

RESILIENCE IN CHILD SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST: TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF RESILIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Resilience, according to the dictionary, means recoiling or springing back to the original shape after bending, stretching, or compression. Psychosocial resilience implies a similar springing back after having been subject to severe stressors.

As against vulnerability, which we may say is its opposite, resilience is a new concept. It arose from observations that some children seemed to come out relatively unscathed even from most adverse social conditions. This gave rise to the initially rather optimistic concept of invulnerability (Anthony, 1974). However, as all children could succumb to large-enough stressors, the term gave way to the relative concept of resilience.

Perhaps there is an internal dialectic in the term. On the one side, as Wolff (1995) warned, emphasis on resilience may be a self-comforting device which concentrates on the indomitable and triumphant human spirit and hides the devastating nature and pessimism of major childhood adversity. This includes the "St. Matthew effect," where those who have will receive, and those who have not will have taken away (Matthew 13:12). On the other hand, resilience may be an objectively useful concept which while it does indicate the strength of the human spirit, may also point to factors which could be facilitated to mitigate long-term effects of severe stressors.

The Nature of Resilience

The nature of resilience has been elusive. Factors ranging from chance innate childhood qualities to character traits, and

from social supports to socially supporting others were found to lessen later deviance and were labeled as resilience.

Thus resilience factors included being a girl and having a suitable temperament to caretaking adults (Garmezy, 1985); competence manifested in self-reliance and making the best of environments (Felsman & Vaillant, 1987); supportive family milieu with at least one parent taking an active interest in the child and external support network which the child readily accesses (Garmezy, 1985); and capacity to parent disabled (schizophrenic) parents (Bleuler, 1978).

Not only was the range of resilience factors wide but they were also relative to circumstances. Thus Rutter (1985) noted that family could be protective or disruptive. Nevertheless, he concluded that it was difficult to negate the mitigating influence of a secure attachment figure, some good relationships and care, success in some field of importance, and positive self-esteem.

Some have questioned the conclusions on resilience because they stemmed from purely operationalized observable criteria of outcomes. For instance, Luthar and Zigler (1991) found that previously competent children who as adults were deemed resilient, when questioned often reported relatively high levels of anxiety and depression. Further, what was considered resilience at one time could crumble when specific vulnerabilities were touched. Thus at different times past experiences could be "steeling" or sensitizing. Wolff (1995) concluded that resilience factors, like those of vulnerability, were part of a chain of events which fed off each other, and influenced larger systems.

In summary, the literature agrees that being appealing, having good attachments, social supports, interactional skills, and self-esteem mitigate long-term effects of traumatic situations, and are more important than socioeconomic status and intelligence. This is perhaps a foundation for another generation of observations which include psychological factors which in a complex system of events allow children to maintain love, hope, and striving for happiness. Finally, one must identify the sources of awe and admiration for the spirit of children who struggle against odds to maintain and fulfill aspects of their humanity. So what is the admirable nature of their resilience? It is suggested that

child survivors of the Holocaust may be a useful group to help answer some of these questions.

CHILD SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Being prime and most vulnerable victims of the greatest persecution in history where 90% of 1.5 million were killed, child survivors of the Holocaust were almost by definition resilient. Nevertheless, though the proportion of survivors is tiny, the numbers are large enough to distinguish initial responses at different ages. It is possible to describe how these children fared over a period of over 50 years.

What follows then is an overview of child survivors' vulnerabilities and resilience. Vulnerabilities are contrasted with resilience to remind us that each aspect of resilience has a corresponding potential hurt and wound. The material is abstracted from the literature, personal treatment of child survivors, chairing a child-survivor group over seven years, and a workshop by that group on resilience. Findings from each phase will be assessed separately, as each phase had its own challenges and lessons. They will be brought together in the final discussion.

During the Holocaust

As part of a systematic genocide whose aim was to extirpate Jews forever, the children were not spared any horrors (Dwork, 1991; Tec, 1993; Valent, 1994). Children shared their parents' segregation in ghettos, overcrowding, starvation, cold, humiliation, hiding, roundups, shootings, deportations in jammed cattle trucks, slave labor if fit enough, and extermination. Their inability to work hard, to execute orders, and their extra needs were treated with special impatience and brutality. For instance infants who could not evacuate a hospital in Lodz ghetto during a roundup were thrown out of the window. Children were used for target practice, medical experimentation, were tortured; but above all, they were killed. Of those who survived, almost all had been separated from their parents, many of whom were killed. Of those

who were hidden among gentiles, quality of caretaking varied. Many were threatened with death if they did not behave, and one-sixth were sexually molested (Moskovitz & Krell, 1990). Other stresses involved interference in developmental phases, regularity of time, sequence and constancy (Kestenberg & Brenner, 1986). Schooling and play were interrupted. In comparison to the above stresses, bombing was described as much less stressful.

Vulnerabilities. Children were physically, psychologically, and socially most vulnerable. Generally, the younger and more isolated the child, the more vulnerable it was. Children under three or four could not understand, their mental coherence could fragment, and they could not contain their emotions (Kestenberg, 1984). They responded somatically, for instance with asthma or diarrhea, or with inappropriate action (Kestenberg & Brenner, 1986). They could be dangerous and at times were even killed if they threatened the group's safety.

Resilience Factors

LUCK. Though the capacities which follow were necessary to survive, even the most omnipotent child survivors agree that luck was the most important factor in survival. It included arbitrary attributes such as having blond hair (looking Aryan), being female (therefore not being discovered through circumcision), or reminding a German of his child at home. Such luck may be analogous to being appealing and having compatible temperament to caretakers in civilian life.

PERSONAL SURVIVAL ATTRIBUTES. Many child survivors cited an inner surge or compulsion to live, a will to survive, as the most important factor in their survival. They used whatever capacities they had to do so. Children as young as four could of their own initiative take life-saving actions such as hiding under the sheets or running to a neighbor (Hogman, 1985). One three-year-old appealed to an SS man to not kill her as she had good hands for work (Kestenberg, 1990). Older children could be quite ingenious. One child worked out that ends of breads had more fat. Another saved herself by willfully becoming infected with scarlet fever so she could receive extra rations in the hospital (Valent, 1994).

Most children survived through attachment to others. Many unconsciously enhanced their natural appeal and cuteness. From the age of four on, children could absorb with great clarity verbal

and nonverbal communications evoking the dread of death. This was associated with capacities of extremes of obedience and adaptability. This included not protesting when separated from parents, suddenly having new caretakers, hiding in small spaces for long periods, sometimes alone, and keeping still and quiet for inordinate lengths of time. From the age of four children could also assume a series of false identities.

Children were able to do these extraordinary things to a large degree because of another capacity—the ability to arrange their psyches as seemed desired. Though they experienced dread, desolation panic, grief despair, anger and guilt akin to adults (Kestenberg & Brenner, 1986; Hogman, 1985), like adults they could also freeze, numb, and make the emotions and their contexts unreal (Gampel, 1988; Hogman, 1985). Children beyond the age of four were able to split their minds and live in two worlds (Kestenberg, 1988; Laub, 1989a). That is, they arranged their psyches to the current world, while they kept alive the world of union with their good parents in a good world. Gampel (1988) saw the inner urge to survive, the ability to not feel, and to keep mental contact with a good object, as the triad helping survival.

SOCIAL SURVIVAL ATTRIBUTES—PARENTS, OTHER ADULTS. Children's traumatic events were experienced of necessity in terms of parents and caretakers. Parental protection mitigated circumstances, while parental dreads, helplessness, and separations were traumatic. The protectiveness of substitute caretakers was often chance, but children attempted to maintain it through pliability, obedience, and temperamental adjustments.

Yet beyond four, children were able to hold on to their parents psychologically. The last looks and things said sustained them and could be remembered forever (Hogman, 1985; Brenner, 1988). Tangible objects such as lockets or combs reinforced these attachments in their times of abandonment (Gampel, 1988). For younger children, acts of goodness and their evoked feeling states transferred from caretaker to caretaker acted as fragmentary symbols of earliest good parenting (Brenner, 1988). Magic was used to connect with parents. For instance, one child (Valent, 1994) kept contact with her father through talking to him via the moon.

Children often motivated parents to greater efforts of survival. Older children actively helped parents to survive, role rever-

sals occurring from the age of six. In retrospect, looking after parents, but more frequently after younger siblings, kept some children going and not thinking about their own problems. This was reminiscent of required helpfulness being a resilience factor noted in civilian children.

JUDGMENTS AND MEANINGS. Judgments and meanings of events were appraised both realistically and imbued with childlike assessments. For instance separations were often judged as abandonments evoking anger or self-blame and guilt, such as, "I chose to stay in bed while my parents were led away" (Hogman, 1985, p. 394).

Judgments and meanings were also frozen. This allowed preservation of an internal psychosocial life, necessary for survival. Meanings of family betrayal or alternately total parental and subjective powerlessness and vulnerability were irreconcilable with struggles for life.

CREATIVITY AND INVENTIVENESS. Whenever possible, children developed and were creative in their own ways. They played and drew wherever it was possible, in ghettos and even concentration camps. The innocence and hopes expressed in children's games were precious to adults, who dared not hope so openly. Even SS guards could be moved by such games (Eisen, 1988). Curiosity survived too. Dori Laub (1989) wondered, "What is father thinking?" as they plodded through the snow. He asked a man what he felt after a flogging. He became a survivor researcher.

Assessment

Child survivors of the Holocaust corroborate the importance of secure attachment, appeal, ability to interact with the environment, competence, and required helpfulness. In addition they indicate the importance of psychological ability to suppress emotions and meanings in traumatic situations and of maintaining hope through intense desires to reunite in the future with dearly held memories of past attachments.

With regard to awe of children's resilience, perhaps above all it pertains to the surge of life they manifested, a kind of

sacred connection with a wider life force. One must respect their developmental drives, creativity and curiosity, maintained against all odds.

However, perhaps what is less obvious is their courage. Certainly at times they sacrificed themselves for the sake of their parents and siblings. But as well, perhaps their courage in overcoming their anxieties at separation from parents, obedience in isolation, voluntary restriction of their movements and expressions, maintaining hope of reuniting with their parents, are at least equivalent to the courage and loyalty of soldiers. So the pathos of children's vulnerabilities may be complemented by admiration for their physical, emotional, social and moral capacities.

Postwar

For the children liberation was both a great "joyous running, falling, feeling the earth, then getting up to run again" (Moskowitz & Krell, 1990, p. 83), and beginnings of understanding the enormity of the trauma. "Suddenly, I saw that I had no one, . . . absolutely nothing" (Gampel, 1988). Some postwar traumas matched the wartime ones. Parents did not return, or when they did they were different to the ones remembered. Often they had new partners. Sometimes children were put into hospitals and orphanages while the adults reestablished themselves. This could be felt as a betrayal of the hopes which kept the children going during the Holocaust.

Many children returned to hostile anti-Semitic environments. For those who emigrated, their past lives seemed unreal. Parents and adoptive countrymen seemed to be indifferent to their past sufferings, and wanted the children to forget them.

Vulnerabilities. Dashed hopes were seldom fully grieved. For orphans they were too great to grieve. Hostile or uninterested environments made processing of events impossible.

Resilience Factors. Children again did what they were asked. Mazor, Gampel, Enright, and Orenstein (1990) noted that child survivors in this phase coped psychologically again by focusing on the future, repressing memories and feelings, and thinking of

memories which remained as belonging to an irrelevant past. They resocialized generally reasonably quickly to peacetime mores. In orphanages they formed friendships (Moskovitz, 1983; Hemmendinger, 1986).

The children focused on current issues, such as learning new languages, and academic performance. Many applied themselves to learning as they had to survive in the past, and many quickly caught up and surpassed peers in academic achievement.

Building and Rebuilding Lives: Latent Period

Children were forgotten, and they forgot themselves as survivors (Mazor et al, 1990) for the next 35 years or so. This phase was marked by one may say the peak of resilience. Thus discoverers of child survivors after thirty years were impressed by the children's resilience (Moskovitz, 1983; Hemmendinger, 1986). Yet perhaps, as in other studies, this was so only on external criteria.

Vulnerabilities. Early professional cross-sectional studies of child survivors tended to be pessimistic. For instance, over half of psychiatrically hospitalized child survivors were noted to be psychotic, the proportion being greater in younger survivors (Krell, 1985). However, the majority belonged to a non-clinical population which indeed seemed to have done well. Nevertheless, most had carried silently a variety of post-traumatic stress responses such as nightmares, physical symptoms, anxieties and other emotional states and disjointed memories. Perhaps most continued silently to yearn to belong (Gampel, 1988), to have fuller loving relationships and to enjoy the world with humor and optimism (Rotenberg, 1985). Even a normal looking jovial man with a supposed "good" outcome, had a chronic, dominant feeling relating to his mother whom he could not remember, "I feel lost, waiting to be found." (Moskovitz, 1985, p. 403).

Resilience Factors.

PERSONAL SURVIVAL ATTRIBUTES. Child survivors worked hard to establish security, often with a margin to spare. Most became financially successful, married and became devoted par-

ents. Many belonged to helping professions, and were otherwise worthwhile and even altruistic members of society (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988).

Not remembering continued to be the key means of coping against the pain of traumas. It was aided by psychological defenses—negation, denial, and repression (Mazor et al, 1990) and "half-knowing" continued as a result of isolation of affect, and depriving the event of meaning, significance and true knowledge (Kestenberg, 1987).

Personal potentials were utilized toward achievement in this phase. Their development and drivenness from the Holocaust were variably acknowledged.

SOCIAL SURVIVAL ATTRIBUTES—PARENTS, OTHER ADULTS. Both children and adults carried with them their respective painful memories and defenses against them. This silence was shared with siblings, fellow child survivor friends who were unwittingly drawn to each other, and the outside world.

On the other hand, the Holocaust still reverberated in family relationships. Child survivors' parents continued to be anxious about their children's survival, and found it difficult to brook normal rebellions and what they saw as luxury lifestyles inconsistent with concentrating on survival. In this sense child survivors shared second generation experiences (Epstein, 1988; Bergman & Jucovy, 1990).

Reversal of roles or required helpfulness continued in many cases. Not only did children not talk about poignant events, they also helped to appease parental insecurities, yearnings, and avoidance of grief. They fulfilled both covert Holocaust missions such as "Do not forget" and missions of creating a new life without the Holocaust. Often older siblings continued their wartime surrogate parent roles with their younger siblings.

JUDGMENTS AND MEANINGS. Neither child survivors nor their parents wanted to expose to each other the frozen judgments and meanings of their traumas. From the child survivors' points of view they included questions such as why they were abandoned, as they saw it. From parents' points of view suppressed pains included being helpless to stay with and protect their children. The silence between the generations has been called the "conspiracy of silence" (Danieli, 1985).

CREATIVITY AND INVENTIVENESS. The most potent creative force in child survivors was creating life. Children overcame genocide, they were a triumph over Hitler. They were an unsullied, innocent future which blossomed out of the painful past.

As well, many child survivors used their Holocaust derived resourcefulness and survival against odds to achieve, and help others. For instance one survivor who while hiding in a dark cupboard for thirteen months learned to use his imagination and memory to a high degree, became a chess and bridge champion (Valent, 1994). Another became involved in child cancer treatment at a time when victims had small chance of recovery.

Assessment

Early competence being a resilience factor for later achievement seems to be confirmed in Holocaust literature. However, once again psychological competence in negotiating the needs of self, parents, and society with respect to one's pain must be added.

It is too easy to take one or other position about the ability of child survivors to build normal lives. In fact, there seems to be a mixture of both the spirit of survival which carried the children into a stream of living beyond their earlier sufferings, and below that the Holocaust having had a continuous pervasive influence over their lives. At times the deep inner pain could crystallize into symptoms or despair.

And yet it is awesome that, considering what these evolving adults had carried inside them, they could struggle with their inner demons even to achieve a semblance of adult normality. It is even more surprising that many could achieve success in work and marriage often beyond the average. Even more surprising was their passion for bringing up children in normal and loving circumstances, and their compassionate community awareness.

Child Survivors Now

Most child survivors have achieved major life goals of successful work careers, having children and now grandchildren. They

can look back on their lives with some satisfaction. Yet child survivors are now in their fifties and sixties, the integrative parts of their lives (Mazor et al, 1990). Past means of coping such as looking to the future and cutting off feelings and memories no longer have survival value, and negate developmental drives to make sense and generate wisdom. Paradoxically and often surprisingly to survivors, memories that return into awareness for processing bring the past closer than it had been for many years.

Vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities of middle and old age have re-kindled the vulnerabilities of childhood, as once again child survivors are confronted by superior forces claiming their lives. Some have lost family members again. Retirement took away a means of survival and defense against remembering. A sizable proportion of child survivors had suffered a variety of illnesses and bad luck, though some illnesses and relationship problems may have been continuations of chains of events from the past. As with the body, long phases of resistance can lead to exhaustion, and child survivors had higher rates of mortality and all kinds of morbidity than the rest of the population.

But most survivors were now ready to face their past vulnerabilities in the service of consolidating the meanings of their lives. The process itself carried risks, and many traveled the process only partially.

Resilience Factors.

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES. Child survivors continued to have the inner surge to survive. By now their skills had served them well, and most had that margin to spare for their old age.

However, psychological competence now called for different skills. It required loosening of lifelong defenses, retrieval of memories, and thawing of frozen emotions and meanings.

Retrieval of memories meant reversal of arranging one's psyche as required, and negating past messages that child survivors could not remember, should not remember, and what they remembered was invalid. "Since you were only a child and can't remember, it didn't mean anything" (Moskovitz, 1985, p. 402). Because memories may not come to consciousness if parents or superego oppose their emergence (Kestenberg, 1987), claiming one's memories required assertiveness over such admonitions.

A dialectic emerged where on the one hand there was a hunger for memories, as if life depended on it (Kestenberg, 1988), while on the other hand, memories were feared, for they "might unleash the demons of remembrance to haunt the already haunted" (Krell, 1985, p. 400). Many fleshed out their memories by reading, talking to others, and going back to the places of their persecution.

SOCIAL ATTRIBUTES—PARENTS, OTHER ADULTS. Parental relationships often stayed unchanged. But in the last decade many child survivors refashioned their relationships with their parents by breaking the conspiracy of silence and asking questions. Often parents were initially defensive, but when they saw that openness could help their children, they themselves reopened old wounds, and the generations were able to reconcile and develop deeper relationships. Sometimes parents opened their hearts as their deaths were approaching. Sometimes the children returned with their parents to the sites of their mutual traumas. Having understood their Holocaust experiences, the survivors could reconnect to their parents as ordinary and loving human beings, also innocent victims. And child survivors started to tell their own children of their experiences, with similar beneficial results.

Survivors had either kept up contact or at times reestablished contact with their prior rescuers or their families. Some showed their gratitude by having their rescuers recognized as righteous gentiles. Others realized how much they had suffered with their substitute caretakers.

Coming out of hiding in the wider community was the social equivalent of retrieving memories and parental relationships. Even the first step of self-recognition as a child survivor of the Holocaust was difficult. To acknowledge publicly one's Jewishness was even more counterintuitive to previous lessons of survival.

Yet recognition was a great healing step. First it came from outside by pioneers such as Kestenberg and Moskowitz. Child survivors now had a name, an identity. They formed groups in many countries. A culminating point was the first international conference in New York in 1991. Child survivors came out of hiding, literally, symbolically, and internally. They were no longer isolated, secret abnormal people. They developed pride in their survivorship. And the world was moved by their achievements.

RECONCILIATION OF JUDGMENTS AND MEANINGS. Through retrieval of memories and breaking the conspiracy of silence, emotions of anguish, guilt, anger and blame, childhood perceptions, judgments, and meanings reigning at the time (Mazor et al, 1990), could be reappraised and reconciled. For instance, that in fact one was not rejected and abandoned as one had thought, but was precious and lovable.

Existential meanings and purpose were difficult to extract from the Holocaust. Values, justice, trust in fellow humans and a moral Jewish God were all shaken. Yet other views could now emerge. Child survivors could take special pride in their survivorship, their own brand of courage and heroism. The little humiliated children came to defeat Hitler and the Nazi war machine. Their own and their children's innocence meant the triumph of goodness over evil. Their own work often used their empathy and compassion for the benefit of the deprived (Moskovitz, 1983), for the unjustly treated and especially the weak (M. Kestenberg, 1985; Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988).

For some the miracle of their survival allowed a personal connection to religion through the assumption that it was God's purpose that they survived (Fogelman, 1988). More frequently there was hope that as the last and most affected witnesses to ultimate evil, bearing witness and testimony could avert similar events in the future (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). The survivors could thus be a sacred bridge between the dead and the world.

CREATIVITY AND INVENTIVENESS. While during the war, children told their stories and hopes in drawings and games, the adults told their stories through testimonies, Holocaust museums, and writings. Politically they supported Israel (the place which guaranteed that the Holocaust would never occur again). At home they often rebuilt Jewish traditions. But perhaps most satisfaction was derived from seeing the growth of children and grandchildren.

Assessment

Having survived the Holocaust and the attrition of time, new challenges of integration arose in the face of increasing vulnerability of old age. New resilience factors were necessary, and included

retrieving memories, readjusting judgments and meanings vis-à-vis parents, asserting one's identity with pride, and making deeper existential meanings out of one's fate.

That these challenges could be met sometimes after 40 or 50 years is a mark of the need for and tenacity of humans to achieve, meaning in the face of timeless traumatic memories—which were difficult to address even after so many years.

The awe which this phase evokes involves the tenacity and courage to face once again one's life's struggles, the capacity to complete such struggles with meaning and purpose, and to ultimately win against greatest evil with the innocence of childhood.

DISCUSSION

Early notions that to have survived the Holocaust showed tremendous resilience, and to have done well showed that at least some humans could take anything, were parallel to early notions of invulnerability (Anthony, 1974). To some extent, as Wolff (1995) suggested, this was wishful thinking. On the whole, bad things produce bad effects, and child survivors of the Holocaust on the whole did worse than the general population. Similarly, as Luther & Zigler (1991) noted for other children, outward appearance may well conceal inner unhappiness and vulnerabilities which may come of age even after many decades.

As with other children (Rutter, 1985), child survivors of the Holocaust also demonstrated the complex interactive nature of stressors, vulnerabilities, and resilience factors, and their relativity according to circumstances and time. For instance, at one time shrewd pushiness was adaptive, at other times it was passivity and obedience. And while cutting off emotions and memories was adaptive for long times, later it was their processing which was adaptive.

That child survivors of the Holocaust reflected findings on other traumatized child groups may indicate universal trends in childhood resilience over many situations, or that many children in what may be thought to be 'ordinary' stressful situations

nevertheless undergo personal 'holocausts'. The latter possibility was suggested by Valent (1995) who found many parallels between child survivors of the Holocaust and sexually abused children.

Findings in all groups indicated that resilience was not a simple concept like a tennis ball springing back, but like vulnerability it was part of a complex system. Though still a simplified image, perhaps humans may be more realistically pictured as complex balloons with biological, psychological, and social features which can be impacted by life's stresses. When the stresses are over, the balloon may spring back to its previous shape, and may even be "steered" or be more springy next time. On the other hand, it may be worn thin and more vulnerable or "sensitized" by the experience. Traumas puncture the balloon. The leak may be dealt with by patching the leaks, creating knots in the balloon, or standing on the puncture. Multiple distensions, compressions, knots, and patches are the result of complex traumas.

Vulnerabilities include the worn parts, and areas around tears, and patches. Resilience is the capacity to spring back, form knots, be patched, and if necessary be encased in a cute package or be otherwise molded by the environment. Resilience also involves eventual exposure and recognition of what is inside, and untangling of knots and distortions.

Recognition of resilience factors may be helpful like recognition of vulnerability ones. Positive attachment figures, accessing supportive networks, competence and positive self-esteem have been found to be ubiquitous resilience factors. Child survivors of the Holocaust indicated as well that an innate desire to live and survive was important. They also indicated that psychological adjustments were important. The latter included mental attachment to good objects and hopes of retrieving them, and cutting out cognitions, emotions, and meanings inconsistent with survival and hopeful attachment figures. However, for later integrity these mental processes had to be revisited and assimilated through understanding and reconciling past and current responses of self and others in their appropriate contexts.

Child survivors also highlighted the importance of higher mental and spiritual levels of resilience such as identity, existential

meanings, and purpose. They indicated how creativity can emerge from resourcefulness developed in traumatic situations and how the life surge can be transferred to the next generation. Also, that meaning can be made even of the biggest traumas if they can help their prevention in others.

Like soldier and rescuer heroes, child survivors of the Holocaust have not seen themselves as courageous or special. Yet they contribute to understanding what evokes awe in survival against odds and making something worthwhile of life in spite of its ravages. This includes love of life itself, the spirit of survival, stamina, courage against fear, the sustaining quality and power of love. They evoke awe for the capacities of the human mind even among those so young, and later capacities of repair and integration. One needs to admire the struggle to maintain what is essentially human, and the struggle to propagate this to others. Finally one cannot help but admire the life force, innocence, and love of children which could surmount the power, perversion, and evil of the worst persecution. That many fell by the way is also the nature of the vulnerability of the human condition in the face of trauma. But that it could be done at all, and that the majority struggled toward it, is a reflection of human resilience.

Many conundrums remain. For instance, what are the outcome measures of resilience—survival, work history, physical health, or happiness, and moral, spiritual, and existential fulfillments? And is there some innate double edge to resilience, akin to defenses, such as short-term survival but long-term unhappiness if the tension implied in resilience is not resolved?

Facilitating resilience may be as complex a problem as obviating vulnerabilities. Both require much knowledge of particular circumstances, and effects of intervention. However, at the least one can recognize that the most traumatized children still have an inner desire to live and to have meaning and purpose to their lives, and that they are willing to undergo extreme hardship for that promise. One should not be deceived by a normal appearance in children, but seek out their inner states. They benefit from being recognized, bearing witness, and providing testimony to their suffering. They benefit from sharing experiences with peers,

and not feeling “weird” and isolated. One may enhance the availability of a constant understanding attachment figure. Connections with parents may be facilitated, traumas reworked with them. One can enhance the thawing and retrieval of memories, reframing meanings and self-esteem. Children’s particular competencies, creativities, and potential, can be enhanced. Existential issues can be addressed such as how the child’s experience and developed resourcefulness can be helpful in the world.

In other words, one can partake as an ally in the person’s struggle for self and existential meaning and perhaps shorten or even prevent decades of unhappiness. On a wider scale, the awe and compassion which children’s resilience evokes may stimulate a desire to protect them from circumstances where they have to be so resilient.

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