A minority will hold fast to the hawkish, a smaller minority to the dovish, position; but most American Jews will be both unwilling to attack head-on the American government's stand and unable to criticize openly the Israeli stand. That's not a happy prospect.

The one conclusion I'm reasonably sure of is that the coming few years will be difficult for those of us who support the Israeli doves and not so easy for those of us who wish to advance liberal or democratic-left opinions. So, a few concluding thoughts:

There is no unquestionable sanction in Jewish tradition or thought for political liberalism. There has been a strand within Jewish life inclining us to liberal and socialist ideas. Insofar as we want to advance such ideas in America, we must do so on intrinsic and universalistic grounds. But to claim that a liberal politics is somehow sanctioned by Judaism leads to parochial sentimentality or ethnic vanity. Our Jewish experience may have prompted some of us to a certain kind of politics, but our argument on its behalf cannot simply rely upon that experience; it must transcend it even as it draws from it.

Now, there may be a certain discontinuity, a ruptured narrative, in what I've been saying. I began by describing the deepening crisis of Jewish identity in America, and then turned to Jewish politics, or, more precisely, to Israeli policies. So let me make clear that I do not see our involvement on the dovish side as necessarily contributing to a solution of the identity crisis of American Jews. For the irony is that those of us who deplore the excessive politicization of American Jewish life must now, unhappily, contribute to it. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is of such overriding importance that we have to give it our major attention. The political battle to which we are obligated to turn will probably obscure efforts to find a solution to the American Jewish crisis of identity—if, as I doubt, there is a solution.

In the next few years there is probably going to be a "war among the Jews"—an intellectual, political "war"—concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Recent events point not to an end but to a beginning of that "war." It will be heated and nasty. Some American Jewish intellectuals may feel tempted simply to pull out. Blessed by geography, we have choices. The temptation to withdraw is only human, and all of us feel it now and again. To keep fighting over this issue, the central issue of Jewish life today, means to win little gratitude at home and some abuse abroad. It means to forgo the moral elevation of an Elie Wiesel, who speaks eloquently about all injustices except those closest to Jewish life.

But we should persist. Why? To stand in solidarity with our friends in Israel—Peace Now and other such groups. To show that from our particularist vantage point we still hold firm to universalist values. And in the hope that Israel as a democratic state will finally agree, with all due precautions, to accept the same national rights for the Palestinians that it fought to gain for itself.

That seems to me the ordering of our crises and our efforts. Unto each day the burdens thereof. □

BANQUET ADDRESS

# Now and Then

*Grace Paley*

I want to read this piece to you first and then I want to say a few things. This is called "A Midrash on Happiness." I don't think this is really a midrash, but I called it that.

* * *

What she meant by happiness, she said, was the following: she meant having (or having had) (or continuing to have) everything. By everything, she meant, first, the children, then a dear person to live with, preferably a man, but not necessarily (by live with, she meant for a long time but not necessarily). Along with and not in preferential order, she required three or four best women friends to whom she could tell every personal fact and then discuss on the widest deepest and most hopeless level, the economy, the constant, unbeatable, cruel war economy, the slavery of the American worker to the

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idea of that economy, the complicity of male people in the whole structure, the dumbness of men (including her preferred man) on this subject. By dumbness, she meant everything dumbness has always meant: silence and stupidity. By silence she meant refusal to speak; by stupidity she meant refusal to hear. For happiness she required women to walk with. To walk in the city arm in arm with a woman friend (as her mother had with aunts and cousins so many years ago) was just plain essential. Oh! those long walks and intimate talks, better than standing alone on the most admirable mountain or in the handsomest forest or hay-blown field (all of which were certainly splendid occupations for the wind-starved soul). More important even (though maybe less sweet because of age) than the old walks with boys she'd walked with as a girl, that nice bunch of worried left-wing boys who flew (always slightly handicapped by that idealistic wing) into a dream of paid-up mortgages with a small room for opinion and solitude in the corner of home. Oh do you remember those fellows, Ruthy?

Remember? Well, I'm married to one.

But she had, Faith continued, democratically tried walking in the beloved city with a man, but the effort had failed since from about that age—twenty-seven or eight—he had felt an obligation, if a young woman passed, to turn abstractedly away, in the middle of the most personal conversation or even to say confidentially, wasn't she something?—or clasping his plaid shirt, at the heart's level, oh my god! The purpose of this: perhaps to work a nice quiet appreciation into thunderous heart-beat as he had been taught on pain of sexual death. For happiness, she also required work to do in this world and bread on the table. By work to do she included the important work of raising children righteously up. By righteously she meant that along with being useful and speaking truth to the community, they must do no harm. By harm she meant not only personal injury to the friend the lover the co-worker the parent (the city the nation) but also the stranger; she meant particularly the stranger in all her or his difference, who, because we were strangers in Egypt, deserves special goodness for life or at least until the end of strangeness. By bread on the table, she meant no metaphor but truly bread as her father had ended every single meal with a hunk of bread. By hunk, she was describing one of the attributes of good bread.

Suddenly she felt she had left out a couple of things: Love. Oh yes, she said, for she was talking, talking all this time, to patient Ruth and they were walking for some reason in a neighborhood where she didn't know the children, the pizza places or the vegetable markets. It was early evening and she could see lovers walking along Riverside Park with their arms around one another, turning away from the sun which now sets among the new apartment houses of New Jersey, to kiss. Oh I forgot, she said, now that I notice, Ruthy I think I would die without love. By love she probably meant she would die without being *in* love. By *in* love she meant the acuteness of the heart at the sudden sight of a particular person or the way over a couple of years of interested friendship one is suddenly stunned by the lungs' longing for more and more breath in the presence of that friend, or nearly drowned to the knees by the salty spring that seems to beat for years on our vaginal shores. Not to omit all sorts of imaginings which assure great spiritual energy for months and when luck follows truth, years.

Oh sure, love. I think so too, sometimes, said Ruth, willing to hear Faith out since she had been watching the kissers too, but I'm really not so sure. Nowadays it seems like pride, I mean overweening pride, when you look at the children and think we don't have time to do much (by time Ruth meant both her personal time and the planet's time). When I read the papers and hear all this boom boom bellicosity, the guys out-daring each other, I see we have to change it all—the world—without killing it absolutely—without killing it, that'll be the trick the kids'll have to figure out. Until that begins, I don't understand happiness—what you mean by it.

Then Faith was ashamed to have wanted so much and so little all at the same time—to be so easily and personally satisfied in this terrible place, when everywhere vast public suffering rose in reeling waves from the round earth's nation-states—hung in the satellite-watched air and settled in no time at all into TV sets and newsrooms. It was all there. Look up and the news of halfway round the planet is falling on us all. So for all these conscientious and technical reasons, Faith was ashamed. It was clear that happiness could not be worthwhile, with so much conversation and so little revolutionary change. Of course, Faith said, I know all that. I do, but sometimes walking with a friend I forget the world. [This story first appeared in the *Triquarterly Review* and was reprinted in the War Resisters League *Peace Calendar 1989.*]

* * *

I would really rather read stories, but I felt that I should say something. And first, I want to thank you all for thinking of me in this connection. It means a lot to me.

One of the things I did want to say something about is the moment at which in one's youth, or one's childhood even, one develops a kind of a fidelity, or one is so struck by some event that one is changed by it. I think of this particularly when we talk of the Holocaust and its meaning to us all.

We seem to forget that our people really lived before the Holocaust and that they were also in a lot of hot water even before that. And I understood this first in a way that has never left me. This happened when I was about, well—what I remember is the size of the kitchen table. The table was at about my eye level. My mother was reading the newspaper, and she turned to my father—my father's name was Zenya; my parents were Russian Jews, like a lot of people—she turned to my father and said, "Zenya, it's coming again."

*To be like all the other nations seems to me to be a waste of nationhood, a waste of statehood, a waste of energy, and a waste of life.*

Now they had come to America in about 1905, and she said "it's coming again." That's all I remember her saying. But I must have heard a lot of other conversations at the time. Because that was in the very beginning of the thirties, and what she was talking about, of course, was the coming of Hitler. And she said "it's coming *again*."

I think Marge [Piercy] has a poem about sleeping with your shoes under your pillow. Well, from that time on, in the middle of an extraordinarily happy childhood in a perfectly wonderful Jewish neighborhood with thousands of children and a first-class family quite friendly to my interests, and despite all the goodness, that incident at the kitchen table was so powerful in my mind that when I began to write I thought, should I really write in English? But since I didn't know any other language, there was really no choice.

The general feeling I had was that I might be forced to live somewhere else; and, as a matter of fact, when my parents came to the U.S., a lot of my mother's friends went to Argentina, and to Palestine, and to Brazil. So they had become Spanish or Portuguese speakers. It didn't seem strange to me that I might live out my life in another country, and I think a lot of us must feel that way sometimes.

That moment at the kitchen table was one of the most striking events in my life. And who knows how I might have felt about things if that hadn't happened, because actually my family was a rather typical socialist Jewish family. My father refused to go anywhere near a synagogue, although he allowed me to take my grandmother on holidays. On the other hand, we were very Jewish, so there we were. I don't know in what direction my Judaism could have gone were it not for that moment.

I move from that to tell another story, or midrash, which I have talked about on various occasions. Growing up within that family there was, I suppose, a certain amount of feeling about being Jewish. I had a lot of vanity about being Jewish. I thought it was really a great thing, and I thought this without any religious education. But I also really felt that to be Jewish was to be a socialist. I mean that was my idea as a kid—that's what it meant to be Jewish. I got over that at a certain point, and so did many of my family members who were my age. But all this brought me to the story that I think of again and again. I don't understand why this story isn't told more often, especially in Israel. Or maybe it should be thrown out.

The story I'm referring to is about Samuel (I think it's in Samuel I). Samuel goes to speak to God and he says that the people want a king.

God says, "No, no, that's wrong, it will be terrible for them if they have a king. They'll have this king, and they'll have to give up their vineyards and their concubines. They'll have a lot of trouble with this king, and they'll lose a great deal more than they'll gain."

So Samuel goes back, and he talks to the people. He tells them what God has said. But the people say, "No, we already told you what we want. We want a king."

So Samuel goes back to God and he says, "You know they really want a king, but I think it's partly because they don't like me."

And God says, "No, that's not true; it's *me* they don't like."

Well, Samuel goes back to the people and tells them again that they really don't want a king. This time the people say, "Look, we want to tell you something. This is what we want. Listen, we want to be like all the other nations and have a king."

God hears this, and he understands they really mean it and he sends Samuel on his way to look for Saul. So that's who they get; they get Saul.

I think of those lines again and again: "We want to be like all the other nations and have a king." And I think: we want to be like all the other nations and have great armies; we want to be like all the other nations and have nuclear bombs. I've told this story to other people, and asked them what does that mean? We want to be like all the other nations and have these things—what does that mean? They say, "Why should Jews be better?"

I keep going back again to an idea, and it's a somewhat sentimental idea, but I'm stuck with it. And I'm entitled to be sentimental since I'm already old, which you can tell because I'm up here. I have this idea that Jews were supposed to be better. I'm not saying they were, but they were *supposed* to be; and it seemed to me on my block that they often were. I don't see any reason in being in this world actually if you can't in some way repair it

somehow, and I think most of the people here feel something like that. So to be like all the other nations seems to me to be a waste of nationhood, a waste of statehood, a waste of energy, and a waste of life.

I want to say just two more things. First, I want to describe an experience I had in Israel about a year and a half ago. We visited a kibbutz and we stayed for a couple of nights with people there. All the members of this kibbutz were South African. They had come to this very kibbutz about thirty years ago. But we found them very interesting because they had come from South Africa. At one point I was talking with our host about what was happening in Israel, and this was a year and a half ago, not last week. Having lived on this kibbutz all these years, having raised their children there—their daughter now in the working world, their son in the army—this man said to me: "I think we should talk to the PLO, and I really think we should get out of the territories."

I said, "Oh?" (I'm in another person's country, after all.)

And he said, "I never would have said anything like this two years ago, but I say it now because I don't like what's happening to my son and his friends. That's the main thing. Not just that they're in danger, but I don't like *what's happening* to them."

Well, we spoke a little further and I was saying to him, you're in danger, Israel is in great danger, maybe the Diaspora was a kind of a back-up for Jews, and so forth. And he looked at me and he said: "Ah, but who said that the Jews have to continue?"

Well, I was hit, so stunned by that remark. And I was brought back to that day in my childhood when my mother spoke to my father at the kitchen table. Although it was a totally different sentence, it was one that I would never forget. He said to me, "Who says we have to continue?" And such a possibility had never occurred to me.

So I said to this man in Israel, this Israeli, and I spoke from the Diaspora, I said: "We *have* to."

Now I just want to end with a short poem which is about generations:

### People In My Family

In my family
people who are 82 are very different
from people who are 92

The 82-year-old people grew up
The year was 1914
This is what they knew World War I
War World War War
That's why when they speak to the grandchild
they say poor little one

The 92-year-old people grew up
The year was 1905
They went to prison
They went into exile
They said ah soon
That's why when they speak to the grandchild
they say first there will be revolution
then there will be revolution then once more
then the earth itself will turn and turn
and cry out Oh I have been made sick
then you my little bud
will flower and save it. □

Banquet Address

# The Cry for Justice

*Alfred Kazin*

I grew up between two competing religions—my mother was Orthodox and my father was an orthodox socialist. Even when I was a boy, my sympathy with Jews was stronger than my belief in their beliefs; it took me a long time to realize that father and mother were really in agreement on one thing: the idea of eternal justice. The Creator, Blessed be He, with whom the Jews had a covenant, had a design for the universe, with the Jews right at the center of His design. This Creator, in the goodness of time, would justify the tribulations of the Jews because of their sinfulness, yet work everything out so that, in the Land of Israel, the

*Alfred Kazin's most recent book is* A Writer's America: Landscape in Literature *(Knopf, 1988). His next book,* Our New York, *written with David Finn, will be published by Harper & Row in September 1989.*