

Summary and Analysis of Chapter 7

Chapter 7 "Pressed up against the others"

Summary:

Inside the train bodies, both dead and alive, are tangled up in each other. Eliezer feels indifferent to everything, including death. Eliezer's father is near him, but does not respond to his call and seems dead. When the train stops, SS officers order that corpses be thrown out of the car. Two men begin to throw Eliezer's father out of the train, but Eliezer revives him by slapping him viciously and screaming desperately in his face. Twenty bodies are thrown out of the wagon. The prisoners travel for ten days, eating only snow. Day is like night.

Once, some German workmen begin throwing bread into the car and stand around watching as the prisoners tear each other to death for scraps. Desperate for food, the prisoners behave like wild beasts. Eliezer resolves not to fight for the food and notices one man who kills his own father for a piece of bread. Then, the son is killed for the same bread, and both father and son lie dead side by side. Eliezer notes at this point in the narrative that he is fifteen years old.

On the third night of the journey, Eliezer is awakened when someone randomly tries to strangle him. He calls to his father at the last minute and is saved by a man named [Meir Katz](#), who had been a gardener at the Buna camp and was therefore more healthy and robust than everyone else. However, a few days later Meir Katz begins to cry, having finally lost his will to live.

On the last day of the journey, there is a bitter wind, and everyone gets up in order to try to keep warm. All the prisoners begin imitating the death cry of a fellow prisoner, and Meir Katz wonders out loud why the SS guards don't just shoot them all right away. Finally, they reach the camp, and only twelve people (of the original hundred) have the strength to leave the wagon. The others, including Meir Katz, remain on the train to die. They are at Buchenwald.

Analysis:

While crowded into the train, Eliezer becomes indifferent to life or death, but he does not entirely lose his will to live: "Indifference deadened the spirit. Here or elsewhere what difference did it make? To die today or tomorrow, or later? The night was long and never ending." Eliezer does not want to die immediately because to him the distinction between life and death has become irrelevant. He is currently experiencing a living hell, and as he repeatedly remarks, the surviving prisoners are now no better than corpses. Everyone is dying, some more quickly than others, and the darkness of night has taken over the day. In this passage Wiesel once again expands on the symbolic meaning of the title Night. "Night" here refers to the living death of the concentration camps that Eliezer does not think will ever end.

Eliezer is continually amazed at how inhumane and beastlike the prisoners can become. Every time that he thinks he and the prisoners have suffered as much pain as they can bear and have behaved as cruelly as possible to one another, the Nazis lead them to behave even more basely and without human respect. The episode where German workmen throw bread into the train demonstrates that the prisoners are maniacally focused on getting food, at the expense of even their closest relations. They have become predatory animals: "Wild beasts of prey, with animal hatred in their eyes; an extraordinary vitality had seized them, sharpening their teeth and nails." Having been starved for ten days, the prisoners are willing to kill each other for bread. A young man even kills his father for a piece of bread. In this world there is no morality, but neither is there a need for the prisoners to live by any standard of morality. For they are no longer living in a

world of social responsibility and respectability, and it makes perfect sense for them to behave as animals, without any regard to familial ties. The Nazis have created this environment, and the prisoners have no choice but to disregard the normal rules of human society.

At the end of this brief section, all the prisoners start imitating the death cry of one of the prisoners. The initial noise<"the cry of a wounded animal">spreads to the entire train and indicates how ready the prisoners are to die. As Wiesel writes, "All limits had been passed. No one had any strength left. And again the night would be long." Life is no longer something that Eliezer and the other prisoners want to fight for; instead, it has become a painful, burdensome existence that they simply want to be free of. No one has any strength left to live, which, however, does not translate into any active desire to die. Instead, they wish passively for the Nazis to put them out of their misery. However, the Nazis probably realize that it is much more torturous to keep the prisoners alive rather than to kill them immediately.