



# Reading Group Gold

## Dawn

by Elie Wiesel

### About this Guide

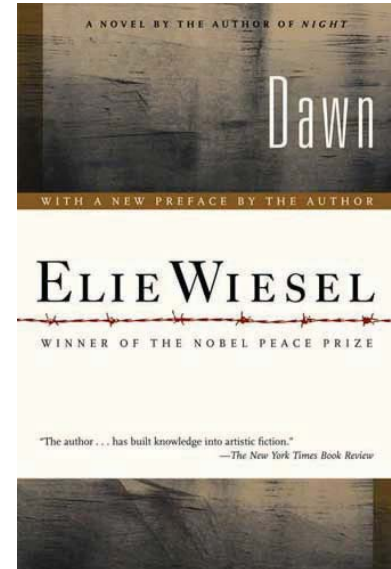
The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Elie Wiesel's *Dawn*. We hope they will enrich your experience as you explore this provocative and mesmerizing novel.

### Introduction

The second book in the trilogy begun by Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*, this chilling novel tells the story of a young Holocaust survivor who has made his way to British-controlled Palestine. Elisha is a devout Israeli freedom fighter, but his latest assignment brings into question the limits of his capacity for violence. The British have set an execution date for one of Elisha's fellow guerrillas; in response, his band have kidnapped a British soldier, announcing their intention to execute him at the precise moment their friend is hanged. Elisha has been appointed to kill the British hostage, evoking the ghost soldiers of his own tortured past and forcing him to confront the very nature of vengeance and valor.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What contemporary insights does Elie Wiesel's preface yield? How was your reading affected by this nonfiction commentary preceding a novel?
2. In a lecture delivered as he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, Wiesel reiterated his belief that while it is crucial to remember the past, a "holy war" is a contradiction in terms. What does *Dawn* reveal about the makings of a "holy warrior"? Could Elisha's dream for Israel have been realized without war? Discuss your reactions to Elisha's recruitment, in which Gad promises to turn his future into "an outcry first of despair and then of hope. And finally a shout of triumph."
3. Early in the novel, Elisha recalls his childhood encounter with a beggar, whom he meets in a synagogue. What does the beggar's advice about distinguishing night from day indicate about the nature of dawn? How does this advice influence Elisha as he looks into the faces of his fellow human beings throughout *Dawn*?
4. Do you agree with Ilana's assertion in her Voice of Freedom broadcast that she and her fellow fighters are not murderers, but that the Cabinet ministers are? How does Elisha view God's commandment not to kill?
5. How were you affected by the narrator's recollections of Catherine from his days in Paris? What does this scene tell us about his experience with love, and its inability to restore his former life with his family?



ISBN: 0-8090-3772-6 | 96 pages



# Reading Group Gold

## Questions for Discussion

6. Does the memory of Elisha's parents weigh on his conscience? Does it spur his admiration for the freedom fighters, or does it make him feel shame? Had they survived the Holocaust, would his parents have shared his passion for Zionism?
7. Characterize the Old Man's influence over the other characters in the novel. What is the source of his power? Is he wise?
8. Discuss the scene in which Elisha's fellow soldiers recall the various ways in which they escaped a brush with death. How do they view death and fate? How do they view their ability to save a life?
9. Like Elisha, the reader does not meet John Dawson until the end of the novel. Were you surprised by his personality? Did he meet Elisha's expectations? What is the nature of their conversation? Why might Dawson think he could persuade Elisha to spare his life?
10. What motivates Elisha to go through with killing Dawson? Were you surprised to see him do it at precisely the moment Dawson uttered his name? Does Elisha seem to achieve his intended result?
11. Inhabited by ghosts, with a timeline in which memories are always present, is *Dawn* a surrealistic novel? Or is it a quite realistic portrait of a Holocaust survivor?
12. As in *Night*, Wiesel concludes *Dawn* with an image of the narrator seeing his own face. How does Elisha's image of himself compare to Eliezer's image of himself after being freed from the Nazis?

## About the Author

Elie Wiesel, the author of some forty books, is Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University. He and his family live in New York City. He has dedicated his life to speaking out against hatred and bigotry, and he was instrumental in the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Mr. Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.