

Centering

Elie Wiesel re-told an ancient Hasidic tale of the great Rabbi Baal Shem-Tov. When the Rabbi saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. He would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle he asked for would be accomplished. The disaster that had seemed so near would be averted.

Much later, another bad moment came, and one of Baal Shem-Tov's disciples felt the need to ask God for the same help. And so he would go to the same place in the forest and say, "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayers." And again the miracle would happen.

Still later—a generation later—a younger rabbi would go into the forest to save his people once more. "I do not know how to light the fire," he said. "And I don't know the prayer. But I know the place, and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient. The miracle was done; his people were saved.

A generation passed, and it became the work of another rabbi to pray for his people to be saved. He sat in his armchair, with his head in his hands. And he spoke to God: "I cannot light the fire," he said; "and I do not know the prayer. I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story. That will have to be enough." And it was enough. The people were saved once more.

God loves stories, Wiesel concluded. God made humankind because God loves stories. What is the story you would tell to God, the story of how your life has been saved? What is the story you must tell yourself, so that you too can remember?

The prophet Isaiah told the story long before we appeared:

*Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God is coming.
And the redeemed of the Lord shall return to the land that has been promised.
They shall come in with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*