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Lecture for 33rd Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków

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SHEMA YISRAEL

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_mleE45RorpsrctBrfNEcGdbMyltGyTGtA

INTRODUCTION

This will not be a lecture. Rather an introduction. I will talk about how and why I changed the vision of this year's Festival, which was originally supposed to be about something different. Also about when and under what circumstances I heard the call for this change within me. And let me tell you that I heard it clearly. At the same time, my introduction is intended to make you aware that there has actually been no change. Because no matter how you look at the 36 years of the Festival, it is always the same - a declaration of my spiritual identity.

You will remember that the last four editions of the Festival focused on the four elements of creation - Earth, Water, Fire, Air. This one was to focus on a gateway to the world of *Jewish mysticism*, to Kabbalah and Hasidism.

For me, turning to the world of mysticism is a natural consequence of exploring the fundamental values of Judaism, the most important of which is *ahava* - God's love for man and man's love for God. Contrary to many false stereotypes that have persisted for centuries, Judaism - invariably opposed to Christianity - is not only a religion of the law. Besides, Judaism is not a religion at all. Judaism is not a religion. It is primarily a command of love, compassion, justice and performing good deeds/mitzvot, i.e. doing good. Without waiting for any reward from heaven or any reward at all. The word "religion" is never used in the entire Torah. Judaism is a way of serving God and man; religious dogmatism is generally not to be found in it.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, in chapter 6, verse 5, you read:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And in the Book of Leviticus 19:18 you find the following words:

You shall not seek vengeance, you shall not bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

We wanted to focus on the subject of mysticism because it is missing in our everyday life, where technology and soullessness play the dominant role.

Mysticism has nothing to do with an attitude commonly referred to as "having your head in the clouds". When you read the biblical writings of the prophets, you find thoroughly mystical texts.

Judaism was born in the Middle East. The prophets were mystics, and the teachings and traditions transmitted by the prophets are nothing other than **Kabbalah**. There are those who study Kabbalah with satisfactory results through intellectual learning. They try to understand and change the world by exploring the essence of the mechanisms of operation of the Universal Force that governs the entire creation. They are interested in the *philosophy* of Kabbalah. They have no need for mysticism.

Others, however, strive to learn about the Universal Force (God, Nature, Universe) through Jewish meditation deeply rooted in the writings of the prophets and, thus, in the entire Torah. Meditation, focused either on individual letters of the sacred Hebrew alphabet or on words, sentences and the meanings hidden in them, is supposed to lead to internal liberation, and this in turn to achieving ***Ruach HaKodesh***, a state of spiritual enlightenment.

You should realise that when you pray, you talk to God, but when you read/study the Torah - God speaks to you, probably hoping that you will at least try to hear and understand Him. The Torah is an eternal gift. Everything else is commentaries.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan - one of the greatest mystics of the 20th century - explains the concept of mysticism in the following way: *It is a direct experience of God. In Judaism, the word that most fully reflects the essence of this experience is "deveykus", i.e. "bond", in this case a deep spiritual bond, "adherence" to God.* You can understand it by remembering your childhood, when you snuggled in your mother's arms. Most frequently your mother's.

On 5th October 2023, I returned to Israel. I did not realize at the time how tragic circumstances would make the command to love God and God's love for man become the most important and only message of this Festival.

A Dream about Israel on a Friday Night in Yerushalayim

6th October was a Friday. It was a sunny, even carefree day in Yerushalayim. All Jews were preparing for the joyful Symchas Torah, i.e. the Day of the Joy of Torah ending the eight-day period of one of the three pilgrim holidays - Sukkot. Thousands of people spend time with their families, among their loved ones, at parties, concerts and festivals, such as the Supernova Festival in the south of Israel, right next to the border with Gaza. Nobody keeps track of time and days frequently end at dawn.

At dusk, to welcome Shabbat, I went to what is commonly referred to as the "Wailing Wall" but which should be more precisely termed the Western Wall, i.e. Kotel ha'Maaravi. The largest synagogue quickly fills with worshipers under the darkening sky.

At the Kotel, there are white shirts and colourful skullcaps of young people, mostly young people. The Hasidim are in a different dimension. Present, but elsewhere. Their Judaism is hermetic, self-centred, and they are rather reluctant to look - if they do at all - towards young people. The latter in turn, in some incomprehensibly frenetic way combine the exuberance of released hormones with prayerful devotion. It is a real gushing geyser with barely concealed sexuality, or, if you prefer, a volcano of youthful vitality and religious ecstasy. I have been fascinated by them for over thirty years. They combine exuberance with total devotion to the moment, expressing joy and pride in belonging to the Jewish nation.

They sang many songs on this beautiful Shabbat evening. The hymn "Kol haolam kulo" by **Rebbe Nachman of Breslov** is closest to my heart:

"The whole world is a very narrow bridge.

And the most important thing is not to be afraid."

I was watching intently. At the same time, I was imagining a reborn Yerushalayim, renewed in the spirit of mutual love, without knives, guns, barbed wire and walls, without hatred, evil and contempt. I imagined what Yerushalayim would sound like without the holy names of God swirling in the air and without what precedes them - shofars, bells, muezzins, cantors, choirs, organs, cantatas, masses and Psalms, and like a crouching animal, I sniffed the scent of a lost paradise, at the same time reconciling with what I inhaled every day, a childish, naive game of imagination, a game of hide and seek with God himself, a longing for the impossible and never existing, the illusion of peace...

And they will beat their swords to ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not raise sword against nation and the art of war will no longer be learned. (Is 2:4)

I was dreaming, or maybe it was a kind of meditation?

In any case, I was once again enchanted by the sounds and smell of Yerushalayim, I imagined its metamorphosis, how, unyielding to signs, flags, patrols and check points, it freed subsequent generations from the excess of painful memories. I dreamt in spite of everything, I dreamt in spite of myself. Returning from the Kotel, I heard how the voices of the street – regardless of the language mix, now sounding identical, rose higher and higher in unison, with greater and greater force, to reach their *crescendo* at the moment when the sound of bells resounds from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the singing of muezzins from the minarets, and although an ear unaccustomed to magical sounds would ignore them, I clearly heard the cantor's prayer above everything:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYgogWubwt8> (0'45)

Shema Yisrael spreads out like friendly, soft sky that descends in these last moments of the day and touches the cracked wounds of the City. The sound itself opens up a mysterious dimension of places that I recognize with my eyes closed. I learn to listen to hear - I want to hear to understand. **I am walking** on the narrow bridge of life, from gate to gate, without a shadow of fear, guided by my one and only desire that this night of the holy Sabbath would last forever.

7th October - The Joy of Torah

On the morning of 7th October, I woke up early. Through the open balcony door, I heard children's voices from the courtyard of the German Schmidt School for Christian and Muslim girls.

Parents were dropping their children off at the iron gate of the school. There was joyful chaos in the courtyard - there was noise and squealing, the pupils dressed in identical uniforms looked like unfeathered chicks. I was drinking coffee on the balcony and, myself invisible, was involuntarily watching them having fun below - happy, carefree, unrestrained. Shabbat,

Symchas Torah, the rising, friendly sun, the cool morning breeze, the shouting of pita, orange and pretzel vendors, the morning ringing of bells..., the beginning of the day heralded joy and rest.

I returned to my room. And at that very moment something strange happened. Something very disturbing. The joyful squeal went out like a blown-out candle, it froze... and in a second it turned into the girls' screams of terror. And at that same moment I heard the terrible howl of sirens that rent the sky over Yerushalayim. I ran out to the balcony. The girls were fleeing to the school building in panic, urged on by terrified teachers, sirens were howling incessantly, and grey, tangled streaks of smoke appeared in the blue sky. This happens every time when the Iron Dome intercepts and destroys in the air rockets fired from Gaza.

However, so far Yerushalayim has not been their destination! This is Al Quds, the third holiest city in the world for Muslims, the Dome of the Rock and, above all, the Al Aqsa mosque. It is impossible. Still unaware of what had happened, I ran out into the street. Arabs were stopping in groups and looking mutely at the sky. I stood among them. I was looking for rockets in the sky. The Iron Dome was tearing them apart almost above us. Smoke covered the sky.

What's happened?, I asked an Arab acquaintance from whom I have been buying my morning coffee for years. He was standing with his back to me, staring at the TV hanging from the ceiling of the cafe. Without turning around, he shrugged and said one word several times: *Hamas*.

The sirens were wailing incessantly. I looked up at the sky again. I had the impression that it was already half covered with smoke. The streets were deserted, the Arab vendors from the Damascus Gate were hurriedly packing their goods, and in this sudden change of everything around me it occurred to me that something terrible was happening, because Yerushalayim is a place where both joyful and mostly terrible things always reach the dimension of a biblical prophecy. And its fulfilment.

I ran back. The narrow Nablus Road was blocked by cars of parents nervously waiting for their children trapped inside the school. I squeezed between them and disappeared behind the iron gate. At 8:45, half an hour after I heard the sirens, I opened my computer. As the terrifying news came, I felt hatred within me. I admit - corrosive drops of hatred were seeping into my heart. They were poisoning my mind. They were turning my thoughts and the sky over Yerushalayim black. A moment later my heart sank.

Faces of the world

I sat paralyzed, glued to my computer. The massacre committed by Hamas on innocent Israelis took place right next door, less than 65 kilometres away as the crow flies. The same distance as the one which separates Kraków from Auschwitz. I was petrified: I looked, listened and did not close my eyes. And although the world outside the window was looking the same like yesterday, the world I had been living in until that moment had fallen apart. I forgot mysticism, the ladder from the earth to the sky, all dreams of the never-ending Shabbat disappeared like the morning mist, I stopped thinking about our Festival as a place where love and mutual respect eliminate all differences. I was already aware of the fact that just a while earlier, beautiful, innocent young people had been slaughtered at a festival similar to ours - the Supernova Festival close to the border with Gaza. For no reason at all. For the fact that they were alive, dancing and loving. Images from the Shalom concert at **Szeroka Street in Krakow** flashed before my eyes, where beautiful, innocent people danced, creating circles of unity out of love for life. ***Nova Shalom Festival...***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iEq2hUZMMQ> (3'35)

In the morning, after a sleepless night, I went to the Old **City**. In the shade of the Damascus Gate, Arab vendors spread coriander, nana, grape leaves, za'atar, eggs, olives, figs, sabra fruits and almonds on sheets of cloth. Next to them, pretzels, boiled broad beans and corn were piled on wooden tables. I was walking along Al Wad Street towards the Kotel. Everything was almost as usual; I passed people and people passed me. I listened to voices I couldn't hear, I listened to the ringing of bells I couldn't hear. Yesterday was gone forever. In a fraction of a second, the ground swallowed up the Sunny Shabbat and the Joy of Torah, as when *"the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses and all the people of Korah and all their possessions"* (IV, Bamidbar, 16:32).

Everything acquired another dimension of literalness – without sound, image, nor hope. The wind from the desert stirred up dust. And tears.

I heard a muezzin who remained stubbornly silent. I kept walking forward with the intention of reaching the Kotel, which I did not reach. Something was holding me back. The Jewish quarter was deserted. It became a ghost town. Only the **Haredim**, unaware of anything, were marching joyfully to the Kotel. It was Shabbat. Closed offices and shops. And people locked in their homes.

Echoing footsteps and the words of the prophet in my aching head: *The once populous city sits alone. (...) She cries, howls in the night, tears on her cheeks.* (Lam, 1:1-2)

Evil is never trivial. On 7th October 2023, we saw evil in its pure, human form.

I have no illusions, I have never had them; over thousands of years, behind every more or less elaborate act of barbarism there is one single reason - unreasonable, devilish hatred for the Jews. The oldest, incurable disease in the world - anti-Semitism. That's all. No other nation has experienced it.

It was already dusk when I climbed the Mount of Olives. The glowing sun was hiding below the horizon and the city looked like it was on fire. Below the Mount of Olives, the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the open tombs lay empty. No Messiah. No resurrection. No exhumation. Only fire.

Around midnight, a dark light descended on the city. Then I remembered Moses and the burning bush - although it burns, it does not burn down. Moses, filled with curiosity, approaches the fire. When he gets too close, he hears the words:

Moses, Moses. And Moses answers *Hineni - Here I am.* And when Moses finds out who is talking to him, he covers his eyes.

This is one of the scenes in the Tanakh which captured me forever in a split second.

Here I am – Hineni.

I looked at the city smouldering beneath me - a bush burning with the flame of eternal torment.

Thoughts about war and peace, mysticism, compassion, love and hate, about those slaughtered at the Supernova Festival, about the spinning Shalom concert at Szeroka **Street**, about the Temple, the victims, about Kazimierz's legacy, the whispers and screams of rabbis buried nearby, about a pained soul lost in my body, about the dance of the dead and the living... they all turned in my head like stone querns.

The sun is rising when I go out through the Dung Gate to the vast courtyard next to the Kotel. In the deep shadow of the Western Wall, the faithful gather. The **Haredim** in black robes and young boys, probably from Judea and Samaria, in crocheted skullcaps and long white shirts with wide belts carrying rifles. The morning *Shacharit* prayer begins. I can hear every word. I'm thinking about the bright, innocent souls of all those slaughtered by Hamas.

My God, my soul which You have given me is pure. You created it, You shaped it, You breathed it into me, You guard it inside me and You will take it from me in the future and return it to me when the time comes. Incessantly, while my soul is within me, I thank You, my God and the God of my fathers, Lord of all works, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, God, who returns souls to dead bodies.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oopRqvN_Rms (3'53)

I go back along Al Wad Street, which is almost deserted at this time. I had the naive dream of coexistence here many times. Today, nothing remains of this dream. The Damascus Gate is cold and dark. The shutters of the shops are down, the stalls of the vendors are still empty. There is no one in the guard tower, where Israeli soldiers check those entering and leaving. I buy coffee with cardamom from the Arab, sit down in the middle of the amphitheatre stairs opposite the Gate and look into its dark interior.

So how and what to talk about during **this** Jewish Culture Festival in the shadow of **this** war? How and what to say in the face of those who, striving to annihilate Jews all over the world, attribute genocide to Jews? How to speak and what to say in the presence of those whom the world hates and excludes and who do not feel safe even in their own country?

How many times have I naively (?) repeated that our Festival is apolitical. I wish it were so. It is certainly home of everyone for whom the traditional and contemporary culture of the Jewish **Diaspora** and Israel are important. For those who, regardless of religion and nationality, feel safe and fulfilled in its light. When we praise Jewish civilization, we draw equally from the source flowing in Israel and in the Diaspora. We discover unity in what is contradictory in the living Jewish culture and in ourselves. How am I to find this unity **now** when the world is cracking like a clay vessel before my eyes? What's the point of all this if almost no one cares about the truth anymore? The world chose the idea of power - we chose the power of ideas.

Right now, at present, there are about 185 so-called "armed conflicts", i.e. cruel wars..., and I am sitting at dawn at the Damascus Gate, sipping my morning coffee, thinking about the primeval source, essence and meaning of some distant Festival in Kraków.

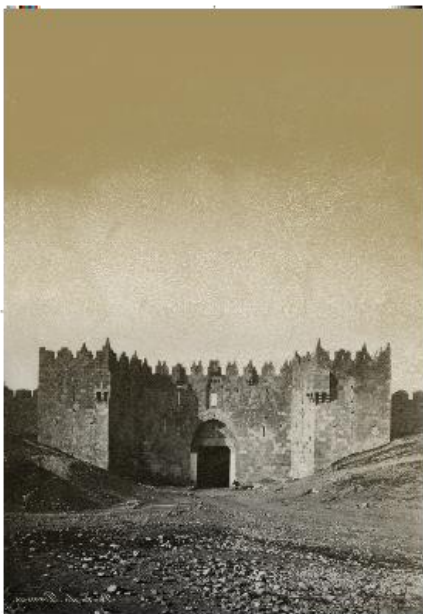
Did I find myself here by accident when Hamas terrorists attacked Israel? Sitting at the "Muslim" Damascus Gate, near the "Jewish" Yafo Gate, I know that our "apolitical character" is only a myth. We find ourselves in the very epicentre of politics, drawn into the vortex of events over which we have no influence. The only thing we can do is manifest our steadfast solidarity with the culture and unity with the people who create this culture.

What continues to heal us are basically two things - music and being together. I. referring to music in general, and especially the music and songs created after the massacre of the 7th October. They reflect history. The same thing happened during and after each of Israel's wars. Israel's endless wars...

There is an existential war going on in Israel. War for survival. For life. Literally. This is not a film. At the same time, it is a war for the survival of Western civilization. The front line is in Israel today.

The sun was rising higher and higher.

People appeared from everywhere, hurrying to do their daily chores, going to prayer, to shops, to meetings, passing one another at the Gate, exchanging greeting, *Shalom, Salem Aleykum, Good morning...*, someone was making his way through the crowd in an electric cart with a swaying pile of cardboard boxes on a trailer, Bedouin women with heavy plastic containers on their heads, filled with olives, fresh herbs, nuts, grapes, teenage boys pushing two-wheeled carts loaded with oranges, mangoes, avocados, peppers, hot pitas, sesame pretzels. Life, as always, continued uninterrupted. I stood up and looked once again into the dark interior of the gate.



No - I did not find myself here by accident at a time when Israel is going through the most difficult time since the war of independence. I already knew that the word **Israel** would shine in the message of the coming Festival.

I love Israel

The biblical home. Home which has been permanently inhabited. Home of the survivors. Of the exiled. Of Zionists. Of pioneers. Of kibbutzniks. Of people who are brave and have a good heart. In 1948, they returned from exile in over 100 countries. Israel. Bathed in sunlight. Bathed in blood. Unobvious. The foundation of the world. Temple of God, Land of the Prophets. Hell and Paradise (with emphasis on "lost"). The habitat of snakes, scorpions and lions, fanatics, desperados, prophets, messiahs and gods... but also a source of love and mercy.

For thirty-six years, together with my friends, I have been building the Jewish Culture Festival - a hospitable home for Jews from Israel and from the Diaspora, for Poles and all people of good will.

We do not preach peace - we live in peace. In a space of mutual respect, we support one another. I don't ask those who want to be with us what their religion or faith is. If they want to demonstrate it, I ask them to be themselves, because only through your actions, your attitude towards other people, towards animals and nature, can you testify your faith. I don't care **where** they are from. I'm happy to see **who** they are. And that they **are** together with our Jewish brothers and sisters. We are the **JEWISH** Culture Festival. There is no place here for those who hate Israel. There is no place for any hatred here.

I have devoted the last 36 years of my life to the Festival. I live it. I breathe it. I am always sketching a map of ascending circles and mutual dependences, starting from early fascination, passion, Tradition, History, Knowledge, Identity, to Responsibility, Consciousness and finally its purest form, i.e. Hineni - Fidelity.

How many times have I asked myself - "what makes you never lose faith in the sense of what you do?" The answer is always the same – **Love. Ahava.**

Listen O Israel, Hear O Israel

In the early morning of 7th October, over 3,000 terrorists from Gaza entered the territory of the State of Israel. With incomprehensible, joyful cruelty, they began the slaughter. When Israel attacked Gaza in retaliation for the deaths of 1,200 innocent civilians, we thought the war would not last long. When Israel responded to the war unleashed by Hamas, we thought that the 251 hostages kidnapped by force would soon return to their families. No one I met at that time - Israelis, Jews, Israeli Arabs, Palestinians, none of my close or distant friends - no one wanted and no one approved of this war. On the contrary. We knew who had started it and why.

Although uncertainly, we made plans for concerts, meetings and lectures. Soon I started receiving greetings and photos from acquainted musicians, booksellers and sellers. They were wearing uniforms, holding rifles and smiling. Just like those who died in action, photos of whom are published almost every day in the Israeli press. Some have come back and are giving concerts again. Others are still fighting in Gaza.

My deputy Kasia did everything to bring me back to Poland. She finally succeeded. On the eve of my departure, I decided to go to the Kotel. I took the Psalms. I went into Wilson's Arch. The evening *Maariv* prayer was just beginning. I opened the Psalms:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Id6Lv_7rSkY (1'30)

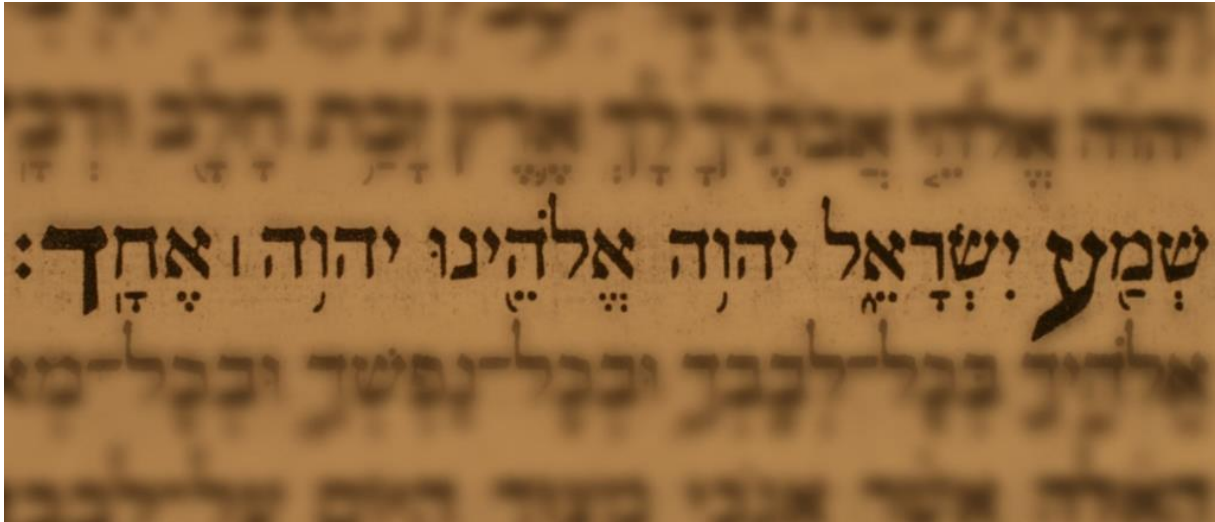
And then I covered my eyes with my right hand and slowly uttered six crowning, extremely important words that have accompanied Jews for thousands of years and constitute the foundation of their faith. Because even if there were no Torah **and no Nevi'im (Prophets) nor**

Ketuvim (Writings), these six words would be enough to express the fullness of love striving to establish oneness between man and God. And I heard everyone else around me saying it.

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Ehad.

Hear, O Yisrael – Hashem is our God, Hashem is the One

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shema-as-a-love-story/>



(Photo by Yaniv Ben-Arie)

The verb Shema means “Listen”. It is the base form. But Shema also means “Hear”. It means “Understand”, Listen - Hear - Understand on many levels of perception at the same time. First, at the literal level of the commandment that I talked about at the beginning (*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength*), to reach what is probably the highest level of understanding, that is, the level of action - *You shall not seek vengeance, you shall not bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself*.

Listen, hear, be attentive. Have no fear. No need to be humble, to fawn, to flatter. Show your trust through concrete actions. That's all.

So how and what to talk about during this Festival?

And it was then - facing the massive stones of the mighty wall surrounding the Temple Mount, a safe distance from the din of war, the desperate cries of death, face to face with the sacred mountain beyond the ancient Wall which *blazed with fire to the very foot of the sky, in darkness and clouds and mist*, as when Moses answered, **Hineni**, as when *the LORD spoke to you from Mount Sinai from this fire; you heard the voice of the words, but you saw no figure, there was only the voice* (Dt 4:11,12) - in the words spoken just then I heard and understood that the message of this year's Festival would be the confession of **Shema Yisrael**. The only thing we can do. What we should do in this state of the world. Shema as the highest expression of **love**.

Love/Ahava – the foundation of Jewish ethics.

Kavanah - Intention

I am afraid that the English word "intention" does not fully reflect the essence of the meaning of the Hebrew word "kavanah". And it is crucial when saying the Shema. It is not the kind of aim as in the case of dignitaries and politicians praying "for world peace." What I mean here is a rare, spiritual ability that allows you to see and understand reality with your inner eye and ear. Let's call it the "*conscious state of a free mind*" which believes what it says and what it hears.

Shema Jsrael - Listen, O Israel, is not a prayer in the strict sense, it is primarily a mystical expression of Jewish identity, the voice and command of God addressed directly to the Jewish **People**, but also to everyone who - like today - in times of hatred and wars, tries to achieve inner concentration and to enter a state of meditation to protect themselves from the destruction of the spiritual dimension of life.

Shema Yisrael is a commandment to live in truth and mutual love. Symbolically and literally, you accept this commandment the moment you say it and when you cross the threshold of the Jewish world/home with a mezuzah fixed above its threshold.

Shema Yisrael is a call to rise to a higher level of perception of yourself and the world, where, after traveling a path full of stormy ups and downs, a calm mind finally reaches the edge of the mystery of existence.

Shema Yisrael comes from the top of Mount Moriah, from the centre of the world, from inside the "Rock of Creation"/*Eben ha'Shetīyyā* where, according to Tradition, God brought the first man to life, Abraham offered his son Isaac to God, Jacob dreamt his dream and fought with the Angel before the latter blessed him and called him Israel.

Today, this rock is covered with the dome of the Muslim temple, the Sanctuary on the Rock. Somewhere, in a place invisible to the human eye, the Holy Name of God is carved on it. The stream of divine energy (assuming one believes in it) on the wave of the ***Shema Yisrael*** confession, enriched with the radiation of the Hidden Light/Or Ha'Ganuz, flows straight into your mind, endowing it with feedback energy, which contributes to the creation of consciousness in its purest form, thanks to which you see what you cannot hear or imagine.

The selection of the ***Shema Yisrael*** prayer as the main idea of the Festival was born in tragic circumstances. Anyway, it's hard to talk about "selection". Just like the prayer itself, it is a spiritual command, the only message we want to share with you. I am sure that the lecturers speaking on the following days will enable you to understand other aspects and the profoundness of this message. I just wanted to tell you how it came to be that the command to "Listen", "Understand" and "Act" is most important for us today.

Shema Yisrael is recited in various situations, and the times we live in seem to create our reality from all these situations.

Here is the full text of this prayer: (Dt 6:4-9; Dt 11:13-21; Nm 15:37-41)

Listen, O Israel! Hashem is our God – Hashem is the One.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Let the words that I command you today be on your heart.

You will teach them to your children and you will talk about them when you are in your house, when you walk along a road, when you lie down at night and when you get up in the morning.

And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be an ornament between your eyes.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on the gates thereof. (Dt 6:4-9)

And if you obey the commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, then he will send autumn and spring rain on your land at the proper time, and you shall gather your grain, your wine, and your oil. He will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle. You will have plenty of food. Beware, and do not let your heart deceive you, lest you go away and serve other gods and worship them, for the wrath of God will burn against you. He will close the sky, and then there will be no rain, the land will not produce its crops, and you will quickly be cut off from this good, beautiful land that God has given you. Take these words of mine to your heart and soul, bind them as a sign on your hand and place them between your eyes. Teach them to your children and talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along a road, when you go to bed and when you rise from sleep. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates, so that you and your children may live in this land which God swore to give to your forefathers as long as there is heaven above the earth. (Dt 11:13-21)

1. You say **Shema Yisrael** twice a day (possibly more often) - during the morning Shacharit prayer and the evening Maariv prayer.
2. **Shema Yisrael** takes a central place in a prayer written on parchment and put in a small box called a mezuzah. You nail the mezuzah with words sacred to the Jews to the doorpost of your house, according to the following commandment: *And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on the gates thereof. (Dt 6:4-9)*
3. **Shema Yisrael** may also be found in wooden boxes, prayer accessories called *tefillin shel rosh*, in accordance with this commandment: *You shall tie them as a sign (tefillin) on your hand, and they will be a Tefillin (emblem) between your eyes.*
4. **Shema Yisrael** is recited at the circumcision of every eight-day-old male newborn.
5. **Shema Yisrael** was recited by millions of Jewish martyrs who went to death over the centuries, thus sanctifying the Name of God – **Kiddush HaShem**.
6. You say **Shema Yisrael** before your own death, if you are aware that it will happen shortly.
7. **Shema Yisrael** has also been a prayer for thousands of years - a call to fight and defend the identity and sovereignty of one's country:
8. **Shema Yisrael** resounds in everyone who wants to hear it.

Listen, O Israel, to the voice of love.

Are we still capable of finding a common place, a word, a value, something that, regardless of who we are and where we are from, will give us a sense of unity and reconciliation? How will we together resist the madness of the leaders and the madness of the crowds demanding punishment for people and nations for crimes not committed? Without which, Jews will always be solely responsible for everything? Without this feeling, we will never cope with the crimes against innocent victims in Israel, in Gaza, in Africa, in Europe, in Belarus, in Ukraine, in Russia, in Kurdistan, in Iran, in Iraq, in Turkey, in China, in Tibet, in Burma, in North Korea..., almost all over the world, in all corners of the bloody earth.

What are the dead to do with our dead compassion?

Those who, in the face of growing evil, remain cowardly silent and only later manifest rage and false compassion will not calm their conscience. What is missing in our lives which makes it yet another circle of hell on earth? Only one thing: Love.

We need ordinary, unwinged, tangible, everyday love. If this sounds too lofty to you - call it compassion. The opposite of love is indifference to the fate of the wronged and cynical compassion. Beware not to let your compassion be managed by evil people.

For 36 years, I have been ensuring that the Festival does not become a political tool. **Against all odds. Even though I know it's impossible.** And it will be like that as long as I am here.

We are not here to save the world. We are carrying out an impossible mission - we are creating a community of people of different languages, nations and religions who find a bond with the world of Jewish ethics and culture, which are the cornerstone of human civilization. This is the civilization of Life that endures thanks to Love.

Poetry does not save, art does not save, culture does not save. Neither does religion. But Love **רַחֲמֵי יְיָ אֱהַבְהָ** saves. And so does mercy **רַחֲמֵי יְיָ**

"Judaism was the first religion in history to place love at the heart of spiritual life: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Love your neighbour. Love a stranger. And what we love most - because that's where God is - is life itself. This is our greatest strength. It helped the Jewish people survive every persecution. It helped people survive the Holocaust. It gave the Jewish nation courage to rebuild the land and the state of Israel. Therefore, our greatest prayer on this day is: "Inscribe us in the Book of Life." We do not ask for wealth or fame, fame or success. We do not pray that hard times and tribulations spare us. We only ask for life. That is what Judaism is: life in love and love for life. All the rest is commentary." (Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks)

God does not say – “Look.” He says, "**Hear.**" You cannot destroy the invisible God, you cannot kill true freedom and love. What shapes you is within you. The Shema reaches to the depths of your consciousness, to that sublime point at the centre of yourself from which you announce to God and the whole world - **Hineni; Here I am.**

The culture of the Word, i.e. of careful listening, **hearing**, understanding and action, has become the culture of the spirit. On this basis, one of the largest and richest civilizations was born and survived - the Jewish civilization. It has survived millennia. It will survive.

The Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow is a celebration of Jewish life. At the same time, it is a commentary on what was and what is. Each of us has the right to our own commentary.

So to finish, let me share *my* commentary with you. These are words taken from the Book of Devarim, or Deuteronomy:

*Today I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you, I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, **listening to His voice**, clinging to Him; for here is your life and your long stay in the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Dt 30:19)*

Hear, O Israel, to the voice of love and speak to the world, O Israel, with the voice of love. And may the world hear you. And may the world understand you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGN1sm5jF9Q> (3'50)

Janusz Makuch