

Night



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ELIE WIESEL

Elie Wiesel was born in the Romanian town of Sighet, which was annexed by Hungary during World War II (the town is now called Sighetu Martiei). His parents came from Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish families, and he was encouraged to learn Hebrew and to study the Bible and the Talmud. His father kept a shop and was a respected man in the town's Jewish community. Both of his parents died in Nazi concentration camps, as did his younger sister; his two elder sisters survived. After the war, Wiesel went to an orphanage in France, studied at the Sorbonne, and became a journalist. In 1945, he swore to himself not to write about his experience in the death camps for ten years. Ten years later, he wrote a massive book in Yiddish called *And the World Remained Silent*, which was published in Argentina in 1956. Parts of it he later edited and published as the books *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Day*. Wiesel moved to the United States in the 1950s. He continued to write many books and has held prominent teaching positions at American universities. For his work as a outspoken proponent of peace and critic of racism, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Night is one person's experience of the Holocaust—the Nazi's effort to exterminate the Jews of Europe, largely by sending the Jews to concentration camps where they were worked to death, or worked to near death and then killed. By the end of World War II, Adolf Hitler had systematically murdered six million Jews and millions of gypsies, Communists, homosexuals, and other people the Nazis considered undesirable. Jews in Hungary were not directly affected until 1944, by which point the concentration camps had been in operation for some time. Yet information was unreliable and difficult to come by. The Jews of Wiesel's town of Sighet either did not know or could not believe the extent of the Nazi's so-called "Final Solution." In the spring of 1944, the Nazis effectively took control of the Hungarian government, and Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's architect of the Holocaust, oversaw the deportation of Hungary's sizable Jewish population to concentration camps in Germany and Poland.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Night is the first book in a trilogy Wiesel wrote about the Holocaust. The others, *Dawn* and *Day*, are novels, whereas *Night* is generally considered to be a memoir. *Night* has become one of the most prominent pieces of literature about the

Holocaust. Other books that deal with the Holocaust and have reached a wide readership include Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*,

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Night*
- **When Written:** 1955 - 1958
- **Where Written:** South America, France
- **When Published:** Argentina, France
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** Europe during World War II
- **Climax:** Eliezer's father's death
- **Antagonist:** The German SS guards and officers; the Kapos
- **Point of View:** First person



PLOT SUMMARY

At the start of the memoir, it's 1941 and Eliezer is a twelve-year-old Jewish boy in the Hungarian town of Sighet. He's deeply religious and spends much of his time studying the Torah (the Bible) and the Talmud and praying. His parents and sisters run a shop in the town, and his father is highly respected in the Jewish community. Eliezer begins to study the Cabbala, the book of Jewish mysticism, with an immigrant named Moché the Beadle. When the Hungarian police deport all of the foreign Jews, Moché is sent away, but he returns with a terrible and fantastic tale: the Gestapo stopped the train and slaughtered the deported Jews. Moché escaped with a leg wound and has come to warn the Jews of Sighet to leave. The Jews of the town can't believe what Moché is saying, and think he's gone mad.

The war continues through 1943. In 1944, the Jews of Sighet still don't really believe Hitler intends to exterminate them. Eliezer wants his father to relocate the family to Palestine, but his father says he's too old to start again. The Fascists come to power in Hungary and German soldiers enter the country. Before long, German officers are living in Sighet and then arresting the Jewish leaders of the town. Soon, the Hungarian police round the Jews up into two ghettos. Next, they force the Jews like cattle onto trains headed to an unknown destination.

The Jews travel on the train for several days, during which time one Jewish woman goes mad and screams about fire. The train arrives at Birkenau, the gateway to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where the passengers can see chimneys belching fire and can smell burned flesh. The women are immediately separated from the men, and Eliezer never sees

his mother or his younger sister again (they are immediately sent to the gas chamber). A Nazi SS doctor separates those who are going to be killed immediately from those who will work. Eliezer sticks close to his father. That first night in the camp, he witnesses babies and children thrown into a great fire in a burning ditch. Eliezer's faith in a just God is shattered.

More separations occur, but Eliezer and his father stay together. All the prisoners are tattooed with a number, and this becomes their identity. They are told they must work or they will be burned in the crematoria. They spend three weeks at Auschwitz before marching to another concentration camp, Buna. Here, Eliezer and his father spend their days working in an electrical equipment warehouse. Their Kapo (the prisoner conscripted to wield power over other prisoners) occasionally goes berserk and beats people, including Eliezer and his father. The SS doctor appears again to weed out another batch of people for the furnaces. Eliezer has a scare when his father is chosen, but his father manages to convince someone that he can still work. While at Buna, Eliezer continues to rebel against the idea of a just God. After being forced to witness the slow hanging death of a child, he ceases to believe in God, altogether.

With the front lines of the war getting closer, the prisoners at Buna are evacuated on a long, nightmare death march to a camp called Gleiwitz. People die continuously along the way as the SS forces them to run for hours and hours in the snow, shooting people who fall behind. Upon arriving at Buna, a young Jewish violinist plays pieces of a Beethoven concerto. By morning the violinist has died. The survivors of the march are kept without food and water for several days, more are separated from the rest to be killed, and the remaining prisoners are crammed onto trains in open-roofed cattle cars. The train ride is endless. The Jews have nothing to eat but snow, and people die left and right. When they pass through a German town, some German workers toss scraps of bread in the car to watch the starving prisoners fight to the death. More people lie down in the snow and die when the train at last arrives at another concentration camp: Buchenwald. Eliezer's father grows feverish, contracts dysentery, and begins to waste away. Doctors won't help, the camp doesn't want to waste food on sick people, and Eliezer can only offer his own rations to his father, who is soon delirious. The night before Eliezer's father passes away, an SS officer beats the dying man on the head. Eliezer is unable to cry or mourn. He spends another two and a half months at Buchenwald in a daze before the Nazis begin another prisoner evacuation. This time there is an armed uprising among the prisoners and the remaining SS flee. American tanks arrive, followed by food, although Eliezer gets food poisoning and spends two weeks in the hospital, near death. When he looks at his face in the mirror for the first time since he left the village of Sighet, he sees a vision he will never forget: the face of a corpse.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Eliezer – The narrator of *Night*, Eliezer is based closely on the author Elie Wiesel and his own experiences before and during the Holocaust. (*Night* is usually classified as a memoir.) Eliezer is a deeply religious teenager from the Hungarian town of Sighet. During his time in Nazi concentration camps, he witnesses unimaginable acts of brutality that challenge and ultimately destroy his religious faith. It becomes his duty to look after his father, Chlomo, as the older man weakens and finally dies in the camps.

Moché the Beadle – A poor Jew, an immigrant to Hungary, who helps out at the synagogue in Sighet. He becomes Eliezer's teacher, but is deported by the authorities because he is a foreigner. He returns to warn the town of terrible things the Germans are doing to Jews, but the town does not take him seriously and thinks he's gone mad.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Chlomo – Eliezer's father, he runs a shop and is highly respected in the town of Sighet. Once Eliezer and Chlomo are separated from the rest of the family, they go to great pains not to be separated from each other and to keep each other alive as long as possible.

Madame Schachter – After being separated from her husband and two of her sons during the deportation from Sighet, Madame Schachter loses her mind during the train ride to Auschwitz. She claims to see furnaces and fires burning and screams out in the night.

Akiba Drumer – A religious man who comforts the other prisoners with his singing. He studies the Caballa and the Bible, but eventually loses his faith while in the camps.

Dr. Mengele – An SS doctor at Auschwitz. He decides who is fit to keep working and who will be killed.

Juliek – A musician whom Eliezer meets at Buna. He plays his violin for the weary and dying after the march to Gleiwitz, and then dies.

Idek – Eliezer's Kapo (a prisoner put in charge of other prisoners) at Buna. He's given to fits of rage, during which he beats the people under his command, including Eliezer, and Eliezer's father

Franek – Eliezer's foreman at Buna. He beats Eliezer's father until Eliezer agrees to give Franek his gold crown, which a dentist removes with a rusty spoon.

Tibi and Yossi – Brothers who befriend Eliezer at Buna. They decide to move to Palestine should they survive.

The French Girl – She works near Eliezer when he is at Buna. She comforts him after a beating and gives him words of

encouragement. Years later he runs into her in Paris.

Rabbi Eliahou – A well loved and respected figure, he is abandoned by his son during the march to Gleiwitz.

Meir Katz – A friend of Eliezer's father and one of the heartiest of the prisoners. He saves Eliezer from an unknown attacker, and later dies on the train to Buchenwald

Hilda – One of Eliezer's elder sisters. She survives the Holocaust.

Bea – One of Eliezer's elder sisters. She survives the Holocaust.

Tzipora – Eliezer's younger sister. He never sees her again after the family is separated at Birkenau. He later learns that she was sent immediately to the gas chamber.

Eliezer's Mother – Eliezer never sees her again after the family is separated at Birkenau. He later learns that she was sent immediately to the gas chamber.

be just. The fact that many Jews *do* continue to pray, to recite the Talmud, and to look for comfort in their faith while in the concentration camp amazes and confounds Eliezer. That people would still pray to a God who allows their families to be gassed and incinerated suggests to Eliezer that people are stronger and more forgiving than the God they pray to. Later, as more people die, and others around him lose hope, starve, and succumb, Eliezer ceases to believe that God could exist at all. He is not alone in his disillusionment. Akiba Drumer (whose faith helps Eliezer endure for a while) as well as a rabbi whom Eliezer talks to, also eventually come to believe that God's existence is impossible in a world that contains such a large-scale, willful horror as the Holocaust. The final nail in the coffin, for Eliezer's faith, comes at Buna, where the prisoners are gathered to watch the hanging of a young boy. A man in the crowd asks, "Where is God now?" Eliezer's internal response is that God is that boy on the gallows. The boy dies slowly as the prisoners are forced to watch.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



HAVING AND LOSING FAITH IN GOD

One of the main themes of *Night* is Eliezer's loss of religious faith. Throughout the book, Eliezer witnesses and experiences things that he cannot reconcile with the idea of a just and all-knowing God.

At the beginning of the narrative, Eliezer declares, "I believed profoundly." He is twelve years old and his life is centered around Judaism—studying the Talmud during the day, praying at the synagogue at night until he weeps with religious feeling. He wants to study the cabbala (Jewish mysticism), but his father says he's too young. Despite this, Eliezer finds a teacher in town, a poor man named Moché the Beadle, and the two of them pore over cabbalistic questions. Eliezer's faith in God is shared by many of his fellow Jews in the town of Sighet. On the trains to the concentration camps, people discuss the banishment from their homes as trial sent from God to be endured—a test of faith.

But Eliezer's belief in God begins to falter at the concentration camps of Birkenau-Aushwitz. Here the furnaces are busy night and day burning people. Here he watches German soldiers throw truckloads of babies and small children into the flames. The longer he stays in the concentration camps, the more he sees and experiences cruelty and suffering. People treat others worse than they would livestock. He can no longer believe that a God who would permit such nightmare places to exist could



INHUMANITY

One of the legacies of the Holocaust is the sheer scale of one group of people's inhumanity towards other groups of people. In the case of the Jews, the German government and German society attempted to redefine them as sub-human, and then as creatures who deserved to die.

But *Night* doesn't just focus on the Nazis and their seemingly endless diabolical behavior (concentration camp doctors—those who swear an oath to do no harm—are some of the worst offenders imaginable). The book also looks at what it is like for an adolescent to live in a situation where he and those around him are no longer treated as humans. The loss of humanity among the victims leads to all kinds of cruelty and callousness among the prisoners as they struggle to survive—prisoners are vicious towards each other, those with small powers abuse them, children abandon parents, starving people kill each other for scraps of food. In the cattle car on the way to Auschwitz, people strike a woman to keep her quiet, something they never would have done in the village. As Eliezer's father lies in his sickbed, near death, other invalids beat him up because he smells bad. Through *Night*, Elie Wiesel makes the point that when people are treated as subhuman and are subjected to the constant threat of death, they may lose the ability to act like a decent person—even towards others in the same situation. Empathy is one of the finest human qualities, but it can be crushed.



FATHERS AND SONS

As his family is being marched from its home, Eliezer sees his father weep for the first time. By the end of the book, his father is dead, another

victim of the Nazi death camps. In between, *Night* explores the ways traditional father-son relationships break down under impossibly difficult conditions. At the heart of this theme is Eliezer's relationship with his own father. Yet the narrator also pays attention to other father-son relationships among the prisoners in the camps; his observations of other fathers and sons make him think about his duties to his own father.

In normal life, before the Holocaust began, Eliezer's father has great respect in the community and within Eliezer's house. The relationship of father to son is traditional—the biblical commandment to honor one's parents is paramount in Jewish families like Eliezer's. After the family is split up at Birkenau, Eliezer and his father have only each other to live for. As his father weakens, the traditional roles of protector and protected are reversed. It is Eliezer who must protect his father.

During their time in the camps, Eliezer time and again feels shame when he is angry at his father for not being able to avoid beatings or for not being able to march correctly. His father continues to look out for him—he gives Eliezer a few tools to keep when it looks like he will be taken away, and he rouses a neighbor to save his son when someone on the train begins to strangle Eliezer. But there's a limit to how much either can shield the other from hardship. And as conditions become more and more impossible, and the physically weaker and older begin to die, fathers become burdens—first to the consciences of sons, who feel guilty about their own survival instincts and their inability to protect their fathers, and then physical burdens, too. Eliezer sees an illustration of this in the death march to Gleiwitz when a young man leaves behind his tired father, a rabbi; and again on the train to Buchenwald, when a son kills his father while fighting for a morsel of bread. These instances of the disintegration of basic familial bonds help remind Eliezer of his love and duty to his own father. By the end of the book, though, his feelings hardly matter. Eliezer's father grows sick, doctors won't help, and Eliezer is simply unable to take care of or prevent others from harming his father.



GUILT AND INACTION

On several occasions in *Night*, Eliezer watches as his father is beaten and can do nothing about it. Or, rather, he could perhaps help his father in the very short term, but he would quickly pay for it with his life. (Eliezer's father, too, must watch powerlessly as Eliezer is whipped by a kapo.) Even though a small act of resistance is the equivalent of suicide, Eliezer cannot help feeling guilt about his fear and his inaction. The whole of the imprisoned community must feel this same impotent rage. Weak and undernourished, surrounded by soldiers with machine guns, in a place where they are utterly expendable, the prisoners' options are limited in what they can do to defend themselves, without inviting torture and slaughter. But that doesn't make Eliezer feel any

better about himself when an SS officer beats his dying father in the head with a truncheon, and Eliezer does nothing to prevent the act or to retaliate for it. By writing the book, however, he *is* taking action and preventing these and many other acts of brutality from going unrecorded.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



FIRE

Madame Schächter's visions of fire, after she has gone mad during the train ride to Auschwitz, are symbolic of the Nazi's power to deliver death to many of the Jews riding with her in the cattle car. When the train arrives at the death camp, the prisoners see fire leaping from the chimneys of the crematoria, where many of them will be burned. Later, Eliezer sees babies and children thrown into a fire burning in a ditch. In many religious teachings fire has the power to cleanse or to erase evil. For instance, God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush before helping the Jews escape Egypt in Exodus. But in Eliezer's experience it is the Nazi's, not God, who wield the firepower, another example of how Eliezer's traditional concepts of justice and divinity are fundamentally altered by his experience during the Holocaust.



NIGHT

Night represents the worst periods of suffering during Eliezer's experience of the Holocaust. In Sighet, the Jews learn of their deportation at night. Eliezer arrives at Birkenau at night. The death march to Gleiwitz happens at night. At Buchenwald, his father is taken away during the night. Night also symbolizes the hole—the absence—left in Eliezer's life as a religious person who comes to a personal realization that God does not exist.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bantam Books edition of *Night* published in 1982.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“ I was twelve. I believed profoundly. During the day I studied the Talmud, and at night I ran to the synagogue to weep over the destruction of the Temple.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The opening of the book establishes the peaceful atmosphere of Eliezer's childhood that is about to be turned inside out. Eliezer lives with his family in a staunchly Jewish community. Faith is the guiding principle of his life – he loves God, just as everyone he knows does, and his intellectual and emotional life is structured around religion. His intellectual curiosity is channeled into the Torah and the Talmud, and he longs to study cabbala, which is known for attracting Jewish intellectuals.

As he writes in this quote, during the nights he wept over "the destruction of the temple." This shows, too, that his faith was not only intellectual – faith was something that roused his emotions in significant ways. God made him think and feel deeply. This early explanation of the importance of Eliezer's faith allows readers to understand the magnitude of the loss he feels later in the camps when he can no longer believe in God.

☞ "I have been saved miraculously. I managed to get back here. Where did I get the strength from? I wanted to come back to Sighet to tell you the story of my death. So what you could prepare yourselves while there was still time... I wanted to come back, and to warn you. And see how it is, no one will listen to me..."

Related Characters: Moché the Beadle (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first indication that something is deeply amiss, and yet also at the tendency for people to not want to believe in horrors that might uproot their lives. In this case, Eliezer's community largely ignores the warnings from Moché the Beadle because what he describes seems too awful to be real. Moché's warning offers an opportunity for the Jews to leave Eastern Europe, but nobody heeds Moché the Beadle's warning because to take his words seriously would be to acknowledge a reality that nobody is prepared to live with.

What Eliezer notices about Moché the Beadle is that his faith – which was once all consuming – seems to have slipped. Here, Moché the Beadle says that he was "saved miraculously" and "managed to get back here." But he does not attribute the strength that this took to God's intervention, as Eliezer would have assumed. Instead, Moché the Beadle is concerned with the human over the divine – he says he found the strength to return so that he could save his community. This foreshadows the loss of faith and the futility of gestures of humanity that occur in the rest of the book.

☞ Night. No one prayed, so that the night would pass quickly. The stars were only sparks of the fire which devoured us. Should that fire die out one day, there would be nothing left in the sky but dead stars, dead eyes.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

This is an early indication of the fear that the Jews are facing as waves of deportations occur and people are reshuffled into worse and worse living quarters. Nobody knows what will happen to them and they shift between optimism and despair – this passage describes a night in which nobody hopes. At this moment, Eliezer has not yet lost his faith, but this is a sign of it waning; he and his community do not pray amid chaos because they don't want to prolong the awful night.

This passage illuminates the significance of two of the book's most prominent symbols. Here, night is seen as a time in which fear and despair dominate and faith is scant. Wiesel later described his life after the Holocaust as "one long night" – this moment, which Eliezer hopes will be temporary, is actually representative of an experience that will scar him profoundly and forever. Fire, too, is important here. While fire in religious texts is sacramental and even good, this passage shows fire as negative. To describe the fire as "consuming us" foreshadows the fires of the death camps.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ "Fire! I can see a fire! I can see a fire!"

Related Characters: Madame Schachter (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is another chilling indication of what is to come. As the Jews are crowded by the Nazis into a cattle car for their days-long journey to the camps, Madame Schachter loses her mind and begins screaming. This is the first sign of the effects of Nazi cruelty. Madame Schachter's reaction is, in a sense, prophetic – she says she sees fire and furnaces. Of course, the furnaces of Auschwitz are where many of these prisoners are headed.

As when Moché the Beadle returned home with seemingly unbelievable horror stories, though, the prisoners do not see truth in her words, and instead tie her up and gag her to keep her quiet. This is the first example Eliezer witnesses of the chain of cruelty that snakes through the camps. Nazi cruelty towards the Jews creates an atmosphere of fear and anger that causes the Jews to be cruel to one another. The more the Nazis treat the Jews as inhuman, the more the Jews are unable to care for one another. It is one of the worst legacies of Eliezer's time in the camps that, since the Nazis created the conditions in which the Jews would abuse one another, Eliezer is forced to feel guilt for the rest of his life.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☹☹ Humanity? Humanity is not concerned with us. Today anything is allowed. Anything is possible, even these crematories.

Related Characters: Chlomo, Eliezer

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Jews have just arrived at the concentration camp of Birkenau, and they are confronted with a scene worse than they could have imagined. They see flames everywhere, and the air smells like burning flesh. At

this moment, they understand that death is surrounding them, but they still do not understand the magnitude of this depravity. Another prisoner tells Eliezer and his father that they are to be burned, and Eliezer tells him he doesn't believe it because humanity wouldn't tolerate burning someone as young as he is. The other prisoner's response is that humanity is not present there.

It's significant that Eliezer objects to the possibility of being burned on the grounds that humanity, not God, wouldn't allow it; this is another indication that he is losing his faith. Watching the chaos around him, Eliezer seems not to assume anymore that God is a significant presence – he is more concerned with what humans will and won't do.

☹☹ 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.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

On their first night in the camp, Eliezer and his father stand before the pits of flames in which babies and children are being burned alive. Neither one of them knows yet whether they will see the morning, or whether they also will be killed before sunrise. This is the major turning point of the book, in which Eliezer witnesses a scene so unimaginable and inhuman that he can no longer assume that a good and just God is looking after him or the world.

Eliezer describes his loss of faith as turning his life into "one long night." Considering the place faith occupied in his life before the camps, it makes sense that the loss of it would leave him bereft intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In the camps, there is nothing to replace faith with – nothing to study, no nourishing human interactions. Eliezer's loss of faith is synonymous with his dehumanization, in which he slowly becomes only a body in search of survival. Night, then, represents in part the void of positive influences to

bolster him, and the darkness of not knowing what will come.

Fire, too, is potent in this passage, and it is clear that its significance is negative. It is the fire transfiguring babies into "wreaths of smoke" and simultaneously devouring Eliezer's faith. Fire here is the evil of the Nazis – it is what burns away what is most cherished from Eliezer.

☛ Some talked of God, of his mysterious ways, of the sins of the Jewish people, and of their future deliverance. But I had ceased to pray. How I sympathized with Job! I did not deny God's existence, but I doubted his absolute justice.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Eliezer clarifies here his statement about his faith being consumed by the flames. This does not yet signify his utter loss of faith – he still believes that God exists. However, his views about the nature of God have dramatically shifted in that he does not assume that God is good or just anymore. He cannot trust God to protect him, and he does not believe, like some others, that the experiences in the camps could be God testing the Jews before their eventual deliverance.

Put another way, even though Eliezer still believes there is a God, God is no longer a relevant force in his life, which is tantamount to loss of faith. God is not somebody to whom he can appeal or in whom he can place his trust. It's significant that this occurs after just one night in the camps. That someone with faith as profound as Eliezer's at the beginning of the book can be disillusioned so quickly indicates the magnitude of Nazi atrocity. Wiesel invites us to consider how much evil it would take to reverse someone's faith in only one night.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ Behind me, I heard the same man asking:
"Where is God now?"
And I heard a voice within me answer him:
"Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows. . ."

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eliezer and the other prisoners are required to witness public executions of Jews who have disobeyed the Nazis. This is a cruel and inhuman tactic that the Nazis used to instill fear and discipline in the Jewish prisoners. While Eliezer witnessed many public executions, the most memorable one was the execution of a young boy. When another prisoner asks "Where is God now?" in the face of this spectacle, Eliezer realizes that he has entirely lost his faith. Not only does he not believe in the goodness of God, he no longer believes in God's existence at all.

Throughout the book, it is witnessing acts of inhumanity towards children that most affects Eliezer. Eliezer grew up expecting to be protected by his father and by his family; his community respected children, and it was a given for him that he would be safe because others were watching. It is witnessing the Nazi disregard for the dignity and vulnerability of children that most terrifies Eliezer, because it signifies a breakdown of the most fundamental social order, and it drives home Eliezer's own vulnerability and isolation. The execution of the young boy by the Nazis is, to Eliezer, something that could only happen in a world with no God.

☛ That night the soup tasted of corpses.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Soup has a marked significance in the book, since getting food becomes the most important objective of the prisoners as they lose their humanity bit by bit. Soup is also particularly important in this section of the book about public executions. In describing one execution, Wiesel notes that Jewish prisoners assisted in the execution of one of their own in exchange for an extra bowl of soup. In this way, soup is a weapon of the Nazis – it incentivizes Jews to be cruel to other prisoners in exchange for something they desperately need. At the same time, that any of the Jews would assist the Nazis for as little as a measly bowl of soup shows just how far the Nazis have been able to dehumanize

and break down the Jews in the camp.

After watching an earlier execution, Eliezer describes the soup as tasting better than ever, perhaps indicating that he has become too protective of his own life to be particularly concerned for the lives of others. After watching the execution of the young boy in which he loses his faith, though, the soup tastes like corpses – this perhaps gestures towards the despair Eliezer feels at his loss of faith, and likely also at his sense that he is complicit in some way in the circus of cruelty he is witnessing.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ "Yes, man is very strong, greater than God. When You were deceived by Adam and Eve, You drove them out of Paradise. When Noah's generation displeased You, You brought down the Flood... But these men here, whom You have betrayed, whom You have allowed to be tortured, slaughtered, gassed, burned, what do they do? They pray before You! They praise your name!"

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

On Rosh Hashana, Eliezer gathers with other Jews for a prayer. Eliezer, who has lost his faith, is unable to pray. Instead, he accuses God of powerlessness and cruelty. He points out a litany of punishments that the Bible recounts God having brought down on sinners, and then he invokes the seemingly innocent and helpless Jews in the camps who are subject to inhuman horrors. Eliezer points out the absurdity of all these Jews gathering to pray to a God who seems indifferent to their suffering. He even proclaims man to be greater than God, in that these Jews are showing more forgiveness and compassion for God than God seems to show for them.

While Eliezer has certainly lost his faith by this point, it is significant that he still has internal conversations with God and still tries to reason with the logic of faith. This doesn't necessarily indicate an ambivalence about his loss of faith – rather, it shows that faith had been previously so central to the way he saw the world that, in its absence, he still can't escape its logic.

☞ That day I had ceased to plead. I was no longer capable of lamentation. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had ceased to be anything but ashes, yet I felt myself to be stronger than the Almighty, to whom my life had been tied for so long. I stood amid that praying congregation, observing it like a stranger.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Oddly, this moment of reckoning with his loss of faith seems to bolster Eliezer. Instead of allowing himself to hope that someone else will save him, this is a moment of Eliezer embracing that he is strong and capable and self-reliant without his faith. On the one hand, he frames this realization as resulting from his anger at God ("I was the accuser, God the accused") and on the other hand, he frames it as utter loss of faith ("I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God").

Regardless, this shows that Eliezer's experiences of horror and inhumanity have led him not only to lose his faith that was once so important, but also to repudiate it as a source of weakness. This passage is not entirely empowering, though – Eliezer describes himself as having "ceased to be anything but ashes." Despite feeling strong, the description of himself as being only ashes gestures towards his difficulty finding anything human within himself without his faith.

☞ "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."

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

In this part of the book, Eliezer has just had surgery on his foot and there are rumors that the Red Army is approaching the camp. In this exchange, Eliezer's neighbor in the hospital tells him that he should not hope that the Red Army will save them, because Hitler has made it clear that he intends to kill all the Jews. Eliezer angrily asks whether they should be treating Hitler's words like he's a prophet, and the

hospital neighbor then explains that Hitler is the only one who keeps his promises to the Jews. This is a sobering exchange that highlights the fact that the whole Holocaust has been, for Eliezer, a negotiation of trying not to believe that rumored horrors could be possible and then having his worst fears and beyond confirmed. The prisoner is right: there is no reason to hope, and every reason to believe the worst based on the experiences they have had.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Pitch darkness. Every now and then, an explosion in the night. They had orders to fire on any who could not keep up. Their fingers on the triggers, they did not deprive themselves of this pleasure. If one of us stopped for a second, a sharp shot finished off another filthy son of a bitch.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

In the hospital, Eliezer and his father couldn't decide whether to evacuate the camp with the rest of the prisoners, or remain in the hospital and take the risk that the Nazis might kill all the prisoners that stay. They chose to evacuate, despite his father's poor health and Eliezer's hurt foot. This choice leads them to experience one of their worst nights during the Holocaust, in which the prisoners are led on a more than forty mile death march through the snow. The marching prisoners are cold and starving, but if they slow for even a moment they are either shot by a Nazi or trampled by the prisoners behind them.

These conditions of fear and struggle for life itself invite cruelty, doubt, and despair. One man loses his father on purpose to increase his own odds for survival. Eliezer, whose father is deeply important to him, understands the man's choice nonetheless—the realization that he might be capable of a similar cruelty to his own father makes Eliezer realize the depth of the inhumanity to which he has succumbed, and to which all people can succumb. A big part of the permanent "night" that Eliezer experiences after the war is founded in this realization.

“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.”

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, like the one in which Eliezer rejects the Rosh Hashana prayer, Wiesel frames absence of faith as a strength, in that it allows him to focus on the concrete concerns of how to keep himself alive. This passage comes in a moment when Eliezer is performing an inhuman feat—starving, injured, and sleep deprived he is moving quickly for hours and hours through the snow under threat of death. Instead of feeling that he isn't up to the task, Eliezer is so dehumanized – so disconnected from his body and self – that he doesn't feel daunted by what he's up against.

There's a religious undertone to this passage, despite the fact that faith seems irrelevant to what Wiesel describes. The first sentence seems to imply that humans have replaced God as the most powerful forces on earth. This seems of a piece with Eliezer's loss of faith, which occurred because humans were able to commit unthinkable atrocities that God did not prevent. However, his description of the Jews as "condemned and wandering" is a subtle Biblical allusion to the historical sufferings of the Jewish people. Throughout the book, though Wiesel proclaims to have lost his faith, he still understands the world through the lens of Judaism.

“He played a fragment from Beethoven's concerto. I had never heard sounds so pure. In such silence.”

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker), Julieck

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *Night*, Wiesel gives us images that seem to promise some kind of redemption (however small) and then ultimately succumb to brutality. This is one of those. The prisoners have finished the death march and are allowed to

get some rest. Juliek and his violin have been spared against all odds, and he plays a bit of Beethoven while people are trying to sleep. This is a moment of beauty in which the Jews are reclaiming something beautiful in the face of one of the worst nights of suffering imaginable.

However, when Eliezer wakes up, Juliek is dead and his violin is crushed. This horrific outcome to a moment of beauty gives the sense of the relentlessness of the brutality of the Holocaust and the futility of hope for redemption. Eliezer and his father have survived the death march, an improbable feat. However, the death of Juliek, an embodiment of beauty, is a reminder that even this most recent improbable survival guarantees nothing.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ 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.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the Jews are thrown into a cattle car yet again to be brought to another camp. Unlike the first journey, they are now weak and dehumanized. There is barely any distinction between the many in the car who are dead and those who are alive. Throughout the book, Eliezer's sensitivity to death has diminished. While he once felt horrified by the Nazi spectacles of death, he is no longer surprised or moved by death in circumstances of cruelty. This is apparent in his off-hand description of twenty bodies being thrown from the train into the snow. This passage gives a sense of hopelessness, and of how far from their original values the prisoners have come. They barely try to discern who is and isn't dead before taking people's clothes and throwing them from the train. While a Jewish death without a proper burial would have once been unimaginable, at this point it is barely remarked on.

☛☛ We were given no food. We lived on snow; it took the place of bread. The days were like nights, and the nights left the dregs of their darkness in our souls.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Wiesel describes the days-long train journey in which the Jews are crowded onto a cattle car and not fed. This is not even how someone would treat livestock – concern for humanity is completely irrelevant here. The Jews in the cattle cars survive solely by eating snow, and witness incredible cruelty. People outside the train amuse themselves by throwing in bits of bread and watching the prisoners fight to the death over the scraps, including one man who kills his own father and then is killed himself before he gets to eat.

Without even the escape of work or the minimal personal space of the camps, the prisoners descend into a new kind of despair that Wiesel elucidates, again, with the metaphor of night. Daylight is no longer a reprieve, and night is unbearable. It's important to note the "their" in the line, "nights left the dregs of their darkness in our souls." Wiesel is acknowledging the complexity of the cruelty between prisoners. He describes this as Nazi darkness that is infecting Jewish souls – it is Nazi cruelty that created the conditions for Jewish cruelty. Even while the behavior of the prisoners demoralizes him, Eliezer still recognizes that this behavior has been, in some sense, externally imposed.

☛☛ Hundreds of cries rose up simultaneously. Not knowing against whom we cried. Not knowing why. The death rattle of a whole convoy who felt the end upon them. 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.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs while Meir Katz, one of the strongest men left, is losing his will to live. It is startling for Eliezer to see this last bulwark of a man lose his strength, and this loss seems to be echoed everywhere as people in the cars wail

desperately and their cries create a cascade of wailing across the train cars. This is a moment in which Eliezer sees everyone around him losing strength and he himself feels vulnerable – Meir Katz has just saved him from strangulation, and he feels that nobody has any energy left to go on. He is facing down death here as the only option left. There is nowhere to flee, and there is no concrete force he is up against except for his own fatigue. The hopelessness of this passage is cemented by the fact that Wiesel, at the end of it, invokes the difficulty of the coming night that nobody feels that they are prepared for.

☞ The last day had been the most murderous. A hundred of us had got into the wagon. A dozen of us got out—among them, my father and I.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker), Chlomo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *Night*, the attrition of human lives has been startling. Wiesel describes, over and over, the numbers of people who did not survive each step of their journey. This last day of the train trip had abysmally low survival rates, but somehow – against all odds – Eliezer and his father are still alive when they reach their destination.

The bond between Eliezer and his father is one of the only human elements that remains as the book gets darker and more desperate, and we get the sense that, even while their commitment to one another slows them down and forces them into risky situations, the love between Eliezer and his father is one of the only things keeping them alive. The importance of this love is emphasized by Meir Katz's decision to stay with the dead on the train (which essentially amounts to suicide). Despite the fact that Katz is one of the strongest men, his grief for his dead son makes him unable to continue.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ "Don't let me find him! If only I could get rid of this dead weight, so that I could use all my strength to struggle for my own survival, and only worry about myself." Immediately I felt ashamed of myself, ashamed forever.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker), Chlomo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

After everything Eliezer and his father have been through, Eliezer still feels impulses to abandon his father to increase his own odds of survival. This moral conflict is at the heart of the book, and despite Eliezer's shame at his own feelings, his ability to feel conflicted at all about his father indicates that he still has some humanity left.

While Eliezer is never outright cruel to his father like some sons are in the camps, he often feels that his inaction in the face of others' cruelty to his father and his secret desires to be rid of his father are just as bad. It's a conflict that the book never resolves. While Eliezer's inaction and secret feelings are understandable in the face of the incredible risks and sacrifices that protecting his father would entail, Wiesel never allows himself to fully justify his actions. He holds himself accountable to what he sees as his own moral failings, even though those failings were provoked by unimaginable cruelty towards him.

☞ Oh, to strangle the doctor and the others! To burn the whole world! My father's murderers! But the cry stayed in my throat.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker), Dr. Mengele

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, Eliezer's father is very sick with dysentery and it's likely that he won't survive. The doctors refuse to give sick people food and won't treat his father, which inspires in Eliezer a murderous rage that, of course, he never acts on. This is one of the rare moments in the book when Eliezer expresses a fantasy that seems to echo Nazi behavior – he wants "to burn the whole world," which is what, it must have seemed to him, the Nazis were doing.

It's important that what brings these feelings out in him is witnessing cruelty towards his father, not cruelty directed towards Eliezer himself. This is another example of the

importance of his relationship with his father. In a sense, his father has replaced religion as the emotional locus of his life; his father is essentially the only thing left that can provoke an emotional reaction in Eliezer. Still, this rage does not inspire Eliezer to actually act on his fantasies of avenging the Nazi cruelty, and so it forces Eliezer also to face his inability to defend his father.

☞ Bending over him, I stayed gazing at him for over an hour, engraving into myself the picture of his blood-stained face, his shattered skull.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker), Chlomo

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Eliezer's father is near death here after one of the guards hit him on the head with a truncheon simply because he wouldn't stop asking for water. Eliezer knows there is nothing he can do to save his father's life at this point, so he tries to memorize his father's face, not neglecting the blood, broken skull, and suffering. While Wiesel does not elaborate on the meaning or purpose of this act, we get the sense that this is, however private and silent, a way of honoring his father. Death has lost almost all meaning to Eliezer (he forgets to pray for a dead friend, he barely notices that so many Jews are going without proper burial) but with his father's death, he clearly feels that he needs to bear witness to his father's suffering.

Even if he can't draw meaning from his father's death now, Eliezer seems to want to cement his father's face in his memory so that he might be able to draw meaning from it later. This is a quiet act of humanity in the face of incredible cruelty, and it shows both how important Eliezer's father was to him, and also how little capacity for emotion he has left.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ Our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. We thought only of that. Not of revenge, not of our families. Nothing but bread.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, Eliezer has been at Buchenwald for a few months, and, without his father, has had barely any will to live. When Buchenwald is liberated, the Jews are at the end of many, many months of physical exhaustion and have witnessed unimaginable suffering and cruelty – as an indication of the inhumanity they have been reduced to, Wiesel notes that, once liberated, they only thought of food. All human concerns had become secondary to basic bodily needs, and they gorged themselves on bread rather than contemplating the meaning of their freedom, or fantasizing about revenge, or considering the families they lost or the ones that they might now be able to reunite with. Just as it took time for them to become dehumanized in the camps, the process of returning to the world of human concerns also takes time. The impact of the Nazis, in fact, would last a lifetime – Eliezer was never able to return to the values, interests, and joy he once took for granted.

☞ One day I was able to get up, after gathering all my strength. I wanted to see myself in the mirror on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto. 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.

Related Characters: Eliezer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eliezer sees himself for the first time since he left home for the camps. The time in between has brought emotional and physical torture – starvation, the death march, beatings, and very little healthcare, among other cruelties. When Eliezer looks in the mirror, he sees a corpse – not even a person, but a dead body.

By this description he invokes the physical toll that the Holocaust has taken on his body (emaciated as he was, his face must have seemed little more than a skull), and also the spiritual toll. When he looked at himself, he no longer recognized himself as human. By this point he had lost his faith in God and his faith in humanity, and he couldn't even take refuge in his own honorable behavior due to his guilt

over his passivity in protecting his father. Wiesel was so emotionally and physically degraded that, when he looked in

the mirror, he did not identify himself as human. This is the ultimate testament to the Nazi horrors that he experienced.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Eliezer is twelve in 1941. He lives in a town called Sighet, in territory then controlled by Hungary. His father is respected in the Jewish community. As a boy, Weisel studies the Torah (the Jewish Bible) and the Talmud (rabbinical teachings), while his sisters Hilda, Béa, and Tzipora help his parents run a shop. Eliezer is very religious and wants to study cabbala, Jewish mysticism, but his father says that he's too young.

Moché the Beadle works at a Hasidic synagogue in the town. Poor and physically awkward, he has a dreamlike and spiritual quality about him. Eliezer and he discuss religion and begin to study cabbala together. Soon, though, all of the foreign Jews are expelled by the Hungarian police. Moché, a foreigner, is forced onto a cattle train and sent away.

A few months later, Moché appears in town again, telling a horror story. Once the train arrived in Poland, the Gestapo took the Jewish passengers off the train, drove them to a forest, made them dig graves, and slaughtered them with machine guns, using babies for target practice. Moché miraculously survived with a leg wound and returned to warn the people of Sighet.

The people of Sighet do not believe Moché's story. Even Eliezer does not believe him, although he notices that Moché has changed, and no longer speaks about God or the cabbala. Moché despairs that no one pays attention to his warning.

Life seems normal enough in the village in 1943. People are encouraged by radio reports of the bombardment of Germany and the progress of the war. Eliezer continues his religious studies and the family thinks about Hilda's marriage prospects.

Things begin to change in 1944, although the Jews in Sighet still doubt that Hitler wants to exterminate them. Eliezer wants his father to sell the business and move to Palestine but his father says he's too old to start a new life. The Fascists come to power in Hungary. They allow German soldiers to enter the country, but in Sighet the Jews remain optimistic.

The narrator doesn't give many details of daily life for the rest of his family or the rest of the townspeople. He focuses on how, as a pre-teen and teenage boy, his own profound faith shapes his activities and his priorities.



Moché is a saint-like figure, an innocent soul, and in that sense he's a good candidate to prophecy the terrors in store for the townspeople. But these same reasons—his dreaminess and simplicity—make it unlikely that the people will believe him.



Moché makes the journey back to Sighet to warn the townspeople of the atrocities to come because at this point they still have time to leave Eastern Europe.



Moché's apparent lack of interest in religious discussion foreshadows Eliezer's own eventual loss of faith once he witnesses the Nazi's atrocities.



This is the calm before the storm. The people of Sighet don't have any idea about the concentration camps.

The villagers' lack of urgency suggests how difficult it was for many people to believe that Hitler could and would actually carry out his stated desire to eliminate the Jews of Europe.



The German soldiers come to Sighet, staying at the houses of local citizens—sometimes Jews. One officer stays in a house across the street from Eliezer's. The soldiers are polite, and the Jews hope things will be fine. They keep a low profile, worship at home instead of at the synagogue. Then, during Passover, the Germans arrest the leaders of the Jewish community.

The authorities issue a series of orders. First, the Jews are commanded to remain in their houses for three days. Then they're ordered to hand over all of their valuables to the Hungarian police. The Jews are next forced to wear a yellow star on their clothing, and are banned from restaurants, trains, and the synagogue. A six o'clock curfew for Jews goes into effect.

Jews are forced to move into one of two ghettos in Sighet. Eliezer's house is already in one of the designated areas, so his family doesn't have to move, but relatives kicked out of their homes move in. Germans use some Jews for labor, but the population remains hopeful that it will remain in the ghetto until the Russians arrive and the war is over.

One **night**, Eliezer's father is hurriedly summoned to a meeting of the Jewish council. Neighbors gather at the house to wait. Eliezer's mother has a feeling something bad is going to happen. His father comes back late at night with the news that they are all being deported.

All **night** the Jews in the ghetto prepare themselves for a journey to an unknown destination. In the morning, Hungarian police enter the ghetto and order the Jews out of their houses into the streets, striking them with rifle butts. The Hungarians keep the Jews standing in the street for hours under the sun, for roll call after roll call, while the Jewish police discreetly try to bring water to the people.

Eliezer watches the people of his town—friends, teachers, the rabbi—pass by with a small bundle of possessions. The scene is surreal, like something out of a book about ancient Jewish history—Biblical stories of the Jews fleeing cruel rulers.

Eliezer's family isn't part of the first deportation. Instead they are going to be sent to the smaller ghetto. When it's their time to leave their house, they are ordered to march. Eliezer sees his father cry for the first time. The Hungarian police order them to run and Eliezer begins to hate them.

The bad news comes in small steps, and at each step the majority of the Jewish community convinces itself that things might not get much worse.



At this point, the Jews of Sighet are clearly being singled out and discriminated against. However, they've been singled out and discriminated against at other times in their history. The Hungarians don't seem to have a problem with doing the Germans' bidding.



They have very little access to information, so the Sighet Jews try to put a bright face on the situation. They expect hardship in wartime, but hope that the situation is temporary.



As a respected and influential man involved in the Jewish affairs of the village, Eliezer's father takes part in the meetings where the Jews learn their fate.



When the Hungarian police have an opportunity to use violence against Jewish civilians, they take it. This suggests a degree of anti-Semitism present among the Hungarians, not just their German masters.



Eliezer views this deportation through the eyes of someone steeped in the Torah. His religious upbringing helps him link the current trial with a long history of trials faced by the Jews.



These tears are the first sign of weakness—a hint that Eliezer's father may not be able to protect his family. The forces now stacked against them are too large, too well-armed, too far beyond rational thought.



In the little ghetto everything is in disarray—the people who lived here had been ordered to leave more quickly. The family's old servant comes to see them and begs them to come to her village and hide. Eliezer's father says that Eliezer and his two older sisters can go if they want to, but the family does not want to be separated.

That **night**, according to Eliezer, no one prays. The next day, people try to feel hopeful. They suggest that they are being deported because the front is coming too close, or because the Germans just want to steal their valuables. For a few days, the differences among the remaining villagers vanish and everyone gets along well.

On Saturday, the Sabbath, the Jews leave their homes and head to the synagogue. The streets are deserted, as if the non-Jews are waiting for the Jews to leave so they can pillage their houses. The synagogue is crowded with people, the altar is broken, the decorations are gone. The Jews spend twenty-four hours there. The next day they're marched to the station and herded onto cattle cars, eighty people per car. One person is responsible for each car; if anyone escapes, this one person will be shot. The Gestapo watches, pleased. The trains begin to move.

CHAPTER 2

On the cattle cars, the people have to take turns sitting. They don't have enough provisions so they try to conserve food and water. The heat is terrible. Some young couples have sex without worrying about privacy. When they reach the Czech border, a German officer informs them that this is their last chance to hand over any valuables. Anyone found with valuables later will be shot. If any one of the eighty people on the car disappears, all eighty will be shot.

The train continues. A woman named Madame Schächter, who has been separated from her husband and her two eldest sons, loses her mind. Her youngest son tries to comfort her as she cries hysterically. On the third **night** of the journey, she screams that she can see a **fire** and wakes everyone up.

The women and the son try to console Madame Schächter, but she continues to say that she can see **fire**, a furnace. The rest of the people's nerves are near the breaking point. Some young men tie up and gag Madame Schächter to keep her quiet. Several more times Madame Schächter manages to scream about the fires, and she is gagged again, even beaten.

The family's desire to stay together is understandable. Maybe things would have turned out better if they'd tried to hide in another village. Or maybe they all would have been discovered and shot.



Again the lack of information is their downfall. This day of calm might turn out to have been the last chance for escape, but without knowledge of the horror that awaits them, the Jews of Sighet don't take desperate measures.



The Jews have lost a little bit of their humanity at each step. First their movements are restricted. Then their possessions are taken. Then they're moved out of their homes. They wait in the desecrated remains of what had been their holy place. Finally, they are herded like livestock onto cars designed for animals.



It's been a harrowing period in the village, but now things have gotten much worse. The physical discomfort is real, and the threat of death has been made explicit.



Everyone has their own limits of what they can bear before. Mrs. Schächter becomes the first victim Eliezer witnesses. Her screams about fire make her seem a madwoman.



Madame Schächter's screaming is making a terrible situation worse, and sympathy is in short supply. The beating of Madame Schächter is the book's first example of powerless prisoners taking out their anger on those weaker than themselves.



The train arrives at a place called Auschwitz. Two men are allowed to get water for the car. They come back with the information that this is a work camp, families will not be split up, conditions are okay. The people feel hopeful.

At **night**, the train moves into the camp. Madame Schächter again screams about flames, but this time they can all see flames shooting out of a chimney. The air smells like burnt flesh. The train stops in Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz, and everyone is herded off the train.

CHAPTER 3

As they step out of the train cars, leaving the last of their valuables behind, they are surrounded by the SS with machine guns. Men are separated from the women. Eliezer watches his sisters and his mother move away. He sees his mother and his youngest sister for the last time.

The SS order them into groups. Eliezer manages to stay with his father. One veteran prisoner tells him to say that he is eighteen, not fifteen, and his father forty, not fifty. Another prisoner begins to curse the new arrivals for coming—anything, even killing themselves, would have been better, he says. He can't believe they haven't heard by 1944 what happens at Auschwitz. Pointing to the chimneys he says, "You're going to be burned."

Some of the young men briefly murmur about revolt—they have a few knives among them, but no other weapons. The older men talk them out of it, telling them not to lose faith.

The new arrivals are marched to a square. An SS officer named Dr. Mengele inspects them, asking some of them questions, and then pointing to the right or to the left with his baton. Eliezer lies and says he is eighteen and a farmer. Dr. Mengele gestures to the left, and does the same for his father. A veteran prisoner tells them they are headed for the crematorium.

The Jews continue to cling to the hope that the worst—the unimaginable—won't happen. They think that they can survive hardship, so long as families stay together and take care of each other.



Probably nothing could prepare Eliezer for what he sees at Birkenau. It's almost as if Madame Schächter, in her madness, is the only one who foresaw the inhuman reality of what awaited them.



This is virtually the last we hear of Eliezer's mother and sister in the book. His attention turns to his father's survival and his own—it's almost as if he can't afford to expend any thought on people he can't help.



The new prisoners can't imagine the inhuman cruelty that they are about to face, and so enter the concentration camp peacefully. The veteran prisoners know better. But even they are so terrified of their jailers that rather than follow their own advice, they take out their anger on the new prisoners.



The old men still have faith in God, and in the humanity of their fellow humans. .



Mengele was called the 'Angel of Death' by the prisoners because he had the power to decide who lived and who was immediately gassed. During his time at Auschwitz, he performed horrifying "medical experiments" on thousands of prisoners, including live dissections of children.



They are marched towards a ditch from which Eliezer sees flames leaping up. He watches a truck pull up to the ditch and sees babies and little children thrown into the flames. They march towards a larger ditch for adults. Eliezer's father wishes his son could have gone with his mother—he does not want to see his son burn.

Eliezer tells his father he will run towards the electric fence instead of dying in the **fire**. His father can only weep. Someone begins to recite the Jewish prayer for the dead—the Kaddish—and Eliezer's father whispers along. Eliezer feels a first sense of rebellion against his religion and his God.

They are marched almost to the edge of the ditch, and then ordered back to the barracks. The narrator says he will never forget that first horrible **night**, "which has turned my life into one long night." He will never forget the faces of the burning children nor the night he loses his belief that God is just.

In the barracks, the new arrivals are beaten by veteran prisoners. The SS officers look for strong men (Eliezer and his father decide not to draw attention to themselves). Next, the new arrivals are sent to the barber to have all their hair shaved. They mingle for hours, finding friends, occasions for joy and for weeping. They are all too numb to think about those they've been separated from.

They are disinfected, made to run naked in the cold, sent to another barracks where they try to sleep standing. Kapos (prisoners given power over other prisoners) take whatever new shoes they can from the new prisoners. An SS officer tells them that in Auschwitz they must work or they will be sent to the crematory.

Certain skilled workers are weeded out and the rest are sent to another barracks. Eliezer's father asks the gypsy deportee in charge of the barracks if he can use the lavatory. The man knocks his father down. Eliezer does not move, and feels guilty, although his father says it doesn't hurt.

Under SS guard, Eliezer, his father, and their group of prisoners are marched out of Birkenau to another camp: Auschwitz proper. They pass through an iron gate with a saying above it that reads, *Work is liberty*.

During the transport of Hungarian Jews in 1944, the crematoria couldn't keep pace with the killings, so the Nazis dug open pits and burned Jews there.



The misfortune of his family losing its home and possessions didn't shake Eliezer's beliefs. But the vision of children and babies thrown into the flames eats away at his sense of God and the universe.



*As this passage suggests, the title *Night* carries a lot of symbolic weight in the book. It refers literally to the night of the burning children, and metaphorically to the darkness of mourning, and the darkness of Eliezer's life without the God he once believed in so fervently.*



This is one of the many decisions Eliezer and his father have to make without really knowing what the stakes are: should they try to be selected as able-bodied prisoners, or should they blend in with the crowd? Which will improve their chances of survival?



The Jews are treated like livestock. The Kapos were often convicted criminals who were given power over the other prisoners. Their reputation was one of brutality.



In the inhumane, insane world of the camps, neither Eliezer nor his father can protect each other the way a son or father should protect each other. To do so might invite death for both of them.



Another translation of the German saying is, "Work will make you free." It was not, however, the Nazi's intention to give the surviving prisoners their freedom in exchange for work.



They are made to shower, are forced to run naked, and arrive at a prison block where a Polish prisoner in charge of them speaks kindly to them. He tells them to keep faith in life and to be comrades to each other. The prisoners sleep.

Eliezer cites few examples of decency from anyone in a position of power, but this is one of them.



The next day the prisoners are tattooed on their left arms. Eliezer becomes A-7713. In the evening, tens of thousands of prisoners stand for roll call as the SS checks the numbers on their arms. They get black coffee in the morning, soup at noon, and a piece of bread and something else at night. Eight days go by.

Tattoos are one of the notable legacies of the concentration camps that survivors have lived with. The number reinforced the idea that each prisoner was no longer a person.



A relative—Eliezer's great-uncle from Antwerp—finds Eliezer's father and asks if anyone has heard news of his wife or children, whom he hasn't seen in two years. Eliezer lies and says his mother heard that they were very well. The man is overjoyed—hope for them is all that keeps him alive.

Conditions in the camp eventually become so harsh that people need some kind of hope to hold onto in order to keep their will to live. Belief in God is not enough.



They spend three weeks at Auschwitz. The relative from Antwerp visits and brings half a ration of bread. He advises Eliezer's father to take care of his son. Then a new transport comes from Antwerp, presumably bringing real news with it, and the relative never comes again.

Eliezer assumes that the relative has learned the truth about his wife and children, and has lost his reason to live.



Lying on their beds at **night** during this period, the prisoners listen to a man named Akiba Drumer sing religious songs. Some people talk about God. Eliezer no longer prays, is no longer sure that God is just. His thoughts turn to his mother and his youngest sister. His father says they must be in a labor camp, and both pretend to believe this.

This is one of the few instances that Eliezer seems to allow himself to think about his mother and sisters. Whereas not long ago he would have prayed to God in a difficult time, he no longer feels he can because he has ceased to believe that God is good.



Roughly a hundred ordinary laborers are left from the original group. Guards take them out of Auschwitz through villages, where girls flirt with the SS soldiers. Four hours later they reach another camp called Buna.

Eliezer and his father are apparently still useful to the Nazis as slave labor—they've managed to avoid the first selections for the gas chamber and the ovens.



CHAPTER 4

The camp of Buna looks almost deserted when they arrive. The head of the camp orders that food be brought to the ten and twelve-year-old prisoners. The German in charge of Eliezer's tent also takes a special interest in the welfare of the children, although his interest may not be so wholesome—Eliezer later learns that many boys were sexually abused.

The sexual predation of boys is another example of the inhumane treatment of the Jewish prisoners by those who had power over them.



One of his assistants in charge of the tent tries to get Eliezer's shoes in exchange for a good work unit assignment and keeping Eliezer and his father together. Eliezer won't give up his shoes.

Eliezer's shoes are his only possession of value at this point (besides a little bit of dental work).

The prisoners spend three days in quarantine, with medical and dental inspection. Then the Kapos arrive and select their work units. Eliezer's unit is joined by prisoners from a musicians' unit, including Julieck, a violinist. They are sent to work in an electrical equipment warehouse. One of the musicians tells Eliezer that he has landed in a good unit, but that the Kapo, Idek, occasionally goes berserk and beats people.

In the warehouse there are also Poles and French women. Franek, the foreman, lets Eliezer work next to his father. Eliezer befriends two Czech brothers, Yossi and Tibi, whose parents have been killed at Birkenau, and who talk of going to Palestine. Akiba Drumer discovers a passage in the Bible that he believes predicts their liberation within a few weeks.

Eliezer is ordered to go to the dentist to have his gold crown removed. Eliezer fakes illness and the dentist tells him to come back when he feels better. Eliezer returns a week later and is successful with the same excuse. Then the dentist is thrown into prison to be hanged for selling the crowns on the black market and Eliezer saves his gold crown.

At the warehouse Eliezer works near a French girl. They don't speak to each other, and Eliezer presumes they don't share a language. He suspects she might be Jewish, but she's there as an Aryan deportee from occupied France. One day, Idek, the Kapo, beats Eliezer savagely. The girl comforts him, gives him some bread, and gives him words of encouragement in German.

Years later, after the war, Eliezer sees a beautiful woman on the Metro in Paris. They recognize each other from the warehouse and spend the evening reminiscing. She is, in fact, Jewish, but made it through the war with forged papers stating she was not. Speaking German was a risk, she admits, but she trusted Eliezer.

On another occasion, Eliezer can only watch as Idek beats his father with an iron bar. Eliezer's instinct is to move farther away. He feels anger, in that moment, more towards his father (for not avoiding the Kapo) than towards Idek.

The Nazis tried to limit the spread of disease among their slave labor so they could get the most work out the prisoners while providing them with the least amount of resources for survival. Musicians were ordered to play marches as the prisoners left each day for work.



The Cabbala, which Eliezer used to study, looks for hidden, deeper meanings within biblical texts. A religious man like Akiba Drumer is relying to the same skills to which Eliezer once devoted his life in order to find some suggestion that God has a miracle in store.



Eliezer's desires and motivations have become simplified: stay alive, stay with my father, keep my shoes, keep my gold crown.



This is a rare example of comforting and sympathy among prisoners in Eliezer's account. It may be that such sympathy and encouragement was given more frequently than Eliezer notes. He does give plenty examples of the cruelty that occurs among mistreated people.



This woman's survival is an example of how some Jews who were more aware of the dangers they faced were able to take measures—even if risky ones—to avoid being marked for death in the concentration camps.



The concentration camp perverts the father-son relationship. For fear of being killed on the spot, neither son nor father can stop the beatings. For Eliezer, this powerlessness feeds a misplaced resentment.



The foreman, Franek, demands the gold crown in Eliezer's mouth. Eliezer refuses. But his father isn't good at marching, so Franek starts to beat him every day for not marching in rhythm. Eliezer tries to give his father lessons. His father still can't march, and still gets beaten, until Eliezer relents. A dentist takes the crown out with a rusty spoon and gives it to Franek.

The foreman is nice enough to Eliezer until he sees the chance to use his position to take Eliezer's small amount of "wealth." Another example of people at their worst when given power over a group of people who are treated like animals.



One day, Idek brings the entire unit to the warehouse even though there is no work that day. Eliezer wanders around and accidentally sees Idek having sex with a Polish girl. Later, Idek gives Eliezer twenty-five lashes with a whip in front of the rest of the prisoners. His father watches helplessly.

Idek has the power to punish the Jews underneath him for whatever reason, and in any manner he feels like.



During an air raid the SS guards go into bomb shelters. A prisoner tries to get some extra soup but is killed by shrapnel from an exploding bomb. The prisoners are overjoyed at the bombing by American planes, even though it puts them in mortal danger.

At this point, the destruction of their torturers seems more important to the prisoners than their own survival and liberation.



A week later the prisoners are assembled in front of a gallows that has been built in the center of the camp. One prisoner, a strong young man, is condemned to death for stealing. He curses Germany and shouts "Long live liberty!" until the chair is pulled away and he dies. The prisoners think about their delayed supper, and Eliezer later enjoys his soup.

The public hanging is meant to set an example for the rest of the prisoners, and it does make an impression on Eliezer. But his needs are so elemental at this point that the desire for food overcomes the disturbance of the hanging.



Although he is forced to watch other hangings, one in particular stays in Eliezer's mind. The young assistant of a Kapo is arrested along with the Kapo and two other prisoners after a power station in Buna blows up. The Kapo is tortured and sent to Auschwitz. The assistant, still only a boy, is tortured and then brought with the other two men to the gallows before the assembled camp. Prisoners refuse to help in the execution.

This is another example of the harsh treatment given to those who attempt to revolt or sabotage the Nazi machine: weeks of torture and then death. Something about this particular boy—his youth and innocence—captures and crushes the hearts of the rest of the prisoners.



A man in the crowd behind Eliezer asks, "Where is God now?" The three are hanged, and the prisoners are forced to march past and look at them. The boy is still alive, dying slowly, as Eliezer passes. Eliezer feels as if his belief in God dies with that boy.

Earlier, Eliezer ceased to be able to pray to God because he no longer believed that God was just. Now he has seen so much evil that he no longer believes in God at all.



CHAPTER 5

On the evening of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) the Jews in Buna gather for a prayer. Eliezer, who once lived for prayer and religious study, rebels against this. He feels that humans are, in a sense, greater than God, stronger than God, do still pray to a God who allows such horrors. "I was the accuser, God the accused... I stood amid the praying congregation, observing it like a stranger."

By Eliezer's reasoning, God is the weaker party since He rejects and punishes those in the Bible who are unjust or cruel—whereas the Jews in Buna still honor a God who permits them to be gassed and burned by the millions. In other words, the people show more forgiveness to God than He does to them.



Eliezer shares a silent, powerful moment of sadness and understanding with his father. For Yom Kippur, when Jews traditionally fast, his father forbids Eliezer from fasting. Eliezer no longer believes in such rituals, anyway.

This is one of the few moments in the narrative of pure love and comprehension. But it occurs in an instant when both father and son share with each other their lost faith in God.



The prisoners must go through a "selection" when they come back from work. The veterans say the newer prisoners are lucky—not long before, corpses were collected by the hundreds each day, and selections took place every week. The head of the block tells them to move around beforehand, to give color to their skin and to show they are healthy. Dr. Mengele watches the prisoners go past him and occasionally writes down the tattooed number of one of them. A few of the feebler ones are written down, but Eliezer is not. However, no one is immediately taken away.

More on Josef Mengele: he castrated boys and men for no reason and without anesthetic; he forced women to endure high-voltage electric shocks; he sterilized and horribly burned a group of Polish nuns using x-rays; he sewed two gypsy children together to try to create conjoined twins; he performed stomach surgeries on prisoners without anesthesia; he routinely killed people in order to dissect them.



A few days later, the head of the block reads off the numbers of those who have been selected to die. Eliezer's father is among them, as is Akiba Drumer, the singer. His father hurriedly gives Eliezer a knife and a spoon, all that he owns. Eliezer is sent off to work. All day he wonders if he will ever see his father again. When he returns to the camp with his work group that evening, his father is still there, having convinced the Nazis that he is still fit for work.

This is another instance in which Eliezer can do nothing to help or protect his father.



During this period of selection, an old rabbi from Poland who used to pray constantly and recite pages of the Talmud loses his faith in God. So does Akiba Drumer, the religious singer, who gives up, and doesn't try to avoid selection. He asks the other prisoners to say a traditional prayer for him three days after his selection. They promise to, but then forget.

Eliezer is not the only one whose faith is shattered by the concentration camps. The prisoners have become indifferent to the life and death of others. Back in their normal lives it would have been unthinkable not to say a prayer after the death of a friend.



Winter arrives and the prisoners truly start to know what it is to be cold. Christmas and New Year's pass. In January, Eliezer's foot swells. He goes to see a doctor—a Jew and a fellow prisoner. The doctor tells him he needs an immediate operation or else amputation will soon be necessary.

This doctor seems to have Eliezer's best interests at heart, unlike the dentist who examined him earlier.

The surgery is successful, and two days later Eliezer hears a rumor that the Red Army is only hours away and that the camp is being evacuated and the invalids will be left behind. However, Eliezer's neighbor in the hospital tells him that the invalids will be killed and sent to the crematorium. Eliezer doesn't know what to believe, but doesn't want to be separated from his father. He and his father confer—the doctor could enter his father onto the hospital roll as a patient and they could wait for the Russians. Eventually, they decide to leave with the evacuation.

Eliezer and his father are again forced to make what could be a life-or-death decision without having reliable information to work with. Their decision not to stay behind seems reasonable—since the Nazis are continually killing and burning people who are no longer useful to them, they might dispatch with the invalids.



After the war, Eliezer learns that those who stayed in the hospital were liberated by the Russian Army two days later.

Once again, it seems as if God has played a cruel trick on them.



Eliezer spends the night back in his block. The prisoners are given bread and margarine for the trip ahead. The next morning, the prisoners, wearing every layer of clothing they can find, are about ready to leave when the head of the block orders them to clean their living space, to show the liberating army that "there were men living here and not pigs."

The prisoners make an effort to assert their humanity...



The evening, surrounded by SS guards and dogs, with the snow falling heavily, the prisoners march out of the camp block by block. At last, Eliezer's block—Block 57—marches out into the darkness.

...but the meaninglessness of this gesture is soon brought home by the terrors, harshness, and pointlessness of the march.



CHAPTER 6

Cursed and prodded by the SS and whipped by the wind, the prisoners march. The guards yell at them to go faster and they begin to run. They hear explosions from time to time: the SS have orders to shoot anyone who can't keep up the pace.

The prisoners are already in bad shape at the beginning of the march, but these conditions are murderous.



Eliezer tries not to think, tries to keep himself moving mindlessly forward. A Polish youth who'd worked next to Eliezer in the warehouse has a stomachache. Eliezer encourages him to keep going, but the young man collapses and is trampled by those who come behind him.

Eliezer tries to become just a body focused on its own survival. The Polish youth is killed not by the Nazis but by his fellow Jews, who are all so focused on their own survival that they run right over him.



Each step with Eliezer's injured foot hurts him terribly. His father, running beside him, keeps him going. It's impossible to slow the pace because others push from behind.

Again, Eliezer's father helps him with encouragement.



They keep going until the sky starts to lighten. An officer tells them they've gone forty-two miles. They pass through a deserted village and finally are allowed to rest in the snow. Eliezer follows his father into a half-collapsed shed. People are sleeping and those sleeping begin to die. Eliezer's father won't let him sleep long. They go outside but people are dying everywhere, so they go back in the shed.

Many people are so weak from their living conditions and the insane death march that they go to sleep and simply don't wake up.



A well-loved rabbi called Rabbi Eliahou comes into the shed looking for his son, from whom he has not been separated for three years, despite them being sent to several camps. He says he was separated from his son on the road, when the rabbi had fallen behind and his son didn't notice. Eliezer says he hasn't seen the rabbi's son.

Another father-son tandem, surviving for years in the camps. But the increasingly awful brutality eventually breaks this tandem up.



Eliezer then remembers that he has seen the son deliberately abandon his father the rabbi. The son sensed that his father was near the end, and he distanced himself from the old man out of self-preservation. Even though he no longer believes in God, Eliezer prays that he doesn't do the same to his own father.

The son's abandonment of his rabbi father is a reminder to Eliezer to fight whatever impulses he might have to view his weakening father as a burden, to remember his duty as a son and never to abandon his father.



The SS soldiers get the prisoners moving again, leaving the dead where they lie in the snow. This part of the march is less orderly. The SS themselves are tired. They encourage the prisoners to keep going a few more hours. Finally they reach a new prison camp, Gleiwitz. The men are hustled into barracks, where they collapse, treading on and crushing each other. Below him in the pile, Eliezer hears the voice of Juliek, the violinist from Buna, crying for mercy. Juliek is worried his violin will be crushed. Eliezer claws at the people lying on top of him and suffocating him. He manages to claw an opening for air. He calls to his father, who is nearby and still alive. They try to sleep.

The narrator conveys a sense of exhaustion so complete that people collapse on top of each other, to sleep or to die. The margin between life and death is very narrow at this point, and the men don't have enough energy to care about one another's survival..



Then they hear the sound of a violin. Someone is playing part of a Beethoven concerto. Eliezer believes it is Juliek, who must somehow have managed to free himself from underneath the mass of exhausted and dying and dead people. Whenever Eliezer hears Beethoven later on in life, he thinks of Juliek.

Jewish musicians at Buna weren't allowed to play Beethoven (a German composer). But Juliek loves the music; its power transcends the German's inhumanity, as well as their attempts to claim it as their exclusive heritage.



The next morning, Eliezer sees Juliek near him, dead, his violin trampled.

The music was briefly uplifting, but the end result is the same.



The prisoners are kept at Gleiwitz without food or water for three days. They can hear gunfire and think the front might be close, but have no faith in being rescued. On the third day the weak are divided from those who can still walk okay. Eliezer's father is selected for the weak. Eliezer runs after him, the SS grab Eliezer, and in the confusion, his father slips into the unselected group, although some other people are shot.

Here Eliezer takes a risk in trying to save his father. He creates a disturbance and his father is able to get out of the group of condemned people—but the price of creating the disturbance is that other Jews are shot.



Eliezer's group is marched out of the camp to a railway, herded onto a long train of cattle cars, one hundred prisoners to a car. It is snowing heavily and the cars have no roofs. The train moves out.

On the way to Auschwitz, there were eighty people crammed into a car. Now there are a hundred people—a reflection of how emaciated they now are, as well as the Nazis increasingly brutal treatment of them..



CHAPTER 7

The train goes on through the **night**. When light comes, Eliezer is unable to tell who is alive and who is dead in the car, including his father. Eliezer feels there is no reason to live.

The car stops in a field and SS soldiers shout at the people in the cars to throw out their dead. People in the car look for the dead, take their clothes and push them out. When two men try to take his father, Eliezer snaps out of his daze and slaps his father until his father's eyelids begin to move. Twenty bodies are thrown out of the car.

The train trip seems to last an eternity. The train moves slowly and the people are not fed—they eat snow to stay alive. They pass through German towns where Germans watch them. One day a German worker throws a piece of bread into a car to watch the people fight each other to the death for it.

Other workmen watch this spectacle, and begin to drop pieces of bread from their lunches into different cars to observe the starving prisoners fight for them. When a piece is dropped in his car Eliezer doesn't fight for it, but sees a younger man beat up his own father for it. The old man dies, and then the son is set upon and killed before he can swallow the bread.

A man named Meir Katz saves Eliezer's life when someone tries to strangle him. One of the most vigorous men left, Meir Katz is put in charge of the train car, but he breaks down and weeps for his son who was taken at the first selection. He can't go on any longer. He wonders why the Nazis don't just shoot them. The train arrives at Buchenwald late at **night** and the living disembark. Meir Katz stays with the dead on the train.

CHAPTER 8

At Buchenwald, Eliezer tries to stay close to his father. Waiting for the showers, people sit and lie down in the snow. Some of them die. Eliezer's father wants to rest, but Eliezer argues with his father, telling him not to. Eliezer feels like he is arguing with death itself.

Sirens go off and the guards move the prisoners to the blocks. They sleep. When Eliezer wakes, he realizes he went into the blocks without his father. For a moment he hopes he doesn't find his father, that his father is already dead and no longer a burden. It is a feeling he will always be ashamed of.

Night, again, serves as a literal and symbolic time of despair.



The Jews on the train are so beaten down that not only are they willing to strip clothing from the dead, they don't even make much effort to determine whether someone really is dead before trying to take his clothing and throwing him from the train.



Ordinary Germans—not just prison guards or soldiers—also treat the Jews like animals, amusing themselves by pitting the desperate, starving, dying Jews against each other.



The prisoners have lost their humanity. Here a son not only abandons his father in order to survive, as the Rabbi's son did earlier, but actually kills his father for a piece of bread.



In trying to stay alive, the prisoners for the most part don't seem to allow themselves to grieve. But at the limits of his physical endurance, Meir Katz at last begins to grieve for the murder of his son. He gives up on life, and lets death come for him.



Eliezer is still fighting for his father's life, but it may now be too late.



Eliezer's guilt over these moments of wishing his father has died is an undertone throughout the book—one can see it in the way he pays special attention to the ways sons fail their fathers.



Eliezer spends hours looking for his father and finally finds him, sick with fever. His father gets sicker. The guards don't want to waste food on sick people, so Eliezer gives his father some of his own food. His father has dysentery. The doctor on duty, a surgeon, can't or won't help.

Despite his sense of guilt, Eliezer makes sacrifices to try to save his father's life.



Another doctor comes, but this one shouts at the sick and calls them lazy. Eliezer feels the desire to kill this doctor, but has neither the strength or the courage to act. Other invalids begin to beat his father and take his food when Eliezer is away, because his father can't get up to go to the bathroom, and he smells.

There is only so much Eliezer can do, because he doesn't have the ability to stay with his father all day. He is again stuck with feelings of guilt about his powerlessness.



A week goes by. The head of the block advises Eliezer not to give his rations to his father. The man tells Eliezer that he can't save his father. Eliezer doesn't listen. He continues to give food to his father, but his father can no longer eat anything. His father wants only water, which Eliezer gives him. Eliezer stays in the invalid block, claiming to be an invalid himself, and takes the bunk above his father's.

This is another risk Eliezer takes—faking an illness in order to stay with his father. Despite everything, even common sense, he never gives up on or abandons his father.



Delirious and sick, his father keeps begging for water, even when an SS officer yells at him to be quiet. The officer hits him on the head with a truncheon. Eliezer does not move. His father says his name, "Eliezer," and begins to have trouble breathing. Eliezer stares at his father's face for an hour to memorize it, bloodied and beaten. It's time for the prisoners to get into bed. When Eliezer wakes up the next day, his father is gone, and a new invalid is in his place. Eliezer is unable to cry.

In the end, Eliezer doesn't know exactly when his father dies. Presumably his father is burned in the furnaces, but Eliezer doesn't know if the Nazi's waited until he was dead, or threw him in while still barely alive, in order to free up another bed. Despite their efforts to keep each other company and alive, Eliezer's father's death is anonymous after all.



CHAPTER 9

Eliezer spends another two and a half months at Buchenwald. He is transferred to the children's block and no longer thinks or feels anything but the desire to eat.

Without his father beside him, Eliezer is now just a body, surviving.



One day the SS are late for roll call—which never happens. Then the loudspeakers call all the Jews to the assembly place. The children begin to move, but other prisoners whisper to them to return to the block.

The prisoners fear that because the war is nearing an end, the Nazi's will speed up the extermination of remaining Jews.

Since lots of Jews didn't show up at the roll call for Jews, there's a general roll call the next day. The prisoners are told that they are going to be evacuated, ten prison blocks each day. Buchenwald is being liquidated. There will be no more food rations given.

Now they will all be starving.



A few days later there are still twenty thousand people in the camp, so the Nazis decide to speed things up and evacuate all the remaining prisoners before blowing up the camp. But an alarm goes off and the prisoners are sent back to their blocks and the evacuation is postponed a day. The prisoners have eaten nothing but grass and scavenged potato peelings for six days.

Then an underground resistance movement within the camp springs into action, shooting and throwing grenades. The SS flees and the resistance takes over. That evening, the first American tank arrives.

At first, after the liberation, Eliezer thinks only of eating. Three days later he gets food poisoning and nearly dies. He spends two weeks in a hospital. When he's able to get up, he looks in the mirror. He has not seen himself since the ghetto in Sighet. He sees the face of a corpse, a face he can never forget.

The Nazi's hope to destroy evidence of their death camps so they won't be held accountable after the war.



Only at the last minute, when the remaining SS units are fearful and relatively weak, are the prisoners able to reassert themselves as people and fight the Nazis off.



Although the book ends with Eliezer's survival, the lasting image from the final page is one of death. After witnessing so much death, the weak and starving Eliezer has come to look like death itself. For Eliezer, death has replaced God, love, family, and community as the one all-powerful fact of existence.





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