

It has been a little over a year since we lost the great Elie Wiesel – prolific writer, political activist, and Nobel Laureate recipient. Many of us best know Wiesel as the author of *Night*, which describes his experiences during his time in Auschwitz. It is a powerful expression of an individual who oscillates between hope and despair amongst a dark and tragic reality. Over the years, he became the voice of survivors. His passing last year reminds us that there are precious few remaining eyewitnesses who can testify to the reality of the Holocaust.

But Elie Wiesel was so much more than a witness to man's inhumanity to man. His greatest inspiration came in his devotion to encouraging the very best of humanity. He was a beacon of hope and light for all those in suffering. He was committed to speaking out against intolerance and injustice. He believed in a world that was not driven by hate. He encouraged all of us to constantly ask questions, not necessarily to find answers, so that we would be united together through dialogue. He taught us what

it means to believe in each other, despite the evil that humanity has the power to act upon. He taught us that, “The opposite of love is not hate – but indifference.” He added in a later interview that to hate would be to reduce oneself to those who hated him, and that the courage to love and be grateful is what can give the human spirit hope to survive anything.

And while his legacy stems from his experiences during the Holocaust, these lessons are not only applicable to the atrocity of the Shoah, but to every act of violence, hatred, and divisiveness that cloud our world today. The names of cities throughout the United States and world that have fallen victim to racism, discrimination, homophobia, Islamophobia, terrorism seemingly increase every day. Wiesel, who was been referred to as the “conscience of the world,” would argue that as long as hate exists, humanity will remain in unrest. We can be angry, discouraged, and frustrated, but to hate is to embrace what is evil and to give power to it.

Wiesel's last published book is entitled *Open Heart*, alluding to his recovery following an emergency open-heart surgery in 2011. In *Open Heart*, he writes about how every moment in our lives represents a new beginning. He asks that 'If life is not an offering to the *other*, what are we doing here on this earth?' His continuous belief in humanity is driven by the notion that just as we have the ability to choose to hate, we can choose love and choose hope. When we open our hearts to others, we can see and experience the world in a way in which we choose to *know* each other, to *listen* to each other's suffering, to want to walk the path of suffering together. Individually, we cannot solve all the problems found in this world, and we cannot help all those who fall victim to those who are afraid of *difference*. But, what we *can* do, what we *should* do, is to reach out to those who suffer. We can remind them that they are not alone. His response to the turmoil of the world today, then, is that we need to be present for each other. We need to continue to ask the challenging question of "Why does evil

persist?” and believe that the more we ask, and the louder we ask, that we will be heard. But the first step is to listen to each other.

When we listen, as Wiesel taught, we become hope.

In his remarks on *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day, in 2009, Wiesel said:

I know and I speak from experience, that even during darkness, it is possible to create light and share warmth with one another: that even on the edge of the abyss, it is possible to dream exalted dreams of compassion; that is possible to be free and to strengthen the ideals of freedom, even within prison walls.

May his words inspire us on this night, so that at dawn we may wake up to a sense of hope that in the coming day, we all will open our hearts, minds, and spirits to each other. May it ever be so.

Shabbat Shalom.

