

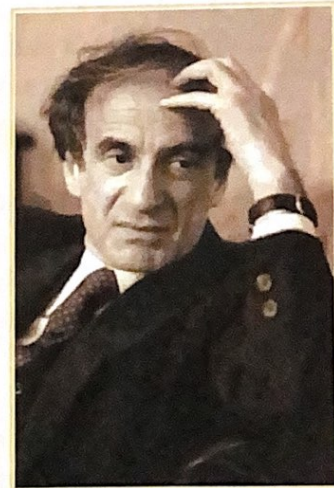


Background The first German concentration camps were built only for opponents of the Nazi Party. Later, these camps were also used to imprison Jews and other supposed enemies of the state. Auschwitz, the largest Nazi concentration camp, was opened in 1940 in southern Poland. Inside, prisoners were forced to do work for the Nazi government. Those who were unable to do useful work were killed. Over one million Jews were sent to Auschwitz. Most of them died inside its walls. The camp was finally abandoned by German soldiers as the Russian army advanced upon it in 1945.

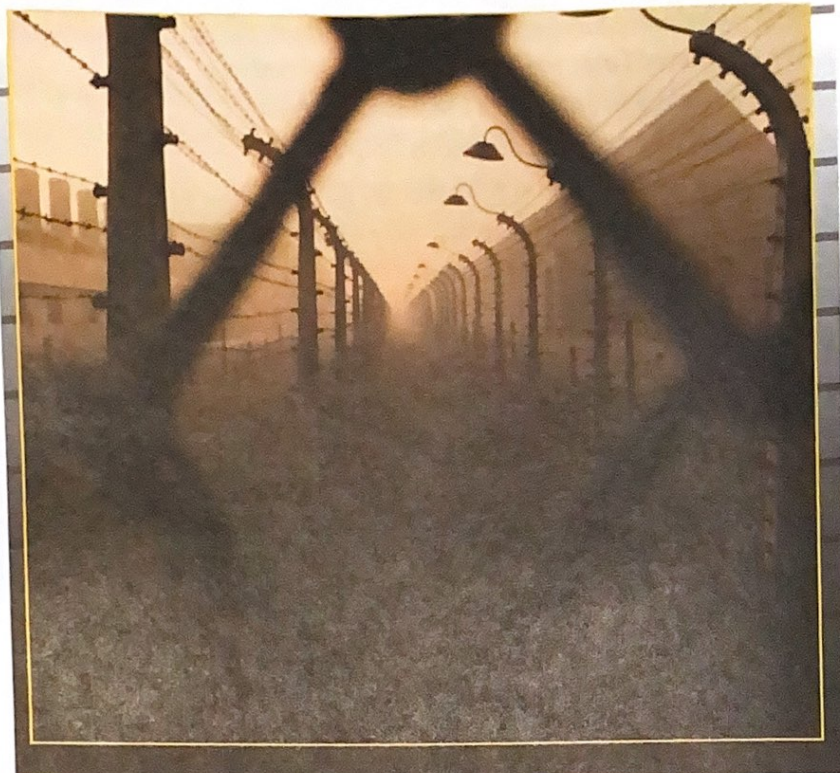
After Auschwitz

Speech by Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel (b. 1928) was born in Romania. After the Germans invaded his town, Wiesel and his family were sent to Auschwitz. Only Wiesel and two of his sisters survived. After the war, Wiesel moved to France and became a journalist. It was there that he wrote *Night*, a book about his experiences at Auschwitz. The book has sold millions of copies in many different languages. Wiesel later moved to the United States. There he devoted himself to ensuring that the deaths of millions of Jews in concentration camps would never be forgotten, and that other human beings would never be subjected to such crimes. In 1986, Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his life's work.



SETTING A PURPOSE The horrible crimes committed in Nazi concentration camps occurred long ago. As you read, think about why the author continues to reflect on these events. Why does he believe people need to be reminded of them? Write down any questions you have.



*“After Auschwitz, the human condition is not the same,
Nothing will be the same.”*

Here heaven and earth are on fire.

I speak to you as a man, who 50 years and nine days ago
had no name, no hope, no future and was known only by his
number, A7713.¹

I speak as a Jew who has seen what humanity has done
to itself by trying to exterminate an entire people and inflict
suffering and humiliation and death on so many others.

10 In this place of darkness and malediction² we can
but stand in awe and remember its stateless, faceless and
nameless victims. Close your eyes and look: endless nocturnal
processions are converging here, and here it is always night.
Here heaven and earth are on fire.

Close your eyes and listen. Listen to the silent screams
of terrified mothers, the prayers of anguished old men and
women. Listen to the tears of children, Jewish children, a
beautiful little girl among them, with golden hair, whose
vulnerable tenderness has never left me. Look and listen as

¹ A7713: the identification number tattooed on Wiesel at Auschwitz.

² malediction (māl ʾī-dīk ʾshən): curse.

20 they quietly walk towards dark flames so gigantic that the planet itself seemed in danger.

All these men and women and children came from everywhere, a gathering of exiles drawn by death.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba.³

In this kingdom of darkness there were many people. People who came from all the occupied lands of Europe. And then there were the Gypsies and the Poles and the Czechs . . . It is true that not all the victims were Jews. But all the Jews were victims.

30 Now, as then, we ask the question of all questions: what was the meaning of what was so routinely going on in this kingdom of eternal night. What kind of demented mind could have invented this system?

And it worked. The killers killed, the victims died and the world was the world and everything else was going on, life as usual. In the towns nearby, what happened? In the lands nearby, what happened? Life was going on where God's creation was condemned to blasphemy⁴ by their killers and their accomplices.

40 **Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba.**

Turning point or watershed,⁵ Birkenau⁶ produced a mutation⁷ on a cosmic scale, affecting man's dreams and endeavours. After Auschwitz, the human condition is no longer the same. After Auschwitz, nothing will ever be the same.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba.

50 As we remember the solitude and the pain of its victims, let us declare this day marks our commitment to commemorate their death, not to celebrate our own victory over death.

³ **Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba:** the words that begin a Jewish prayer for the dead.

⁴ **blasphemy** (blās' fā-mē): a disrespect for religion.

⁵ **watershed:** a place that marks a change of course or direction.

⁶ **Birkenau:** the sub-camp at Auschwitz where prisoners were killed.

⁷ **mutation** (myōō-ta' shən): change.

As we reflect upon the past, we must address ourselves to the present and the future. In the name of all that is sacred in memory, let us stop the bloodshed in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechnia; the vicious and ruthless terror attacks against Jews in the Holy Land.⁸ Let us reject and oppose more effectively religious fanaticism and racial hate.

Where else can we say to the world "*Remember the morality of the human condition*," if not here?

For the sake of our children, we must remember Birkenau,
60 so that it does not become their future.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba: Weep for Thy children whose death was not mourned then: weep for them, our Father in heaven, for they were deprived of their right to be buried, for heaven itself became their cemetery.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION Elie Wiesel delivered the speech you just read at a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. With a partner, discuss whether you think his message was the right one for the occasion. Cite evidence from the text to support your thoughts.

⁸ **Holy Land:** the ancient kingdom of Israel.

Analyze Word Choices

8.RI.2.4

In "After Auschwitz," Elie Wiesel's goal is to persuade, or convince, his audience to adopt a particular viewpoint. To do so, he uses **persuasive techniques**, methods or devices designed to appeal to audiences' feelings and values and thus influence their opinions.

- An **emotional appeal** is a message that creates strong feelings in order to make a point. These appeals can tap into people's feelings such as fear, pity, or vanity. In this passage from his speech, Elie Wiesel appeals to feelings of sympathy and compassion for others.

"Close your eyes and listen. Listen to the silent screams of terrified mothers, the prayers of anguished old men and women. Listen to the tears of children, Jewish children . . ."

- In an **ethical appeal**, a speaker or writer links a claim to a widely accepted value in order to gain moral support for the claim. In his speech, Wiesel appeals to the established belief that human beings should neither murder one another nor be indifferent to suffering.

"And it worked. The killers killed, the victims died and the world was the world and everything else was going on, life as usual."

Speakers can also attempt to persuade listeners by using different rhetorical devices. **Rhetorical devices** are techniques writers use to enhance their arguments and communicate more effectively.

- **Repetition** is a rhetorical device in which a sound, word, phrase, clause, or line is repeated for emphasis or to give a text or speech a sense of unity. Repetition also helps reinforce meaning and can create an appealing rhythm, as in this example.

"After Auschwitz, the human condition is no longer the same. After Auschwitz, nothing will ever be the same."

- **Parallelism** is the use of words, phrases, clauses, or lines that have a similar structure or grammatical form. Like repetition, parallelism can emphasize meaning and also produce a pleasing rhythm.

"In this place of darkness and malediction we can but stand in awe and remember its stateless, faceless and nameless victims."

Study the persuasive techniques Elie Wiesel uses as you analyze his speech.

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

1. **Analyze** Wiesel's speech begins: "After Auschwitz, the human condition is not the same, nothing will be the same." Identify where similar language is repeated later in his speech. What is the effect of this repetition?
2. **Analyze** Reread lines 4–9. Identify two examples of parallelism in these lines and describe the effect of each.
3. **Interpret Imagery** Imagery consists of descriptive words and phrases that create sensory experiences for the reader. Wiesel writes: "Here heaven and earth are on fire." What image is he communicating? What effect does it have on the reader?
4. **Identify** Examine lines 51–60. What kind of appeal is Wiesel making in this part of his speech? What human values is he calling on his audience to consider?
5. **Identify** Reread lines 61–64. What kind of appeal is Wiesel making in this part of his speech? What human feelings is he tapping into to make his point?
6. **Evaluate** The sentence *Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba* is repeated three times in the speech. Is the use of this rhetorical device effective? Why or why not?
7. **Evaluate** Considering the author's purpose and audience, which persuasive techniques make the speech effective? Explain.

PERFORMANCE TASK



Speaking Activity: Discussion

Imagine that you have been put in charge of a museum exhibit about the Holocaust. Create a remembrance poster for the exhibit based on Elie Wiesel's speech.

- Choose two key quotes or ideas from the speech to highlight on your poster.
- Research the Holocaust, collecting information from print and digital sources.
- Select important facts, dates, quotes, and photographs to support the main points in Wiesel's speech.
- On the poster, include visuals such as a timeline or your own artwork or symbols.
- Describe your completed work to the class in an oral presentation. Discuss with classmates Wiesel's purpose and message and how your poster relates to them.