**MUSELMANN** (German for Muslim), death camp slang word for prisoners on the edge of death who have surrendered to their fate, i.e., showing the symptoms of the last stages of hunger, disease, mental indifference and physical exhaustion. This term was mostly used at Auschwitz. It seems to have originated from the typical deportment of the sufferers, e.g., to squat with their legs tucked in an "Oriental" fashion, their faces masklike in stiffness. Often the muselmann was the target of anger from fellow prisoners, who avoided them lest they too be overcome by despair at the conditions they faced.

Primo \*Levi has argued that had the *lagers* lasted a little longer they would have developed a language of their own. His chilling description of the muselmann indicates the depth of their despair: "The musselmaner, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march to labor in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to suffer. One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, they are too tired to understand.… If I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image, which is familiar to me: an emaciated man with head dropped and shoulders curved, on which face and in whose eyes not a trace of thought is to be seen."

Respond to this passage:

“And he began beating him with an iron bar. At first my father simply doubled over under the blows, but then he seemed to break in two like an old tree struck by lightning.

I had watched it all happening without moving. I kept silent. In fact, I thought of stealing away in order not to suffer the blows. What’s more, if I felt anger at that moment, it was not directed at the Kapo, but at my father. Why couldn’t he have avoided Idek’s wrath? That was what life in the concentration camp had made of me…” pg 54

“At that moment in time, all that mattered to me was my daily bowl of soup, my crust of stale bread. The bread, the soup—those were my entire life. I was nothing but a body. Perhaps even less: a famished stomach. The stomach alone was measuring time.” Pg 52

“I nodded once, ten times, endlessly. As if my head had decided to say yes for all eternity.” Page 58

“A man appeared, crawling snakelike in the direction of the cauldrons.

Hundreds of eyes were watching his every move. Hundreds of men were crawling with him, scraping their bodies with his on the stones. All hearts trembled, but mostly with envy. He was the one who had dared…We never thought to admire him Poor hero committing suicide for a ration or two or more of soup…In our minds, he was already dead.” Pg 59

“In those days, I fully believed that the salvation of the world depended on every one of my deeds, on every one of my prayers.

But now, I no longer prayed for anything…I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy. I was nothing but ashes now, but I felt myself to be stronger than this Almighty to whom my life had been bound for so long.” Pg 68

“I no longer accepted God’s silence. As I swallowed my ration of soup, I turned that act into a symbol of rebellion, of protest against Him.

And I nibbled on my crust of bread.

Deep inside of me, I felt a great void opening.” Pg 69

“’Here, take this knife,’ he said. ‘I won’t need it anymore. You may find it useful. Also take the spoon. Don’t sell it. Quickly! Go ahead, take what I am giving you!”

My inheritance…” (pg 75)

“I felt sick at heart. How kindly they treated me. Like an orphan. I thought: Even now, my father is helping me.” (pg 75)

“Poor Akiba Drumer, if only he could have kept his faith in God, if only he could have considered this suffering a divine test, he would not have been swept away by the selection. But as soon as he felt the first chinks in his faith, he lost all incentive to fight and opened the door to death.” Pg 77

“We promised: in three days, when we would see the smoke rising from the chimney, we would think of him. We would gather ten men and hold a special service. All his friends would say Kaddish…

There followed terrible days. We received more blows than food. The work was crushing. And three days after he left, we forgot to say Kaddish.” Pg 77

“’Don’t be deluded. Hitler has made it clear that he will annihilate all Jews before the clock strikes twelve.’

I exploded:

‘What do you care what he said? Would you want us to consider him a prophet?’

His cold eyes stared at me. At last, he said wearily:

‘I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He alone has kept his promises, all is promises, to the Jewish people.’” Pg 80-81

“After the war, I learned the fate of those who had remained at the infirmary. They were, quite simply, liberated by the Russians, two days after the evacuation.” Pg 82

“The last night in Buna. Once more, the last night. The last night at home, the last night in the ghetto, the last night in the cattle car, and, now, the last night in Buna. How much longer would our lives be lived from one “last night” to the next? Pg 83

“Suddenly the *Blockalteste* remembered that we had forgotten to clean the block. He commanded four prisoners to mop the floor...one hour before leaving camp! Why? For whom?

‘For the liberating army,’ he told us. ‘Let them know that here lived men and not pigs.’

So we were men after all? The block was cleaned from top to bottom. Pg 84