

# Elie Wiesel's message for Trump: Love is louder | Faith Matters



By **Rev. Alexander Santora/For the Jersey Journal**

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I wondered why there were so many police on the PATH trains on a sunny, Sunday afternoon. Walking in the Wall Street area last Sunday, there were police on every corner and barricades all over as I headed toward the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Battery Park.

I noticed the Statue of Liberty in the back drop as thousands protested President Trump's executive order banning immigrants from seven countries from entering the U.S. As I passed behind the crowd, N.J. Senator Corey Booker was introduced to cheers.

I could hear him begin to speak as I entered the museum for an "International Tribute to Elie Wiesel," who died last year on July 2, 2016. Eliezer "Elie" Wiesel was a Romanian-born, American Jewish writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor. He authored 57 books, written mostly in French and English, including "Night," a work based on his experiences as a prisoner in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps.

Though this event was planned a long time ago, it could not have been more timely with the ascendancy of Trump's nativist and xenophobic policies. Abraham H. Foxman, the museum's vice chair and director of their Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, called Wiesel "the conscience of the world," and alluded to the tension in our country by suggesting, "the Statue of Liberty was blindfolded and Emma Lazarus was being gagged." He went on to say that if Wiesel were still alive, "he would be the voice of moral outrage." He quoted Wiesel who said that "the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference."

Very early in "Night," we meet Moshe, the Beadle, who dialogued about Judaism with Wiesel as a teenager. Moshe and many other Hungarian Jews were taken by the Nazis to dig their own graves. They were then told to stand at the edge of the huge pits as they were gunned down. Infants were thrown into the air and shot. Moshe was shot in the leg and thought to be dead when he actually survived and called it "a miracle." And though he told every one about his survival, other Jews did not believe him and thought that no one could be that savage and cruel. Even when the German officers moved into homes among the Jews, the Jews commented how polite they were. One even gave his landlady chocolate. Those courtesies did not last long.

I heard ten of 68 individuals read from "Night." Among them were David Hyde Pierce, the star of the TV comedy "Frasier" and Broadway actor, and NYC police Commissioner James O'Neill, whose New York accent stood out. The most lively was Broadway actress Tovah Feldshuh who actually embodied the dialogue from the book. She and Pierce came into the audience after they read and listened to others. Other readers included actor Joel Grey, journalist Ann Curry of TODAY fame, actress Ellen Burstyn, Eliot Spitzer, former governor of New York, and my friend, sex therapist and Holocaust survivor, Dr. Ruth Westheimer.

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Wiesel was involved with Jewish causes, including this museum, and helped establish the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. He also campaigned for victims of oppression in places like South Africa and Nicaragua and spoke against the genocide in Sudan. He was a strong defender of human rights during his lifetime. Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, at which time the Nobel Committee called him a "messenger to mankind."

I read "Night" in English class at St. Peter's Prep but its importance did not resonate with me until years later as I tried to comprehend the immense atrocity known as the Holocaust. As a priest, I heard him speak at Boston University, where he was a professor of the humanities and writer in residence. The school created the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies in his honor. He sat at a table with a small lamp and spoke for two hours to a packed audience.

As I exited the museum Sunday, the estimated 10,000 protesters began to march through Wall Street and I had no choice but to walk along side them as I headed back to PATH. They were chanting slogans like, "No hate, No fear, refugees are welcome here," and carrying signs like, "Love is Louder," and "The Emperor Has No Clothes," referring to Trump.

I never thought Trump would win; he ran an embarrassing campaign, which still endeared him to 63 million people, who voted for him. Trying to make sense of his election is fruitless; it will be a long four years. Yet, people will now have to stand up for the rights we believe are part of the American dream. Among the crowd were many young people, young families with their children and the diversity that is the mosaic of this metropolitan area. Trump may want to bring us backwards. But he will learn, if not already, that the American people will be anything but, as Wiesel warned, "indifferent."

F.Y.I.

Museum of Jewish Heritage--A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

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