

Student Name

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English 10-- 2

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### Emotion and Spirituality in *Night*

A growing teenager's stomach rumbles. He thinks longingly of his next meal. Then reality sets in, and he remembers that if anything, he will get nothing more than a negligible slice of stale bread and watered-down soup. He curses aloud at his fate, and is beaten severely for the outburst. Desperation sets in. He wants to go home. He wants a warm, dry bed. He wants a full, hot meal. He longs to see his mother and sisters again. But he has no hope. He is in a concentration camp, held prisoner by the Nazis. Situations like these probably occurred regularly throughout the Holocaust. These circumstances would break down even the strongest individual. Elie Wiesel, author of *Night* is no exception. In his memoir *Night*, Elie Wiesel portrays the grim realities of life in a concentration camp during the Holocaust; realities that lead, not surprisingly, to emotional and spiritual changes Elie never imagined possible.

At the beginning of the novel, Elie's emotional and spiritual states seem atypical for a boy of 12. Our first glimpse into Elie's emotional stability is in his relationship with his father. Elie's relationship with his father is distant, at best. "My father was a cultured, rather unsentimental man. There was never any display of emotion, even at home." Wiesel continues by adding, "He was more concerned with others than with his own family" (Wiesel 2). Most fathers and sons share a special bond. However, Elie's father seems completely disconnected from his family. Chlomo seems completely engrossed in his work and social obligations, spending little time with his family. Based on Elie's description of his father's lack of emotion or

time with his family, it is likely Elie did not have a close bond with his father. It is also possible that Elie's lack of father-son bond contributes to Elie so easily disregarding his father's instruction to wait until he was older to continue his studies into the Cabala and Talmud. Elie also reveals his emotional state in his denial about the threat of Hitler and the Nazi party. Moshe the Beadle escapes the fate of the other foreign Jews who are expelled from Sighet. Moshe returns to warn the others about the fate awaiting them. However, nobody will listen. Even Elie, who respects Moshe says, "I did not believe him myself" (Wiesel 5). Clearly, danger is imminent to the Jewish people of Sighet, but Elie, like the others, is in complete denial. Even when they are in the ghetto, Elie follows the mentality of the others, refusing to accept the truth, "At dawn, there was nothing left of this melancholy. We felt as though we were on holiday" (Wiesel 18). Much of Elie's optimism, though, is based on his strong religious convictions. "I believed profoundly" (Wiesel 1). This is one of the first things Elie tells the reader about himself. Obviously, it is an integral part of who he feels he is at this point in his story. Most children of 12 go through religious education only because their parents tell them to. This statement, though, shows how deeply Elie's faith already runs. Elie further displays his commitment to his faith when he defies his father and on his own, seeks out someone to teach him about the deeper mysteries of his faith. He even weeps when he reads scripture. This is a rare quality in most people, but especially in a youth of Elie's age. Though Elie may not fully understand what he is learning, his faith is ingrained in him. Even when forced into the ghetto, Elie maintains his dedication to his religion, "I sat in the Ezra Malik gardens, studying a treatise on the Talmud" (Wiesel 10). Truly, this is a boy committed to his God; in the face of adversity, he looks to religion for strength and answers.