

# Night Book Notes

## Night by Elie Wiesel

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## Author/Context

Eliezer (Elie) Wiesel was born on September 30, 1928 in Sighet, a border town between Hungary and Romania. Wiesel grew up in the town's *shtetl*, or Jewish section, where his father, Shlomo, was a shopkeeper and a well-respected leader in the Jewish community. As a young boy, Wiesel was devoted to the study of the Torah, the Talmud, and the mystical writings of the Kabbala. In the spring of 1944, when Elie was only fifteen years old, the Germans deported 15,000 Jews from Sighet to the notorious concentration camp, Auschwitz. His mother and younger sister Zipporah were exterminated at Birkenau, his two older sisters, Hilda and Bea, managed to survive. Until his father's death in Buchenwald, Wiesel and his father were together throughout their internment, the experiences of which he writes about in his autobiographical novel, *Night*.

After the liberation of Buchenwald, Elie Wiesel and many of the surviving children were sent to France. In Paris, Wiesel decided to learn the French language (the language that he primarily writes in). For several years, Wiesel studied at the Sorbonne, where he was deeply influenced by the existentialist writings of Camus and Sartre. Afterwards, he took various jobs as a journalist, traveling extensively, especially to Israel, North America, South America, and the United States. In 1954, while he was working as a foreign correspondent for an Israeli newspaper, Elie Wiesel met the famous Catholic novelist and moralist, Francois Muriac (author of the foreword to *Night*). Through Muriac's strong encouragement, Wiesel wrote a memoir of his Holocaust experience.

After honoring his vow of silence for ten years, Elie Wiesel first published a Yiddish version of his Holocaust story in 1956. An English translation of the shortened French version of *Night* appeared in 1960. It was not the first book to detail the experiences of a Holocaust survivor, but *Night* has become one of the most widely read, if not *the* most read book on the Holocaust. Critic Robert McAfee Brown gives *Night* the distinction of being "the most influential book" in confronting the difficult, harsh memories of the Holocaust. Since the publication of *Night*, Wiesel has written extensively, utilizing many different literary styles. His novels include *Dawn* (1960), *The Accident* (1961), and *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (1968). He has also written numerous articles, novellas, plays, and a series of memoirs.

In 1969, Elie Wiesel married Marion Erster Rose, who was also a survivor of the concentration camps. She remains his closest collaborator, having translated many of his books. A prolific writer who has won many awards, including the *Prix Medicis*, one of France's most distinguished literary prizes, Elie Wiesel is also well known as a teacher, lecturer, and spokesman. In 1979, Wiesel was appointed Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. His story and influence greatly contributed to the heightened awareness of the significance of the Holocaust and the memory of its victims. As a world-renowned champion of peace and human rights, Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. He is currently serving as the Andrew Mellon Professor of Humanities and University Professor at Boston University.



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## Plot Summary

Night begins in 1941, when, the narrator of the story, Elie, is twelve years old. Having grown up in a little town called Sighet in Transylvania, Elie is a studious, deeply religious boy with a loving family consisting of his parents and three sisters. One day, Moshe the Beadle, a Jew from Sighet, deported in 1942, with whom Elie had once studied the cabbala, comes back and warns the town of the impending dangers of the German army. No one listens and years pass by. But by 1944, Germans are already in the town of Sighet and they set up ghettos for the Jews. After a while, the Germans begin the deportation of the Jews to the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

The Jews of Sighet are forced into crowded cattle wagons, each car consisting of eighty people. The conditions of the train ride are horrific; they are treated no better than animals. A woman named Madame Schachter starts to go mad. She yells, "Fire! I can see a fire!" (Chapter 2, pg. 22) Periodically, throughout the train ride, she yells about fire, flames, and the furnace. At first, the others try to quiet her. When that does not work, they merely ignore her. When the train arrives at its destination, they are at Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz. The air smells of burning flesh.

At Birkenau, Elie is separated from his mother and sisters. Realizing the importance of being together, Elie and his father lie about their age. As they prepare to enter the camp, they see a ditch where babies are thrown into a burning flame. Elie cannot imagine that this is actually happening. It feels like a nightmare that he can never forget. The male Jews are shaved, showered, and given work clothes. After a long march, they enter Auschwitz, where Elie becomes number A-7713. After a brief stay at Auschwitz, they are moved to a new camp, Buna.

At Buna, Elie goes through the dehumanizing process of the concentration camps. Both he and his father experience severe beatings at the hand of the kapos (overseers). In one instance, Elie receives twenty-five strokes of the whip from Idek the Kapo for walking in on him while he is with a girl. All the prisoners are overworked and undernourished. Many lose faith in God, including Elie. He witnesses several hangings, one of a boy with an angelic face, and sees him struggle for over thirty minutes fighting for his life. To a stranger's cry of "Where is God now?" Elie answers: "He is hanging here on this gallows...." Chapter 4, pg. 62

Elie and his father manage to survive through the selection process, where the unfit are condemned to the crematory. Elie suffers from a foot injury that places him in a hospital. After the surgery, the Germans decide to relocate the prisoners because of the advancement of the Russian army. The prisoners begin a long trek in the dead of winter. Many do not make it. Elie and his father support each other through the grueling march.

The march leads to a train ride where Elie witnesses a boy kill his father for a morsel of bread. Elie is horrified at the very thought, but he realizes that he too has become callous-that he is beginning to care only about his own survival. By the end of the winter

trek to Buchenwald, out of a hundred prisoners, only a dozen survive, including Elie and his father.

Although Elie's father survives the trip, he later falls ill. Elie witnesses the slow deterioration of his father's health and his eventual death. At Buchenwald, the Germans try in desperation to exterminate all the remaining Jews. But by this time, the Germans are close to defeat. Before the Germans can carry out Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jews, there is a successful uprising in the camp by the resistance. On April 11, 1945, American tanks arrive at Buchenwald. As Elie recuperates in a hospital, he looks into a mirror and sees a corpse gaze back at him.



# Major Characters

**Elie (Eliezer):** The main character and narrator of the story, Elie is fifteen years old when he is taken to the Nazi concentration camps. Elie and his father support each other throughout their internment. Elie's father dies before the liberation, but Elie becomes a survivor and witness of the death camps. Elie's narrative recounts the horrors of his nightmarish Holocaust experience.

**Elie's father (Shlomo):** A storeowner and a well-respected Jewish community leader in Sighet before the deportation of the Jews. Elie develops a strong bond with his father as they go through the unforgettable journey through the death camps. He manages to survive the internment until the very end, where he dies of dysentery before the liberation of the camps.

**Moshe the Beadle:** A poor Jewish mystic in the town of Sighet who becomes Elie's spiritual mentor and friend. In 1942, Moshe is deported to Poland where he witnesses the mass extermination of the Jews. He manages to escape and goes back to Sighet to warn them of danger. No one listens to him.

**Dr. Mengele:** Described as a typical SS officer (a cruel face, but not devoid of intelligence, and wearing a monocle), he uses a baton during the selection process. He decides who lives to work another day and who is sent to their deaths at the crematory. Cold, unaffected, and authoritative, he is the prototypical Nazi officer.

**young pipel:** A young assistant under the Dutch Oberkapo (head overseer) at Buna, he is sentenced to death for being involved in sabotage. Described as having the face of angel, he struggles on the gallows for more than half an hour before he dies. Elie is deeply affected by witnessing the boy's death.

## Minor Characters

**Elie's mother:** Separated from Elie and her husband at Birkenau, she and Elie's younger sister, Tzipora, die in the crematory at Birkenau.

**Hilda and Bea:** Elie's older sisters, they survive the camps.

**Tzipora:** Elie's younger sister. She dies, along with Elie's mother at Birkenau.

**Madame Schachter:** A woman of about fifty with a ten year old child. On the train ride to Auschwitz, she starts to lose her mind. She constantly warns the passengers of the fire, flame, and furnace. Her words prove prophetic, as the other Jews witness the flames of the crematory and the smell of burning flesh upon arrival of Birkenau.

**Stein of Antwerp:** A relative of the Wiesels, he questions Elie's father about the whereabouts of his wife and two little boys. Elie lies and tells them that he has heard of them, which makes Stein happy. He brings Elie extra rations of food until he hears the truth about his family. Elie does not hear from him again.



**Akiba Drumer:** A fellow prisoner with a deep solemn voice, he sings Hasidic melodies at Birkenau. Deeply religious, he is optimistic that their imprisonment will not last long. As time passes, he loses faith.

**Juliek:** A bespectacled Polish Jew, he is a violinist in the orchestra at Buna. At Gleiwitz, amidst a barrack full of dying men, Elie hears Juliek play his violin one last time. In the morning, Elie finds him dead, his violin crushed.

**Idek the Kapo:** An overseer at Buna, he is described as having fits of madness. He beats Elie and his father on different occasions. In one incident, Elie discovers him with a girl. As punishment, Idek gives him 25 strokes of the whip.

**Yossi and Tibi:** Two Czech brothers whose parents are exterminated at Birkenau. They become friends with Elie at Buna. Together with Elie, they plan to go to Palestine after the war.

**Franek:** A Pole and former student from Warsaw, he is the foreman at Buna. He forces Elie to give up the gold crown on his tooth by tormenting Elie's father.

**Alphonse:** A German Jew and head of the block at Buna, he is kind and generous to the members of his block.

**dentist (Jewish Czech):** A Jewish dentist at Buna that Elie goes to see for his gold crown, his dentist office is closed down after being arrested for running a private trade of gold teeth.

**French girl (Jewess):** A girl with whom Elie works next to at a warehouse at Buna. When Elie is beaten by Idek the Kapo, the French girl helps him and tells him to keep his anger for another day. Years later in Paris, Elie Wiesel runs into her in the Metro. After reminiscing about the past, Elie finds out that she is, as he had thought, Jewish.

**youth from Warsaw:** Elie's first witness of a hanging, the Polish boy is hanged for stealing during an alert. All the prisoners are made to stare at the face of the hanged body.

**Dutch Oberkapo:** A kind and beloved overseer at Buna, he is accused of sabotage and stocking arms. He is transferred to Auschwitz and never seen again. His assistant, the pipel, is hanged.

**rabbi from Poland:** Like Akiba Drumer, a person who loses his faith while in the camps. Initially, he recites whole passages of the Talmud and argues with himself about God. Later on, he concludes that God is no longer with them.

**Jewish doctor (at Buna):** A doctor that operates on Elie's foot. He promises Elie that he will walk again.



**neighbor (in the hospital):** A Hungarian Jew who is an invalid in the hospital where Elie recuperates from his foot surgery. He tells Elie that Hitler will be faithful to his promise of annihilating all the Jews.

**Zalman:** A Polish lad, who works with Elie at the electrical warehouse at Buna, he falls behind during the winter march to Gleiwitz. Elie believes the other prisoners trampled Zalman.

**Rabbi Eliahou:** A rabbi of a small Polish community, he is described as beloved by everyone in the camp, including the Kapos. Known to shine with inner purity, his words always bring comfort to the people. As he goes around looking for his son, Elie remembers how he had seen the rabbi's son abandon him during the winter march. Elie prays that he does not become like the rabbi's son.

**Meir :** On the winter transfer to Buchenwald, he kills his father over a morsel of bread. After he snatches the bread from his father, he himself is killed by other men.

**Meir Katz:** A friend of Elie's father, he is one of the strongest in the camp. Elie's father calls for Meir's help when Elie is choked during the night. Near the end of the trip to Buchenwald, Meir starts to lose hope and tells Elie's father that he cannot make it. He dies as they arrive at Buchenwald.



## Objects/Places

**Sighet:** Little town in Transylvania where Elie and his family live before they are deported to the concentration camps.

**Talmud:** Jewish religious text. Elie is devoted to its studies before his internment.

**cabbala:** Jewish mystical writings that emphasize the significance of numbers, among other things. Elie studies the cabbala under Moshe the Beadle.

**cattle trains (wagons):** Train cars that the Germans use to transport the Jews to the concentration camps.

**yellow star:** A decree comes from the Germans that all Jews wear this identifying symbol. Elie's father's response to the decree is that at least no one dies of it.

**ghettos:** Jewish settlements set up by the Germans. Two ghettos are created in Sighet before the Jews are deported to the concentration camps.

**Auschwitz:** The first concentration camp to which the Jews of Sighet are taken. Elie and his father spend three weeks there before being relocated to Buna.

**Birkenau:** The reception center for Auschwitz. Elie and his father are separated from the female members of the family. Elie's mother and youngest sister are exterminated at Birkenau.

**crematory:** The fiery furnace where many Jews are sent to their deaths.

**baton:** Dr. Mengele uses it to separate the prisoners to the left and to the right. The selection process is used to determine those who live and those who die.

**Kaddish:** A prayer for the dead. Akiba Drumer asks fellow prisoners to recite the Kaddish after his death.

**A-7713:** The identification number engraved on Elie's arm at Auschwitz. The camp overseers refer to the prisoners by their numbers.

**Buna:** The second concentration camp where Elie and his father are taken to, it is at Buna where they face the hardest labor and abuse.

**Palestine:** At Auschwitz, Elie and his friends, Yossi and Tibi talk about going to Palestine after the war. Earlier in the novel, Elie suggests that they relocate to Palestine. Elie's father says that he is too old to start over.

**(Elie's) gold crown:** A Jewish dentist from Czechoslovakia tries to extract Elie's gold crown without success. However, Franek, the foreman, gets Elie's gold crown by tormenting his father.



**gallows:** The place of several hangings, including the pipel with the face of an angel.

**bell:** The bell regulates everything in the camp. The bell signals roll call and even the selection. Elie wishes for a world without bells.

**Gleiwitz:** The camp the prisoners reach during the winter march. The prisoners move from Gleiwitz to Buchenwald.

**Juliek's violin:** Juliek plays the violin in a room full of dying men. In the morning, Elie finds Juliek dead and the violin smashed.

**Beethoven's concerto:** The piece that Juliek plays before his death.

**Buchenwald:** The concentration camp where Elie's father dies. A Jewish resistance takes control of the camp.



# Quotes

Quote 1: "What can we expect? It's war..." Chapter 1, pg. 4

Quote 2: "I wanted to come back to Sighet to tell you the story of my death. So that you could prepare yourselves while there was still time. To live? I don't attach any importance to my life any more. I'm alone. No, I wanted to come back, and to warn you. And see how it is, no one will listen to me..." Chapter 1, pg. 5

Quote 3: "The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don't die of it..." Chapter 1, pg. 9

Quote 4: "A prolonged whistle split the air. The wheels began to grind. We were on our way." Chapter 1, pg. 20

Quote 5: "The doors were nailed up; the way back was finally cut off. The world was a cattle wagon hermetically sealed." Chapter 2, pg. 22

Quote 6: "Men to the left! Women to the right!" Chapter 3, pg. 27

Quote 7: "Eight words spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion. Eight short, simple words. Yet that was the moment when I parted from my mother." Chapter 3, pg. 27

Quote 8: "Do you see that chimney over there? See it? Do you see those flames? (Yes, we did see the flames.) Over there-that's where you're going to be taken. That's your grave, over there." Chapter 3, pg. 28

Quote 9: "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 those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never." Chapter 3, pg. 32

Quote 10: "The night was gone. The morning star was shining in the sky. I too had become a completely different person. The student of the Talmud, the child that I was, had been consumed in the flames. There remained only a shape that looked like me. A dark flame had entered into my soul and devoured it." Chapter 3, pg. 34

Quote 11: "[W]as there a single place here where you were not in danger of death?" Chapter 3, pg. 37

Quote 12: "I did not deny God's existence, but I doubted His absolute justice." Chapter 3, pg. 42

Quote 13: "I was a body. Perhaps less than that even: a starved stomach. The stomach alone was aware of the passage of time." Chapter 4, pg. 50



Quote 14: "Bite your lip, little brother....Keep your anger and hatred for another day, for later on. The day will come, but not now....Wait. Grit your teeth and wait...." Chapter 4, pg. 51

Quote 15: "I was thinking of my father. He must have suffered more than I did." Chapter 4, pg. 56

Quote 16: "If it could only have lasted ten times ten hours!" Chapter 4, pg. 57

Quote 17: "'Where is He? Here He is-He is hanging here on this gallows....'" Chapter 4, pg. 62

Quote 18: "Whose was that tear? Mine? His?...We had never understood one another so clearly." Chapter 5, pg. 65

Quote 19: "Whenever I dreamed of a better world, I could only imagine a universe with no bells." Chapter 5, pg. 69-70

Quote 20: "'I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people.'" Chapter 5, pg. 77

Quote 21: "Yet another last night. The last night at home, the last night in the ghetto, the last night in the train, and, now, the last night in Buna. How much longer were our lives to be dragged out from one 'last night' to another?" Chapter 5, pg. 79

Quote 22: "We were masters of nature, masters of the world. We had forgotten everything-death, fatigue, our natural needs. Stronger than cold or hunger, stronger than the shots and the desire to die, condemned and wandering, mere numbers, we were the only men on earth." Chapter 6, pg. 83

Quote 23: "I shall always remember that smile. From which world did it come?" Chapter 6, pg. 86

Quote 24: "How could I forget that concert, given to an audience of dying and dead men!" Chapter 6, pg. 90

Quote 25: "When they withdrew, next to me were two corpses, side by side, the father and the son. I was fifteen years old." Chapter 7, pg. 96

Quote 26: "We were all going to die here. All limits had been passed. No one had any strength left. And again the night would be long." Chapter 7, pg. 98

Quote 27: "I probably brought him more satisfaction than I had done during my whole childhood." Chapter 8, pg. 101

Quote 28: "But I had no more tears. And, in the depths of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like-free at last!" Chapter 8, pg. 106



Quote 29: "After my father's death, nothing could touch me any more." Chapter 9, pg. 107

Quote 30: "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." Chapter 9, pg. 109



# Topic Tracking: Death

## Chapter 1

Death 1: One day, Moshe the Beadle, who had been deported, comes back to Sighet to tell the story of the extermination of the Jews by the Gestapo. Although Moshe begs desperately to be heard, no one believes him. He tells Elie, "I wanted to come back to Sighet to tell you the story of my death." (Chapter 1, pg. 5) Moshe the Beadle considers himself as already having gone through death. As someone who has experienced death and miraculously lives, he wants to save others from having to go through that same death.

Death 2: Elie identifies the German soldiers by their steel helmets with the emblem, the death's head. It is the first impression Elie has of the German soldiers.

The Jews are not allowed to leave their houses for three days-on pain of death. The term, "on pain of death" is used several times in the narrative to emphasize the harsh reality of the German's threats.

As the Jews are forced to wear the yellow star, Elie's father replies, "The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don't die of it..." Chapter 1, pg. 9 Elie responds, "Poor Father! Of what then did you die?" (Chapter 1, pg. 9) The yellow star symbolizes the mark of distinction that sends many Jews to their deaths. In retrospect, Wiesel feels that his father and the Jews of Sighet conceded to their deaths by submitting to every German decree. With each submission, they die a bit more.

As the ghettos are emptied by the deportation of the Jews, rooms that were once bustling with activity, lay open with the people's belongings still remaining. It is like an "open tomb" in that there is no longer any sign of life.

## Chapter 3

Death 3: The crematories serve as factories of death. The big, fiery furnace is where those who do not make the selection are sent. The threat of being sent to the crematory is likened to being sent to the grave.

As the prisoners witness the burning of babies, they begin to recite the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. It is a prayer that the living offer up on behalf of the dead. "Someone began to recite the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. I do not know if it has ever happened before, in the long history of the Jews, that people have ever recited the prayer for the dead for themselves." (Chapter 3, pg. 31) The threat of death is so imminent that the Jews recite the prayer for their own souls.

## Death 4:



The SS officer who introduces them to Auschwitz is described as having the odor of the Angel of Death. He tells the Jews that if they do not work, they will be sent to the crematory. The idea of being sent to the furnace becomes a firm reality.

Elie realizes, as he settles in during the first night of camp, that he has changed: the child in him is dead. It is the death of his old identity-the death of his innocence.

On the electric wires at Auschwitz, there is a sign with a caption: "Warning. Danger of death." Elie considers it a mockery because everywhere in the camp, there is constant danger of death.

#### **Chapter 4**

Death 5: As Elie witnesses the hanging of the young pipel, he feels that it is his God who is hanging on the gallows. Elie identifies with the death of the young pipel because he undergoes a similar slow, painful, spiritual death.

#### **Chapter 5**

Death 6: The selection process determines who will live and who will die. Dr. Mengele, the notorious SS officer, is the person who heads the selection. He moves his baton to the right or to the left, depending on the health of the prisoners. Dr. Mengele is like the Angel of Death. He is the messenger of death.

As the prisoners prepare for the evacuation of Buna, the bell rings. It signals the start of the winter march. The sight of the prisoners setting out in the winter is likened to a burial procession. The prisoners realize that many of them will not make it through the march alive.

#### **Chapter 6**

Death 7: On the winter march, the prisoners who cannot keep up are either shot by the SS officers or trampled upon by the others. The winter march is a march to their deaths. As Elie sees his friend Zalman fall behind, he begins to think about his painful foot: "Death wrapped itself around me till I was stifled. It stuck to me. I felt I could touch it." (Chapter 6, pg. 82) The presence of his father is the only motivation that keeps him going.

#### **Chapter 7**

Death 8: On the train ride, dead corpses are thrown overboard onto the snow. "Twenty bodies were thrown out of our wagon. Then the train resumed its journey, leaving behind it a few hundred naked dead, deprived of burial, in the deep snow of a field in Poland." (Chapter 7, pg. 94) By this time, Elie is indifferent to death.

As the Jews on the train feel that the end is near, they all begin to wail like animals that are about to die. The cries are a primal, instinctive, and reactionary response to death. Many die like animals, without the dignity accorded to human beings.



### **Chapter 8**

Death 9: At Buchenwald, Elie's father struggles with dysentery. Elie tries to revive his father's spirit, but it is of no use. Elie's father is taken away during the night. Elie feels guilty that he cannot find the tears to weep. Concentration camp existence has robbed him of the proper response to his father's death. Elie is emotionally dead.

### **Chapter 9**

Death 10: In his Holocaust experience, Elie undergoes near physical, spiritual, and emotional death. It is graphically reflected in the mirror as he sees the image of a corpse staring back at him.



# Topic Tracking: Faith

## Chapter 1

Faith 1: Elie is a deeply religious boy whose favorite activities are studying the Talmud and spending time at the Temple with his spiritual mentor, Moshe the Beadle. At an early age, Elie has a naïve, yet strong faith in God.

## Chapter 3

Faith 2: Many of the prisoners try to cope with their situation by talking of God. Akiba Drumer, a devout Jew with a deep solemn voice, sings Hasidic melodies and talks about God testing the Jews. Elie, however, ceases to pray. He identifies with the biblical character Job, who questions God when misfortunes come upon him. Similarly, Elie begins to doubt God's absolute justice.

## Chapter 4

Faith 3: As Elie witnesses the hanging of the young pipel, he feels that it is his God who is hanging on the gallows. Elie identifies with the death of the young pipel because he undergoes a similar slow, painful spiritual death. The death of the pipel is related to the death of his faith in God.

## Chapter 5

Faith 4: On the Jewish New Year, Elie feels a strong rebellion against God. He becomes the accuser and God the accused. But in his rebellion against his faith in God, he also feels alone and empty.

The Jews debate whether they should fast for Yom Kippur. As an act of obedience to his father and also as an act of rebellion against God, Elie swallows his food. In the camps, his physical needs become more important than his faith.

Faith 5: Even the most devout, religious Jews begin to lose faith. Akiba Drumer does not make the selection when "cracks" begin to form in his faith. A rabbi from Poland, who always recites the Talmud from memory, concludes that God is no longer with them. For some, losing their faith in God is akin to losing their will to live.

Faith 6: As Elie recuperates in the hospital after his foot surgery, a faceless neighbor tells him that he has more faith in Hitler than in anyone else because he's the only one who's kept his promises to the Jewish people. This is a direct attack on those who have clung to their faith in God. The ultimate insult is that even Hitler is an object worthier of faith than is God.

## Chapter 6



Faith 7: Recalling the actions of Rabbi Eliahou's son, Elie prays to the God he no longer believes in, that he have the strength to never do what the rabbi's son had done in abandoning his father. Rabbi Eliahou's search for his son rekindles in Elie a sense of hope and faith. Elie feels that at the very least, he should be faithful to his father to the end.



# Topic Tracking: Memory

## Chapter 1

Memory 1: Although the whole of *Night* is a series of memories, there are many cases where either "forgetting" or "remembering" plays a significant role in the narrative. In the first chapter, Moshe the Beadle and all the foreign Jews of Sighet are expelled by the Hungarian Police. The Jews of Sighet are troubled but soon after the deportation, the deportees are forgotten and town life returns to normal.

Moshe returns to Sighet and recounts the horror stories of the Gestapo's extermination of the Jews. He tries to recall from memory, the stories of the victims' deaths: "He went from one Jewish house to another, telling the story of Malka, the young girl who had taken three days to die, and of Tobias, the tailor, who had begged to be killed before his sons..." (Chapter 1, pg. 4)

The German army sets up two ghettos in Sighet. The Jews of the "little ghetto" are deported first and just three days later, even as they move into the previous occupants' homes, the Jews of the big ghetto forget about them.

## Chapter 2

Memory 2: During the train ride, the Jews try desperately to silence the maddening screams of Madame Schachter. They even go so far as to hit her. Just as the Jews are able to block Madame Schachter out of their minds, they see the flames of the furnace and smell the odor of burning flesh at Birkenau. There, they are reminded of Madame Schachter's visions.

## Chapter 3

Memory 3: The first night of camp is forever etched into Elie's memory. Repeatedly, he uses the phrase "never shall I forget." Elie does not have to try to remember anything because even if he tries to forget, the memories are eternal, forever.

Upon arrival of Auschwitz, the SS officer in charge gives the new prisoners an introduction to the camp. He says, "Remember it forever. Engrave it into your minds. You are at Auschwitz." (Chapter 3, pg. 36)

As the prisoners talk about God and wonder about their fate, Elie finds that only occasionally does he think about the fates of his mother and younger sister. The rigors of concentration camp life have dulled his sense of memory.

## Chapter 4

Memory 4: At Buna, Elie is beaten by Idek the Kapo and a young French girl comes to his aid and tells him to keep his anger and hatred for another day. Years later, Elie



Wiesel recalls running into her in Paris. They reminisce about the days in the concentration camp. Such memories are hard to forget.

## Chapter 5

Memory 5: After the prisoners go through the selection process, they forget about it until a few days later when the head of the barracks reads off the numbers of those selected. Although the prisoners forget, Dr. Mengele, the one who makes the selections, does not forget.

Akiba Drumer, sensing that his death is near, makes Elie and others promise to remember him when he is taken away by praying the Kaddish. Due to the harsh treatment they receive, after only three days since Akiba Drumer is taken away, Elie and the others forget to pray the Kaddish for him.

## Chapter 6

Memory 6: During the train ride in the dead of winter, the prisoners forget about everything-death, fatigue, and their physical needs. The unbearable sufferings that the prisoners undergo desensitize their senses-they are able to block everything from their minds.

Elie remembers that Rabbi Eliahou's son had tried to abandon his father during the winter march. That memory makes him pray to a God that he no longer believes in, to give him the strength not to do what the rabbi's son had done.

Memory 7: Elie cannot forget the smile his father shows him even in the midst of his suffering. "I shall always remember that smile. From which world did it come?" Chapter 6, pg. 86 Elie asks. These seemingly minor, death-defying gestures are particularly memorable.

Memory 8: Elie finds it hard to forget the last concert Juliek gives to an audience of dying men. The memory of the last concert is heightened by the lasting images of Juliek's dead body and his smashed violin. And whenever Elie Wiesel hears Beethoven's concerto, he remembers the face of his friend, Juliek, and his last concert.

## Chapter 8

Memory 9: When he awakes from his sleep, Elie remembers that he has a father. Sleep and fatigue had gotten the better of him; the survival of his body overcomes him to the point of forgetting about his father.

At Elie's father's death, there are no prayers, no candles lit to his memory, no tears. In the depth of his memory, Elie admits feeling a sense of relief in not having to worry about his father anymore. He feels free from his father's physical presence, but not from the memory of his father, which remains with him forever.



# Topic Tracking: Night

## Chapter 1

Night 1: Before the Germans arrive at Sighet, nighttime is for Elie a time of spiritual and physical renewal. It is a time of studying religious texts, of prayer, and of restful sleep. This comforting sense of night is forever lost as Elie experiences the horrible, dreadful nights of the concentration camps.

Night 2: Elie describes how in the ghetto, as his father was telling stories, "Night fell," foreshadowing the news of their deportation. The notion of "night" falling on the Jews becomes a running theme throughout the book. There are several instances where the phrase precedes some dreadful event.

## Chapter 2

Night 3: Darkness characterizes the cattle train ride to Birkenau-Auschwitz. In the darkness, Madame Schachter goes out of her mind and yells incessantly about the fire, flames, and furnace. When she points and screams about the fire and flames, the other Jews see only darkness. Darkness is also a character of night that allows the young to flirt and people to relieve themselves without being seen.

## Chapter 3

Night 4: The overwhelming sense of Elie's experiences during the first day of camp is that it is like a nightmare. As Elie and the other prisoners walk past the chimneys at Birkenau, they stand motionless, unable to comprehend the sights: "We stayed motionless, petrified. Surely it was all a nightmare? An unimaginable nightmare?" (Chapter 3, pg. 28) Elie thinks he's dreaming. After pinching his face, in disbelief he utters, "How could it be possible for them to burn people, children, and for the world to keep silent? No, none of this could be true. It was a nightmare...." (Chapter 3, pg. 30)

That first night of camp is forever etched into Elie's mind. His entire narrative story seems like an account of one long, endless night: "So much had happened within such a few hours that I had lost all sense of time. When had we left our houses? And the ghetto? And the train? Was it only a week? One night-*one single night*?" (Chapter 3, pg. 34)

## Chapter 5

Night 5: The impression of "last nights" anchors the timeframe of Elie's narrative. There are numerous instances of last nights: the last night at home; the last night in the ghetto; the last night on the train; the last night at Buna.

Night 6: "Night" carries with it the notion of uncertainty and fear. Short of representing death, night becomes an imagery of the unknown. As Elie and the other prisoners prepare to leave Buna, there is a greater fear of what is to come: "The gates of the



camp opened. It seemed that an even darker night was waiting for us on the other side."  
(Chapter 5, pg. 80)

### **Chapter 7**

Night 7: One night, on the winter trek to Buchenwald, Elie is almost strangled to death by an unknown attacker. Elie does not know the reason for the attack. Night brings out the worst dangers.

The nights become bleaker as the narrative progresses. Thus, Elie detests the "long nights" of the winter: "We were all going to die here. All limits had been passed. No one had any strength left. And again the night would be long." Chapter 7, pg. 98



# Chapter 1

The year is 1941 and Elie Wiesel, the narrator of the story, is twelve years old. The Wiesel family consists of Elie's father, Chlomo, a shopkeeper and well-respected Jewish community leader, Elie's mother, his two older sisters, Hilda and Bea, and youngest sister, Tzipora. They live in the town of Sighet in Transylvania (on the border of Hungary and Romania). Elie is a studious, deeply religious boy who enjoys studying the Talmud (Jewish religious text) by day and praying in the temple at night.

Topic Tracking: Night 1

Even at his young age, Elie wishes to find someone who can teach him the Jewish mystical teachings of the cabbala. One day, as Elie is praying at the temple, Moshe the Beadle, the temple caretaker, asks him why he prays. Elie finds the question strange because for him, praying is as natural as breathing, but he replies that he does not know. From then on, Moshe the Beadle becomes his spiritual mentor. They spend many hours in the temple talking about the mysteries of God.

Topic Tracking: Faith 1

One day in 1942, Moshe the Beadle and all the other foreign Jews of Sighet are expelled and deported on cattle trains. Although the townspeople are disturbed, they quickly forget about the deportees. Elie hears a Jew sigh and say, "What can we expect? It's war...." Chapter 1, pg. 4 Then one day, Moshe the Beadle comes back to Sighet and recounts the horrors of what had happened to him and his companions at the hands of the German police, the Gestapo. No one believes him. When Elie asks Moshe why he wishes so much to be heard, he responds:

*"I wanted to come back to Sighet to tell you the story of my death. So that you could prepare yourselves while there was still time. To live? I don't attach any importance to my life any more. I'm alone. No, I wanted to come back, and to warn you. And see how it is, no one will listen to me...."* Chapter 1, pg. 5

Topic Tracking: Death 1

More than a year passes and the Jews of Sighet are confident that the war will soon be over. However, bad news arrives: Fascists take power in Hungary and there are frequent incidents of anti-Semitism. Before long, German troops appear in the streets of Sighet. Elie identifies the soldiers by the emblem on their helmets, the death's head. At first, the Jews of Sighet take kindly to the German soldiers who seem distant, but polite. However, on the seventh day of Passover, the Germans arrest the leaders of the Jewish community. Moshe the Beadle warns Elie's father one last time, then disappears. Things happen very quickly afterwards: the Germans issue a decree preventing the Jews from leaving their homes (on pain of death); then a decree goes out that all Jews must wear the yellow star. Elie's father's responds, "The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don't die of it...." Chapter 1, pg. 9 Soon after, two ghettos are set up-a large one in the center



of town and a smaller one. Even in the ghettos, the Jews remain naively optimistic that things will not get any worse. However, *night falls*. All Jews are to be deported.

Topic Tracking: Night 2

The smaller ghetto is expelled first and Elie compares the emptied houses to open tombs. Even as the remaining Jews move from the big ghetto into the smaller ghetto, they forget about the previous occupants. Within a few days, the rest of the Jews, including Elie's family, are deported. Packed eighty people to each cattle wagon, the last of the Jews depart Sighet. They embark on a journey that no Jew onboard could have ever imagined. "A prolonged whistle split the air. The wheels began to grind. We were on our way." Chapter 1, pg. 20

Topic Tracking: Memory 1

Topic Tracking: Death 2



## Chapter 2

In the crowded cattle wagon, the Jews are treated like caged animals. Free from social constraint, young people flirt in the darkness. Others relieve themselves as they please. A German officer orders the Jews to give up their valuables. He adds that if anyone is missing, they will all be shot like dogs. The train ride is a taste of what's to come: "The doors were nailed up; the way back was finally cut off. The world was a cattle wagon hermetically sealed." Chapter 2, pg. 22

During the night journey, Madame Schachter, a woman of about fifty with a ten-year-old son, starts to go out of her mind. By the third day of the trip, she yells, "Fire! I can see a fire! I can see a fire!" (Chapter 2, pg. 22) Although the others try to calm her down, she continues to shout about the fire, flames, and furnace. Her screams, along with the darkness, the stench, and lack of air, make the others fear for the worst. In order to quiet her down, the young men resort to hitting her. After a long, harrowing trip the train reaches the last station. The Jews discover that it is Auschwitz, a labor camp. They are told that the conditions are good and that families will not be separated. The Jews give thanks to God. While they wait in the train, Madame Schachter again begins to point and scream about the fire, flames, and furnace. The others look, but all they see is darkness. Ashamed that they had even momentarily believed her, the Jews go back to their places. To quiet her, Madame Schachter is dealt more blows. As the train enters the camp, they forget about the existence of Madame Schachter, who has retreated to a corner. But as the train pulls in, they notice the flames and the smell of burning flesh. The place is Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz.

Topic Tracking: Night 3

Topic Tracking: Memory 2



## Chapter 3

As soon as they get off the train, the men and women are separated. An SS officer cries, "Men to the left! Women to the right!" Chapter 3, pg. 27 Elie parts from his mother and sisters. Elie sadly reflects, "Eight words spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion. Eight short, simple words. Yet that was the moment when I parted from my mother." Chapter 3, pg. 27

As the new arrivals enter the camp, a veteran prisoner advises Elie and his father to lie about their ages so they could be together. Another prisoner points to the chimney of the crematory and warns them that it is the place of their graves. He says, "Do you see that chimney over there? See it? Do you see those flames? (Yes, we did see the flames.) Over there-that's where you're going to be taken. That's your grave, over there." Chapter 3, pg. 28

In the middle of the square, Dr. Mengele, an SS officer with a conductor's baton in his hand, separates the men according to who can work and who cannot. Elie and his father remain together. As the new prisoners march toward the barracks, they witness babies being thrown into a ditch filled with flames. The Jews cannot believe their eyes; it is like a nightmare. They begin to recite the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead. For the first time, Elie begins to feel a sense of revolt against a God who would allow something like this to happen. As he nears the flames of the ditch, Elie thinks about jumping to his death. But at the last moment, he chooses to live. Two steps from the pit, they are ordered to turn left. That first night in camp is forever etched into the memory of Elie Wiesel:

*"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 those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never."* Chapter 3, pg. 32

Topic Tracking: Night 4  
Topic Tracking: Death 3

The new arrivals are taken to the showers, shaven at the barber, and given work clothes. As the Jews assemble into crowds, some are joyful at being alive, others cry. Elie notices that both he and his father have changed during the grueling process of being turned into prisoners of camp. Elie feels that the child in him has died; he is no longer the young, studious boy he once was:

*"The night was gone. The morning star was shining in the sky. I too had become a completely different person. The student of the Talmud, the child that I was, had been consumed in the flames. There remained only a shape that looked like me. A dark flame had entered into my soul and devoured it."* Chapter 3, pg. 34



An SS officer, with an "odor of the Angel of Death," tells the prisoners that they are at Auschwitz and that they should remember this forever. He warns the prisoners that anyone who cannot work will be sent to the crematory. As Elie and his father enter their barracks, the gypsy in charge strikes Elie's father for asking about the lavatories. Elie knows that he has changed. Before, he would surely have retaliated. On the march to work, Elie notices a white placard with a caption: "Warning. Danger of Death." Elie finds the sign a mockery: "[W]as there a single place here where you were not in danger of death?" Chapter 3, pg. 37

Topic Tracking: Memory 3

Topic Tracking: Death 4

The prisoners are assigned to their respective blocks. The general consensus among the prisoners is that the war will soon be over. Prisoner morale is high. Still the spoiled child, Elie refuses his soup even though he's hungry. His father eats Elie's portion. After the meal, the prisoners are engraved with their prison identification numbers. Elie becomes A-7713. After a few days, the prisoners accustom themselves to the daily routine of roll call, meals, and work. By the third day, Elie eats whatever is provided. On the eighth day, Elie and his father come across Stein of Antwerp, a relative of theirs. He asks them about the whereabouts of his wife and children. Although Elie does not know, he lies and says that he has heard news about them. Stein weeps with joy. He continues to visit, bringing with him extra rations of bread for Elie. One day, a transport from Antwerp arrives and Stein finds out the truth about his family. Elie does not hear from him again.

In the evenings, the Jews spend time talking about the mysteries of God. Akiba Drumer, a religious man with a deep, solemn voice, sings Hasidic melodies. Elie, however, ceases to pray. He sympathizes with Job when he says, "I did not deny God's existence, but I doubted His absolute justice." Chapter 3, pg. 42 During these conversations, Elie occasionally wonders about his mother and sisters. Elie's father reassures him by saying that they are probably doing well. Elie finds this difficult to believe. The prisoners stay in Auschwitz for three weeks; after which they are relocated to a new work camp, Buna.

Topic Tracking: Faith 2



## Chapter 4

At Buna, the new arrivals learn from the veteran prisoners that the camp is bearable. For three days, the new prisoners are quarantined. On the fourth day, the overseers of the units select the prisoners as if they are cattle or merchandise. Elie and his father are taken to the orchestra block. Julieck, a violinist, tells Elie that they are lucky to be in a good unit and that the work at the electrical equipment warehouse is not difficult. The only warning he gives is of Idek the Kapo, an overseer, who is known for his fits of rage. In their group, Elie makes friends with two Czech brothers, Yossi and Tibi. They talk of going to Palestine together if they survive the camps. The foreman of the group is a former student from Warsaw named Franek. The head of the block is a German Jew named Alphonse, who is kind and generous to the members of his block.

One day, Elie is sent to the camp dentist, a Jew from Czechoslovakia, for the extraction of his gold crown. Elie pretends to be ill and is sent away by the dentist with a command to come back later. On the second visit, Elie gets another reprieve by feigning illness. Later, Elie finds out that the dentist office is closed-the dentist is hanged for running a private traffic of gold teeth. Elie feels no pity for him and is glad to have saved his tooth because it could, at some time, buy bread or life. The most important thing for Elie becomes filling his stomach. Elie confesses: "I was a body. Perhaps less than that even: a starved stomach. The stomach alone was aware of the passage of time." Chapter 4, pg. 50

Another time, while Elie is working at the electrical warehouse, Idek the Kapo goes on one of his fits of rage and beats him. A young French girl that Elie works next to, aids him by wiping his bloodied lips. She slips a bit of bread into Elie's hand and tells him in perfect German, "'Bite your lip, little brother....Keep your anger and hatred for another day, for later on. The day will come, but not now....Wait. Grit your teeth and wait....'" Chapter 4, pg. 51 Elie is surprised because he thought she knew no German. Many years later, Elie Wiesel recalls running into her in Paris. They spend the day reminiscing about the past experiences at Buna and he finds out that she is, as he had thought, Jewish.

Topic Tracking: Memory 4

Yet another time, Idek the Kapo has another fit of rage directed against Elie's father. Beaten by an iron bar, Elie's father falls to the floor. All Elie could do is watch, for fear that he too will be hit. Ironically, Elie's anger is not against Idek, but at his father for not knowing how to avoid getting hit. "That is what concentration camp life had made of me," (Chapter 4, pg. 52) recalls Elie. One day, Franek, the foreman, asks Elie for his gold crown. Elie comes up with various excuses but Franek insists on getting the tooth. He uses Elie's father's inability to march in step as an opportunity to torment Elie by beating his father day after day. Elie tries to give his father marching lessons, but it does not help. Finally, Elie gives in to Franek's wish. Elie ends up getting nothing for his gold crown.



One Sunday morning, when the unit did not have to work, Idek tells the prisoners to go to the warehouse anyway. Tired of just squatting around with nothing to do, Elie accidentally walks in on Idek with a girl. Thinking the situation humorous, Elie bursts out laughing. Later that day during roll call, Elie's number is called and he is given twenty-five lashes of the whip. Elie faints from the blows. As Elie comes back to his senses, he remembers his father: "I was thinking of my father. He must have suffered more than I did." Chapter 4, pg. 56 Another Sunday, when Elie and half the prisoners of the block remain late in bed, there is an air-raid attack on the camp. As the guards go for cover, two cauldrons of soup remain in the kitchen, unguarded. The only thing on the minds of the prisoners is soup. One man dares to reach the cauldron, but suddenly, an explosion goes off and the man is killed. The bombing lasts for over an hour. The prisoners, however, are filled with hope and joy because the rumors they have heard about German defeat on various fronts seem real and believable now. Elie's thoughts during the raid: "If it could only have lasted ten times ten hours!" Chapter 4, pg. 57 In the afternoon, the prisoners cheerfully clear away the ruins.

A week later, the prisoners notice a black gallows in the middle of the camp. A youth from Warsaw, a strong, well-built boy is hanged for stealing. Everyone is forced to march past the dead youth and stare into his eyes and at his "lolling tongue of death." Elie, unaffected, finds the soup excellent that evening. Although there are other hangings, one has a particularly haunting effect on Elie. A Dutch Oberkapo, or head overseer, a giant of a man who is well liked by all the prisoners, is arrested and sent away on charges of sabotaging an electric power station and stocking arms. He has a pipel, or young assistant, who is well liked and described as having the face of an angel. Because of his association with the Dutch Oberkapo, he is hanged on the gallows along with two adults. The adults die right away, but the young pipel, being so light, struggles on the gallows for over half an hour. A man behind Elie asks, "'Where is God now?'" Elie hears a voice within him answer: "'Where is He? Here He is-He is hanging here on this gallows....'" Chapter 4, pg. 62 That night, the soup tastes of corpses.

Topic Tracking: Faith 3

Topic Tracking: Death 5



## Chapter 5

The Jewish year passes and on New Year's Day, the prisoners gather to celebrate and give thanks to God. Elie remembers that at one time, New Year's Day had dominated his life. But now, he refuses to offer up any prayers or praises to God. He feels no longer capable of lamentation, blaming God instead. But he also feels lonely in a world without God. As the Jews wish one another a Happy New Year, Elie finds his father, takes his hand, and kisses it. A tear falls on it and Elie asks, "Whose was that tear? Mine? His?" They both remain silent. Elie concludes, "We had never understood one another so clearly." Chapter 5, pg. 65 On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the Jews debate whether they should fast or not. Partly in obedience to his father and partly as a revolt against God, Elie swallows his food. But again, in his heart he feels a great void.

Topic Tracking: Faith 4

Elie is separated from his father. He is transferred to another building where he hauls heavy blocks of stone for twelve hours a day. The veterans talk about how terrible Buna used to be and how it is now a paradise compared to before. But Elie is not comforted because there are rumors of another selection process. Elie is worried about his father because he does not know if he can pass the selection. The head of Elie's new block tells them that in order to pass the selection they must run in front of the SS doctors. The SS officer in charge of the selection is the notorious Dr. Mengele. When Elie's turn comes, he runs as if his life depends on it. After the selection process, Elie finds his father and they share good news they had both passed. The bell rings and they separate. Elie hates the unceasing regulation of the bell. Elie notes, "Whenever I dreamed of a better world, I could only imagine a universe with no bells." Chapter 5, pg. 69-70

Topic Tracking: Death 6

Several days pass and the prisoners forget about the selection. But the head of the block reads off a list of ten prisoners who are to remain behind. Dr. Mengele has not forgotten. Elie's father comes running and says that he too has been selected to be left behind. All day, Elie worries about his father. After work, he is relieved to find that his father has passed a second, decisive selection. Many in the camp, however, do not make it. Akiba Drumer, having lost his once strong faith, becomes a victim of the crematory. A rabbi from Poland, who spends hours reciting the Talmud, concludes hopelessly that God is no longer with them. Before being taken away, Akiba Drumer asks some of the prisoners to recite the Kaddish for him. After only three days, they forget the promise.

Topic Tracking: Memory 5

Topic Tracking: Faith 5

During the winter, Elie's foot starts to swell. He goes to the hospital and there, a Jewish doctor tells Elie that the foot must be operated on. After the surgery, as Elie recuperates



in the hospital, his neighbor, a faceless Hungarian Jew, tells him that Hitler will annihilate all the Jews. In anger, Elie asks why Hitler should be regarded as a prophet. The faceless neighbor counters, "I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people." Chapter 5, pg. 77

Topic Tracking: Faith 6

There is news that Buna will be evacuated. Elie and his father decide between staying at the hospital or going on with the other prisoners. They choose the latter. (Later, Elie finds out that two days after the evacuation, the Russian army liberates the hospital). Elie remembers that last night in Buna:

*"Yet another last night. The last night at home, the last night in the ghetto, the last night in the train, and, now, the last night in Buna. How much longer were our lives to be dragged out from one 'last night' to another?"* Chapter 5, pg. 79

Topic Tracking: Night 5

Just before they evacuate, the head of the block tells the prisoners to wash the wooden floor. He wants the liberating army to know that men lived there, not animals. The bell rings again. The march is like a procession of the dead. Night falls, but outside the gate, Elie feels that "an even darker night was waiting for us on the other side." (Chapter 5, pg. 80)

Topic Tracking: Night 6



## Chapter 6

The SS guards fire on anyone who cannot keep up with the march. At Elie's side, a Polish lad, Zalman, gets a stomach cramp and falls behind. Elie guesses that the others trample Zalman to death. As Elie is reminded of the pain in his foot, death seems to draw closer. Only the thought of his father keeps Elie moving. For the prisoners, the only thing that matters is survival:

*"We were masters of nature, masters of the world. We had forgotten everything-death, fatigue, our natural needs. Stronger than cold or hunger, stronger than the shots and the desire to die, condemned and wandering, mere numbers, we were the only men on earth."* Chapter 6, pg. 83

Topic Tracking: Memory 6

Topic Tracking: Death 7

After covering a distance of more than forty-two miles, finally, they are allowed to rest. Many prisoners, including Elie and his father, force their way into a roofless brick factory. Elie falls asleep in the snow until his father wakes him up. They force themselves outside, but seeing no other place to rest, they re-enter the shed. All around lay bodies, some just frozen corpses, others, getting some rest so that they can set out again. Elie wakes his father up and sees him smile. "I shall always remember that smile. From which world did it come?" Chapter 6, pg. 86 Elie bewilderingly asks.

Topic Tracking: Memory 7

Just then, Rabbi Elihou, enters the shed and asks if anyone has seen his son. The rabbi is well known and loved by everyone and his presence is said to bring people genuine peace and comfort. He asks Elie if he has seen his son. Elie has not. As the rabbi leaves, Elie suddenly remembers seeing the rabbi's son deliberately run ahead of his father in order to get rid of him-a dead weight. Elie is horrified at the thought that a son could do so, but is also comforted that Rabbi Eliahou would continue looking for his beloved son. Elie prays to a God that he no longer believes in, to give him the strength not to be like the rabbi's son.

Topic Tracking: Faith 7

The march resumes again as the snow starts to fall. The surviving prisoners walk for several more hours until they reach Gleiwitz. They are thrown into overcrowded barracks where they lie on top of one another. There, Elie hears the voice of his friend, Juliek. A body on top of Elie almost suffocates him to death. Elie is barely able to free himself. In the room full of dying men, Elie suddenly hears the sound of Juliek's violin. He plays Beethoven's concerto. The next day, Elie awakes to see Juliek dead, his violin crushed. To this day, when he hears Beethoven's concerto, Elie Wiesel remembers Juliek's concert: "How could I forget that concert, given to an audience of dying and dead men!" Chapter 6, pg. 90

### Topic Tracking: Memory 8

After three days in the barracks of Gleiwitz without any bread or water, the prisoners are forced to march again because the Russian front is advancing. There is another selection where Elie's father is chosen. Elie somehow manages to cause such confusion that his father is able to sneak back to the other side. While they wait for the train, the prisoners eat their meager ration of bread. For water, they eat the snow accumulated on each other's backs. The guards find this amusing. The train arrives in the evening and the Jews are packed in, one hundred to a carriage.



## Chapter 7

On the train ride, dead corpses are thrown out. Two prisoners try to throw Elie's father out but Elie convinces the men that his father is still alive. In all, twenty bodies are thrown out of the train, "leaving behind it a few hundred naked dead, deprived of burial, in the deep snow of a field in Poland." (Chapter 7, pg. 94) As they have no rations, the only food available is snow. After ten days of travel, a German workman throws a piece of bread into the passing wagon. There is a stampede for the morsel of bread. The German workman finds the melee interesting. (Elie Wiesel recalls years later, at Aden, a similar situation where some woman throws coins for the native boys). Elie even witnesses a boy named Meir kill his own father over a piece of bread. After the son seizes the bread from his father, he too is killed by other hungry prisoners. Elie watches the resulting sight with horror: "When they withdrew, next to me were two corpses, side by side, the father and the son. I was fifteen years old." Chapter 7, pg. 96

Topic Tracking: Death 8

One night, on the train ride, a stranger tries to strangle Elie. His father call for his friend, Meir Katz, and he comes and saves Elie. Although Meir Katz is the most robust of them all, he begins to lose hope. After keeping his emotions in check up to this time, Meir Katz finally weeps over his son, a victim of the first selection. As an icy wind starts to blow, someone dying lets out a loud wail. It becomes contagious and soon, everyone starts to cry and wail. Elie can only dread: "All limits had been passed. No one had any strength left. And again the night would be long." Chapter 7, pg. 98 At last, the train reaches its final destination, Buchenwald. Meir Katz does not make it. A hundred prisoners begin the trip; only a dozen survive, including Elie and his father.

Topic Tracking: Night 7



## Chapter 8

At Buchenwald, Elie's father says that he wants to give up. Elie tries desperately to urge his father to have hope. But Elie is so tired he falls asleep. When he awakes, he remembers his father. Feeling that somehow, he had abandoned his father, Elie goes to look for him. Yet, in his mind, Elie wishes that he could be rid of his father. Ashamed of such thoughts, Elie finds his father and attends to his needs. In bringing some hot coffee, Elie thinks that with those few gulps, "I probably brought him more satisfaction than I had done during my whole childhood." Chapter 8, pg. 101 Elie's father suffers from dysentery and is near death. Elie gets a doctor to see his father, but the doctor tells Elie that it is useless. Elie's father lies in bed for several days where he complains to Elie that his neighbors are beating him and taking his food. A week goes by. The head of the block tells Elie to look out for himself and forget about his father. Although Elie finds the advice reasonable, he chooses not to leave his father. As Elie's father cries out for water, an officer gives him a severe blow to his head. On January 28th, 1945, Elie sees his father for the last time: "his blood-stained face, his shattered skull." (Chapter 8, pg. 106) When Elie wakes up the next day, his father is gone-they had taken him during the night. Elie feels guilty that he has no tears to shed. He does not know what to feel:

*"But I had no more tears. And, in the depths of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like-free at last!"* Chapter 8, pg. 106

Topic Tracking: Death 9

Topic Tracking: Memory 9



## Chapter 9

Elie stays in Buchenwald until April 11th. During this period, Elie is emotionally numb. "After my father's death, nothing could touch me any more." Chapter 9, pg. 107

As the front draws ever closer, the Germans decide to liquidate the camp. But on April 10th, as the prisoners gather for an assembly, the camp resistance successfully takes control of Buchenwald. The Germans do not put up a fight. At about six o'clock in the evening, American tanks arrive. The first thing the prisoners do as free men is to go through the provisions. They think not of revenge, nor their families, but of bread. Three days after the liberation of Buchenwald, Elie suffers from food poisoning and spends two weeks in the hospital between life and death. One day, Elie gathers enough strength to get up and look in the mirror. He had not seen himself since the ghetto. He stares into someone unrecognizable: "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." Chapter 9, pg. 109

Topic Tracking: Death 10