PREFACE

IN FEBRUARY 1986, I became the first political prisoner released by Mikhail Gorbachev. Nine years earlier, I had been arrested on false charges of high treason. My real crimes: fighting for human rights inside the Soviet Union and for the right of Soviet Jews, myself included, to emigrate. The KGB derisively referred to the many people in the West who were working so diligently to free Soviet Jewry as "a bunch of students and housewives." But the power of this volunteer army to help us win our freedom was greatly underestimated by the Soviet leadership.

Credit for the final push that led to my release goes to President Ronald Reagan. As my wife, Avital, was demonstrating outside a superpower summit in Geneva at the end

of 1985, President Reagan, pointing at her, turned to Gorbachev and said: "You can keep saying that Sharansky is an American spy, but my people trust that woman. And as long as you keep him and other political prisoners locked up, we will not be able to establish a relationship of trust."

Very soon after that conversation, I was moved from my cell in a prison camp in the Urals to a hospital. Those in charge of the Soviet penal system had developed a series of eighteen diets for "reeducation" purposes. When I checked into the hospital, my diet was immediately upgraded from the lowest level to the highest one. Over the course of the next seven weeks, the Soviets worked to rehabilitate my weakened body with plenty of food, medicines, and vitamins, as well as two hours of fresh air every day. They treated me like a cow being fattened for sale.

At that time, Gorbachev was still not ready to admit, as he would a few months later, that there were political prisoners in the USSR. That is why he tried to make my release part of a larger "spy exchange" between East and West. Fortunately, the Americans were not willing to give credence to this lie. They insisted I be set free thirty minutes before the official exchange of arrested spies.

On Glinecke Bridge, I crossed from East Berlin to West Berlin, from East Germany to West Germany, from the world of slavery to the world of freedom. In the morning I was a prisoner of the KGB. In the afternoon, I was reunited with Avital, after a twelve-year separation. In the evening, I was swept off my feet and swimming on a sea of shoulders at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. In a few hours, I had

ascended from hell to paradise, from the grim reality of evil to the fantasy world of my imagination.

Despite the transcendent feeling of being transported to a different dimension, I could not forget for one moment the friends I had left behind in prison or behind the Iron Curtain. The struggle for my freedom had ended. The struggle for their freedom would continue. Though I knew there were many difficult challenges ahead, from the heights to which I had ascended, these challenges appeared insignificant. My greatest fear was that I would release Avital's hand and suddenly find myself back in a cold, dark punishment cell. I was in the world of my dreams, and I did not want to wake.

But from the heavens, there is only one way to go: down. I realized the descent would inevitably bring disappointment, both to myself and to the many whose expectations of me could not be any higher. Yet I was ready to return to the real world and lead a normal life. I was also confident that I would be able to meet the challenges ahead. In large part, this confidence was rooted in a belief that my experiences had left me not simply memories of the past but also a perspective that could serve me well in the future. During my long journey through the world of evil, I had discovered three sources of power: the power of an individual's inner freedom, the power of a free society, and the power of the solidarity of the free world.

The Soviet Union did its best to turn individuals into what Stalin called "the cogs" of a totalitarian machine, transforming them from *Homo Sapiens* into *Homo Sovieti-*

cus. They did this by depriving individuals not merely of their property but also of their connections to their own history, religion, nationality, and culture. In my experience, rebuilding these connections was the key to confronting tyranny. Going back to my roots, reestablishing a link with my people—both ancient and modern—had given me the strength to shed the loyal Soviet citizen's life of doublethink. It had given me the strength to fight for my own rights as well as the rights of others.

But in addition to drawing upon inner freedom, I found the idea of living in a free society a powerful source of strength. As a schoolboy, I would supplement my English lessons by buying and reading *The Morning Star*, a foreign English-language newspaper that was available in the USSR. The Soviets permitted us to read this Communist daily published in London because, in being very critical of the democratic and capitalist world, the paper parroted the ideological line of the party. For me, however, its effect would prove highly subversive. What left a lasting impression was not the content of the criticism but the very fact that people outside the Soviet Union were free to criticize their own government without going to prison. The stronger the criticism, the more impressed I was by the degree of freedom enjoyed elsewhere. Years later, I would discover that the belief that the right to dissent was more important than the content of dissent was the glue that united all dissidents in the Soviet Union. For us, the profound moral difference between our society and a free society was that people in free societies could publicly express their own ideas and persuade others to accept those ideas as well. We all under-

stood, therefore, that free societies had a basic respect for human rights.

Finally, in fighting with the Soviet regime, we dissidents came to appreciate the power of the solidarity of the free world. We believed that a state's respect for the rights of its own citizens should be the criterion by which to measure that state's intentions. In the readiness of democratic leaders to link their relations with other states to the extent those states respected human rights, we saw great potential for the development and expansion of freedom across the globe.

While I brought this perspective on freedom with me to my new life in Israel, I soon realized that there were few who shared it. For many years, I have been asking myself why so many of those who have always lived in liberty do not appreciate the enormous power of freedom. With time, I have come to understand that my exposure to the black-and-white world of the Soviet Union provided me with a unique laboratory to discover the line between good and evil. In the free world, with its varying shades of gray, isolating the black and white, finding moral clarity, becomes far more difficult.

"The Prisoner of Zion's struggle for freedom is only now beginning."[1] One of Israel's most prominent journalists used these words three days after my arrival in Israel to warn me about the indigenous forces of "darkness" I would soon be confronting. From the rough translation I received at the time, I surmised that "darkness" for this writer meant religion and nationalism, especially the combination of the two.

No sooner had I set foot in the country, he noted cynically, than my wife, Avital, having become religious during our long separation, was changing my name from Anatoly to Natan and slapping a kippah on my head.

I was shocked. For nine years in a KGB prison, I had been struggling and praying to be reunited with my wife and my people and to start a new life in a Jewish and democratic state. How could anyone possibly believe that my real struggle for freedom was only *now* beginning? As somebody whose inner freedom stemmed from my reconnection to the history and religion of my people, this argument made no sense at all. How could anyone in Israel have a problem with a Jewish-sounding name?

My grandfather hoped I would be named after his father, Natan, the patriarchal figure of the family who had passed away during the first decade of the twentieth century. Since I was born in 1948 during a new wave of persecutions against Jews, my parents were afraid to subject their son to any more anti-Semitism than could otherwise be expected. So they told my grandfather that "Anatoly" was an appropriate equivalent. Grandpa called me Natanchik anyway. The moment I broke free of the world of doublethink and began my work as a Zionist and dissident, I asked friends to call me Natan. My grandfather, no longer alive, would surely have been proud to know that his grandson, no longer afraid, finally bore the name intended for him.

Similarly, I could not understand how covering one's head could be so politicized. For many secularists in Israel, it would be as treasonable for me to decide to wear a kippah

as it would be to submit to the KGB. On the other hand, for religious groups, a kippah would be a clear signal that I was firmly ensconced in their camp, adopting their friends as well as their enemies.

In prison, I thought one wore a kippah whenever one felt close to God. During my confinement, there were many such moments, but I did not have a kippah to commemorate them. That is, until my non-Jewish Ukranian cellmate, knowing how much it would mean to me, used the fabric that protected his feet from frostbite to sew one. To this day, I wear that kippah at every Passover Seder, the holiday when Jews celebrate their people's journey from slavery to freedom.

It is difficult to imagine a moment in which I would feel closer to God than when I arrived in Israel for the first time. Putting on a kippah in the airport was such a natural response. I could not understand how anyone could see the symbol of my inner freedom in the Soviet Union as a symbol of slavery in Israel.

If anyone would have asked me in prison if I felt more solidarity with Labor or Likud, religious or secular, Orthodox or Reform, I would have considered the question ridiculous. Having served as an activist and spokesman for Soviet Jewish groups, I was certainly aware of internecine rivalries and conflicts—and experienced quite a few firsthand—but in prison, in the struggle against the KGB, against evil itself, these differences were meaningless. It was the connection I felt with all the people of Israel, with our mutual history and destiny, that was the source of my strength.

But on arriving in Israel, I was immediately besieged by all sorts of groups demanding support for their causes. Left-wing groups called on me to fight for Palestinian rights in Israel as vigorously as I fought for human rights in the Soviet Union. Right-wing groups, insisting that only they were the keepers of the Zionist flame, called on me, as a "symbol" of Zionism, to support their struggle for a Greater Land of Israel. Some demanded that I fight against the theocratization of Israeli society, while others wanted me to join their struggle against undermining the Jewish character of the state.

That I felt like a human wishbone being pulled in different directions was bad enough. But it also quickly became clear that identifying with one group was tantamount to rejecting all the rest. To support one cause was to deny another. To endorse one aspect of a struggle was to its opponents to champion it wholesale. From my perspective, forged in the Soviet Union, these groups shared vast common ground and an underlying unity. But from the perspective of most Israelis, they were worlds apart, incapable of being reconciled.

The extent to which this attitude prevailed within Israel could be seen in the debate surrounding my marriage. In terms of practical observance, Avital, having become Orthodox during our long separation, was clearly more "religious" than I was. Now that we were reunited, people wondered whether she would become more secular or whether I would become more religious. The common assumption was that if neither of us changed, the marriage

would not last or could not be real because Jews of different levels of observance could not build a home together. In prison, I had learned that people with completely separate backgrounds and ideologies could live together quite happily in one cell if they felt that their mutual struggle was far more important than their differences. But in Israel, my deep connection with Avital, which had survived twelve years of separation, was seen as incapable of withstanding minor differences between us.

Shortly after I arrived in Israel, I was invited to the Knesset, Israel's parliament. Shlomo Hillel, then speaker of the Knesset, greeted me warmly, pledging that the fight to free Soviet Jewry would continue. What I thought was a perfectly innocent statement triggered a heated confrontation. "Why don't we work to free non-Jews as well?" shouted one Knesset member. To which another shouted back: "Why are you always interested in non-Jews? Are Jews not interesting enough?" I was thoroughly confused. I did not realize then that these politicians were not speaking to me, nor even to each other, but to their electorates. They were seizing upon the one point that would rally their constituencies and differentiate themselves from their political opponents.

Among those who have always lived in a democracy, this story will raise few eyebrows. After all, in the free world, the competition of ideas and of parties flourishes, and allegiances are often based on a single common principle or purpose that struggles against a competing point of view.

Though generally healthy for a society, this competition can be quite dangerous if we lose sight of the fact that there

is a far greater divide between the world of freedom and the world of fear than there is between the competing factions within a free society. If we fail to recognize this, we lose moral clarity. The legitimate differences among us, the shades of gray in a free society, will be wrongly perceived as black and white. Then, the real black-and-white line that divides free societies from fear societies, the real line that divides good from evil, will no longer be distinguishable.

A lack of moral clarity is why an Israeli journalist compared a kippah to a prison. It is why people living in free societies cannot distinguish between religious fundamentalists in democratic states and religious terrorists in fundamentalist states. It is why people living in free societies can come to see their fellow citizens as their enemies, and foreign dictators as their friends.

Those who seek to move the earth must first, as Archimedes explained, have a place to stand. Moral clarity provides us with a place to stand, a reference point from where to leverage our talents, ideas, and energies to create a better world. Without moral clarity, without a reference point, those same talents, ideas, and energies are just as likely to do harm as good.

This is the tragedy that has befallen the contemporary struggle for human rights. The great dividing line in that struggle is the line that separates free societies that thrive on dissent from fear societies that ban it. Societies that do not allow dissent will *never* protect human rights.

But today, detached from the concept of a free society, human rights have no reference point. The concept of human

rights has come to mean sympathy for the poor, the weak, and the suffering. To be sure, this sympathy is essential if we want to live in moral societies and should be encouraged and cultivated by families, faiths, schools, and governments. Yet without moral clarity, sympathy can also be placed in the service of evil.

A world without moral clarity, is a world in which dictators speak about human rights even as they kill thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions, and even tens of millions of people. It is a world in which the only democracy in the Middle East is perceived as the greatest violator of human rights in the world. It is a world in which a human rights conference against racism, such as the one that took place in Durban, South Africa a few years ago, can be turned into a carnival of hate.

A lack of moral clarity is also the tragedy that has befallen efforts to advance peace and security in the world. Promoting peace and security is fundamentally connected to promoting freedom and democracy. As I learned from my teacher Andrei Sakharov, the world cannot depend on leaders who do not depend on their own people.

But today, the struggle for peace and security in the world is not linked to promoting democracy. The road to peace is seen as paved with good intentions, goodwill, and faith in the brotherhood of man. Likewise, security is believed to be a function of strong leaders and powerful armies. All of these, of course, can help advance peace and security, but detached from the idea of a free society, they can just as easily be placed in the service of evil.

A world without moral clarity, is a world in which, in

the name of peace, pacifists in the West marched alongside emissaries of the KGB who, posing as peace activists, sought to undermine the efforts of a free world to defend itself against Soviet aggression. It is a world in which a strong dictator can be seen as a reliable partner for peace. It is a world in which those who dream of peace are willing to place a wolf and lamb in the same cage and hope for the best—again and again.

A couple of years after my release from prison, I met former President Jimmy Carter during his visit to Israel. I felt an obligation to express my gratitude. When I was arrested, he took the unprecedented step of declaring that I was not an American spy. After thanking him, we began talking about the situation in the Middle East. I told him I thought the reason why Palestinians were suffering and why states in the region were not at peace was the lack of democracy in this part of the world. Furthermore, I explained why Israel must link its concessions in the future to the development of democracy among it neighbors. Carter replied: "You know, you are right, but don't try to be too rational about these things. The moment you see people suffering, you should feel solidarity with them and try to help them without thinking too much about the reasons."

As far as peace depending on democracy, Carter said Israel should not wait. "It's true," he said, "Assad is a dictator. But you can rely on him. He never lied to me. If you sign an agreement, he'll keep it. When I was president, I visited Syria. Our intelligence knew that Assad had violated one of his obligations on a security-related issue. When I

raised the question with Assad, he emphatically denied it. Before leaving for the airport, I told people in our delegation how disappointed I was because Assad never lied to me before and now he clearly was. But on the way to the airport, Assad called to apologize. He told me he had checked the point I raised and that he had been mistaken. He promised to correct the problem."

"So you see," Carter told me, "he never lies. If he signs an agreement with Israel, he'll keep it."

I have no doubt that the causes of peace and human rights are both very dear to Carter's heart. For his indefatigable efforts to bring parties together all over the world, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As for human rights, he turned them into a banner during his first presidential campaign, and in doing so, upgraded the struggle of all dissidents around the world. While it was true that we dissidents were later disappointed when Carter's rhetoric was not backed by forceful action, I always believed that Carter at least understood the meaning of human rights. But here he was speaking about blind sympathy for the suffering and about trust for dictators. He only had to read the testimonies of those who once placed great faith in Stalin's "workers' paradise" to understand how misplaced sympathy for the weak can be manipulated by tyrants, or the stories of how Stalin toyed with his foreign guests by bugging their rooms and surrounding them with informers.

This exchange with Carter is only one episode of many that has convinced me how easy it is for those living in a

free society to lose moral clarity. In our television age, when pictures without context immediately influence our emotions, when cause and effect are deemed irrelevant, when only suffering is important, human sympathy and a deep desire for peace can turn into a weapon of tyranny. Sadly, I have watched many of those who yearn for peace and who champion human rights turn their backs on the freedom that makes both possible.

Over the years, I have come to understand a critical difference between the world of fear and the world of freedom. In the former, the primary challenge is finding the inner strength to confront evil. In the latter, the primary challenge is finding the moral clarity to see evil.

After my release from prison, I dedicated myself to the struggle to free Soviet Jewry. I wrote about my experiences in prison, lectured around the world, met with democratic leaders, and worked on numerous campaigns and petitions. I even moved to the United States for three months to help organize and promote a 1987 rally in Washington on behalf of Soviet Jewry, which became one of the largest rallies in the history of the capital.

In 1988, sensing that Soviet Jews would soon be free and would be arriving in droves in Israel, I and other Jewish activists from the USSR founded the Soviet Jewry Zionist Forum to ease the absorption of new immigrants into Israeli society. In 1989, the Iron Curtain fell and the flood of Soviet Jews began. Over the next decade, one million Jews moved

to Israel, a proportional equivalent of 50 million immigrants moving to America over a similar time period.

Despite a number of overtures to join Israeli politics over the years, I refused. I was afraid that by joining one faction, or one party, in Israel's highly politicized society, I would lose the powerful feeling of interconnection with all the people of Israel—a feeling that had given me so much strength and inspiration through the years.

But in 1995, I finally entered political life when I realized that my ability to help Soviet Jews integrate into Israeli society from outside the political system has long been limited. Even though Israel is a country whose lifeblood has long been immigration, it was conventional wisdom that the first generation of immigrants would be a "generation of the desert," and that only their children would fully integrate into Israeli life. I disagreed with this approach. Like many other immigrant activists, I believed that it was vital for both Israel and for the new immigrants that the tremendous potential of these highly educated and ambitious Soviet Jews be harnessed by immediately opening the doors of Israeli society to them. I discovered that the only way this was going to happen was to establish a political force that could push open those doors. As the slogan of our party, Yisrael Ba'aliyah, made clear, there could be "no integration without representation." Since another leader of our party, Yuli Edelstein, was a Soviet dissident who had served three years in prison, we also thought we had a powerful selling point in noting that we were a different kind of party: Our leaders first go to prison and only then go into politics.

In the years ahead, our party focused on issues relating to the absorption of new immigrants and was responsible for a number of important achievements. The paradox was that as a party dedicated to integrating new immigrants into Israeli life, the more we succeeded, the less justification there would be for our existence. I always understood that our party was an inherently temporary project, designed for a particular historical moment and task. And so it proved to be. In 1996, the party received seven seats in the Israeli Knesset, and three years later, it won six seats. By 2003, our Knesset faction had shrunk to two. Despite this dwindling support, I felt a deep satisfaction that our party had achieved its aims and one more chapter in Jewish history had closed. The Jews of the Soviet Union, an assimilated and almost lost tribe behind the Iron Curtain, had escaped tyranny, returned to their ancestral homeland, and quickly become an integral and important part of the modern State of Israel.

But as I look back on my political journey, along with this sense of satisfaction, I also feel a profound disappointment. Whatever the reasons one enters Israeli politics, there is no avoiding the existential issues that have confronted the country since the day it was born. The question of how Israel can achieve peace and security is one no Israeli leader can ignore. This was especially true during the last decade when the peace process became the central issue of our public discourse, and during the last four years, when the fight against terror was the primary concern of our people and our government.

Like most people, Israelis immediately classify public figures according to familiar labels: Are you in the "peace camp" or the "national camp"? Are you on the Left or the Right? But perhaps because of the gravity of the issues at stake, Israel's debate is particularly divisive. In grappling with these life-and-death questions, many attack not only your positions but your motives as well. In this contentious climate, persuading others to accept your view is a unique challenge. It has been no less challenging for me to get people to *understand* my views. Ironically the same principles that allowed nearly all the people of Israel to feel some connection with me when I was a dissident have left me almost alone as a politician.

But the principles that guided me as a dissident in the struggle against tyranny continue to guide me today. I believe that all people are capable of building a free society. I believe that all free societies will guarantee security and peace. And I believe that by linking international policy to building free societies, the free world can once again secure a better future for hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Serving in both Right-wing and Left-wing governments, in both narrow and broad coalitions, under both Likud and Labor prime ministers, I have argued for these principles. When hopes for peace were at their highest and when despair over Palestinian terror was at its deepest, I have argued for these principles. For me, it was never about Left and Right, but about right and wrong.

Now that we are entering what some have called World War IV, we must restore the moral clarity that helped win

the last world war without firing a shot. We must understand the difference between fear societies and free societies, between dictators and democrats. We must understand the link between democracy and peace and between human rights and security. Above all, we must bring back moral clarity so that we may draw on the power of free individuals, free nations, and the free world for the enormous challenges ahead. I have written this book in the hope that it may help us meet those challenges.