

ON THE NATURE AND VALUE OF TESTIMONIES

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The word testimony comes from the Latin word for witness. It involves giving very important evidence from personal knowledge, under solemn affirmation, in public.

Testimonies include a sense of the sacred. The bible indicates in a number of places that the evidence of creation is testimony to the truth of God. The testimony includes justice, the soul and wisdom.

The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul; the teaching of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple (Pray:7).

The power of human testimonies is that the testifier becomes a godlike vehicle of teaching about the universe. The awe and sacredness of the testimony stems from it providing some kind of universal knowledge of life and death and good and evil. The fact that it is secular evidence without the wish fulfilling protectiveness of religious beliefs may make it more awe inspiring and fearful.

The fear aroused by such evidence may be shunned or silenced because it may evoke helplessness and despair in the listeners. To be heard, testimonies must be accompanied by hope that the lessons learned will increase security and goodness.

Perhaps the power of the film *Schindler's List* and its consequent worldwide testimonies project was that the Holocaust could be looked at through a small window of goodness and hope.

Testimonies have recently gained favor both as historical records and as adjuncts to healing. Holocaust testimonies have particularly gained momentum as survivors are

becoming older and their last chance to convey the truth of their sufferings is slowly passing many by. As well, the Spielberg project has given a fillip to their collection. However, testimonies are also encouraged from other genocides from the Armenian to the Rwandan one, and from survivors of political torture to survivors of childhood sexual traumas. Testimonies by perpetrators are much rarer. A remarkable exception is the reconciliation process in South Africa where perpetrators are given immunity from prosecution in exchange for their testimonies.

The value and purpose of testimonies are multiple. Firstly recognition that evil had been done and exacting justice may give satisfaction. The victim may have his or her day in court and exacts apology, compensation or punishment. Testimony against a tyrannical government which uses state torture and genocide may help its overthrow. A government such as the German one may admit guilt retrospectively, apologize and pay compensation.

Another purpose of testimonies is historical. It allows the descendants of victims to know their roots, and to record the truth for posterity generally. It fulfills the last requests of the slain - "Tell the world what was done to us." Testimonies ensure that their deaths and names do not pass into senseless oblivion. Imprinting what had happened on the collective mind may serve as an eternal memorial which may also warn the world against similar events happening in the future. Prevention of such events makes the deaths of the innocent and one's own sufferings meaningful.

Next, much of the encouragement to give testimonies stems from the finding that they promote healing in the testifiers. This is because by telling a story one may vocalize, come to grips with and defeat inner unexpressed demons. As well in telling one's story

one makes sense and meaning of the story for self and others and integrates one's identity in the world.

Lastly, testimonies provide information and scientific material whose research may answer questions of how people survive or succumb to traumatic situations, and how people turn to evil deeds.

In this essay I will not look at political testimonies against current regimes, nor will I explore perpetrator testimonies, important as they are. What I wish to explore is the positive power of testimonies as part of unique conjunction of human endeavor and purpose. Testimonies will be shown to be communications of painful events for the sake of benefit to the communicator, the interviewer and the recipients of the information. The benefits include healing and restoration of disrupted bodies, minds and souls.

I will draw on my personal experiences of the Holocaust and my testimony as part of my healing process. The reader is referred to the details of that testimony which was previously published elsewhere (Valent, 1994). I will also draw on seven years chairmanship of the Child Survivors of the Holocaust group in Melbourne, whose main activity was the sharing of testimonies. I have also recorded ten psychohistories in a book based on testimonies given by child survivors of various ages (Valent, 1994a) and I have had the fortune to supervise a testimony project for all ages in the Melbourne Holocaust Center. As a psychodynamic psychiatrist, consultant to an emergency department in a major hospital for many years, and traumatologist I have heard many stories in a wide variety of contexts. I have been interested in the way life and death stories are told in physical and mental symptoms, psychotherapeutic histories, and testimonies.

Testimonies as Integrators and Agents of Information

Very soon after survival of catastrophic events people have great need to talk over with great intensity what had happened to them. Listening to others who shared the event allows assimilation of many angles of the disaster, leading to understanding of its causes, responses and means of preventing its recurrence. Institution of debriefs after traumatic events such as deaths in the emergency department, allowed staff to integrate facts about a particular life and death, and people's relationship to it. Understanding always provided relief for instance that the staff were not the cause of death. It also allowed learning of how to improve things in the future.

For many survivors, such as incest survivors and child survivors of the Holocaust, such psychological and social integration of events soon after they happened could not occur. At the time there were many reasons to not tell of one's pain, but rather to hide one's story. To expose it may have brought punishment and even death. Even later telling of stories failed to bring security and goodwill, but rather pain and rejection.

For instance, people did not want to hear Holocaust stories. Even within families conspiracies of silence protected against demands to know and the burden of unwanted emotions. Neither my own survivor parents nor any other adults ever asked me about my wartime experiences and their aftermaths. As a result, integration of events may not occur for decades, and people can harbor guilt, anger, feelings of abandonment and grief almost indefinitely. For example, I harbored anger for being abandoned, as I saw it, after my parents were arrested and sent to the cattle cars bound for Auschwitz. But I kept silent, not even knowing myself for many years that I harbored such feelings, not being able to

reconcile for a long time my feelings with my parents' pain and love and my own worthwhileness.

It was only decades later when I sought to integrate myself and my history that I became aware of my traumas and was able to realign my perceptions and feelings. This needed a very complex belated debrief, called therapy.

While it was going on, a unique event happened. This was the first international gathering of child survivors, the Hidden Child Conference in New York in 1991. Within wide media coverage I testified publicly about my Holocaust experience to over 1000 delegates. I came out of hiding. I said who I was and what happened to me.

In the same days I told my story in smaller groups, but very importantly I gave my testimony to the arguably most experienced interviewer of the Child Development Research project which researched Holocaust children. This is the testimony alluded to above. The conjunction of three different ways of telling my story provided a unique subjective opportunity to compare and contrast them.

This is not as easy as it may sound, for the three means of conveying my story were part of a whole for me. In retrospect, they acted synergistically like the prongs of a fork. Perhaps without all three, my healing process would have lacked some important perspective.

The conference provided a forum for recognition in various groups of peers and to a wide world stage. What did I need recognized? That I was Jewish and a human being. That I was an individual and also part of a group and a people who were nice and innocent, persecuted for no reason, caused hurt and suffering. This included perverse questions about having deserved the punishment, being ashamed for real inferiorities. Yet

in telling the hurt was validated, the perverse questions answered. All layers of society agreed that Jews were humans, that children should not have been persecuted, that I was innocent and nice. I received a sense of validation and pride. I also felt I stood for others like me, the one and a half million children who perished. I was conveying their message too, and they were also being recognized as worthwhile. Their deaths were mourned as a huge tragedy. In my gratitude to the people who were recognizing me, I also felt that I was contributing something important and interesting. Child survivors of the Holocaust were in fact interesting and had much information to give to the world.

In my one to one tape recorded interview for the research project I understood that the rationale of me telling my story was ultimately to provide knowledge on what happens to traumatized children, and to ensure that experiences like mine would not recur. However, my subjective emotional drive was to be recognized and validated by this kind and knowledgeable interviewer, and for my most intimate experiences to be respected or forgiven. I wanted to be seen as worthwhile and lovable. I kept a very close eye on my interviewer's responses, her degree of intimacy in her involvement with me. The more I trusted her, the more I gave. She helped me to retrieve some forgotten memories, pleasant as well as unpleasant ones. We recovered a very intimate story of my whole life, warts and all, with the Holocaust trauma pervading it. For instance we explored the ramifications of my sense of abandonment on my personality, relationships, sense of being rejectable, shame, and guilt for my anger at my parents.

I felt gratified that my interviewer seemed to like and respect me in spite of all. In fact she revealed to me through her eyes the terrors and griefs of the separated child and provide him retrospective comfort for the first time. My purpose was to be intimately

recognized by this kind person so I could recognize myself and be able to comfort myself too. At the same time her eyes verified in me an adult who had achieved much in spite of my traumas. While the research project was the rationale for this process and set its time, venue and limits, at the time it seemed to me to be secondary and in the background. It was necessary for me to feel that way in order to fulfill the project's purpose, and I knew this. I also knew that while the gifts I received were genuine and valuable, they enabled me to open up and be a wider and deeper witness to the Holocaust.

The purpose of my therapy was to enable me to have a story to tell in the first place. In the beginning I did not know that, wanting only to eliminate psychological and social symptoms. But slowly they came to be connected to threads leading back to aspects of the Holocaust. Eventually the threads wove a tapestry which came to make up my story. This allowed me to remake my future story by separating it from the past one. The process was long and difficult. It required a trusting relationship in which my therapist recognized me and the connections in my mind, and engendered hope that my own recognition would give benefit. In that environment, which included his love of my being which I recognized in his face, that I lowered my defenses and allowed my painful early traumas to surface. With trepidation I braved hope of a better life, felt thawed painful emotions, connected them with events whose meanings and judgments I slowly rearranged, and in the process realigned my soul in more fulfilling ways.

My therapy preceded and continued after my other testimonies. It enabled me to testify show myself and testify at the Conference, and made me more open for my research interview. In turn both gave a fillip to the therapy. My memory of all three is very positive. They all contributed to me in very special ways. The public testimony gave

a social dimension and validation of my therapy. It belonged in the world, my experiences were reconnected to it. My research testimony confirmed and expanded my therapy in some ways, and made my life meaningful by helping others. Its permanent record connected my personal past and the pasts of those I bore witness to, with the indefinite universal future. The overlaps and distinctions between testimony and therapy will be explored further below.

In summary, it may be seen that there are multiple purposes of telling a story. For me as the testifier it may have been important to be recognized and validated as an innocent, nice person who unjustly suffered at the hand of perpetrators. In other words my being needed to be identified with a wholesome morality and justice. In the telling I received recognition that I need not hide in shame, it was the perpetrators who needed to, they were in hiding and silent. Further, I could be a vehicle in the recognition and justice of other silent, hidden victims, and those permanently silenced in their deaths. I became advocate on behalf of potential future victims, giving them a proactive voice, in fact hopefully preventing their victimization. My testimony put both personal and national historical truth on the map. It may help give power to fashion both types of histories for the better in the future.

The telling of one's story is a unique interchange of information. The testifier puts as it were his or her life on the line, exposes one's whole self. This is in order to provide unique and important knowledge about what one has been part of and witnessed of the ultimate questions of life and death, good and evil. In return the testifier receives recognition and respect that indeed the suffering happened, the witness was unjustly hurt, the story of what was witnessed was important and deeply meaningful, and gratefully and

respectfully received. This is opposite to killing the messenger. The interviewer provides the mouthpiece and means of dispersion of information and recognition of the testifier. In return interviewers are the first to receive the information in its most vivid form, and receive satisfaction from a difficult job well done. The receivers of the testimony benefit from the information and learn something very important. It is a win-win-win situation.

Circumscribed Testimony; Reasons for Telling Only Parts of the Story

Circumscribed testimonies or only partial exposure of stories may be due to victim, interviewer and societal factors.

Victim Factors.

Victims may have circumscribed aims in telling their stories. For instance, if the aim is to contradict Holocaust deniers, testimonies may focus on camp experiences, and witnessing of gas chambers and crematoria. Victims of political torture may be driven by specific feelings of injustice, revenge, ideological values, and desire to overthrow a tyranny. Others again may wish to establish their suffering for compensation purposes. In such cases personal traumas, guilts and shames may be overlooked.

Perhaps most commonly victims give partial testimonies because they defend against reliving the traumas which testimonies can evoke, and even when they relive them they do so together with numbing and dissociation of the pain, judgments and meanings of the traumas which occurred at the original time of the traumas. This may underlie description of events without apparent feelings, like oral equivalents of documentary films silently showing piles of naked emaciated bodies. Dates and facts may be exact, but it is as if for the listeners to feel and act in response to their facts. Defenses against feeling the real pain of the events may manifest in interviews by subjects

deflecting attention to physical complaints, or interfering with the interview, such as cutting it short.

Defenses are used against remembering specific events and feeling the intense emotions such as grief, rage, helplessness, yearning and abandonment associated with them. They also obscure underlying negative self judgments such as regret, guilt, shame, sense of worthlessness, as well as meanings which evolved from the events such as, “I am a an ungrateful son to my parents.” “I was abandoned because I am unlovable.” or “I am doomed to be forever alone without family or God.”

Lastly, full testimonies may be impossible for some because traumatic events were fragmented in their minds and/or they were too young to encode their experiences in sequential verbal memories. Many child survivors may feel that they have nothing to say, that their stories are subsumed in those of their parents.

In both latter cases skillful interviewers may elicit evidence of the traumas and their aftermaths through highlighting nonverbal communications of fragments of the truth. For instance, emotions which appear for no apparent reason or gestures such as wringing a handkerchief may indicate what is otherwise not said (see below).

Interviewer Factors

Many interviewers also have circumscribed aims such as negating Holocaust deniers, and they may direct and limit testimonies toward those aims. Those wanting to do their bit to apportion blame and extract justice may shun evidence of collaboration, complicity, and exploitation by victims. Some interviewers may wish to glorify their interviewees as martyrs and protect them from what they feel to be their guilts and

shames, such as sexual abuse and unheroic acts of survival. Some have suggested to survivors that they dress nicely, and even smile courageously, in a way that is the deserving of their remembrance by their grandchildren.

Perhaps the most common reason for circumscribing testimonies is that reciprocally to the victims, interviewers are unable to bear survivors' pain, feelings, and victims' and interviewers' negative judgments and meanings.

Societal Factors.

Acceptable social milieus are necessary for testimonies. Victims may not testify if there is continued threat of punishment by those in power. Testimonies may not be accepted if they threaten the listeners. For instance, the testimonies of Auschwitz escapees who tried to warn the population of Hungary about their imminent fate were suppressed. It has taken decades for Israeli society to listen to Holocaust survivors.

On the other side perpetrators may suppress their victims' testimonies and avoid giving their own because of threat of punishment and ostracism. It has taken Germany a long time to accept guilt, apologize and compensate.

An interesting exception is the reconciliation process in South Africa where former victims now in power take testimonies equally from victims and perpetrators. The latter are guaranteed indemnity for the exchange of truth. The latter is considered more necessary than punishment, because the truth allows understanding the factors which lead to atrocities. Such truth may indicate that perpetrators had also frequently been victims. This may cast an uneasy tension over desires to differentiate good and evil, just as happens when interviewing victims one finds that they at times hurt their own through

impossible choices of survival. The truth may give new knowledge about good and evil which may be of pragmatic help in the future.

The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth?

Historians were employed in the past to tell the glories of their masters. Such propagandists gave way to professional historians who through documents and other artifacts produced objective histories. Yet official documents and artifacts could often only provide a thin crust of facts at best.

In some ways letters and autobiographies of ordinary people who did not pursue glory or immortality were found to provide more objective 'feels' of events. Professionally documented eyewitness accounts or testimonies of such ordinary people could potentially provide even better histories. These days the sounds and images of the original eye witnesses can be recorded, and their original vividness retained for reassessment by new waves of researchers.

In other words, verbal messages of today's testimonies can be more colorful, vivid and enlivened by accompanying records of nonverbal messages. For instance, fearful expressions and actions while describing terrifying experiences, involuntary tears while describing losses, unconsciously clenched fists reflecting hidden rage, expressions of disgust while describing the smell of burning human flesh, become especially significant records adding weight, color and depth to verbal testimonies. And the total testimony is available for recurrent review and tests of credibility.

In fact all psychodynamic means of eliciting information can be applied. This can include associative links and themes in which information is presented, contents of physiological responses, nightmares, dreams, fantasies, slips of the tongue, may all add

depth to presented information. Transference responses in which the subject for instance conveys terror of the interviewer as if he or she were a Nazi, and countertransference responses in which interviewers and viewers have particular feelings and images evoked in them, such as contempt akin to those of Nazis', can provide valuable information about the subject's cognitive and emotional state.

The reason that all these techniques may have place in the testimony is the contention that it may be that what is forgotten, defended against, or only nonverbally expressed is as important as what is consciously said. It may be through the nonverbal techniques that initial clues may be obtained about painful emotions, negatively judged events and meanings. Interviews may record the initial defenses, the clues, and the eventual exposure with its nonverbal accompaniments.

It may be asked whether it is valid to use subjective nonverbal means of deriving information, and whether it is fair to elicit information which may be painful, self-judgmental and possibly interpreted as derogatory to the testifier?

Firstly, it is suggested that intuition is always used in assessing communication. In a courtroom testimony, verbal evidence is constantly assessed for veracity through nonverbal information and feelings it evokes in oneself. In a professional testimony interview intuition is used consciously, is better defined, and therefore is more subject to controls.

Second, informed consent to tell the whole truth should be obtained and the implications discussed with testifiers. If it should be decided that certain topics will be avoided, this should be stated in the testimony, and to the degree feasible, the nature of the topic should be indicated. The point is, that if a viewer notes certain obfuscations in a

testimony claiming to tell the whole truth, the credibility of the whole testimony may falter.

It is suggested that deep down a testifier wants to tell the whole truth because without it the purpose of giving the testimony is undermined. The indirect communications are often not only the sole means of providing repressed or unintegrated material, but also a test of the interviewer's involvement, non-judgmental attitude, interest, and ability to listen. If the interviewer genuinely does not see certain exposures such as having soiled oneself in fear, being sexually abused or acting unheroically to survive as demeaning and derogatory, the subject is more likely to disclose them. In the process it will be clarified that actually these acts are derogatory and demeaning of the abuser, not the victim. Misguided protection against exposure may in fact confirm the victim's unwarranted sense of shame. The undoing of that shame through exposure may be an essential part of testimony of how victims' sense of justice and worth can be perverted toward self-blame and shame.

Had I not been given the chance of exposure of my negative self-judgments, I would have felt short changed because I would not have been able to put my shames in context of innocence in my catastrophes and hence resolve them as false judgments. I would also have felt that I was short changing the world, for others could not have learned from my false shames to resolve theirs.

Much discussion revolves around how much testifiers disclose in what settings. I disclosed all I could in my one to one interview and my therapy, even though in both it required supportive encouragement to drop defenses and explore memories. In the public testimony I alluded to my shames in metaphors and as general occurrences. I believe that

I could have been more specific and personal in proportion to the compassion and sympathy of an interviewer and the public. Experience in our child survivor group is that at times very personal shames and information which is deemed to potentially damage another person, a spouse, or a current relationship is sometimes not exposed.

I believe that I would give the same evidence on video as on audiotape with the same interviewer. When I videotaped interviews for my book, the subjects came to ignore the camera. For instance, they kept on talking uninterruptedly during breaks or when the tape had to be changed.

It may not be the medium which is as important as the altered state of consciousness one enters when in the world of the testimony. Once trust is built up that this vulnerable state will not be abused, the subject allows information to flow from that world without excessive filtering. More depends on the relationship with the interviewer than with the medium.

In summary, people may avoid full disclosures or testimonies altogether in order to save suffering to self or others. Once the intention to tell the whole truth has been agreed to and possible consequences discussed, this goal should be pursued. Follow up interviews may be offered to support the testifier through subsequent distress.

In most cases the self-blames are unwarranted fantasies. In worst case scenarios testimonies may indeed expose what in normal circumstances may appear as terrible means of survival, such as sexual favors, allowing sacrifice of family members, being a bad kapo or spying for the enemy. However, all human responses need to be shown in testimonies which purport to be true documents. It may need to be known that torture and

persecution can pervert people's everyday morality. The meaning of morality may change in extreme circumstances.

It is suggested that with compassionate audiences, testifiers want to testify to all, because it is their lives which are being given recognition integration and meaning. That is why even Nazi perpetrators told of their deeds to Lifton (1986), a non-judgmental interviewer who wanted to know their truth. It is becoming clear that the relationship to the interviewer is crucial in how much one is willing to expose.

Relationship to the Interviewer

It is suggested that the more intimate and whole is the testimony, the more important, intimate and whole needs to be the relationship with the interviewer.

First and foremost the interviewer and the context of the interview must be experienced as safe and countertraumatic. Both must be opposite to the perpetrator and his environment. This cannot be devised. It must be true. In other words, the interviewer truly desires and provides for the testifier's safety and fulfilment in testimony. The survivor may feel perhaps for the first time truly invited to be identified and recognized. The interviewer may impart for the first time that the story is acknowledged as human, meaningful and important.

For the testifier it is extremely important that the interviewer be involved, believing, understanding and non-judgmental. The interviewer must reverberate with perfect attunement of all the senses in order to understand the whole story. This openness includes but goes beyond sympathy, compassion, empathy. It is a way of being, being (pre)occupied, immersed in the other in order to fully understand and give the importance its due. The story teller, mistrustful and wary because of previous disinterest and

rejection may use all the intuitive techniques used by the interviewer to diagnose the interviewer's motives and genuineness.

Any faltering by the interviewer may lead to a sense of repetition of earlier abandonment and mistrust, even of the trauma being repeated in the interview. For instance, a historical correction by the interviewer made in order to make the testimony more credible to later viewers may be seen as a criticism and denigration of the victim's truth. If this is not clarified and maybe even used as evidence of mistrust consequent to persecution, the testimony may lose its openness.

My interviewer looked at me, smiled, accepted me, worked hard, was exhausted, but at least constantly tried and usually succeeded to be attuned to both the boy I had been and the adult I was at the time. Each detail was closely dissected, to be put into a homogenous picture. My interviewer used her mind, body, every aspect of herself to connect with every aspect of me. She had diarrhea in response to the anxiety felt in my bowel, a central feature of my trauma. A surge of love overcame me when I realised this. I was prepared to retrieve painful memories, feel shame and guilt, anger and meaninglessness. I wanted to testify fully.

In a sense such a testimony is an act of love and work of creation. Each contributes a unique self, sacrifice and hard work to produce a result of great moment.

It is not a love that loses its head or its purpose. The unburdening of the heart is a rational, fortified by the head and heart of the other. Both touch the soul and gift it to humanity.

The Process of the Testimony

The generation of the testimony is a process whereby the testifier bears witness to important events and transfers that information through the interviewer to humanity at large. It is then a tripartite process which may be likened to childbirth. The child is the testimony which comes out of the intimate parts of the witness. the interviewer is the midwife through whom the burden is released, and the new life is given to the world.

The reverberating attunement role of the interviewer midwife is called participant witnessing by Bass-Wichelhaus (1994). It is as if the interviewer enters the world of the subject and together they witness past events. The new witness is necessary in order to see afresh from outside as well as inside, from the present as well as the past, to lend clearer recognition, adult words and sequence. The interviewer is the vehicle for the emergence of the testimony story. Literally the interviewer is a medium of viewing. The viewing audience itself become participant witnesses through viewing the interview process. They view simultaneously both the primary and secondary witnesses and reverberate with both. This is like seeing childbirth from both the mother's and the midwife's points of view. The audience itself participates in melding the story and its meaning.

The process then involves a communal creative witnessing of a story of life and death. However, it is not only the story teller's story which is being told, but the community's. The story could be everybody's story. It is like a secular myth in the making, a revelation from the depths. But unlike prophets testifying to God's rationale for apparently senseless disasters, testimonies are earthly stories by ordinary people whose gifts are knowledge about the truth of unnatural death, trauma, and the evil people

can do to each other. And yet their testimonies are moral tales delivered with love and hope. Akin to prophets giving hope for the future through repentance for sins, testimonies give hope for the future through secular knowledge of catastrophe and evil.

Reflecting the state of religious awe when prophets deliver the word of God, all participants may enter altered states of consciousness when they enter the world of testimonies. Yet it is also clear that today is a time of trust and love, giving and listening.

Testifier, interviewer and viewers meet in the past and the present, to produce a new, wiser future for all. Testimonies are means of intimate participating and learning this wisdom as it were in the flesh. It is a hard process but all benefit from it.

Healing Through Testimonies

What is the healing power of testimonies alluded to for a variety of traumatized groups?

It is suggested that there are three broad categories of healing. The first one is the benefit of being recognized, validated, and accepted to belong to a group; second, retrieval of memories and sequential relating of one's experiences promotes integration and understanding the threads of one's mind and one's self; third, testimonies enhance regeneration of morality, meaning, purpose and the sense of one's soul.

Recognition, Validation and Belonging

To know oneself one must see oneself through the eyes of others. Being recognized during one's testimony through the eyes of others as normal, worthwhile, lovable and having something important to contribute is an essential ingredient to healing of the self which had been torn apart. It took me some time to realise that stories like mine and of

other child survivors were actually very interesting and important in finding out about aftermaths of children's traumas over a lifetime.

Survivors are often relieved to hear that their stories reverberated and overlapped with those of others, and to hear others' testimonies which have familiar rings. It means that one belongs to a group who share similar experiences, where one can be sure of understanding. Meeting in homogenous groups offers much solace and heals previous feelings of alienation in the world.

Recognition validation and belonging allows one's sufferings and survivorship to become part of the normal poignancy of one's shared humanity.

Retrieval of Memories and Integration of One's Mind and Identity

Retrieval of memories, one's mind and identity supplements recognition from outside with subjective recognition. Retrieval of memories is an important step because one is one's memories. Holes in memories and disconnections between their parts means having holes and alienation in oneself. Recognition of one's memories, their sequence, and their connections with events, feelings, thoughts actions and relationships allows a coherent thread of internal existence.

Testimonies give memories words, structure, sequence, boundaries. They produce a story and a storyteller who both lives the story and looks on it along with others from a distance. Past, present and future are demarcated, and the story and the storytelling are put in context. This leads to integration, sense and understanding of oneself and one's context. This is what is meant by testimonies being a creation of one's identity. It means that one's identity coheres as one tell one's story.

Retrieval and integration of memories is painful because they bring back the original traumas with their intense painful emotions, negative judgments and meanings. However, even as memories are retrieved they are reviewed through a sympathetic tripartite relationship and benevolent purpose with the result that past judgments and meanings can be realigned. For instance, traumatic guilt may be reviewed as unrealistic considering the circumstances and one's powerlessness at the time. Similarly, one's sense of unlovableness may be reviewed as stemming from traumatic but unrealistic sense of rejection and abandonment.

Retrieval of memories replaces black holes with human pain. But this may be tolerable because testifiers can be reassured that they were not bad, and that they and their families were normal innocent people who responded normally to abnormal circumstances. The testimony of their sufferings now is a story by these people of the abnormal times. It is a story gifted in goodness. Therefore memories are now precious to both the givers and the given.

Regeneration of Purpose and Soul

We saw that the every process of testimonies counters their content. By disclosing one's story one is no longer in hiding, by exposing the culprits one is no longer to blame, by testifying one bears witness to one's wounds, but also survivorship and importance.

Testimonies overcome the stigma of one's wounds. One is not the wound, one is a nice person who has been unjustly wounded. The wound is not ugly, the perpetrator of the wound is. One is not weak for being wounded, one is human. One is not stupid for being wounded. Rather, one carries wisdom imparted by the wounding and healing. One

is not despicable because of the wound. On the contrary, one bears sacred witness having faced and overcome death and evil. One is not expendable for being wounded. On the contrary, one is essential for knowledge of life and death, good and evil.

By speaking out one defeats the enemy, and by upholding the principles and values of life, one defeats the enemy's philosophy of destructiveness and death. One's testimony makes the deaths of others and one's own suffering meaningful aiding life. In the act of sharing in trust and love the vulnerabilities of one's life one rejoins in a deeply significant way the process of life. In this way testimonies help regeneration of an essence which one may call the soul.

Testimonies and Treatment

Because testimonies and psychodynamic therapy may use similar techniques and subjects may feel healing from both, the two may become confused in their overlap. However, it is important to distinguish the two, for the goals of either may be subverted if they digress too far into the other.

It must be remembered that the goal of testimonies is to benefit third parties through a focused story of life and death, good and evil, provided by the testifier. It is secondarily that testifiers may benefit through the eyes of their audience, and reconnect and regenerate their souls through reentering the stream of life.

On the other hand, the aim of therapy is to benefit specific individuals by facilitating their awareness of their stories and their ramifications. This may occur through numerous explorations of part stories and subplots in a nonsequential order over long times. Therapy thus concentrates on the second healing potential of testimonies, that is reconnecting symptoms with traumatic memories, judgments and meanings, making

sense of them and reworking them. This may be a long term project because of the intensity and multiplicity of traumas and their occurrence at a young age. Testimonies may be secondary products of therapy, or may be fortuitously furthered by testimonies.

Event though testimonies and therapy are often synergistic, it must be remembered that their divergences are emphasized by their contexts. For instance, the relationship with the interviewer lasts only as long as the testimony, and that short term goal is achieved quickly. After the testimony the participants diverge from each other and assimilate their wisdoms separately. The parting is sweet, as after sharing a childbirth, a profound movie or book, or more accurately, the production of a book. While authors publishers and readers share an intimacy during its production, after they produced the story they do not need each other anymore. They have each been touched indelibly by the story and the process of its narration in their own ways, but it was only one profound experience to be assimilated with others in their lives.

In summary, therapy concentrates on making sense of symptoms and one's self, testimonies on making sense of the universe. The two overlap, but their social goals differ in time line, technique and responsibility.

The Ethics of Testimonies

Both the goals of testimonies and the capacities to use techniques in pursuit of these goals vary. Both should be acknowledged and tailored to each other. If for instance the goal of testimony is documentation of outside historical facts, historical expertise and a question and answer technique may be required, though even then unconscious interactions between interviewers and interviewees may influence the information obtained. If the goal of testimony is to provide the whole truth, not only historical but

also sophisticated psychological knowledge and techniques, and personal characteristics enter the equation. Certainly care, compassion, understanding and concern for the testifier are needed. But because the interviewer is such an important vehicle for such important information, much of which may be expressed through the interviewer in nonverbal ways, the interviewer needs training, debriefing, supervision, and understanding of his or her own past traumas.

It is therefore beholden on interviewers and their organizations to know the potentials of the techniques and the interviewers using them, in order to be able to tailor them appropriately to particular types of testimonies and individuals giving them.

Conclusion

There are many different ways of telling important life and death stories, ranging from almost total silence and constricted statements to epic writings and insightful biographies. Testimonies also vary, but in this essay the full meaning of the word, that is giving total witness in solemn and sacred truth was emphasized.

In that sense, testimonies may be seen as secular wisdom relating to catastrophic events which in the past was the domain of prophets and scriptures. The latter explained why bad things happened, and how by changing sinful ways matters could be repaired. Testimonies do not give religious comfort. They give evidence that the world order is not magical, that bad things happen to good people, that death and evil can occur without making sense. Testimonies take much courage to give and receive because one may relive and be participatory witness to a dangerous and bad world.

However, testimonies have the advantage over religious solutions in that they show the truth, and no matter how unpalatable, allow adjustment to it. In fact by taking the past

into account they allow a wiser readjustment to the present and future. Testimonies are very important in that they bring together yet distinguish past and present, and in the very telling experientially negate past trauma by establishing hope, trust, love and regeneration.

Testimonies negate the biblical blaming of victims, but rather show them to be good people and innocent victims. They negate the censorship of knowledge, rather they allow survivors to give their greatest gift, their knowledge of death and evil. The sacred aspect of the tripartite project may come from the release of all partners from the grip of the fantasy that knowledge is part of the destructive process. Rather, testimony to the truth is a gift of life. Life's purpose comes from the love and sacrifice in sharing knowledge of death and evil.

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