

Holocaust experience
in the book 'night' by
elie wiesel essay



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Elie Wiesel accounts for a life full of horror and conflicting experiences. In the Wiesel's Night story, Eliezer is depicted as the main character who witnesses and survives the Jewish holocaust. As a young boy, Eliezer is observant of life as it unfolds especially during the holocaust. Eliezer's depiction in the story as the main character in the story is that of a humble and religious young man. Like any other boy from a humble family in the eastern European countries, Eliezer's early knowledge of religious matters is evidenced from constant reading of the Torah and Cabala.

In fact, Eliezer had Moshe as a religious instructor at an early age. Eliezer's passion and faith in God are further revealed from frequent visits to the synagogue. Eliezer's understanding of God remains unshaken until he witnesses horrors beyond imagination. Eliezer's faith in God keeps on shifting with time as the Nazis continue the atrocities against the Jews. In this regard, Eliezer struggles to maintain faith in God as events unfold in the story.

For a long time, Eliezer believed that God protected the righteous from the evil. However, Eliezer witnesses dehumanization of his neighbors, friends and family. Eliezer witnesses as the Jews are subjected to horrendous treatment by the Nazis during the selection process at Birkenau (Wiesel 77). Eliezer remembers the smell from the burning Jewish bodies once they arrive at Birkenau. At this point, the idea of embracing heroic humanism takes toll a majority of the Jews contemplate of escaping. On the other hand, Eliezer develops cynicism about God after many Jews are killed by the Nazis.

Eliezer remembers his commitment to an omnipotent God and asks “ Where is God? Where is He?” The blurred vision of God is realized once a young boy is sentenced to death by strangling on the gallows by the Nazis. Eliezer’s anger in God for forsaking his people is too much to bear after the death of a young boy (63). According to Eliezer, God also died on that day by “ hanging here on this gallows” (65). The likening of God execution marks Eliezer’s lack of hope and faith for a bright future. In an ironical twist, Eliezer admits that there is God does not favor the youth.

Eliezer’s struggle to maintain his faith in God makes him an existential superman. Life difficulties and the urge to survive makes Eliezer and his ilk become masters of the world. Without faith in God, Eliezer bears no illusions or false hopes. In this context, the will to survive and make a difference leaves young Eliezer without compassion of others.

In fact, this is evidenced when Eliezer friends distanced themselves from family to ease the pain of death and suffering. According to Eliezer, such is a sacrifice that he wishes not to commit. He witnesses Rabbi Eliahou’s son loses compassion of family and friends to save them from further humiliation by the Nazis. Ironically, Eliezer renews his faith in God by praying for compassion to avoid such embarrassment.

Although Eliezer is disillusioned and does not embrace faith during the experience, he still believes in God. For Eliezer, it is a constant struggle to maintain the very faith in God which leaves him weak and confused. The character becomes vulnerable to diminishing faith. In this regard, he is in a

constant praying mood so as to ensure that his faith in God does not diminish.

Moshe, who is a religious instructor, insists on the importance of praying by saying “ I pray to the God within me that He will give me the strength to ask Him the right questions” (5). Perhaps, this is the very basis that Eliezer uses to contemplate his faith in God. Indeed the holocaust experience makes Eliezer reevaluate his faith by questioning the nature of good and evil. Without a doubt, Eliezer’s experience makes him have a firm stand on his faith in God than before.

Eliezer’s portrayal as a man struggling with his faith is a replica of humanity’s experience during the difficult moments. The night is an effective symbol of a situation where man has no firm stand in regard to what he believes. The fact that the main character is a young boy who struggles with negative thoughts and emerges victorious in his quest shows the resilience of humanity. The constant questioning of faith reveals the strength of man during adversities.

In fact, “.... every question possessed power that did not lie in the answer. Man raises himself toward God by the question he asks him” (5). From the story of Eliezer, the importance of faith in deriving a moral authority over issues affecting humanity is critical. The world’s struggles in the 20th century as evidenced by the impact of the holocaust calls for mankind to strive for compassion. In this context, the reality of consulting faith as the last resort in embracing compassion and humanity is recommendable.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006. Print.

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