Mr. WIESEL: Yeah. That plagues me to this day because, you know, the father authority, after all, the love, the "Honor Thy Father"— again, I remember I felt like running to that man, that kapo who beat him up and throw myself either at his feet for mercy or beat him up, but I didn't do it.

MOYERS: Why?
Mr. WIESEL: I was afraid.

MOYERS: Of?
Mr. WIESEL: Of being beaten, of being killed.

MOYERS: But could it have been that you also couldn't decide that it was, in fact, happening?
Mr. WIESEL: That also is true, but I— it would be too easy for me to get out of it. No. I felt—

MOYERS: Fear?
Mr. WIESEL: Still fear— I feel guilt. To this day, I feel guilt because I should have done that, but it was— we just arrived. It was a few hours after our arrival and I remember exactly — I write about it exactly in night— my father all of a sudden felt he had to go to the toilet. And there was a kapo, so he went to the kapo, saying, "Can I go to the toilet?" And all of us were— hundreds and hundreds of people were there, lined up. And the kapo measured him up with his look and he give him simply a slap in the face — only one — and my father fell to the ground.

And it lasted a second. My father got up and came back and during that second, I staged my own trial. I accused myself, I defended myself and I pronounced the verdict on myself.

MOYERS: Guilty?
Mr. WIESEL: Guilty.

MOYERS: Of?
Mr. WIESEL: Of not behaving as a son should behave.

MOYERS: And yet, had you behaved as a son behaved—
Mr. WIESEL: Oh, this is true.

MOYERS: —this is not rationalization. I read these 30-some-odd books, look at the witness, look at the memory that would have perished.
Mr. WIESEL: Still— still, again, I— I understand all that. Nevertheless— nevertheless— and later on, you know, I became very close to my father because at home, I was studying and he was always involved in communal affairs. He was the county official — the official representative to the authorities to help Jews escape and I didn't see him often except for the Sabbath.

And for the first time that we were together, really together, was there, which means I came to know my father and he came to know me and we were so close because he was all I had and I was all he had.

MOYERS: Can you speak about your father's death now?
Mr. WIESEL: It's difficult because— because he was my father, but it's even more difficult for me to speak about my mother and my little sister. I rarely do.

MOYERS: They died, too.
Mr. WIESEL: They died the first night, but my father, he was hungry and tired and we arrived to Buchenwald, we were hundreds and hundreds of people in one barrack. And he got sick — diarrhea — and I ran from one physician to another to try to bring coal. That was the only thing we could get is coal, black coal, and I couldn't even get black coal.

And one night, I heard him call me, and that morning, he died. And I felt he wanted to tell me something, but he couldn't. And again, even
today, I try to figure out what was his testament. What did he want to
tell me?

And maybe all the books I'm writing is to figure out maybe— maybe in
these words there will be a few that I may have received from him, al-
though he had not articulated. All I have, I owe him.

MOYERS: When he died, did you feel any hatred toward his tormentors?
Mr. WIESEL: No, because they were not tormentors present, so to
speak. They didn't beat him up. He just— he suffered and then he sank
into death because of hunger, starvation and sickness. He didn't moan,
he didn't scream. In a way, he died before he died.

Hate, no. Again, all I felt then was how am I managing to get 10 men
around me to say the Prayer for the Dead and I couldn't find them and I
didn't.

MOYERS: How many members of your family perished in the camps?
Mr. WIESEL: I had numerous uncles and cousins and— every Jewish fam-
ily in Eastern Europe really was the same.

MOYERS: You lost your mother and your father, your sister—
Mr. WIESEL: And my little sister and uncles and cousins and grand-
mother and grandfather and so many.

MOYERS: You said that Himmler and Mengele and the others didn't
hate the Jews because— was it because they didn't see you as human or—
Mr. WIESEL: We were not human for them. We were what they called
“subhumans” and you don't cry when a subhuman cries.

MOYERS: A beast, a mineral, an object.
Mr. WIESEL: Not even an animal, but an object because what they tried
to do— you know, I believe, in general, they had a theory. They really
wanted to create a universe parallel to our own. They wanted to reinvent
creation.

And in that universe, in that creation, a new language was invented, a
new attitude towards human being, a new God. An S.S. man was God.
We had no right to look at an S.S. man in the face because you cannot
look into God's face and remain alive. And therefore, in their concept of
the universe, we were subhuman, unworthy of living.

So what did they do? They shrank everything. Let's say, from the
universe, we went to a country and a country to a town, from a town to a
street, from a street to an apartment, apartment to a room, from the
room to the cellar, from the cellar to the train.

It's always smaller and smaller— from the train to the gas chamber.
And then the person, who was first a person, became a prisoner and the
prisoner became a number.

MOYERS: And the number became an ash.
Mr. WIESEL: Ash, and the ash itself was dispersed. When you think of
what they tried to do us, they were relentless. They lost the war and they
still wanted to kill Jews and to annihilate Jewish memory.

MOYERS: Did you see them as human?
Mr. WIESEL: That is, of course, the question of all questions, that you
asked in the very beginning. Is humanity good or is humanity evil? At
the time, I didn't think in these terms. It's only much later when I began
thinking and searching and doing my own inquiries. I think that they
wanted to dehumanize the victim and in doing so, they dehumanized
themselves, but at the beginning, they were human. Their own acts, their
own projects dehumanized them.

MOYERS: But one survivor said to me once, “I ceased to see human
beings and saw simply the cold, impersonal face of a highly efficient ma-
chine and how do you hate a machine?”

Mr. WIESEL: Yeah. Still, I imagine if I, let's say, had to face, during the
war, an S.S. man one-to-one and if I had the power, I think I would
have killed an S.S. man.

MOYERS: You would have killed?
Mr. WIESEL: I think so, an S.S. man, if I had the power— if, if, if, if— if
I had been alone with him and— I think I would have.

MOYERS: I remember reading in one of your books about the Russian
prisoners at Buchenwald who, when they were liberated, commandeered
American jeeps, drove into the nearby German town and killed the
civilians there for simply having lived outside beyond the barbed wire.
The Jews didn't do that, apparently, and I've often wondered, did the
Russians have the right idea? Did they reconcile more fully with death
after the dead than those of you who, all these years, have been weighed
down by your inability to reconcile what happened?

Mr. WIESEL: I don't have an answer to that. That was a very special
day. It was the day of liberation and the Russian prisoners of war suf-
fured as much as we did, maybe because of their military training.

What was my training? I was a student. I brought into the war, into
the camps, a bag thick with books, as much as with anything else. More
than food, I had books. So therefore, my point of reference was books—
words, ideas, memories—not acts, not gestures.

I cannot condemn them. I do not. But I remember that, when liberation
came, really, our first community, created immedi-
ately, was a community of prayer. We gathered and we prayed and we
said Kaddish, the Prayer for the Dead. And I am not sure, really, that
God was worthy of that courage.

MOYERS: What do you mean, “God was not worthy?”

Mr. WIESEL: Because, you know, to sanctify his name, to glorify his
name there, then— but nevertheless, we prayed to Him and we
sanctified his name. And ever since, whenever I say, now, the same
Prayer for the Dead, I still hear my voice from 1945.

MOYERS: Do you ever find yourself wishing that perhaps or thinking
that perhaps it might have been better for you to have done what the
Russians soldiers did?

Mr. WIESEL: I never felt any attraction towards violence. I never tried
to express myself through violence. Violence is a language. When
language fails, violence becomes a language: I never had that feeling. Lan-
guage failed me very often, but then, the substitute for me was silence,
but not violence.

It doesn't mean that I'm proud of it. I'm not. It's simply my nature and
I was always too shy. Maybe it was cowardice. I was simply a coward.

MOYERS: But I have this image in my mind of the— and it's purely hy-
pothetical. I have this image in my mind of that Russian who was
liberated beside you, who went into the village and got his vengeance im-
mediately, having gone back to the Ukraine or back to Russia and having
lived a life relatively unmolested by memory.

Mr. WIESEL: Sure.

MOYERS: But he got it out of him.

Mr. WIESEL: Got it out at the same time. At the same time, still, to live
with a certain memory that, for one hour, he was not only an avenger,
but something else, maybe a killer. Again, I understand the impulse and
I don't condemn that impulse. Who am I? I don't justify it, either. But I
couldn't do it for the same reason that during the war, I was always so
frightened that I have never done anything than say to obtain more
bread or—nothing. I was terribly intimidated.

MOYERS: By?

Mr. WIESEL: By anything that could have happened to me, other than receive blows. I preferred hunger. The only time that I tried to do something was for my father. As long as my father was alive, I felt responsible for him, just as he felt probably responsible for me, surely responsible for me. So, for me, it was somehow impossible to take a gun and shoot.

MOYERS: But could you not commit violence because you didn’t hate or because you were able to tame the hate you felt? Did you feel hate?

Mr. WIESEL: No. Again, it could have happened for hate to enter me, to penetrate me. It didn’t, by chance. I was lucky. It’s a terrible thing to say “lucky,” but I was lucky.

MOYERS: Lucky in the midst of that—

Mr. WIESEL: I was lucky because during the war, I came—after all, I came young. I was very young. For one year—the war almost ended. You know, if I had to wait—

MOYERS: You were 13 or 14 when—

Mr. WIESEL: I was 15 when I came in.

MOYERS: Fifteen years old? That’s—today, there are people in the streets of New York exercising the full prerogatives of manhood with—

Mr. WIESEL: It’s true. Again, but remember, I come from yeshiva. I had peyot. That wasn’t my world and everything happened very fast. If I am angry—and I am terribly angry—it’s really with the western society, with the liberals, with the Allies. I’m angry with Roosevelt, I’m angry with Churchill, but really angry because they knew what we didn’t know. We were taken two weeks before D-Day. Imagine, two weeks before D-Day and we didn’t know that Auschwitz existed. Now, how is that possible?

Now, I met Carter when he was President and he appointed me to some position and he showed pictures that the Air Force has taken and I explained the pictures. Everybody knew except the victims. The Russians were, you know, 20 kilometers away from my ghetto. We could have gone to the mountains without any problem and yet, nobody cared enough to tell us, “Don’t go.” That’s where my anger comes through.

MOYERS: You mean, you were seized, just almost as the Allies were landing at Normandy—

Mr. WIESEL: Two weeks before. Now, if Roosevelt had gone on radio and simply said, “Jews in Hungary, don’t go because Auschwitz is there”—if Churchill had done the same—we listened to the BBC. We listened to the radio. I don’t understand it because they were good people and I admire both Churchill and Roosevelt for what they had done, but there is something in me which cannot make peace—

MOYERS: Forgive?

Mr. WIESEL: —cannot make peace.

MOYERS: You cannot make peace with the Messiah for not coming.

Mr. WIESEL: Of course. But then, the Messiah may say to me maybe those are my only possible answer would be that sometimes winds of madness erupt in history. The Crusades were for madness, the Inquisition was madness and this may have been madness.

MOYERS: Madness relieves the human being of his responsibility, don’t you think?

Mr. WIESEL: Sure.

MOYERS: Which is to say, then, that if the Germans were mad, if there were a corporate or a group hatred or venom or passion, they somehow were not acting humanly.

Mr. WIESEL: But I would say they were the ones who generated madness. They provoked the madness, so they are responsible.

MOYERS: The irony is none of these words do justice to the reality. “Madness” doesn’t, nor does “hate.”

Mr. WIESEL: It’s true. Hate would reduce the whole thing to something so silly, and how are we to reduce such a tragedy to a simple business of hating.

MOYERS: Do I hear you saying that the Holocaust was not about hatred?

Mr. WIESEL: Not only about hatred. It had some of the logical dimension. Now, when you said earlier that you still don’t understand and I don’t understand it, either. I have read probably every single book that came out on the subject. Each time, I say to myself, “Now, I’m going to find something,” and the more I read, the less I understand. I don’t understand a killer, nor do I understand a victim. How could—how could men kill and go on killing?

MOYERS: That isn’t hard for me to understand in a religious context because God is so often invoked as the source of the hatred and the anger. I mean, one of the things I did last night before seeing you was to read Night again.

The other thing I did this morning was to read the Old Testament
again and Moses, in the name of God, commanding the army of Israel against the Midianites; Joshua sending his troops out to slay with the sword the women, the children, the babies, the ox in the name of God; Saul being commanded by the messenger of God to spare not an inhabitant of a city. There's so much anger in there and so much wrath in there and so much hate in there that hate in the name of God I do understand, but in the name of no god, in Germany—

Mr. WIESEL: Well, Germany had a god— it was Hitler. Germany had a religion of Nazism. The vocabulary was a religious vocabulary about purification of the race, about the offering, sacrifice. As for the bible, I would like to defend the bible a little bit. I love the bible too much. I love the bible.

MOYERS: It's my bible, too and I love it, but it is full of this paradox. In one chapter, God says, “Thou Shalt Not Kill” and in the next chapter, He sends these instructions of “No mercy— exterminate the people of Ai and Hazor.”

Mr. WIESEL: It's true, but in the Book of Joshua, Joshua always gives them a choice. “If you live in peace, we won't touch you. We shall conquer you, we shall conquer you, but we won't kill you, we won't touch you.”

Second, even when he does, Joshua really is the most violent of all the violence books. Well, I read it and I re-read and I re-read it. I didn't feel good about it because you go from violence to violence, from bloodshed to bloodshed. I said, “It's too much.”

And then, at one point, I realized that that is the only book in the bible— meaning the bible and the prophets, and the writings— that has no poetry and that is a lesson. Don't make poetry out of murder, out of bloodshed. We have to kill in war, but no glory in war, no glorification of war.

Furthermore, there is one more lesson that we have learned and I believe, really, that it came at the beginning of our history to tell us that that is the end of that chapter. “Don't do it again.” That doesn't mean it wasn't attempted. People tried.

MOYERS: It doesn't mean it hasn't been done.

Mr. WIESEL: There is a marvelous book by Stefan Zweig, it's a play — you may have read it — about Prophet Jeremiah. You know, Jeremiah was a pacifist among all the prophets and I always feel— I feel very sorry and I have a special feeling for him because he was the only prophet to have foreseen the tragedy, to have lived the tragedy and to have remembered the tragedy.

And Stefan Zweig, who was a pacifist, was also infatuated with the Messiah and he describes Jeremiah the last night before the assault of the Babylonians, incognito on the walls and he listens to the soldiers speaking to each other.

And one soldier says to his friend, “Tomorrow, I may be killed, you may be killed or I may kill, you may kill. Why? “What do you mean, why?” says the other, “Because we have to.” “Why do we have to?” “Because the Lieutenant says so.”


And they go to the General and finally, the General says, “I don't war on Babylonians. If I go to war, it's because the King says so.” And the King says to himself, “I never wanted war.” So nobody wants war and yet, its victims are there.

MOYERS: It's the one thing Jeremiah hated, to use our current word. He hated war. He hated—

Mr. WIESEL: And hypocrisy. He hated hypocrisy.

MOYERS: Hypocrisy. I think the hypocrisy angered him and the war drew forth his passionate detestation.

Mr. WIESEL: Because, more than any other, he had to face the false prophets. In the Book of Jeremiah, we have a lot about the false prophets and the difference is very simple, really. A false prophet is always assuring and reassuring, whereas a real prophet, a true prophet is disturbing.

MOYERS: Do you fight this paradox in your own life, of wanting to believe that every day in every way we are getting better and better, but knowing that to say, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace can lead to the destruction of civilizations?

Mr. WIESEL: Oh, but in my way, in a very small way, in a very modest way. Look, when I was very young, I was very religious, extremely religious and I indulged in mysticism and the mystical teaching tells us that it is possible for any person to bring the Messiah for the whole world and I believed in it. I no longer believe in it. I believe today that it's possible for you or me or anyone to bring a moment, a messianic moment, to each other. If I could simply bring a messianic moment into the life of one person, I think that my life would have been justified.

MOYERS: What do you mean, “messianic moment”?

Mr. WIESEL: I mean, to humanize destiny, to give that person— man or woman or child, especially child — a different environment, a different way of looking at the environment, of finding truth without cruelty, without pain. That is a messianic moment.

MOYERS: That means we're always always, all of us, looking for the Messiah. There's a friend of mine writing a book called “Every One a Messiah.”

Mr. WIESEL: Really?

MOYERS: Yes, out in San Francisco. By that, you mean an act of mercy, reconciliation, anti-hatred?

Mr. WIESEL: That, too. Hatred is the block, of course. Hatred is the screen that blocks everything else, but it's not enough. You know, even if we could remove hatred from our heart, from all hearts, things will still be problematic for humankind. There would be other problems, other dangers, other threats. But I mean simply to make the human being more human and that is some task for the teacher that I try to be, for the writer I try to be.

MOYERS: When are we most truly human?

Mr. WIESEL: When we are weak and when we try to overcome weakness by not choosing inhumanity.

MOYERS: But it's very often the strong who triumph over the weak, meaning that genetically, strength and power have the upper hand.

Mr. WIESEL: That is the Darwin theory and unfortunately, Darwin he— he is right, but not in the long run. In the short run, of course, one machine gun is stronger than a hundred poets, unfortunately. I could even say that one inflammatory speech of hatred and racism and prejudice is stronger than a hundred poems, but what remains? What remains after life? Life.

MOYERS: Yes, but I have little tolerance any longer for the term “in the long run” because as I get older, I realize the number of victims who died before the machine gun in the death camps find no solace in the long run.

Mr. WIESEL: I don't. I don't, either, sure.

MOYERS: They're dead.

Mr. WIESEL: They are dead. They are dead and we carried them in us and therefore, when you say “reconciliation,” I had a kind of hesitation—
Mr. WIESEL: —because I do not believe it's possible. I cannot—

Mr. MOYERS: Reconciliation is not possible?

Mr. WIESEL: I know. It was first— I have not reconciled myself yet with the dead, so how can I reconcile myself with the living?

Mr. MOYERS: But you seem to me to have spent your whole life reconciling yourself with the dead.

Mr. WIESEL: That's right. You know, after the war, it was much more difficult for us to adjust to death than to life. Why? Because during the war, we lived— we lived with the corpses. We lived with the dead. That was the norm. Life was abnormal. It was normal to go to sleep with corpses and wake up with corpses, wondering whether you are not one of them.

After the war, it was difficult once more to see in death a scandal, to see in death once more a source of pain. That was the difficulty. That means to reconcile oneself with the loss of life and death.

Mr. MOYERS: Did you ever see yourself in the face of your tormentor?

Mr. WIESEL: No, but— because, again— because I wasn't, but on the other hand, I don't think that anyone deserves even to ask himself the question because it didn't happen. What is happening today is something very strange. Those who were the killers have no soul-searching. The victims do the soul-searching. Meaning, I have asked myself why did I survive? That is my question. What did I do so good to deserve survival? I wasn't better than the others. I wasn't wortier than the others. I wasn't wiser than the others.

Furthermore, the system was such that numbers played their role. The Germans had decided, let's say, in Buchenwald, they wanted 10,000 that day and they did. I happened to be in the line 10,800 and I asked myself, "Who is the person who went in my stead— before?" And often, I say to myself, "Now you're responsible for his memory as well. Who was he?"

As for Saul and Samuel, I love King Saul. I love him because he refused to kill the king of the Malachis, Agog.

Mr. MOYERS: Yes. What a human, what a humanist. I love him.

Mr. WIESEL: But it was only after he had killed a lot of others who were considered lesser.

Mr. MOYERS: But war. That was war.

Mr. WIESEL: And you know what God did to Saul for refusing to kill the General. He rem—

Mr. MOYERS: He removed the crown. Poor man, poor—

Mr. WIESEL: What does that tell you about the author's idea of God?

Mr. MOYERS: Well, the author's idea was you must obey God. Don't question. God says something, obey.

Mr. WIESEL: Even when He says, "Kill"?

Mr. MOYERS: Even if it says, "Kill." Now, my whole— of course, my whole attitude has been, since I began searching in myself and around me, is to question God. I believe that is the virtue of human beings, that we are allowed to question God.

Mr. MOYERS: I thought God died in Auschwitz.

Mr. WIESEL: The idea of God, not God. God is God. God doesn't die, but the idea of God, the prayer to God, that is, the faith in God— I think died.

Mr. MOYERS: You wondered why you survived. Was it because or despite the fact that, as a boy in Transylvania, born in 1928—

Mr. WIESEL: Twenty-eight.

Mr. MOYERS: —immersed in Jewish tradition, scriptures, mysticism, deeply loved, vastly welcomed by your friends and neighbors and parents— was it something that you got there that enabled you to survive?

Mr. WIESEL: No. I don't even say that God saved me. I really believe it was an accident. The last days of the war, every day, we were taken out to the gate and then beyond. It was almost certainty of death and for some reason, I was always in the last line. I didn't do anything for it. And throughout the entire period of the war, believe me, I didn't do anything to survive.

In the beginning, maybe I wanted to live because of my father, but when my father died, I had no desire to live. I retreated in a kind of non-being situation. And to say that because I studied or because I didn't, I really wouldn't want to think that.

Mr. MOYERS: Well, is life just a lottery?

Mr. WIESEL: There, it was, but— but now, I have to give meaning to that survival. I believe in that, that because I survived by accident, my survival should not remain an accident and I must give meaning. I now believe that every moment is a moment of grace and we must make it into an offering.

Mr. MOYERS: But there was a while when you were silent about the Holocaust— several years, wasn't there, after—

Mr. WIESEL: I still am. You'd be surprised. I still am. I've written very few books about it. Of the 32 books that I have written, maybe five, four or five, deal with that subject. But in the beginning, it's true. I took a vow, a vow of silence of 10 years.

Mr. MOYERS: Why?

Mr. WIESEL: [sighs] I knew I— I would fail. There are no words. I wanted to be sure that the words I would find would be the proper words and there's a certain mystical experience called the "purification of language through silence."

Mr. MOYERS: What have you analyzed— why you were finally able to break that silence and find the words?

Mr. WIESEL: Oh, I didn't find them.

Mr. MOYERS: You're still—

Mr. WIESEL: I still look for them. You know, I found once a marvelous story. Sam Beckett and I met and I liked the man. He was not only a handsome man and a great writer. He was a beautiful man and as shy as I was. And we met when I wrote Night. He wanted to meet me and we met in a café.

And I don't like people to wait for me, so I always come before and wait. He did the same. I didn't know. So I came — and we had a meeting at 11 o'clock — I came at 10 o'clock and I sat in the café in Paris, drinking coffee. And there was a man on the other side, also drinking coffee. At 11 or so, we looked, both of us, at the watch and we looked at each other. And we smiled and we met and we kept silent for a long time, but just shook hands and we didn't say anything to each other.

And all of a sudden, really out of the blue, he says to me, "You know, yesterday I discovered a manuscript of a book that was published a few years ago, the novel Quand Molloy Meurt — When Molloy Dies — and I discovered," he says, "to my surprise, that the motto on the manuscript was not printed in the book and the motto is en désespoir de cause, which means "in desperation." What else could he do than write books? What else could I do than write with poor words that are still at my command? But I know there are other, proper words.
MOYERS: By writing, were you able to cope with this suppressed hatred that— I'm not a psychologist, but you must have felt—
Mr. WIESEL: Anger, really, not hate because as I told you, Bill, I was spared that temptation of hate— maybe because immediately after the war, I came back to study, into religious study, so— but I somehow was spared that and I think it was self-preservation because now I know that hatred is not only destructive, it is self-destructive. The hater also destroys himself. It is not only the hated that is destroyed. And subconsciously, I must have thought in those terms.
MOYERS: Yet somewhere you write that every Jew, somewhere in his being, must set apart a zone of hate— healthy and viral hate — or, you said, he does an injustice to the dead. Is there a zone of hate that you have set aside?
Mr. WIESEL: I wrote it in— that was an essay I wrote in 1964, I think. I went back to Germany to do a piece for a magazine, my first return to Germany and I was supposed to stay three weeks to meet, you know, people and Prime Minister, Chancellors and so forth. But deep down, I called it an encounter— an appointment with hate.
MOYERS: Yeah.
Mr. WIESEL: I wanted to see, do I hate? And I came there — Frankfurt and Berlin— not Berlin, Munich — and when I would see a person in the street, I would stop and judge that person. How old is he? Where was he? Could he have been? And I realized I don't hate and that bothered me. I cannot.

MOYERS: Well, viral hate I can understand, but healthy hate seems an oxymoron.
Mr. WIESEL: It's true, but it's anger. If you replace the word "hate" with "anger," then I think you would understand.
MOYERS: Can we do that? Is anger the equivalent of hate?
Mr. WIESEL: No, because anger has some positive attributes to it and hate has none. Even hate of hate is dangerous.
MOYERS: So there is no such thing as a healthy hate?
Mr. WIESEL: I don't believe so.
MOYERS: That was—
Mr. WIESEL: Today, I would change— If I had written it today, I would certainly have changed for anger, not hate.
MOYERS: There is something called "cold hatred," just as there's something called "cold anger." You didn't feel that? [Wiesel shakes his head no.] What was your response when you saw these Germans on the streets after your first visit there?
Mr. WIESEL: I left 24 hours later. I couldn't stand it.
MOYERS: Why?
Mr. WIESEL: I didn't want to be surrounded by all these possible defendants, in my own mind.
MOYERS: Do you think it's true, then, that people can be in the grip of hatred, possessed, almost driven by that hatred?
Mr. WIESEL: It is because we have seen it happen. Look, let's go back to the origins of human beings— Cain and Abel, two brothers, the only brothers in the world. And they had a good father, a good mother. After all, not only that, good father and mother knew God. And yet, one became the victim and/or assassin of the other.
Why? Because God refused the offering of Cain. So what? Why hate? Why didn't Cain hate God? Why did he hate his brother? And maybe the lesson there is that one hates his brother better. That's why a civil war is always the worst of all wars.
MOYERS: Why do you think we hate our brothers better?
Mr. WIESEL: That's the question that we have to explore, really. Do I hate my brother because he reminds me of myself or do I hate my brother because he reminds me of someone who is not myself? So whom do I hate— the one who is me or the one who is anything but me? Ultimately, whoever hates, hates his brother and whenever one hates his brother, one always hates himself.
MOYERS: Do we have to be passionate and emotional in our hate or can hate be an act of cold, indifferent, deliberate will?
Mr. WIESEL: I think the latter is worse because if it is an impulse, it doesn't last long. If it is not, it can last very long 'cause then it takes time to prepare.
A cold-blooded hater prepares his hatred and it takes him a few weeks. And then, even when he commits the act of hatred, which is murder or humiliation— because I think one of the most scandalous aspects of hatred is that the hater humiliates his victim, the hated. It always implicates and involves an act of humiliation because the hated is less good than the hater and the hated has to be killed by the hater, who is God to the hated.
But therefore, when he prepares his act of hatred, he takes time, he works on it. He has plans— this is good, Monday is good, Tuesday is not so good.
MOYERS: What do you make of the term "blind hate"? And I ask it because as you were talking, I was thinking of an old story of John Ruskin, the English writer, who was standing on a corner with a friend and a stranger passed by— no, a third man passed by and Ruskin said, "I hate that man." And his friend said, "Well you don't know him." And he said, "That's why I hate him."
Mr. WIESEL: I'll give you my example. I am a Jew and I am hated by anti-Semites who have never met me. Any Jew is hated by any anti-Semite, although they never met one another. The same, I'm sure, is true of racism as well. That means the racist who hates the blacks or the Hispanics or the poor or the crippled or the gays or the Lutherans. They hate all, in group, collectively.
And that is, again, something which elevates or, quite the opposite, destroys the humanity of the hated because hatred then goes beyond its own dimension. An anti-Semite hates all Jews, those who were born yesterday and those who will be born tomorrow.
So why should he hate me? I have never done anything to him. I've never even met him and yet, he hates me, so what does he hate? Whom does he hate when he hates?
MOYERS: Somewhere along the way, the killer, who was a child, learns to hate and do you think, therefore, that the hatred is born in us or, as the song in South Pacific says, we must be taught to hate?
Mr. WIESEL: I think, in religious terms— I would say it's a heritage.
For so many centuries, it was transmitted from one generation to another. That means that teaching was part of life. It wasn't even conscious. If a Christian or a Catholic or a Lutheran went to church and heard about the killing instinct of the Jew, about the "perfidy of the Jew," as they called it in the texts, in the liturgy, without even thinking that it's a teaching, it was communicated.
I think today it's different. Today, it had to be taught. It's not enough to be born in a family or in a group or in a street— in a group where hate dominates life, to be contaminated by it, I don't think so, but in those years, yes.
MOYERS: When you look around and see what’s happening in the world today—in this country, in northern Ireland, in the Middle East, in Eastern Europe—does it strike chords of remembrance in you or when it comes to hatred, is the Holocaust immeasurable, incomparable?

Mr. WIESEL: It is immeasurable and incomparable. It’s a unique event. Never before have such plans been conceived. Never before have so many people killed so many people in a systematic, cynical, calculated way. The link is memory. Meaning, I always had hoped that if we remember, our memory would shield other people as well.

MOYERS: But it hasn’t happened—Cambodia, El Salvador—

Mr. WIESEL: It hasn’t, no, and the—

MOYERS: —Uganda.

Mr. WIESEL: And today, too. So recently, the faces of children in Romania, the sick children, the way they were treated by the regime. My God, how is that possible? [sighs] That disturbs me. That moves me to despair, meaning our message has not been received.

MOYERS: Given this and given the fact that some of your most sophisticated participants in these conferences have not truly wanted to face the question of hate, what do you hope to achieve with these conferences?

Mr. WIESEL: First, to face it. You know, in the beginning, many people wanted me to call the conference differently, ‘cause these are a series, you know—The Anatomy of Hatred in Boston and in Haifa and now in Oslo. And they wanted me to call it—“Why not The Anatomy of Love” or something?

No, I wanted it really to be a conference where people of all horizons—religious or ethnic or economic—should meet and face a common threat. And that is my belief, that hate is a common threat. Hate does not even pretend to be a single-minded obsession against one person or one group. It goes beyond. By its nature, it goes beyond that group. So I hope, first of all, to bring all these people together and show, together with them, that hate is our common enemy.

Second, I would like to have ideas what to do about it because if our achievements of the last decade, the last year, in many parts of the world, are so great and yet so threatened, it is because of hate. And there are achievements. Eastern Europe is gaining freedom. The American government and the Russian government are now allies, almost allies. Things are happening. What jeopardizes those achievements is hate and therefore, I feel that we should, together with you, do something about it and come out with ideas, with maybe crazy ideas. Why not?

MOYERS: But, my god, you’ve been wrestling with this almost 50 years now, all of your adult life and you haven’t found the answer?

Mr. WIESEL: No. I am very good with questions. You know, actually, we should have it the other way around. I should ask the questions and you should give me the answers because I am very good at questions. That’s my whole work. My whole life, really, had been devoted to questions, not to answers.

MOYERS: What’s the question of hate that burns most in your curiosity?

Mr. WIESEL: Why haven’t we succeeded—we who have been victims of hate—in transforming that hate into a warning? Why haven’t we—that bothers me.

MOYERS: Into a—

Mr. WIESEL: —warning, into a kind of alarm, saying, “Look, look, hate means Auschwitz”?

MOYERS: But you said earlier that you weren’t sure the Germans hated you.

Mr. WIESEL: Yes, but the—first of all, it’s a good question. I accept it’s a paradox, but on the other hand, I am not sure that it was hate alone that did it, but the consequence of hate; the consequence of hate. Don’t you think that every murder is also an act of hate?

MOYERS: As a layman, I would say yes, but the source of that hate the elimination of that hate—I don’t know.

Mr. WIESEL: Nor do I, but maybe, after all, that is the child in me that remains childish and naive. And I would like to believe that whenever two persons meet, whenever people meet, a miracle is possible.

MOYERS: [voice-over] This has been a discussion with Elie Wiesel. I’m Bill Moyers.

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