



ENDURANCE OF PAIN AND SUFFERINGS OF HOLOCAUST IN ELIE WIESEL'S *NIGHT*

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ABSTRACT

Beliefs and values of a person transforms when death waits at every waking moment. In Elie Wiesel's memoir, "Night", Wiesel finds ways from his companions and morals to survive the Holocaust. It is expected that the Holocaust survivors would lose faith in God, their determination to go on living, and their reliance in others because of the horrific experiences that they faced day to day. But Elie Wiesel on the other hand, endured the sufferings in the concentration camp. It is explicable that men in concentration camp would question their faith in God while they were to face death either in the gas chamber or in a revolver head. A person would question living when he sees the demise of loved ones and fellow Jews right before his eyes. When starting to give up on all hope of life and God, it would be anticipated that one would no longer trust others, especially when they are fighting each other for their own survival. Contradictory to this, Elie Wiesel stood strong as much as he could. Night illustrates the values in human ties even during the anguish of the reprehensible treatment that the Jews received every day.

Key words: Jewish, Holocaust, Culture, War, Relationship, Values, Sufferings, Identity

INTRODUCTION

"Every man is a child; pain is his teacher." - Alfred de Musset, French poet

Night, a memoir by Elie Wiesel, is critical in understanding the human nature. *Night* represents the best and the worst of the human experience in many ways. It is Elie Wiesel's retrospective account of his life, from his hometown in Transylvania through

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his experiences in Aushwitz - Birkenau and other work-camps, until just after the camps were liberated. Wiesel explains his horrible journey through the Holocaust, but tells about how it expanded his compassion, brought him closer to his father, forced him to mature quickly, and ultimately made him grow as a person. There were countless physical and emotional demands that the Holocaust insisted he go through, including hard labor, hypothermia, and watching his loved ones pass away. Through all of these atrocities, Wiesel found that every cloud has a silver lining.

In 1941, Wiesel was 13. He lived with his parents and sister, and from his account, it seems he was studiously devoted to the Talmud. In 1944, he was rounded up with his family and all other Jews into two Ghettos, and later transported in cattle trains to Auschwitz, Buna and finally Buchenwald. It's not as simple as it appears: murder, brutality, starvation, extreme cold, back-breaking work, illness and finally death. It is a short, intensely difficult work to process.

Wiesel shows extreme courage throughout his stay in the concentration camps. A key event that displayed his courage was the terrible march in which the prisoners are required to run for forty miles to the Gleiwitz camp without stopping. During the march, Wiesel decided that the "idea of dying...fascinated [him]" (Wiesel 86). Even though he thought that he was going to turn into a corpse, Wiesel was determined to keep pushing on. He did not care about what was happening in the present because he was only focusing on what was going to be his future. Wiesel's father has similar thoughts. He never lost his hope and also encouraged his son to do the same. Eliahu, A Rabbi was searching for his son who he had "lost in the commotion" (Wiesel 90). His son had accompanied Eliahu throughout his stay in the concentration camps. Wiesel misleadingly informs Rabbi Eliahu that he has not seen his son. In reality, Wiesel witnessed the young man desert his father, running forward when it seemed Eliahu would not stay alive for the duration of the journey. In contrast, Wiesel would never leave his father alone. He even went as far as asking God for the strength to never run off from his father. This undoubtedly displayed his everlasting courage during the march and his eternal love for his father. As always, a negative experience can lead to a positive lesson.

Humans can build themselves from negative experiences. We learn to grow from our mistakes, punishments and faults. Elie Wiesel explains his emotional tragedies and how they have made him an all-around better person. In one horrible instance, Wiesel is forced to get his tooth pulled out by a Jewish dentist in Auschwitz. Wiesel attempts and succeeds to excuse himself from the procedure by telling the dentist he is feeling ill. A few days later, the dentist is executed for "dealing in the prisoners' gold teeth" (Wiesel 52) to no one's advantage but his own. Later, a foreman named Franek tells Wiesel to give his precious gold tooth to him. Elie Wiesel asks his father's advice, and the father refuses to let him give the tooth to Franek. Wiesel realizes that Franek knows his father's weak spot, which is his



inability to march in formation. Wiesel knows that Franek will chastise his father in order to use Wiesel's emotions for his benefit. This fault brings Wiesel and his father closer. For hours, Elie Wiesel teaches his father how to march. This scenario is one of the ways that Wiesel learns to grow from his negative experiences. His father is mocked and teased, and instead of fighting back and lowering himself to their level, he decides to bond with his father and better himself. In another situation, Wiesel meets a French girl who works next to him in the warehouse. She is a forced labor inmate and seems to not understand or speak German. One day, Idek (who is the head of Wiesel's work camp) takes his anger out on Wiesel and continuously lashes him. Later, the French girl slips him bread and tells him something in perfect German. She tells him to keep his anger bottled up and to "bite [his] lips" (Wiesel 53). She lets him know that liberation will come soon and that he should just wait. Years later, he sees her in Paris and they spend the night reminiscing. This displays the goodness in the human experience through friendship and humanity. The French girl could have chosen to ignore him for fear of getting beaten, or for the fear of being overheard when talking about liberation. But she decided to make him feel better and create a sense of love in the dark times of the holocaust.

The last instance that helps Wiesel grow and find the good in the human experience is when the man tried to steal soup during the air raid. During a bombing, a man crawls to the soup pot because of his eternal hunger. Wiesel explains the jealousy felt by him and his comrades, and lets the reader know that "fear is greater than hunger" (Wiesel 59). The man screams in utter sanity of fulfilling some of his hunger, and finally gets shot. After that, Wiesel lets the reader know that he and his companions are no longer afraid of death. They have reached the point to where they accept death; they even may go further to welcome it. In Wiesel's mind, the reality of staying alive until after the holocaust is itself an extremely impossible chance, a stroke of pure luck. We come to realize that he has now grown up and learned to acknowledge his destiny. He is no longer the optimistic, jubilant boy that he was when he first got taken from his home. This exhibits the best of the human experience by showing the reader just how fast someone can mature when they need to. Elie Wiesel experienced the best when he bonded with his father, learned about friendship and humanity, and matured rapidly during his time at Auschwitz.

In Elie Wiesel's "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech", he explains the damage that the holocaust has done to his mind. He also talks about many things that his time in the Holocaust made him realize. Much of what he now understood is crucial to being fair and realizing the significance of equality in the human experience. Wiesel decided that he would speak up "whenever . . . human beings endured suffering". In his speech, Elie Wiesel centers the focus on others. He does not speak about himself and his personal importance. Wiesel instead brings attention to the "injustice and suffering" that is calling out for the concern of the world. This shows that Wiesel has gained a new perspective on life from his time spent in the



Holocaust. He has experienced the pain and sorrow and is now ready to help others who are going through the same discrimination that he underwent. Wiesel also explains that he still has faith in God, even though he almost lost it. He told of his decreasing loyalty to Him in his memoir *Night*. Although the holocaust caused long-lasting damage to Wiesel physically and emotionally, he still took positive ideas away from it. This demonstrates that even when we, as humans, are put in the absolute worst situations possible, optimism can shine through and create a long-lasting difference in the both our lives and others.

His relationship with his father was vital to his survival. He stood close with his father in their battle to protect each other and keep each other alive. It is unimaginable how people could have survived the experience of their parents/children/siblings beaten or killed, or suffering in that awful 'edge of death' way that we know people suffered in concentration camps.

Elie Wiesel is a perfect example of a man who has found something positive and worthwhile in a horrible scenario. He found both companions and enemies in his time spent in the Holocaust. His journey opened his eyes to the many crimes that are taking place around the world. He developed a better relationship with his father and learns about the importance of spending time with loved ones while they are still living. The memoir, "Night", tells humanity about his immense determination to find the best of the human experience in the worst!

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