

## Biography of Eliezer Weisel

Elie Wiesel's statement, "...to remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all..." stands as a succinct summary of his views on life and serves as the driving force of his work. Wiesel is the author of 36 works dealing with Judaism, the Holocaust, and the moral responsibility of all people to fight hatred, racism and genocide.



Elie Wiesel -- age 15

Born September 30, 1928, Eliezer Wiesel led a life representative of many Jewish children. Growing up in a small village in Romania, his world revolved around family, religious study, community and God. Yet his family, community and his innocent faith were destroyed upon the deportation of his village in 1944. Arguably the most powerful and renowned passage in Holocaust literature, his first book, *Night*, records the inclusive experience of the Jews:

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. Never shall I forget  
those flames which consumed  
my faith forever. Never shall I forget  
that nocturnal silence which deprived me,  
for all eternity, of the desire to live.  
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.

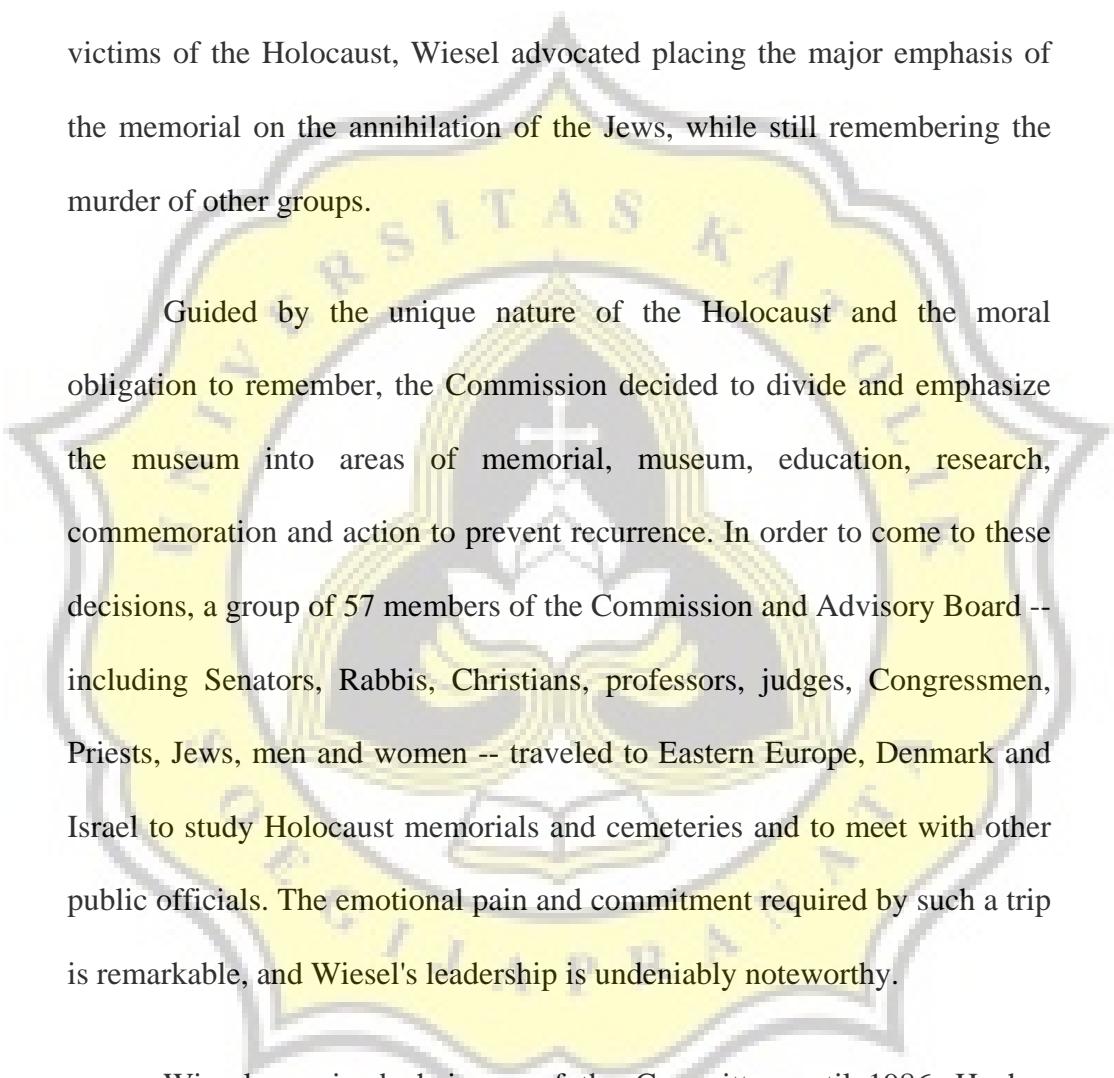
And Wiesel has since dedicated his life to ensuring that none of us forget what happened to the Jews.

Wiesel survived Auschwitz, Buna, Buchenwald and Gleiwitz. After the liberation of the camps in April 1945, Wiesel spent a few years in a French orphanage and in 1948 began to study in Paris at the Sorbonne. He became involved in journalistic work with the French newspaper *L'arche*. He was acquainted with Nobel laureate Francois Mauriac, who eventually influenced Wiesel to break his vowed silence and write of his experience in the concentration camps, thus beginning a lifetime of service.

Wiesel has since published over thirty books, earned the Nobel Peace Prize, been appointed to chair the President's Commission on the Holocaust, and awarded the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement and more. Due to a fateful car accident in New York in 1956, Wiesel spent a year confined to a wheelchair while recovering. It was during this year that he made the decision to become a U.S. citizen and is still today an active figure within our society, as well as fulfilling his role in Jewish politics around the world.

Wiesel's job as chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust was the planning of an American memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. The Report to the President on the President's Commission on

the Holocaust focuses on memory. Wiesel writes that the reason for creating the museum must include; denying the Nazi's a posthumous victory, honoring the last wish of victims to tell, and protecting the future of humanity from such evil recurring. Always maintaining his dedicated belief that although all the victims of the Holocaust were not Jewish, all Jews were victims of the Holocaust, Wiesel advocated placing the major emphasis of the memorial on the annihilation of the Jews, while still remembering the murder of other groups.

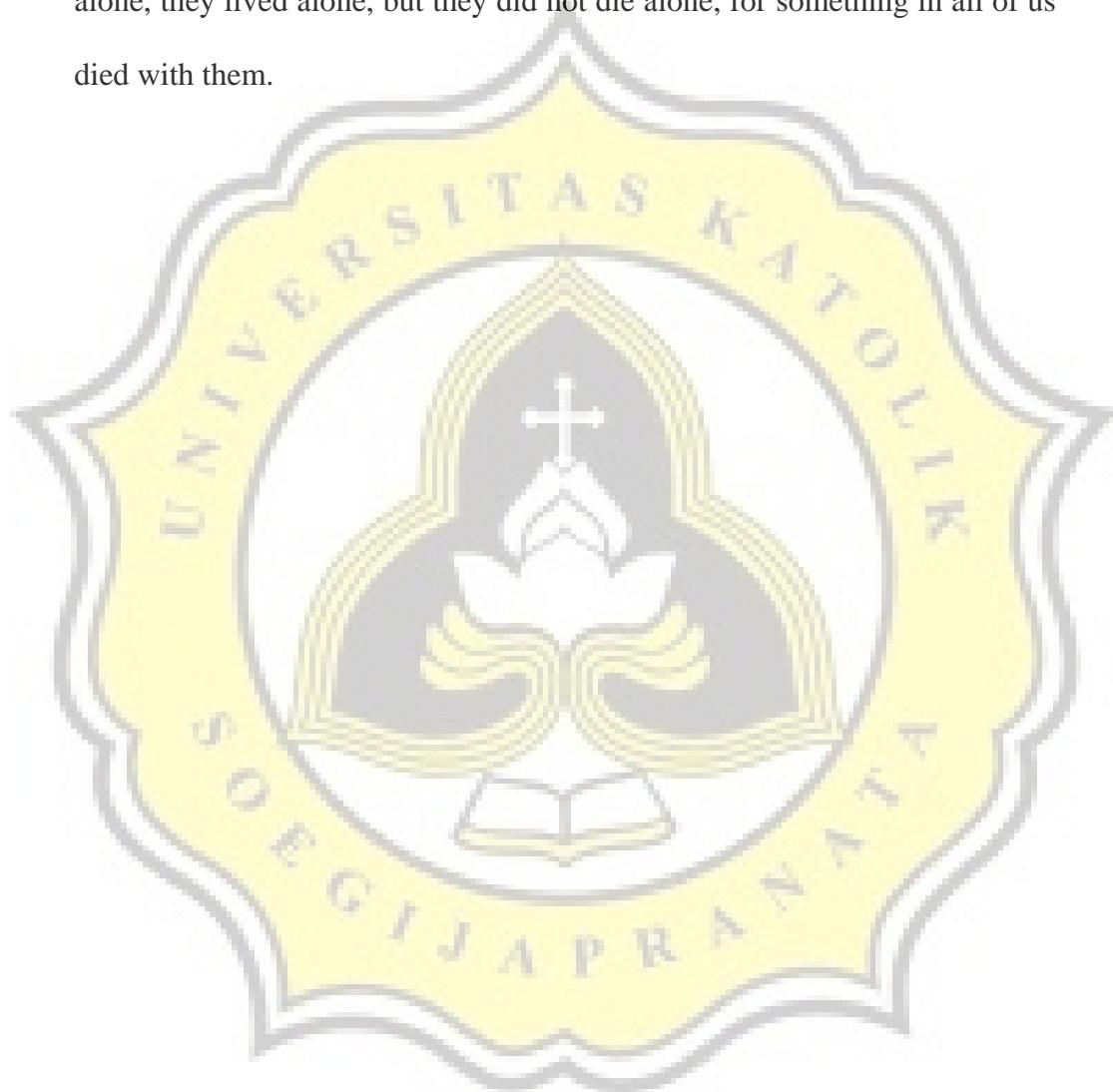


Guided by the unique nature of the Holocaust and the moral obligation to remember, the Commission decided to divide and emphasize the museum into areas of memorial, museum, education, research, commemoration and action to prevent recurrence. In order to come to these decisions, a group of 57 members of the Commission and Advisory Board -- including Senators, Rabbis, Christians, professors, judges, Congressmen, Priests, Jews, men and women -- traveled to Eastern Europe, Denmark and Israel to study Holocaust memorials and cemeteries and to meet with other public officials. The emotional pain and commitment required by such a trip is remarkable, and Wiesel's leadership is undeniably noteworthy.

Wiesel remained chairman of the Committee until 1986. He has aided in the recognition and remembrance of Soviet Jews, the establishment of Israel and has dedicated the latter part of his life to the witness of the second-generation and the vital requirement that memory and action be

carried on after the survivors have all left us. Wiesel's own words are the best explanation:

Let us remember, let us remember the heroes of Warsaw, the martyrs of Treblinka, the children of Auschwitz. They fought alone, they suffered alone, they lived alone, but they did not die alone, for something in all of us died with them.



## SUMMARY OF NIGHT

The reader is introduced to a dedicated and committed boy whose sole aim in life is to study the Talmud and learn the teachings of the Cabbala. Eliezer spent many hours praying in his local temple, even "weeping" because of the destruction of the temple in Israel. This naïve yet strong faith in God is ever emanating as Eliezer continues to nag his disinterested father to find him a mentor to help achieve his goal. After failing to do so Eliezer persuades a temple helper, Moshe the Beadle to assist him in his venture into the complex text of the Cabbala. This proves Eliezer's desire to further his comprehension of his religion. However this is not completely by choice more in fact by habit. When asked by Moshe "why did he pray"" no real answer was given by the young boy, his only reply was "why did we breathe"" this establishes a thought of blind faith which could be very easy for Eliezer to challenge when he matures.

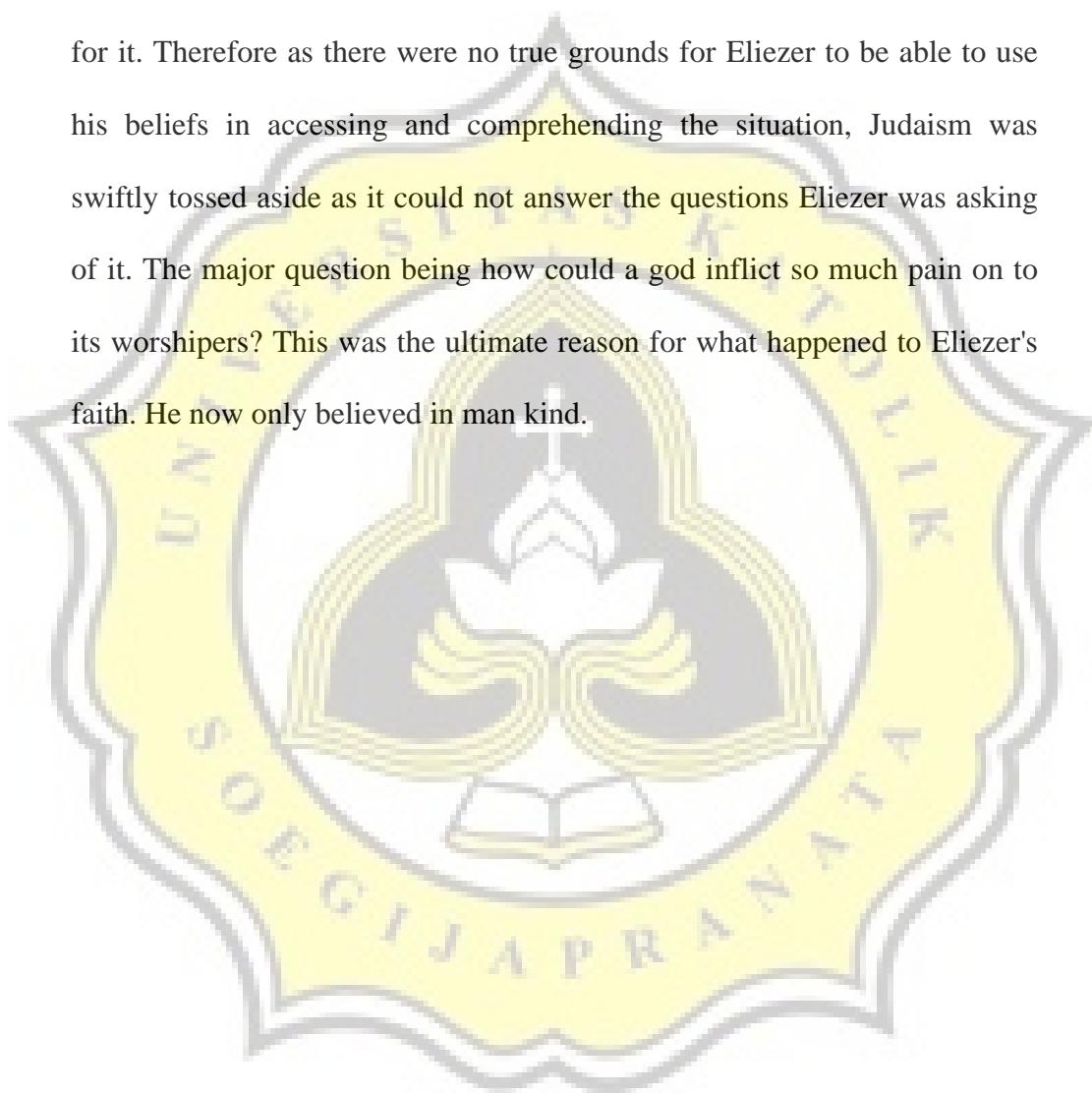
Eliezer's faith is dealt a blow as he witnesses the fiery death pit of which laid countless babies used for target practice by the Nazi's. The vile image portrayed acts as the first moment in which Eliezer's faith is questioned as he queries Gods existence for allowing such evil act to occur. He even contemplates suicide before being ordered turn away from the ditch. The event which will be forever remembered by Eliezer begins to form the cracks in his dwindling faith.

The public hanging of the "pipel" further destroys Eliezer's faith. The slow and painful death of the young boy is a comparison to the death of Eliezer's beliefs. For him it is not only the pipel who dies but also God. He

considers that God "is hanging here on the gallows." Eliezer now believes that he has relinquished all of his loyalties towards God and ceases any form of ritual or pray which honors his lord. This is evident as the holy days of "Rosh Hashanah" and "Yom Kippur" occurs. It is during the New Year celebrations where Eliezer pronouns that God has become the "accused" and he the "accuser." However within this rebellion it is also when he feels most "alone" and "empty." This shows that although Eliezer is attempting to renounce his beliefs he is also feeling a great void in his being. A second movement of revolt against God takes places when Eliezer continues to disregard any form of ritual as he does not fast throughout The Day Of Atonement. Although this is also the wishes of his father he takes it upon himself to ensure he "swallows" his rations for the day to maintain his rebellious ways.

However a part of Elie's faith does return even though unknowingly. Eliezer prays twice to a God he no longer believes in. The first time is when his father fails "selection." Eliezer turns to God in the hope that he will finally answer one of the Jews pleas and help to give Chlomo the strength to pass a second selection. Although he does Eliezer's faith is not fully returned. The Second occasion is after the retelling of "Rabbi Eliahou's son." Eliezer again prays to an "unjust" Lord to give him the power to never do what the Rabbi's son did and abandoned his father. Though this did rekindle Eliezer's beliefs for a moment, the moment passed and Eliezer's faith continued its demise.

Eliezer never really lost his faith it only transferred from being with God to mankind. He began believing that "man was stronger than God." The transformation was due to the constant subjections of brutality which forced an innocent young boy to quickly become a man before the time was right. This compelled Elie to question a faith he had not fully understood yet lived for it. Therefore as there were no true grounds for Eliezer to be able to use his beliefs in accessing and comprehending the situation, Judaism was swiftly tossed aside as it could not answer the questions Eliezer was asking of it. The major question being how could a god inflict so much pain on to its worshipers? This was the ultimate reason for what happened to Eliezer's faith. He now only believed in mankind.



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