



SIEBENQUELL

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# The Moment God smiled

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Every year when we commemorate the Shoah, it is my custom to read something from a survivor. It does not have to be about the Shoah itself, but it must be from a person who emerged from that horror against humanity. When I was recently asked about this custom during a retreat, I responded by saying, that I wanted to practice commemoration, and true commemoration cannot occur if we only mark the horror that was endured, but not the grace, strength, courage and beauty that the survivors brought to the life of the world afterwards, despite experiencing the worst that inhumanity has to offer. We must not forget the horror, but dare we forget the testimony of grace that emerged in the men and women who refused to let it define them?

This year, I read Elie Wiesel's book *Open Heart*. It is a tiny book about his experience of open heart surgery in 2011 and the thoughts, feeling, memories and questions this near death experience awakened in him. In chapter 23, he recounts the visit of his grandson Elijah after the surgery. It is a tiny, gentle, tender testimony of grace from a man who had every right to see hell everywhere after Auschwitz, yet became one of the greatest storytellers of grace, redemption and atonement. Here he shows once again his mastery of the storyteller's craft and the depth of an authentic life with God. He shows us that he recognized the moment, when God smiled.

»One day at the beginning of my convalescence, little Elijah, five years old, comes to pay me a visit. I hug him and tell him, 'Every time I see you, my life becomes a gift.'

He observes me closely as I speak and then, with a serious mien, responds: 'Grandpa, you know that I love you, and I see you are in pain. Tell me: If I loved you more, would you be in less pain?'

I am convinced God at that moment is smiling as He contemplates His creation.«

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