

## Elie Wiesel, Humanist

A Crusader for Tolerance and Justice



Born 1928 in Transylvania (now part of Romania), Elie Wiesel is a voice against human atrocities and an advocate for the perils of silence. As a Holocaust survivor, his destiny rose from the ashes of Auschwitz. He was educated in Paris and later became a journalist and author of more than 50 books. He is a professor, a 1986 Nobel laureate, and the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, National Humanities Medal, Lifetime Literary Achievement Award, Medal of Liberty and the rank of Grand-Croix in the French Legion of Honor. He has been awarded more than 100 honorary degrees from institutions of higher learning. As president of *The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity*, he and his wife are dedicated to the fight against indifference, intolerance and injustice.

In their citation The Norwegian Nobel Committee called him a “messenger to mankind,” Mr Wiesel has delivered to mankind, throughout his life, a powerful message of “peace, atonement and human dignity.”

**DAVID:** You are the voice for protest and the conscience for indifference. You experienced first hand the price paid for silence. As the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University’s Departments of Religion and Philosophy, how do you educate young people who have not paid that price, and instead fear the cost of speaking out?

**WIESEL:** Evil has no boundaries. The destruction of one people represents the destruction of all. The message is not whether one should consider paying the price for protesting. The price will inevitably be paid. The question is, do you want to pay it sooner and minimize the damage, or later and face greater, unspeakable horrors? Never be silent. Protest at any sign and at any cost. Don’t give hatred the possibility of growing.

**DAVID:** How old were you when the Nazis deported you and your family to Auschwitz?

**WIESEL:** I write about it in my book *Night (La Nuit)*. I was 15. My mother and younger sister died there. My two older sisters survived. My father and I were later transported to Buchenwald, where he died shortly before the camp was liberated in 1945. It was where I understood my mission: that I must be the voice for the millions who were silenced; that

this should never happen again; and the world must guard against it. The moment I saw that I had a public audience, I took the opportunity to be heard, even if they were not listening.

**DAVID:** Do you see a comparison between the current rise of radical Islam and world appeasement, and the past rise of the Nazi regime?

**WIESEL:** I don’t like comparisons. They are not helpful. And I do not believe radical Islam is the same as the Nazis. The mission of the Nazis was to wipe out all the Jews. I do not believe that is the mission of radical Islam. Don’t get me wrong; I oppose them. They should be stopped, but they are not the same as the Nazis.

**DAVID:** You said, “Friendship marks a life more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession.” Please elaborate.

**WIESEL:** I have been blessed with wonderful friends who have been with me for much of my life. Friendship lasts because of what you share together. Love is sometimes too emotional, and cannot always withstand the test of time.

**DAVID:** As a learned Jew, do you have a favorite biblical character?

**WIESEL:** I would have to say Moses. He was a prophet and never had a good day in his life. Either the people were against him or G-d was against him. But he followed his G-d-given mission no matter what. He was the commander in chief of perhaps the first liberation army, and the greatest legislator who ever lived. And he had humility, something everyone needs, especially leaders.

**DAVID:** Why especially leaders?

**WIESEL:** Because they have power.

**DAVID:** Can you share a regret, or lesson learned, that could enlighten readers?

**WIESEL:** I thought maybe by my witness to atrocities, it would be received and things would change. But if this were true, there would not have been Rwanda, Darfur, Cambodia and Bosnia. Human nature cannot be changed in one generation. We must continue the fight.

*Mr Wiesel will be honored at The Dr Miriam and Sheldon Adelson Educational Campus Annual Gala, Saturday, November 17, 6:30 pm, The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino.*