



Night, by Elie Wiesel – Selected Passages

The debatable question for this unit is:

Did the Nazis succeed in committing deicide during the Holocaust, according to *Night*, by Elie Wiesel?

Passages from *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1958, 2006), translated by Marion Wiesel.

- (1) Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him, he liked to say. Therein lies true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them. Because they dwell in the depths of our souls and remain there until we die. The real answers, Eliezer, you will find only within yourself. "And why do you pray, Moishe?" I asked him. "I pray to the God within me for the strength to ask Him the real questions" (5).
- (2) That was when I began to hate them [the Nazis], and my hatred remains our only link today. They were our first oppressors. They were the faces of hell and death (19).
- (3) The older men begged their sons not to be foolish: "We mustn't give up hope, even now as the sword hangs over our heads. So taught our sages . . ." (31).
- (4) A truck drew close and unloaded its hold small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes . . . children thrown into the flames. . . . I pinched myself: Was I still alive? Was I awake? How was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and the world kept silent? (32).
- (5) "*Yisgadal, veyiskadash, shmey raba*...May His name be celebrated and sanctified..." whispered my father. For the first time, I felt anger rising within me. Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for? (33).

- (6) Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.
Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.
Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.
Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.
Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.
Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.
Never (34).
- (7) The night had passed completely. The morning star shone in the sky. I too had become a different person. The student of Talmud, the child that I was, had been consumed by the flames. All that was left was a shape that resembled me. My soul had been invaded—and devoured—by a black flame (37).
- (8) Their parents, like mine, had not had the courage to sell everything and emigrate while there was still time. We decided that if we were allowed to live until the Liberation, we would not stay another day in Europe. We would board the first ship to Haifa (50 – 51).
- (9) Behind me, I heard the same man asking: “For God’s sake, where is God?” And from within me, I heard a voice answer: “Where is He? This is where—hanging here from the gallows...” That night, the soup tasted of corpses (65).
- (10) Night was falling rapidly. And more and more prisoners kept coming, from every block, suddenly able to overcome time and space, to will both into submission. What are You, my God? I thought angrily. How do You compare to this stricken mass gathered to affirm to You their faith, their anger, their defiance? What does Your grandeur mean, Master of the Universe, in the face of all this cowardice, this decay, and this misery? (66).
- (11) Blessed be God’s name? Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves. Because He kept six crematoria working day and night including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in his great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Bund, and so many other factories of death? How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch as our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? Praised be Thy Holy Name, for having chosen us to be slaughtered on Thine altar? (67).
- (12) And I, the former mystic, was thinking: Yes, man is stronger, greater than God. When Adam and Eve deceived You, You chased them from paradise. When You were displeased by Noah’s generation, You brought down the flood. When Sodom lost Your favor, You caused the heavens to rain down fire and

damnation. But look at these men whom you betrayed, allowing them to be tortured, slaughtered, gassed, and burned, what do they do? They pray before You! They praise Your name! . . . In days gone by, Rosh Hashanah had dominated my life. I knew that my sins grieved the Almighty and so I pleaded for forgiveness. In those days, I fully believed that the salvation of the world depended on every one of my deeds, on every one of my prayers. But now, I no longer pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused (67 – 68).

- (13) Akiba Drumer has left us, a victim of the selection. He just kept repeating that it was all over for him, that he could no longer fight, he had no more strength, no more faith. His eyes would suddenly go blank, leaving two gaping wounds, two wells of terror. He was not alone in having lost his faith during those days selection. I knew a rabbi, from a small town in Poland. He was old and bent, his lips constantly trembling. He was always praying, in the block, at work, in the ranks. He recited entire pages from the Talmud, arguing with himself, asking and answering himself endless questions. One day, he said to me: “It’s over. God is no longer with us” (76).
- (14) Death enveloped me, it suffocated me. It stuck to me like glue. I felt I could touch it. The idea of dying, of ceasing to be, began to fascinate me. To no longer exist. To no longer feel the excruciating pain of my foot. To no longer feel anything, neither fatigue nor cold, nothing. . . . But deep inside, I knew that to sleep meant to die. And something in me rebelled against that death (86 – 89).
- (15) And in spite of myself, a prayer formed inside me, a prayer to this God in whom I no longer believed. “Oh God, Master of the Universe, give me the strength never to do what Rabbi Eliahu’s son has done” (91).
- (16) Yet at the same time a thought crept into my mind: If only I didn’t find him! If only I were relieved of this responsibility, I could use all my strength to fight for my own survival, to take care only of myselfInstantly, I felt ashamed, ashamed of myself foreverHe seemed to be burning with fever. I fought my way to the coffee cauldron like a wild beast. And I succeeded in bringing back a cup. I took one gulp. The rest was for him. I shall never forget the gratitude that shone in his eyes when he swallowed this beverage. The gratitude of a wounded animal. With these few mouthfuls of hot water, I had probably given him more satisfaction than during my entire childhood (106 – 107).