

## *from* **ELIE WIESEL'S Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech**

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**Nobel Prize:** Winners of the Nobel Prize receive a medal (shown at right) and a cash award. Prizes are awarded annually in the following areas: physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, economics, literature, and peace. One side of each medal features a bust of Alfred Nobel (1833-1896), the Swedish scientist and inventor who established the awards in the late 1800s.



**Oslo, Norway (December 10, 1986):** During Wiesel's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he brought his son up on the stage with him as a reminder of how Jews and their heritage have survived despite the Holocaust. Wiesel went on to talk about human rights all over the world, and how the lessons learned from the Holocaust can be applied elsewhere today.

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It is with a profound sense of humility that I accept the honor you have chosen to bestow upon me. I know: your choice transcends me. This both frightens and pleases me.

It frightens me because I wonder: do I have the right to represent the multitudes who have perished? Do I have the right to accept this great honor on their behalf? I do not. That would be presumptuous. No one may speak for the dead, no one may interpret their mutilated dreams and visions.

It pleases me because I may say that this honor belongs to all the survivors and their children, and through us, to the Jewish people with whose destiny I have always identified.

I remember: it happened yesterday or eternities ago. A young Jewish boy discovered the kingdom of night. I remember his bewilderment, I remember his anguish. It all happened so fast. The ghetto. The deportation. The sealed cattle car. The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed.

I remember: he asked his father: "Can this be true? This is the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not the Middle Ages. Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How could the world remain silent?"

And now the boy is turning to me: "Tell me," he asks. "What have you done with my future? What have you done with your life?"

And I tell him that I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget we are guilty, we are accomplices.

And then I explained to him how naïve we were, that the world did know and remain silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

**GENOCIDE:** The Holocaust is not the only example of attempted genocide or ethnic cleansing to have occurred. Others include the Turkish slaughter of more than 1,000,000 Armenians around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge's brutal murder of about 3,000,000 Cambodians in the 1970s; and, more recently, the killing of over 400,000 Tutsi people in Rwanda by the rival Hutu people, and the "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs in the former Yugoslavia. Closer to home, millions of Native Americans died due to war, starvation, disease, and brutal slavery that took place during the colonization of North and South America by the British and Spanish.