

Night

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Elie Wiesel's *Night* is a vivid account of the horrors of the Holocaust.

Describing in his memoirs the extent of the horrendous atrocities he both witnessed and experienced, Wiesel tells of a boy who is stripped forever of the world he has known. *Night* tells of not only Wiesel's stolen innocence, but also of the darkness that forever extinguishes the light in both his soul as well as the soul of all those who are touched by this event. His witnessing of good people turned into brutes through atrocities and brutal treatment, what he sees as the death of God, and the air of death which constantly surrounds him and his people give shape to the darkness which extinguishes the flame in his soul. Throughout his memoirs, Wiesel describes the treatment both he and his people experienced. He retells of the torture, the starvation, the beatings and the death which surround them all and the effect it has on them. He describes how good people, people he himself knew previously, or had come to know in his time at the concentration camps, succumbed to the treatment they experienced and begin to turn on one another, himself included. I had watched the whole scene without moving. I kept quiet . . . any anger I felt at the moment was directed, not against the Kapo but against my father. I was angry at him, for not knowing how to avoid Idek's outbreak. This is what concentration camp had made of me. He describes how people are willing to murder for a single piece of bread, be shot for a bowl of soup and how they willingly helped the Nazis dispose of dead bodies, where " Sons abandoned their father's remains without a tear. " A shell of his former self, Wiesel describes how when he had lost location of his father for a time his heart prayed " Don't let me find him! If only I could rid of this dead weight, so that I could use all of my strength to struggle for my

own survival, and only worry about myself. " Though he and his father had drew strength from one another throughout the beginning of their ordeal, Wiesel himself succumbs to the thinking of most who surround him; " Here, ever man has to fight for himself and not think of anyone else. Even of his father. Here, there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends. Everyone lives and dies for himself alone. " In experiencing such ordeals, they can think only of their own survival, driven mainly by the instinct to survive, which does not give consideration for others around them. In being forced to endure animalistic conditions, animalistic instincts arise to allow for survival. Ordinarily good, kind people must either succumb to these instincts to survive or they will not survive, to become the brutes or to experience a brutalized death. To both witness and experience such transformations forms not only a mask from which he will forever view his world, but violently tears from the boy any innocence which resided in him and in the world around him, allowing a darkness to engulf the essence of his very existence; his soul. Wiesel was not only a Jew but a devoted follower, wishing to be a student of and pursue the mysteries and path of God in the Jewish tradition. " During the day I studied the Talmud, and at night I ran to the synagogue to weep over the destruction of the Temple. " Though still so young, he still had a passion to know God within his tradition. Come the start of his ordeal, Wiesel still had faith in God and believed as many others did that God was merely testing the Jewish people. His view began to change though once he entered the first concentration camp, where upon his arrival he viewed such horrendous atrocities that all strength in his faith left him and the shadows of darkness took an eternal root in his soul. " Never shall I forget those flames

which consumed by faith forever . . . Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul. " Wiesel " did not deny God's existence, but . . . doubted his absolute justice" right up until he witnessed his God's death. " Where is God now? " And I heard a voice within me answer him: " Where is He? Here He is-He is hanging here on this gallows . . . " Up until this point, though he held no longer praise but instead contempt for God, Wiesel's heart still took occasional comfort in prayers to God and retained some of his humanity. (It is interesting to note that it is after this event which sees Wiesel's fastest pace of deterioration in the sense of his identity, strength and humanity. Up until this point, though changes in him are evident, the most drastic occur after this event.) After this event, " My [Wiesel's] eyes were open and I was alone-terribly alone in a world without God" and " In the depths of my heart, I felt a great void. " Where before Wiesel still believed in God, even if in a negative way, his soul still draws comfort and strength in the belief that He is still there, as can be seen the multiple times Wiesel unwillingly finds himself reciting a prayer. After this event though, no prayer can be found uttered by him in the rest of his memoirs. His heart and soul no longer had a source of strength. Where at least before anger gave him strength, Wiesel could no longer find a God to be angry with. Rather, it was scorn which replaced his anger, an emotion which provides no strength only contempt, which eventually leads to despair, hopelessness, and/or indifference. With no source of strength, his heart and soul become weak and are swallowed by the darkness which surrounds him. When he looks at himself at the end he saw " From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed at me [Wiesel]. " The source of his humanity, his life, which

are defined by the soul, are nothing but a corpse. His soul is nothing but that of the dead, murdered by the darkness of his ordeals. The Holocaust and death can be considered one in the same. Though many survived this horrendous event, it was not without a cost and many told that though their bodies remained alive, their heart and soul died. Many claim to be nothing more than the walking dead, without a heart and a soul; a shell, or distortion, of their former selves for their real selves perished in this event. Wiesel was no exception to the companionship of this shadow of death and its lasting effects. Though his body survived, the death around him had forever changed him, robbing him of all which constitutes life. " Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, of all eternity, of the desire to live. " He witness death all round him, from his first night of the concentration camp. " A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load-little children! Yes, I say it-saw it with my own eyes . . . those children in the flames. " He struggles with and even confronts death. " I was face to face with the Angel of Death" " I felt that I was not arguing with him, but with death itself. " This shadow of death is a constant companion to him in all his ordeals, a companion which he constantly must face and rebuke. Though Wiesel may escape with his life after the liberation, much of what constitutes life has been stolen from him. Though death may have spared him, it was not without a price, that price being his soul. " I too had become a completely different person. The student of the Talmud, the child that I was, had been consumed in the flames. There remained only a shape that looked like me. A dark flame had entered into my soul and devoured it. " Elie Wiesel's Night is but a brief glimpse of the horrors of the Holocaust. This event not only saw

the physical murder of millions of innocence, but also the death of millions more. Many may have escaped physically alive, but have psychologically, emotionally and spiritually were murdered, including Elie Wiesel. They were robbed of not only the desire to live, but also of their souls, unable to ever lift their eyes towards God. Though they had suffered and died for their religion, in the end their faith was stripped from them, darkening their hearts towards God and the world, their soul consumed in darkness.