

Elisha Wiesel's Message to His Dad, Elie

Dear Dean Hollerith, Michelle, the incredibly warm staff of the National Cathedral. Not only did you show my father the most profound respect by choosing to include him here for all time, but you were more than supportive, you were passionate about recognizing him in today's unveiling as the observant Jew he was. You went so far as to introduce a blemish into the stonework to address the Biblical injunction against graven images. Our family and I are as moved by as we are grateful for your hospitality.

I want to say something to the people gathered here today. If I say anything that offends, or is controversial, or that you disagree with, or that makes you uncomfortable, please know that these words are my own. They do not reflect the National Cathedral. They are amazing people and they have spoken about what moved them to honor my father in the panel you just heard: my father's unbelievable passion for justice, regardless of skin color, gender or nationality. My father's belief in a better future for everyone is what moved the Cathedral to honor him. I'm here to fill in some other important pieces of my father's legacy.

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Dear Dad,

Sometimes I think about what you had to cross for me to be here, to be who I am.

After surviving the Night that consumed our family, you felt the world no longer deserved Jewish children. I exist because you refused to give up on the world. I exist because you did not want our family's story to end with you.

You spoke to your ancestors often.

You spoke to the ones you loved. You remembered the ones you knew by name, and you dreamed of the ones you could not name and the ones you didn't know existed.

Unknown ancestors line the branches of our family tree, but you knew where the chain resolved again on the other side: Levi the son of Jacob the son of Isaac the son of Abraham. You wandered back often through this chain, sometimes exploring, sometimes just being pulled by the texts through which our ancestors speak to us and each other.

You knew nobody could speak for the dead, but they were with you when you spoke and when you wrote. They were with you because you took them with you.



Elie Wiesel (left) and his son, Elisha.

Photos: YouTube.

I know you are with me now.

How can I remind the world of who you were, of how you saw yourself? What must the world know about you that only I can tell them?

Today you are recognized as a universal figure speaking universal truths accepted by a secular world. But you were also an observant Jew who davened, or prayed, with intent and without fail every single day. Your faith helped define you.

Today you are recognized for speaking out against silence. But sometimes I see people quote your admonition against silence as an excuse to scream at others with contempt, self-righteousness and anger. You never humiliated, ridiculed or screamed.

But what's hardest for me is seeing those who read your books, cry for the dead Jews, quote your protests against injustice - and then condemn in the most unforgiving terms the six million Jews living in Israel who refuse to depend ever again on the world to rescue them. No longer stateless and defenseless, these Jews face difficult circumstances and sometimes impossible choices. For that, they are held to a different standard than any other nation on Earth by America's elite.

How do I remind the world that you didn't just advocate for the people of Kosovo and Darfur and Cambodia, but that you also supported the State of Israel and defended her right to exist in peace and security? You understood all too well what it meant to live in a world without a Jewish state.

Today you are being honored as a friend of the church. As a child, you would cross the street to avoid the

would cross the street to avoid the church and beatings from those within; on Christmas Eve you knew to stay off the streets altogether. Your grandmother sang you songs about Jewish communities falsely accused of poisoning wells or murdering Christian children to make Matzoh with their blood.

How do I help our Christian friends understand that the Jewish people are still subject to blood libels today?

Reactionary American pastors teach via YouTube that, by supporting immigrants and people of color, Jews are poisoning the wells of White America. They hate us because your wife, my mother, arrived here from war-torn Europe and marched with the NAACP. They hate us because you asked "how can a human being be illegal?" American right-wing extremists shoot us with rifles in synagogues.

Meanwhile, the left throws the word apartheid at Israel, ignoring the fact that thousands of Arabs voluntarily serve in the Israeli Defense Forces and take their oath on a Quran or New Testament. Celebrities weigh in, accusing Israel of ethnic cleansing, ignoring that the Palestinian population has grown by a factor of nine since 1948. Instead, almost all states in the Arab Middle East are Judenrein, or cleansed of Jews.

And last summer, left-wing extremists spread lies that Israel trained George Floyd's murderers. And the United Church of Christ Synod condemned Israel in vitriolic terms, without a trace of compassion for the Israeli people facing violence and terror. They never once mentioned Hamas.

And Hamas mobs in Los Angeles and

New York trashed restaurants, cursing Israel and searching for Jews to violently attack.

Why must our people stand accused of blood libel generation after generation, day after day?

You taught us that language matters and truth matters, but we have grown lazy with language and lazy with truth, and our enemies pervert and cheapen the most consequential words just to attack us.

All suffering is painted with the same brush. Reductive thinking has become the enemy of compassion.

How do I get well-intentioned people to recognize that if they find themselves in any movement that tolerates lies and hatred towards the world's only Jewish state, that unless they can challenge and remove the anti-Semitic poison, that place is not their place?

How do I get them to realize pro Palestinian does not have to mean anti Israel?

Your generation was blessed with the gift of great Christian allies like the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who rejected the anti-Israel sentiment that threatened to poison their movements towards peace.

Perhaps our next generation of allies will come from those who walk through the doors of the National Cathedral, look up to your likeness, and are inspired to ask questions about your presence in this church.

It gives me a reason to hope, as do you.

If you were betrayed by the world and could still engage with it - then surely I can as well.

If you faced total devastation and could still have a relationship with God - then surely I can as well.

In 2006, you and King Abdullah of Jordan brought Abbas and Ehud Olmert together in the interests of peace. It must have caused you pain to break bread with someone who began his career publishing many vile lies about the Holocaust, but you kept your counsel.

If you could bear insult to that deepest of wounds and still resist anger and hatred - then I can too.

Peace at that moment must have felt as unlikely as the coming of Moshiach, the Messiah, but it did not stop you from believing and it did not stop you from trying.

You never stopped trying. So neither can we.