



Elie Wiesel in an interview with FokusIsrael.ch: “In Auschwitz, I accused God, I did not deny Him”

About the Person

As a “Messenger of Humanity,” Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. With this award, the Nobel Committee honored one of the most significant Jewish writers of the 20th century. Elie Wiesel was born on September 30, 1928, in Sighet, Romania, into a Hasidic family. In 1944, at the age of 15, he was deported to Auschwitz. His mother and younger sister were murdered there. His father died in January 1945 at the Buchenwald concentration camp after he and Elie Wiesel had endured the death march from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. Three months after his father’s death, on April 11, 1945, Elie Wiesel was liberated by American troops along with the other survivors of the concentration camp. His autobiographical work **Night** (1958) describes the horrors of the concentration camps and the traumatic death of his father, and has become a classic of Holocaust literature.

After the war, Elie Wiesel initially lived in France, where he studied and worked as a journalist. Later, New York became his adopted home. Elie Wiesel wrote over 40 books, taught at universities, and campaigned worldwide against injustice, indifference, and genocide. After being awarded the Nobel Prize “for peace, reconciliation, and human dignity,” he founded the “Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity.” Elie Wiesel died on July 2, 2016, in New York. This conversation with Elie Wiesel is based on an interview the author conducted with him in 1993 for the *SonntagsZeitung*, as well as on additional statements by Elie Wiesel that were composed with the help of AI.

By Sacha Wigdorovits 

Elie Wiesel, you have dedicated your life to fighting indifference and promoting human rights. How do you view the world today from this perspective?

Elie Wiesel: Today’s world fills me with concern. Indifference remains the greatest danger—it paves the way for new injustices and new suffering. Remembrance alone is not enough; it must lead to action. Where human rights are violated, where hatred grows, and where the voices of the victims are silenced, we are all called to act. Silence is betrayal. We must remain vigilant and resist.

How should we “resist”?

Elie Wiesel: We must resist by refusing to remain silent. Indifference is the enemy. We must speak out where others remain silent, take action where injustice occurs,



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and keep the memory alive. Everyone can bear witness, teach, and protest. It begins with the courage to look and to take responsibility—for the victims of yesterday and today.

You say, “Indifference is the enemy.” Isn’t “hatred the enemy”?

Elie Wiesel: No. Hate is visible; you can fight it. Indifference is invisible and more deadly. It allows hate to grow unchecked. I have learned that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. Those who remain indifferent make themselves complicit. That is why indifference is the true enemy.

Does that also apply to the rampant anti-Semitism that we Jews have been facing almost everywhere in the world since October 7, 2023?

Elie Wiesel: Yes. Anti-Semitism was and remains a deadly danger. Indifference to hatred of Jews allows it to resurface time and again. I have seen where silence leads. We must clearly identify anti-Semitism, oppose it, and protect the victims—everywhere and at all times. Remembrance compels us to do so.

Shouldn’t we also actively combat the hatred we face today—primarily from the left and from radical Islamists—using other means?

Elie Wiesel: Hate must be fought—no matter where it comes from. With words, with remembrance, with moral courage, and with a clear “no” to indifference. Violence only breeds new hatred. We must speak the truth, protect the victims, and educate the younger generations. That is the path I know and believe to be the right one.

How are we supposed to combat this hatred?

Elie Wiesel: By not remaining silent. We must call hatred by its name, bear witness to the truth, and pass on the memory. Education is crucial: Young people must learn what indifference can lead to. We protect the dignity of the victims and take action wherever injustice occurs—with words, with moral courage, and with a clear commitment: Never again.

Are words enough, as you say, or are military measures also necessary?

Elie Wiesel: Words and memory are the most important weapons against hatred. But when people’s lives are threatened, everyone has the right to defend themselves. Self-defense is not revenge—it is a necessity when survival is at stake.



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The struggle, however, always begins in the mind and in the heart.

You survived the Holocaust and chronicled your story in the autobiographical book **Die Nacht**. What was the worst part of that time for you?

Elie Wiesel: The worst thing was my father’s death. I watched him die and couldn’t do anything. What was even worse was that, at the time, I felt ashamed that I couldn’t help him anymore. The dehumanization, the loss of faith, and the indifference all around us—all of that has shaped me forever.

You’re always standing up for the victims—those of the Holocaust, in South Africa, in Cambodia, in Bosnia. Why don’t you ever address the perpetrators? Just as Simon Wiesenthal or Beate and Serge Klarsfeld did, who tracked down Nazi criminals. Isn’t that important?

Elie Wiesel: That’s actually very important. But I won’t live forever; there are only so many things I can do. And I’ve chosen to focus on the victims—to give them a voice, restore their dignity, and keep their memory alive. People like the Klarsfelds, whom I greatly admire, focus on the perpetrators.

When we first met 33 years ago, you told me, “I wish we had a second Albert Einstein today.” Why?

Elie Wiesel: Our world lacks moral voices that speak out and that people listen to. That is why I would like to see a second Albert Einstein. For Einstein did not only speak about scientific topics; he also spoke out on moral issues—and people listened to him. That is the kind of voice we need today.

You yourself are one such voice. You have even been called the “Jewish conscience.”

Elie Wiesel (shakes his head): I don’t accept that. A conscience is something very personal; you don’t lend it to anyone, and you don’t borrow it from anyone. The only thing I can try to do is remain true to my own conscience—just as you try to remain true to yours.

You come from a strictly religious Jewish family. How much has that shaped you?

Elie Wiesel: Very deeply. I grew up in a Hasidic world, full of prayer, the Talmud, and mysticism. Faith was my whole life. Auschwitz shook my faith—I asked God



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questions I had never dared to ask before. Yet the language and the longing for the divine remained. Since then, my Judaism has been shaped by both doubt and faith.

The question of how God could have allowed Auschwitz to happen, if He exists, is one that many of us grapple with. What is your answer?

Elie Wiesel: I have no answer. I can only ask the question—and it remains open. In Auschwitz, I accused God, not denied Him. My faith has been wounded ever since, but not destroyed. I protest, I doubt, and yet I remain a Jew. God’s silence is the greatest mystery. Some questions must not be answered—they must be endured.

On October 7, 2023, Israel experienced the largest pogrom of the postwar era. 1,200 people were brutally murdered, ranging from a toddler just a few months old to elderly men and women. All because the Palestinian perpetrators mistook them for Jews—which not all of them were. Would you have thought this possible?

Elie Wiesel: After Auschwitz, I learned this: Nothing is impossible when hatred and indifference reign. I had hoped the world had learned its lesson. But history teaches us that anti-Semitism keeps finding new forms. Those who forget the victims pave the way for new crimes. That is why vigilance and remembrance remain vital.

*Remark: This interview is based on Elie Wiesel’s responses during a conversation with the author in the *SonntagsZeitung* on July 11, 1993, and additional statements by him that were generated using AI. In our series “Conversations with Legends,” we speak with figures from the worlds of politics, religion, science, and culture who have been significant to Judaism and Israel. Our aim is to introduce them and their ideas to today’s audience. Interviews published so far include those with [Theodor Herzl](#), the founder of modern Zionism, [Chaim Weizmann](#), Israel’s first president, [David Ben-Gurion](#), Israel’s first prime minister, Israel’s only [female prime minister](#), [Golda Meir](#), [Anwar Sadat](#), the [Egyptian president](#), who traveled to Jerusalem in 1977 to make peace with Israel, [Moses](#), who led the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt to freedom, with the one who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries the great Jewish scholar [Maimonides](#), with whom [former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom](#), [Lord Jonathan Sacks](#), [Sigmund Freud](#), the founder of psychoanalysis, [Albert Einstein](#), the founder of the theory of relativity, [Robert Oppenheimer](#), the “father of the atomic bomb,” the Hollywood icon and inventor [Hedy Lamarr](#), the entrepreneur [Estée Lauder](#), and the Nobel Prize in Economics laureate [Milton Friedman](#) and [Levi Strauss](#), the inventor of jeans.*



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