

Night by elie wiesel essay sample



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In the memoir, *Night*, Elie Wiesel describes the multiple losses of loved ones, of caring humanity, of personal identity, and of belief in God's justice, which he experiences as a concentration camp inmate in 1944-1945. Each loss reinforces or lays the foundation for another. His human losses contribute to his gradual loss of faith in God's justice, which is finally and forcefully expressed in a passage on pp. 78-79. This is a significant passage in the memoir, for it summarizes the devastating change that occurs in Elie's religious belief.

He went from being a deeply religious Jewish child in a small Transylvanian village to a fifteen year old who loses his faith in God's justice because of the horrors he experiences in Auschwitz. Although several instances in the memoir are mentioned by Wiesel where he questions his God's mercy, nowhere else in his book does he express his anger at God and his sense of being in a spiritual "night", with such a bitter, angry tone and with images of alienation, as he does in the passage on pp. 78-79.

The intensity of Elie's anger at God's lack of justice is at its greatest in the passage on pp. 78-79, but it is presaged by two situations which occur in Ch. 3. At the beginning of Ch. 3, Elie's mother and sister are sent to the crematorium and he witnesses the burning alive of a lorry full of children and babies. At this point, he says, "For the first time, I felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank Him for?" (44).

Later in this chapter, he and his fellow inmates witness the hanging of a thirteen year old boy. A man in the crowd asks, "Where is God now?"

(77). A voice within Elie answers, " ' Where is He? Here He is-He is hanging here on this gallows ... '" (77). These two experiences lay the foundation for Elie's anger and accusations in the passage on pp. 78-79. The passage in which Elie Wiesel accuses God of abandoning him and his suffering people is set on the eve of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, several months after Elie and his father have been at the Buna concentration camp.

Wiesel writes this passage in personal and strongly emotional tones of anger, bitterness, and alienation. Early in the passage, Elie angrily asks himself, just as the service begins and the officiant requests those present to bless the name of God, " Why, but why should I bless Him? In every fiber I rebelled. Because He had had thousands of children burned in His pits? " (78). Anger at God builds in the passage as Wiesel thinks of the God he once believed so powerful and who now seems to do nothing for His people.

As the congregation repeats the prayers, Elie's anger at what he sees as God's betrayal becomes more intense: " ' But these men here, whom You have betrayed, whom You have allowed to be tortured, butchered, gassed, burned, what do they do? They pray before You! They praise Your name! ' " (79). His anger turns to bitterness as he reflects that he once begged God's forgiveness for being a sinner but now he feels himself "... stronger than the Almighty, to whom my life had been tied for so long... (78).

At this point in the passage, the tone of bitterness becomes one of alienation because of God's abandonment of His people. " My eyes were open and I was alone - terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy" (79). This change in tone slows the pace of the passage.

Wiesel ends the paragraph with Elie thinking that he is "... like a stranger..." (79) as he observes the praying men. The simile emphasizes Elie's sense of alienation both from God and from humanity.

No longer having the light of faith in God's justice to guide him, Elie Wiesel is in a spiritual "night." Because of the intensity of emotion with which Wiesel writes the passage on pp. 78-79, the reader understands and is affected by the sheer pain Elie feels at the loss of his belief in God's justice. "Night" descends on Elie's soul in this passage, and his loss of the God he once revered adds to the numerous losses the Holocaust forces upon him. The passage stands out in the memoir as a moment when a boy's soul undergoes the ultimate spiritual loss, the loss of his faith in God's mercy.