A Consequence of Night

The memoir *Night*, by Ellie Weisel, is about a young boy and his family’s terrifying journey through the concentration camps during the Holocaust. During this experience, Elie struggles with changing views on himself, his faith, and his fellow Jews. Throughout this journey, it is shown that the horrors of the Holocaust turned the Jews against each other. This is demonstrated during the cattle car ride from Gleiwitz to Buchenwald when the Jews mauled each other to death over a crust of bread; and even when Elie bonded with his fellow inmates over Hebrew customs.

On their journey from Gleiwitz to Buchenwald, the Jews were thrown into cattle cars on a train. By this time, most of the Jews were weak, dying, and desperate for food and warmth. As the train would pass through villages, the townspeople would amuse themselves by throwing crusts of bread into the train and watching as the starving Jews mauled each other for it. Elie recalls, “In the wagon where the bread had landed, a battle had ensued. Men were hurtling themselves against each other, trampling, tearing at and mauling each other. Beasts of prey unleashed, animal hate in their eyes. An extraordinary vitality possessed them, sharpening their teeth and nails” (Weisel 101). The men in this quote were once peers, once brothers thrust into the same horrible situation. But this bad situation was now turning them into enemies. Through their experiences at the concentration camps, the Jews learned to fight their fellow man for anything from food to the chance to live. They learned to think of their own needs before anyone else’s in order to survive. Prior to the concentration camps, when the Jews were still living in freedom, people helped each other and worked as a community. But by the time they had made it to the train in this quote, the Jews had learned the survival skills they needed in order to make it in this hostile environment. These survival skills included putting their own needs first, not hesitating to fight, and doing whatever was necessary to remain alive. The men on the train did not hesitate to literally tear each other apart in order to stay alive. Even thought these Jewish men had once been a close community, all ties were severed when they were in competition for survival.

It could be said, however, that the horrors of the Holocaust brought the Jews together. This could be shown when Elie and his father had just been transferred into a new Kommando in Auschwitz and they were meeting their neighbors. Elie remembers, “They quickly became my friends. Having once belonged to a Zionist youth organization, they knew countless Hebrew songs… We decided that if we were allowed to live until the Liberation, we would not stay another day in Europe” (Weisel 50). On the surface, Elie bonding with his fellow inmates over their Jewish faith seems to reinforce the idea that the Holocaust brought the Jews together. However, that isn’t necessarily true. Although it seems that Elie is bonding with the other inmates out of kindness and comradery, in reality he only needs these “friends” to take him out of his own loneliness. The reason behind this relationship is not actual friendship; it is a selfish need to escape from the torture happening for a little while. Elie has no other option but to seek comfort in these men since he will be in close proximity to them for an indefinite time. Also, these relationships were not lasting. Elie became close to these men and then soon after, they were ripped apart and ultimately forgot about each other. The Holocaust may have forced the Jews to seek company in each other, but it did not make and lasting change in their community within the camps.