

## The Elie Wiesel Living Archive Teaching/Study Guide #3 The Mystical Meaning of Overcoming Anger

### In the Talmud: Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai Revisited (1990; 24<sup>th</sup> year):

#### Goals:

To understand Professor Wiesel's remarkable approach to the ethics of suffering.  
To see how for Professor Wiesel Talmud study is also a means to bear witness  
To appreciate how, according to Professor Wiesel, the foundation of Jewish mysticism pivots around the response to suffering

#### Background:

EW began to lecture on Talmudic personages in 1970 at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, which EW referred to as “my yeshiva.” The first Talmudic presentation focused on Rabbi Akiva, the second on his student Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. He again lectured on Rabbi Shimon at Boston University in 1981, then again at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Y. in 1990 in a series on “fathers and sons,” with a similar lecture presented at BU in 1991.

We focus our study on the 1990 lecture, which was nearly the 100<sup>th</sup> lecture Professor Wiesel gave at the 92Y and his twentieth portrait of a Talmudic sage. A version appeared in French in his essay collection, *Celebration Talmudique* (1991), and in English in his collection, *Sages and Dreamers* (1991). EW also wove strands of the lecture on Rabbi Shimon into his address to the International Second Generation Conference in 1984.

#### Please Refer to the Handout

#### See quotations:

a): Over and over again, Professor Wiesel emphasizes the importance of questions. How would you put in your own words the question he is asking about Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai?

b) and c): What exactly makes the experience of R. Shimon and R. Eleazar parallel to that of survivors after World War II?

d) and e): How does Professor Wiesel explain the “last year”? Why might he draw on the Soviet prisoners—and what does it add to his first gloss?

f) In what way is EW saying that Rabbi Shimon became a “different man”--different in what respects?

How does that difference help explain R. Shimon's special position with regard to Jewish mysticism?

What is required of me to come to perceive the world with the eyes of R. Shimon?