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English 11-4

2 April 2019

### Elie Wiesel's Survival in the Camps

Elie Wiesel's bestselling memoir *Night* depicts the Holocaust through the eyes of a Holocaust survivor. Unlike Wiesel's other books about this subject, *Night* goes through Wiesel's vivid memories and personal experiences in the camps, rather than the experiences of a fictional character. When he was a child in Sighet, Wiesel and his father disconnected from each other, and he instead devoted his time to learning the Kabbalah and furthering his Jewish faith (4). The German army sends Wiesel (and his family) to the concentration camps at age thirteen, where he stays with his father (29). Although some survived the Holocaust by sheer luck, Wiesel's loss of faith and relationship with his father motivated him to live through the camps and become stronger.

In the concentration camps, Wiesel does everything he can to stay with his father. Because Wiesel goes as far as giving up bread rations to be with his father, it becomes his Achilles heel. Wiesel says "Unfortunately Franek knew how to handle this; he knew my weak spot. My father had never served in the military and could not march in step.... That presented Franek with the opportunity to torment him, and on a daily basis, thrash him savagely" (55). Using Wiesel's fear of losing his father against him, Franek makes Wiesel obey him without any question (56). Each time he almost got separated from his father, Wiesel does everything he can to stay with him, such as when Wiesel's father gets mistaken for a corpse when falling asleep on

the train. To wake his father up, Wiesel throws himself onto his body, slaps him relentlessly, and pleads to the S.S. Guards “No!... He’s not dead! Not yet!” (98) as they determined if they should throw him off of the train. As his father steps one foot in the grave in the last chapter, Wiesel realizes that “Suddenly, the evidence overwhelmed me: there was no longer any reason to live, any reason to fight” (99). Wiesel has already suffered so much loss, that only his relationship with his father makes sense to him. Since Wiesel’s relationship with his father was the only sense of humanity he had left, he did not desire anything else once Wiesel’s father dies. A good example of this is when the prisoners find bread crumbs on the train and kill each other for a small piece. When an old man finds enough to feed himself and his son, someone else notices and starts beating him up. The old man cried “Meir, my little Meir! Don’t you recognize me... You’re killing your father... I have bread... for you too... for you too...” (101). The only way for Wiesel to not become a savage animal like the rest of the prisoners on the train was to not think of himself first. With his father gone, there was no point in engaging in animalistic behavior or bother trying to survive, which is why he decides to sulk in one spot indefinitely (113).

When Wiesel loses his faith in God, he gains the ability to survive in the camps for longer. At the beginning of the book, Judaism was so important to him that praying was almost second nature (4). Wiesel even asked “Why did I pray? Strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?” (4). Despite devoting himself to the Kabbalah before the camps, Wiesel’s mentality towards God changes when he arrives in Birkenau. After watching the hanging of a young pipel, Wiesel’s faith in God shrinks, causing him to draw a new conclusion about God: “Where He is? This is where --- hanging there from the gallows...” (65). This shows that Wiesel

no longer believes in God, and by comparing Him to the pipel, he indicates his belief that God died. This foundation of his early years turned out to be nothing more than a myth. Wiesel dislikes God so much at this point, that he decides not to fast on Yom Kippur (69). According to Wiesel, “There was no longer any reason for me to fast. I no longer accepted God’s silence” (69). Wiesel needs as much strength as possible to survive the labor and realizes that eating on Yom Kippur was a way to stick it to God and make up for all of the torture he has gone through. By disobeying God on Yom Kippur, Wiesel becomes stronger (68). Because Wiesel no longer believes in God he says “ I no longer pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament... I was the accuser, God the accused” (68). If Wiesel had not lost his faith in God, he might have ended up like Abika Drummer and given up on survival due to God not answering his prayers (72). Losing faith allows Wiesel to focus more on the survival of his father and himself, rather than false hope in God.

Wiesel’s fear of losing his father and loss of faith in God helped him survive the concentration camps. Wiesel used his fear of separation and lack of faith to push himself to last throughout the entire Holocaust. This allowed Wiesel to avoid the crematorium and worse punishment than some of the other prisoners at the camps. If he still did not have a great relationship with his father and believed in God, Wiesel may not have been able to tell his story at all.

Work Cited

Wiesel, Elie, and Marion Wiesel. *Night: With a New Preface by the Author*. New York, Hill and Wang, 2006.