

A new edition of the book “Night” was published this year, one year after the death of its author, Elie Wiesel. It is amazing that the book was published at all. Wiesel wrote Night in 1955 while living in Paris. No one would print it. The French book companies said, in 1955, “No one is interested in the death camps anymore. It just won’t sell.” The American publishers said that American readers “seemed to prefer optimistic books.” The word “Holocaust” did not appear in the New York Times until 1959. The world did not want to know about the Shoah. Nobody wanted to be uncomfortable.

- Night was eventually published – in 1958 in French; 1960 in English. It is now translated into 30 languages and sells 300,000 copies a year.

In writing the book, Wiesel’s goal was to shine a light on human suffering. He himself refused to look away.

- He went to a village on the Thai – Cambodia border to meet with refugees who escaped the Khmer Rouge.
- He crossed the jungle of Nicaragua on foot and kayak to meet an Indian tribe that had been driven from its land.
- Together with his wife, Marion, he set up a program in Tel Aviv for undocumented immigrants from the Sudan.

The world looked the other way when our people were slaughtered.

Wiesel would do everything he could to make sure that never happened again.

You would think that having been through the camps and losing his family, being rejected by the American and European publishing houses, that Elie Wiesel would have been a sad or an angry man. He was anything but. **While he refused to look away from suffering, he also refused to give in to it.**

- When he visited that school in Tel Aviv for the Sudanese refugees, Wiesel sang and danced with the children.

- He told Oprah Winfrey that he felt called to enjoy life – to enjoy good food and drink, to have a family; to play with his grandchildren.

I have always struggled with Abraham's behavior in the story of the Aqedah. One of my complaints may seem small - but I wonder why Abraham did not celebrate life in its aftermath? Why did he not offer a sacrifice; have a celebratory meal; gather his neighbors and say, "We still have life!?" That was Elie Wiesel's response to the Shoah. I wish it would have been Abraham's response to the Aqedah.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, tells the story of a headmistress of a school in London who spoke to him about her program. She said the school was floundering. Enrollment was down from 1,000 to 500; student grades were down; the spirit of the school was depressed. If something did not change, the school would have to close. After talking about all the practical things that could be

done, Rabbi Sacks realized he'd been giving the wrong kind of advice. He changed his tone and said, "I want you to live one word: celebrate!" The educator said, "But everything is going wrong!" Rabbi Sacks said, "Find something. If one student got a better grade – celebrate that. If someone has a birthday – celebrate. If it's a Tuesday – celebrate! Always find something to celebrate." Eight years later, the educator wrote Rabbi Sacks to say grades and graduation rates had improved dramatically; enrollment was back to 1,000.

- Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav taught: "If you don't feel happy, pretend to be. Even if you are downright depressed, put on a smile. Act happy. Genuine joy will follow."

The last few weeks have been difficult. We've evacuated our homes, not knowing what we would find when we got back; had destruction to our homes and properties, and then lived without power for days. Some still do not have power. Our lives were turned upside down.

But, as I said yesterday, there were also incredible acts of kindness. I don't mean to be Pollyannaish; I don't mean to diminish the aggravation and dislocation we all experienced. I do believe that we reaffirm life when we focus on the positives. The psalmist says, "Serve the LORD with joy." We serve God and humanity when we always look for something to celebrate.

The Jewish response to loss is to be full of life: to grab every moment; to be aware of and engaged with the world around us. That is Wiesel's lesson for us today. As we recover from this storm, and remember all that could have been lost, we can serve God and humanity by moving forward into life: living with joy and committed to improving God's creation.