



What Being Jewish Means to Me

| Wiesel, Elie

Elie Wiesel on Rosh-Hashanah, Judaism and humanity in a New York Times advertisement by the American Jewish Committee.

What Being Jewish Means to Me

by Elie Wiesel

The following statement by Elie Wiesel was published in an advertisement in the New York Times on September 29, 2000, the eve of Rosh Ha-Shanah (the first day of the Jewish year 5761), as part of a series sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and featuring statements by prominent figures in American public life on "What Being Jewish Means to Me."

I remember: as a child, on the other side of oceans and mountains, the Jew in me would anticipate Rosh Ha-Shanah with fear and trembling.

He still does.

On that Day of Awe, I believed then, nations and individuals, Jewish and non-Jewish, are being judged by their common creator.

This is still my belief.

In spite of all that happened? Because of all that happened?

I still believe that to be Jewish today means what it meant yesterday and a thousand years ago. It means for the Jew in me to seek fulfillment both as a Jew and as a human being. For a Jew, Judaism and humanity must go together. To be Jewish today is to recognize that every person is created in the image of God and that our purpose in living is to be a reminder of God.

Naturally, I claim total kinship with my people and its destiny. Judaism integrates particularist aspirations with universal values, fervor with rigor, legend with law. Being Jewish to me is to reject all fanaticism anywhere.

To be Jewish is, above all, to safeguard memory and open its gates to the celebration of life as well as to the suffering, to the song of ecstasy as well as to the tears of distress that are our legacy as Jews. It is to rejoice in the renaissance of Jewish sovereignty in Israel and the re-awakening of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union. It is to identify with the plight of Jews living under oppressive regimes and with the challenges facing our communities in free societies.

A Jew must be sensitive to the pain of all human beings. A Jew cannot remain indifferent to human suffering, whether in other countries or in our own cities and towns. The mission of the Jewish people has never been to make the world more Jewish, but to make it more human.