

Eliezer Wiesel

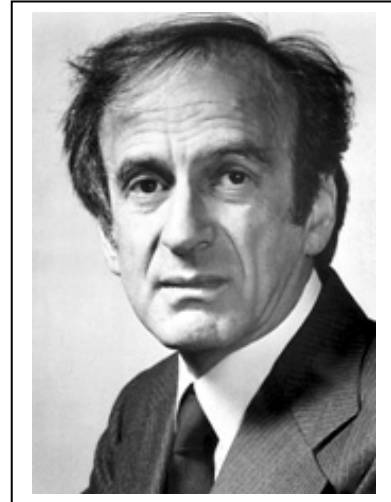
1986

“Indifference, to me, is the epitome of evil.”

Elie Wiesel believed it was important to fight evil in the world. His ideas are based on his own personal experience in Hitler's death camps. His ideas are written in a book about this experience.

Eliezer “Elie” Wiesel transformed the most horrible of experiences into faith, hope and strength.

Wiesel was born into a time and place when life was very difficult. Being a Jew in Central Europe was a **guarantee** of suspicion, discrimination, and violence. His parents Shlomo and Sarah raised their only son to respect their family history. Elie read many books and learned the Hebrew language, while his mother encouraged him to study the **Torah** and **Kabalah**.



- Wiesel prefers to avoid the term “Holocaust” because he says it doesn’t approach the magnitude of what happened to the victims.
- During World War II, Norway (the country responsible for the Peace Prize) was under a pro-Nazi government.
- Wiesel recently visited Auschwitz with Oprah Winfrey for his last visit to that place.

Wiesel is an author of the most informative book on what happened to Jews during World War II.

When Wiesel was young the Nazis came to power in nearby Germany. The Wiesel family lived in Sighet, which became part of Hungary. Their community was under the rule of the Nazis.

Early in the war, his father was thrown in jail for helping Polish Jews escape to Hungary. Even before the war, the Nazis openly declared their hatred for Jews, blaming them for problems Germany had after losing the First World War.

The Nazis treated Jews as **scapegoats**, and encouraged **anti-Semitism**. The Jews were not the only targets. The Nazis declared themselves the elite group of people and thought that they should rule over those they did not like.

Other peoples (such as Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, Gays, the disabled), were beaten, jailed, thrown into **concentration** camps, and killed. The Nazis strongly supported anti-Semitism.

Jews, were robbed of their citizenship,

property and possessions, were eventually forced into concentration camps throughout much of Europe. Jewish pleas for help from the Allies, including the United States did not bring any help.

In 1944, Elie Wiesel's family and the entire Jewish community of Sighet was sent to the **Auschwitz-Birkenau** camp.

At Auschwitz, Elie received the tattoo that all Jews in the camps were forced to wear — a number on his arm. This became his identification so his captors knew who he was. His name was never used.

Elie's number was A-7713. He and his father were separated from his mother Sarah and sister Tzipora, who were murdered at Auschwitz. Elie and Shlomo were sent to various work camps, where they became slave laborers for the Nazis. The living conditions were unimaginable in their **hardship** and cruelty.

In the winter of early 1945, Elie and Shlomo were moved again to the **Buchenwald** camp. **Liberation** by the American Third Army was only months away, but the Allied approach made the Nazis kill their victims faster to keep them from being rescued.

On January 28, Shlomo was beaten by a guard at Buchenwald. Already suffering, from starvation, **dysentery** and exhaustion, Shlomo died. His last word was the name of his beloved son.

The liberation of Buchenwald came that spring. Elie was sent to an orphanage in France, where he was reunited with his sisters Bea and Hilda, who had also survived the war.

After learning French, Elie studied at the Sorbonne, a famous university in Paris. After he graduated Wiesel taught Hebrew and choir. He decided to become a journalist because of his life experiences.

At that time, Jewish refugees were trying to create a Jewish homeland. Almost all the Jews of Europe had been killed by the Nazis and their allies, and the movement for a Jewish Country was seen as very important to all Jews.

Wiesel acted on behalf of Jewish statehood by writing supporting these ideas. In 1947 the Jews proclaimed State of Israel to exist. Despite the protests of the Arabs living in neighboring countries, the United Nations recognized the State of Israel.

For eleven years after the Second World War, Wiesel could not speak of what he had seen and experienced in the camps. Like many Holocaust survivors, the horror along with guilt over having survived when so many perished, made it impossible to speak.

Fortunately, Elie met with Nobel Literature Prize laureate François Mauriac in 1952. He persuaded him to share his story with the world.

His book, **Night**, became one of the most highly regarded works in all of modern literature. It describes the suffering and events of life in the concentration camps. *Night* is a memory to the horrible truths that the world would rather forget. Wiesel's main point in writing about the Holocaust is to stop it from happening ever again.

Here is a passage from *Night*:

“Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one

long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.”

In 1955, Elie Wiesel moved to the United States. He was hit by a taxi the next year, and the hospital refused to treat him without money or insurance. Luckily, a second hospital agreed to treat his injuries, but he spent a year in a wheelchair recovering from his injuries.

In America, Elie continued writing. He has written over forty books and won many awards. He became a US citizen in 1963. The following year he returned to visit the town of Sighet, now part of Romania. In 1969, he married Marion Rose. Together, Elie and Marion have also created the Elie Wiesel **Foundation** for Humanity. Their most important work is the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Elie Wiesel and President Bill Clinton lit the eternal flame in the Museum’s Remembrance Hall at the 1993 opening ceremony. Elie Wiesel has spoken out against **genocide** around the globe: in Darfur, Sudan; in the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iraq; in Bosnia-Herzegovina; in South Africa under **apartheid**, and in Indian lands in Central America.

Elie Wiesel’s life and career are a testament to the power of memory and the courage. With his success has come a responsibility to work toward peace and justice.

For his efforts Elie Wiesel has won numerous awards, including the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1986.

Activities

Elie Weisel

Vocabulary Terms:

1. **Torah**
2. **Kabalah**
3. **Anti-Semitism**
4. **Scapegoat**
5. **guarantee**
6. **Dysentery**
7. **Palestine**
8. **Yiddish**
9. **Émigré**
10. **Foundation**
11. **Genocide**
12. **Apartheid**

Study Questions

1. What was life like for European Jews before the war?
2. Why did the Nazis in Germany choose Jews as a target or their hate? What did they do to them?
3. What did Elie Wiesel study as a boy?
4. What happened to each of Elie's family members during the war?
5. Why did Elie Wiesel wait eleven years before writing and speaking of his experience?
6. Why do you think Elie and so many other European Jews chose to leave Germany after the war, rather than return home?
7. How do Elie Wiesel's actions and experiences compare with other American Peace Prize laureates?

Introductory and Extended Exercises

- A. Ask students to read selected passages from "Anne Frank" or "Night" and create a three-dimensional art project that symbolizes the book's themes.
- B. Ask students to study the Holocaust, and try to answer the question: "Could the Holocaust ever happen again?" After students share their answers and discussion, present materials (newscast, article, etc.) about the Rwandan Genocide and the global response to it. Ask the students to interpret and explain the inaction on the part of world leaders to genocide. Then present materials on Darfur, and ask students what ought to be done about it.
- C. Following either of these exercises, ask students to do further research and create an essay outline on an important subject raised in the reading or subsequent discussion.

Technology Option

Watch Oprah Winfrey's television special featuring Elie Wiesel on his last trip to Auschwitz.

Watch the PBS Special "Elie Wiesel: First Person Singular"

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