**Sources Journey 6.**

**Text 1.**



**Text 2.**

**The Jew of Saragossa (Elie Wiesel, 'Legends of our Time')**

It was at Saragossa.

Like a good tourist, I was attentively exploring the cathedral when a man approached me and, in French, offered to serve as guide. Why? Why not? He liked foreigners. His price? None. He was not offering his services for money. Only for the pleasure of having his town admired. He spoke of Saragossa enthusiastically. And eloquently. He commented on everything: history, architecture, customs. Then, over a glass of wine, he transferred his amiability to my person: where did I come from, where was I going, was I married, and did I believe in God. I replied: I come from far, the road before me will be long. 1 eluded his other questions. He did not insist.

"So, you travel a great deal," he said politely. "Yes, a great deal."

"Too much, perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

"What does it gain you?" "Memories, friends."

''That's all? Why not look for those at home?"

"For the pleasure of returning, no doubt, with a few words I didn't know before in my luggage:' "Which?"

"I can't answer that. Not yet. I have no luggage yet."

We clinked glasses. I was hoping he would change the subject, but he returned to it.

"You must know many languages, yes?"

"Too many," I said.

I enumerated them for him: Yiddish, German, Hungarian, French, English, and Hebrew.

"Hebrew?" he asked, pricking up his ears. *"Hebreo?* It exists?"

"It does exist," I said with a laugh.

"Difficult language, eh?"

"Not for Jews."

"Ah, I see, excuse me. You're a Jew." "They do exist," I said it with a laugh.

Certain of having blundered, he looked for a way out.

Embarrassed, he thought a minute before going on: "How is Hebrew written? Like Arabic?"

"Like Arabic. From right to left."

An idea seemed to cross his mind, but he hesitated to share it with me. I encouraged him, "Any more questions? Don't be shy."

He said: "May I ask a favor of you? A great favor?"

"Of course," I said.

"Come, come with me."

This was unexpected.

"With you?" I protested. "Where to? To do what?"

"Come. It will take only a few minutes. It may be of importance to me. Please, I beg you, come."

There was such insistence in his voice that I could not say no. Besides, my curiosity had gotten the upper hand. I knew that Saragossa occupied an important place in Jewish history. It was there that the mystic Abraham Aboulafia was born and grew up, the man who had conceived the plan to convert to Judaism Pope Nicholas III himself. In this town, anything could happen.

I followed my guide home. His apartment, on the third floor, consisted of only two tiny rooms, poorly furnished. A kerosene lamp lit up a portrait of the Virgin. A crucifix hung opposite. The Spaniard invited me to sit down.

"Excuse me, I'll only be a second."

He disappeared into the other room and returned again after a few minutes. He was holding a fragment of yel­lowed parchment, which he handed me.

"Is this in Hebrew? Look at it."

I took the parchment and opened it. I was immediately overwhelmed by emotion, my eyes clouded, 'My fingers were touching a sacred' relic, fragment of a testament written centuries before.

"Yes," I said, in a choked voice. "It is in Hebrew."

I could not keep my hand from trembling, The Spaniard noticed this.

"Read it," he ordered.

With considerable effort I succeeded in deciphering the characters, blurred by the passage of some four hundred years: "I, Moses, son of Abraham, forced to break all ties with my people and my faith, leave these lines to the children of my children and to theirs, in order that on the day when Israel will be able to walk again, its head high under the sun, without fear and without remorse, they will know where their roots lie. Written at Saragossa, this ninth day of the month of *Av,* in the year of punishment and exile."

"Aloud," cried the Spaniard, impatient. "Read it aloud."

I had to clear my throat: "Yes, it's a document. A very old document. Let me buy it from you.

"No," he said sharply.

"I'll give you a good price."

"Stop insisting, the answer is no."

"I am sorry."

"This object is not for sale, I tell you" I did not understand his behavior.

"Do not be angry, I did not mean to enrage you It's just that for me this parchment has historical and religious value; for me it is more than a souvenir, it is more like a sign, a ... "

"For me, too" he shouted.

I still did not understand. Why had he hardened so suddenly?

"For you too? In what way?"

He explained briefly: it was the tradition in his family to transmit this object from father to son. It was looked upon as an amulet the disappearance of which would call down a curse.

"I understand," I whispered, "yes, I understand."

History had just closed the circle. It had taken four centuries for the message of Moses, son of Abraham, to reach its destination. I must have had an odd look on my face.

"What's going on?" the Spaniard wanted to know. You say nothing, you conceal your thoughts from me" you offend me. Well, say something. Just because I won t sell you the amulet you don't have the right to be angry with me, do you?"

Crimson with indignation, with anxiety perhaps, he suddenly looked evil, sinister. Two furrows wrinkled his forehead. Then it was he who was awaiting me here. I was the bearer of his *Tikkun,* his restoration, and he was not aware of it. I wondered how to disclose it to him. At last finding no better way, I looked him straight in the eye and said: "Nothing is going on, nothing. I am not angry with you, know only this: you are a Jew."

And I repeated the last words: "Yes, you are a Jew. *Judeo.* You."

He turned pale. He was at a loss for words. He was choking, had to hold himself not to seize me by the throat and throw me out. *Judeo* is an insult, the word evokes the devil. Offended, the Spaniard was going to teach me a lesson for having wounded his honor. Then his anger gave way to amazement. He looked at me as if he were seeing me for the first time, as if I belonged to another century, to a tribe with an unknown language. He was waiting for me to tell him that it was not true, that I was joking, but I remained silent. Everything had been said. A long time ago. Whatever was to follow would only be commentary. With difficulty, my host finally regained control of himself and leaned over to me.

"Speak," he said.

Slowly, stressing every syllable, every word, I began reading the document in Hebrew, then translating it for him. He winced at each of the sentences :1S though they were so many burns.

"That's all?" he asked when I had finished. "That's all."

He squinted, opened his mouth as if gasping for air.

For an instant I was afraid he would faint. But he composed himself, threw his head back to see. On the wall behind me, the frozen pain of the Virgin. Then he turned toward me again.

"No," he said resolutely. "That is not all. Continue."

"I have given you a complete translation of the parch­ment. I have not left out a single word."

"Go on, go on, I say. Don't stop in the middle. Go on, I'm listening."

I obeyed him. I returned to the past and sketched a picture of Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, when Tomas de Torquemada, native of Valladolid, Grand In­quisitor of. Gracious Queen Isabella the Catholic, trans­formed the country into a gigantic stake in order to save the Jews by burning them, so that the word of Jesus Christ might be heard and known far and wide, loved and accepted. Amen.

Soon the Spaniard had tears in his eyes. He had not known this chapter of his history. He had not known the Jews had been so intimately linked with the greatness of his country before they were driven out. For him, Jews were part of mythology; he had not known "they do exist."

"Go on," he pleaded, "please go on, don't stop."

I had to go back to the Sources: the kingdom of Judea, the prophets, the wars, the First Temple, the Babylonian Diaspora, the Second Temple, the sieges of Jerusalem and Masada, the armed resistance to the Roman occupation, the exile and then the long wait down through the ages, the wait for the Messiah, painfully present and painfully distant; I told him of Auschwitz as well as the renaissance of Israel. All that my memory contained I shared with him. And he listened to me without interrupting, .except to say: "More, more." Then I stopped. I had nothing more to add. As always when I talk too much, I felt ill at ease, suddenly an intruder. I got up.

"I have to leave now, I'm late."

The car would be waiting for me in front of the Cathedral. The Spaniard took me there, his head lowered, listening to his own footsteps. The square was deserted: no car in sight. I reassured my guide: there was no reason to worry, the car would not leave without me.

We walked around the building once, twice, and my guide, as before, told me more about the Cathedral of Notre-Dame del Pilar. Then, heavy with fatigue, we found ourselves inside, seated on a bench, and, there, in that quiet half-darkness where nothing seemed to exist anymore, he begged me to read him one last time the testament that a Jew of Saragossa had written long ago, thinking of him.

A few years later, passing through Jerusalem, I was on my way to the Knesset, where a particularly stormy de­bate was raging over Israel's policy toward Germany. At the comer of King George Street, a passerby accosted me:

"Wait a minute."

His rudeness displeased me; I did not know him. What was more, I had neither time nor the inclination to make his acquaintance.

"I beg your pardon," I said. ''I'm in a hurry."

He grabbed my arm.

"Don't go," he said in a pressing tone. Not yet. I must talk to you."

He spoke a halting Hebrew. A tourist, no doubt, ~r. an immigrant recently arrived. A madman perhaps, a visionary or a beggar: the eternal city lacks for none. I tried to break away, but he would not let go.

''I've a question to ask you." "Go ahead, but quickly." "Do you remember me?"

Worried about arriving late, I hurriedly replied that he was surely making a mistake and confusing me with someone else.

He pushed me back with a violent gesture. "You're not ashamed?"

"Not in the least. What do you want? My memory isn't infallible. And judging from what I see neither is yours."

I was just about to leave when under his breath the man pronounced a single word: "Saragossa."

I stood rooted to the ground, incredulous, incapable of any thought, any movement. Him, here? Facing me, with me? I was revolving in a world where hallucination seemed the rule. I was witnessing, as if from outside, the meeting of two cities, two timeless eras and, to convince myself that I was not dreaming, I repeated the same word over and over again: "Saragossa, Saragossa."

"Come," said' the man. "I have something to show you."

That afternoon I thought no longer about the Knesset or the debate that was to weigh on the political conscience of the country for so long. I followed the Spaniard home. Here, too*,* he occupied a modest two-room apart­ment. But there was nothing on the walls.

"Wait," said my host.

I sank into an armchair while he went into the other room.. He reappeared immediately, holding a picture ­frame containing a fragment of yellowed parchment.

"Look," the man said. "I have learned to reacl."

. We spent the rest of the day together. We drank wine, we talked. He told me about his friends, his work, his first impressions of Israel. I told him about my travels, my discoveries. 'I said: "I am ashamed to have forgotten.

An indulgent smile lit his face.

"Perhaps you too need an amulet like mine; it will keep you from forgetting."

"May I buy it from you"

"Impossible, since it's you who gave it to me."

I got up to take leave. It was only when we were about to say good-bye that my host, shaking my hand, said with mild amusement: "By the way, I have not told you my name."

He waited several seconds to enjoy the suspense, while a warm and mischievous light animated his face: "My name is Moshe ben Abraham, Moses, son of Abraham."

**Text 3.**

**Who is a Jew and What kind of Jew?**

(Sami Shalom Chetrit)

An American Jew dies, and he leaves no children.

In is will, the following is written:

“I hereby decree that all my money and property

be given to the State of Israel and my last

wish is that I be buried in the Land of Israel.

The undersigned, Isaac Cohen”

The attendants sent the deceased and his money,

According to his last request, to the Land of Israel,

to eternal rest. The clerks of Zion collected

his money and transferred the corpse, as a matter

of course, to the burial society of the Ashkenazi Jews.

They turned his papers upside down but found no formal authorization

to determine whether or not he really was an Ashkenazi.

Because of their doubts they deferred, sending him

on to the eternal resting place for Sephardi Jews.

The Sephardi sages sat down to take the matter

under advisement and, in conclusion, their answer

was formulated like this: “The name Isaac Cohen could

be either here or there, and given that this is so,

if he is a Sephardic Jew, then we have been privileged

to fulfil a wonderful commandment, and if he is

an Ashkenazi Jew, then we will gladly bury him!”