

Chapter 7

A Child Is Something Else Again

A child is something else again: on a rainy spring day
Glimpsing the Garden of Eden through the fence,
Kissing him in his sleep,
Hearing footsteps in the wet pine needles.
A child delivers you from death.
Child, Garden, Rain, Fate.

Yehuda Amichai, 1980

Some of the psychoanalysts featured in this final chapter were children during the Third Reich, while others were born afterward to parents who had suffered under the Nazis. If some of their analytic foremothers and fathers downplayed the impact of personal catastrophe on professional life, this group seems to honor the place of traumatic history in their work. Why would this be so?

For some, one suspects that their age at the time of the Shoah has something to do with it. The analysts Henri Parens and Henry Krystal, who have spoken openly about their experiences, were children or adolescents during World War II. Their ordeals date to a period long before they had established identities as members of the profession. They were not bound to any communal expectation or conventions regarding their response to trauma, since at the time they were merely youngsters, not analysts. But a changed professional context may also be a factor. Their personal testimonies are given towards the latter part of their careers, received amid today's appreciation for contextual rather than absolute psychoanalytic truth. Such is also the case for the narratives of analysts who were born after the Shoah. For this latter group—herein represented by Jack Drescher, Robert Prince, and Evelyn Hartman—a generational distance seems to have permitted a different kind of dialogue, one in which the examination of tradition and the development of personal beliefs and responses are not viewed as a thing apart from professional development. In addition, as we shall also see, an important role seems to have been played in their lives by colleagues, mentors, and family members who were themselves survivors, and whose

responses served as examples. It was, after all, not only trauma that was transmitted from one generation to the next.

Sickness, Insanity, and Death

If the subject of trauma was largely neglected in psychoanalysis for most of the twentieth century, Dr. Henry Krystal almost single-handedly countered this trend. Long before the term dissociation was common in the field, his innovative work mapped reactions to catastrophe as a progression from excitability to emotional and even physical rigidity and deadness (Krystal, 1966; 1975). While his cohorts were still struggling to make interpretations to their patients in the pursuit of insight, Krystal resolutely focused on the affective interaction in the therapeutic dyad, helping sufferers to bear and to mentalize the intolerable. Indeed, his clinical vignettes of more than 40 years ago seem more suited to twenty-first century analytic rules of engagement than to the philosophies of analytic process that then prevailed. What accounts for his prescience?

Invited to contribute to an anthology (Krystal, 2006) about the lives of the pioneers in trauma studies, Krystal begins his essay with a quote from Edward Munch that speaks volumes about himself: “Sickness, insanity and death were the dark angels standing guard at my cradle and they have followed me throughout my life” (p. 111). Krystal explicitly describes the personal antecedents to his interest in trauma—a life-threatening illness in early childhood and then the ordeals he endured in Nazi Europe as an adolescent—and one hears echoes of Anna Ornstein, whom we met in Chapter 1. Like her, he credits the love of his mother as a crucial factor in his survival. More generally, he credits “secure attachment” as the “single most important asset in promoting survival in Holocaust victims” (Krystal, 2006, p. 112.) He recalls the mother of his childhood as the non-anxious, constant sentry by his sickbed, even as he suffered unremitting pain and an uncertain prognosis. Krystal’s psychoanalytic theory of the development of affect tolerance (1975) clearly culls from such moments:

One key operation, which is reserved primarily for the mother, is begun in infancy: her role as an “auxiliary stimulus barrier.” Her very presence and response is already reassuring to the anxious child. She may be able to offer herself (her ego) as an auxiliary organ for the child in that she is not herself perceptibly anxious. In the child’s necessity to accept her evaluation of the world lies the foundation of his suggestibility. The young have no choice but to accept the mother as omnipotent. They will therefore exercise their imagination to support this belief, even when the mother cannot relieve their distress. And so, in areas of pain, or painful affect, the child is inclined to allow the mother to distract him, or to *compensate* him for the discomfort.

(p. 193)

Indeed, Krystal says he survived slave labor and Auschwitz because of the quality of his maternal attachment. “Invoking my mother’s image,” he states, “I preserved my capacity to fight for my survival for some time” (2006, p. 113).

Trauma and Violence in the Lives of Children

To child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Henri Parens, maternal love is also a key factor in survival. His mother managed to rescue herself and 11-year-old Henri from the Nazi invasion of Belgium, despite little outside support or resources. They fled to France, where they found temporary haven, until the Vichy government interned them and other foreign-born Jews in what Parens recalls as a filthy French concentration camp where they languished in a state of near-starvation. Parens’ mother sensed the darkness to come and insisted her son escape, lest he suffer what indeed became her fate: deportation, and death in Auschwitz. Her selfless love, according to Parens, and the many memories of her soothing presence during his childhood sustained him as he ran for his life, found temporary refuge in the midst of terror, and was eventually taken in by a family in America.

In his 2004 autobiography *Renewal of Life*, Parens writes that this early attachment alerted him to the importance of family relationships in child development, accounting in part for his choice to become a child psychiatrist. The suffering he endured at the hands of the Nazis, he adds, “opened my eyes to the suffering of children all around us. I cannot look at myself without seeing and holding in mind the burden of suffering that afflicts so many around us, so many children” (p. 108). Later, he continues developing the theme in terms of his professional life: “I have assumed that the path from experiencing excessive psychic pain to healing children’s wounded psychic being was laid down somewhere in my brain in the course of what happened to me” (p. 110).

Parens has spent much of that professional life studying the parent–child dyad. He reflects in his memoir that in addition to youngsters, he “wanted to help mothers” (p. 206), not only to insure the psychic health of the child, but also because he wanted to help *his* mother. He thought of her long hours as a seamstress for scant pay, of her rich relatives who would not support her escape from the Germans, of her death in Auschwitz when he, her loving son, was already safely ensconced with a family in America. He wanted to save his mother, and to atone for not saving her.

Aggression in Children, Destruction of the World

Moreover, Parens’ close observation of parent–child dyads in educational group settings challenged his received psychoanalytic understanding. The assumption of an innate human aggression that becomes neutralized with

maturation fell away, as he tells it, while he watched children with their caregivers. Instead, Parens perceived different types of aggression that are mediated by the environment. One sort is connected to children's psychic pain, or "excessive unpleasure," prompting what he refers to as "hostile destructiveness" (1991, p. 78). This pain-induced destructiveness is not the same, according to Parens, as aggression that is adaptive, even creative. Devouring a delicious piece of meat to nourish oneself, for instance, or taking apart toys with great intensity to learn about the world and how it works also engage aggression, but not in service of ruination. Parens' *in vivo* observations suggest that if the pains of childhood are met with parental soothing and containment, rather than rigidity, punishment, or neglect, the likelihood that aggression devolves into hostile destructiveness is significantly decreased (p. 82).

Finally, Parens asserts that one is less likely to respond destructively to the slings and arrows, or even the traumas, of living in the world if early family ties are on the whole secure. If his own productive life, despite the trauma of the Shoah, is attributed to just such attachment, the opposite outcome can be expected without such loving connection, for as Parens explains:

To be intentionally hurt badly by your own mother or father carries with it the experience of being hurt by those who are supposed to love you, care for you, protect you against harm, and more. That they do you harm is experienced as a profound betrayal of trust, as a betrayal of familial love. I am not the only Holocaust survivor in our field who holds this view. A friend, Anna Ornstein, also a child psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and Auschwitz survivor, holds the same view. She puts it well, "Hitler never promised the Jews of Europe anything but death"... But when it's your own mother! Your own father!

(2004, p. 109)

Still, Parens reports (personal interview, 2012) that it was only considerably later in his life that he linked his interest in aggression to his own persecution, and to the Nazi murder of his mother. When I suggested that his initial disconnection between his past and present might be an example of "adaptive dissociation," he disagreed. He defines dissociation in terms of a "splitting of the ego," and this description does not jibe with how he considers that he dealt with his past—that is, with "suppression, some repression, and avoidance." We went on to discuss the ways the very term "dissociation" is understood differently in different analytic traditions. Most particularly, I noted that poorly or partially mentalized experience, according to the interpersonal view, is made meaningful *for the first time, in dialogue with an other*, contrasting sharply with the classical assumption of an *a priori* psychic reality that presupposes formulated memories that are split off and/or kept out of awareness. Quite apart from such theoretical

and semantic distinctions, we also agreed that each survivor's experience is unique to them, their sensibility, their history.

Over time, as Parens felt able to realize the connection between his interest in aggression and his life history, he began to link his clinical studies to more overarching efforts to ameliorate hate and destruction in society. Indeed, in our personal discussions he stressed the importance of the research being conducted by UNICEF and other organizations that report on the vast numbers of young children who are traumatized throughout the world. As he sees it, these studies confirm his observations that parental methods prompting the child's excessive displeasure reap destructiveness in the child, who grows into a destructive adult. Since groups, even nations, he reckons, are made of individuals who were once children with caregivers, large-scale parenting educational programs are required in order to reverse such patterns.¹ Reading of his initiatives, I commented to him that such proactive, essentially hopeful effort seemed remarkable, particularly from a man who had endured horrific persecution and loss at a tender age. "Well," he replied, "my mother loved me."

Rejecting the Mindset of Slave

The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jack Drescher (personal interview, 2010) similarly refuses to allow his past, and his parents' past, to stop him from moving forward. Raised in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, Drescher remembers being "seven or eight years old" when his parents, who had escaped the Nazi massacres in their decimated hometowns, said, "'Sit, watch and learn,' or something like that." He and his two brothers were told to view a public television documentary about the Holocaust. Drescher recalled, "In my mind's eye, I can still see an image of splayed naked, dead bodies piled up outside a gas chamber." Exposure to this lurid material, he now knows, was inappropriate at such a young age, and perhaps explains why the pictures remain so stark and vivid in his imagination.

Yet experiences like these have not encumbered Dr. Drescher as much as they have emboldened him. Since his graduation from the William Alanson White Institute in 1992, he has emerged as a powerful voice. Stephen Mitchell commented on Drescher's first 1998 book:

Psychoanalysis is in the process of emerging from a dark age in which understandings and clinical approaches to homosexuality were driven by deep fears and pervaded by utter nonsense. Jack Drescher's *Psychoanalytic Therapy and the Gay Man* is an important contribution to that emergence. He explores key dimensions of the experiences and struggles of gay men, in terms of both what is known and also what is not known, in a frank and lucid manner.

(1998, dust jacket)

Since then, Drescher has written extensively on conceptions of gender and sexuality and how they intertwine with clinical issues, analytic theory, public policy, and what he aptly calls “the culture wars.” He holds leadership positions in many organizations, including the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, and has functioned as an editor in a number of contexts. Not unlike Parens, Drescher cites his mother as influential in his success and activism. She is 87 and lives in Florida. Hers is the almost miraculous story of how an adolescent girl was instrumental in saving an entire extended family. In 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland, including the village of Tischevitz, where her parents and grandparents lived (Drescher, personal interview, 2010).

My mother was only fourteen, but treated as a mature adolescent whom adults took seriously. She told the family that they had to leave; she didn’t like these Germans. Consequently, her paternal grandparents, two uncles and their families, a young aunt, her own parents and her own two siblings fled for the Soviet-occupied part of Poland. The Nazis killed everyone who stayed behind. Today my mother is the undisputed matriarch of an extended family whose members live on three continents.

Drescher goes on to say that personally he never wished to identify with children of survivors as a group:

While I understood and respected other people’s motives for doing so, to me it felt too much like embracing a victim’s identity. What I had always liked about Passover, besides my mother’s gefilte fish, macaroons, and chocolate-covered matzo, was the lessons that it taught me: the Israelites transcended victim status. “Let my people go.” They demanded freedom from slavery. Then, after a moment of recidivism, creating and worshipping a golden calf, they were forced to wander in the desert for forty years. Another lesson I learned from those events: God said no one who had grown up with the mindset of a slave would live to enter the Promised Land.

Nevertheless, he concedes that the specter of the Shoah was ever-present growing up:

Undoubtedly, family dynamics shaped some of my present attitudes about taking on a victim role. I have a private term (private in the sense that I’ve never written about it) called *the hierarchy of suffering*. In our family the hierarchy of suffering went something like this: Given what my parents had endured, how could any problem we children had compare with that? They found it difficult to treat mundane childhood problems with proportional responses. A hierarchy of suffering did not

just organize parent–child relationships in our family. There were other permutations. When I was an adolescent, my mother told me, in what I today remember as an embarrassed whisper, that she and my father were “not really survivors.” They were “escapees,” who fled German-occupied Poland in 1939 to the presumably safer Soviet-occupied side. “Real survivors” was a term intended for those who had been in concentration camps. Internment in Siberian forced labor camps (which both of them endured), relocation to Bukhara, Uzbekistan in Soviet Central Asia (where they met and later married), the loss of extended family and homeland—none of those entailed as much suffering as imprisonment in a concentration camp.

I’ve found the hierarchy of suffering concept useful in my clinical work, both in treating couples and individuals struggling with interpersonal relationships. Each member of the couple usually enters treatment with a litany of complaints. Each seeks to occupy a moral high ground that equates and elevates one’s own injuries at the hands of a spouse or partner to a higher plane of suffering.

Finally, Drescher stresses learning to distinguish problems in living from genocide. In his fight for gay rights, for example, he chafes when others refer to his opponents as Nazis; he insists that the metaphor of the Holocaust can also be “a form of catastrophizing,” and must be used sparingly. “I am grateful to see the difference,” says Drescher, who has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to reach out to disparate, even mutually hostile groups not only on national issues, but within psychoanalysis, a profession long burdened by its insularity and divisiveness.

Perhaps Drescher’s more measured response to the Holocaust is a corrective to his otherwise courageous family’s vulnerability to terror and sadness. He learned early in life that it was

Better to work any problem out yourself than bring it to the parents. Otherwise, small problems could be infused with levels of anxiety of catastrophic proportions. To keep parental anxieties down, the expectations were that we make no waves, go to school, get good grades, do as we were told, become good Jews, grow up to be successful professionals, marry Jewish girls (ideally girls with Polish parents as well), be fruitful and multiply to replenish the world with Jews to replace those who had been lost in the Holocaust and for whom we children were all named. Keeping parental distress to a minimum was not always easy, for it always lurked in the wings and was readily evoked. For my father, joyful events were tinged with sadness. I vividly recall on High Holy Days the four *yahrzeit* candles, symbols of my father’s lost family (we mourned his parents and two younger sisters as well, although none of us including my mother had even met them).

I asked Drescher, who fed me chicken soup on a cold winter's day in New York City, whether he thought the field of psychoanalysis had been influenced by the Shoah. Eventually, he kindly sent me a scholarly reply that began with the quintessentially Jewish tendency to answer a question with a question. He wrote: "How could psychoanalysis *not* have been influenced by its own history? The influx of European analysts before and after the war certainly changed the nature of analytic discourse in the States." He then went on to cite the work of historian Kenneth Lewes (1988), which in Drescher's words "documents a post-war period when émigré Jewish analysts spoke and wrote disparagingly of 'homosexuals' in language that faintly echoed the moralizing, anti-Semitic diatribes of the Nazis." Lewes writes:

It is a striking fact of our history that both the conviction that homosexual object choice was necessarily psychopathological and the extremity of negative characterizations of homosexual general functioning became prominent in the years following World War II. At the risk of committing a *post hoc propter hoc* error, I suggest that the historical trauma of the war was one cause of this shift in opinion. Along with the geographical move of psychoanalysis from Berlin and Vienna first to London and then to New York City, the attack on liberal institutions by Fascism resulted in a reaffirmation of bourgeois values, especially those of an American variety ... It is as if psychoanalysis, having found refuge in a new homeland, sought to demonstrate its relief, gratitude, and worthiness by subscribing to and by lending its weight to the consolidation of American values and institutions. This led to a narrowing of the more nearly cosmopolitan European stance of the early Freudians.

(Lewes, 1988, p. 232, cited by Drescher, personal interview, 2010)

Yet Drescher is careful not to attribute all of homophobia in psychoanalysis to a single factor:

I would hesitate to attribute all of these analytic stances to a post-Holocaust sensibility. Lewes attributes some of these attitudes to a "gynephobic" stance, and Ronnie Lesser (1999) takes up this point as it applies to an earlier period in psychoanalytic history, locating the seeds of analytic attitudes toward homosexuality in the misogyny and anti-Semitism of nineteenth-century Vienna.

(personal interview, 2010)

Nothing Is Off Limits

I first met Robert M. Prince after reading his book (1985, 1999 second edition) *The Legacy of the Holocaust: Psychobistorical Themes in the Second*

Generation, which was written in advance of today's plethora of interest in this population. I invited him to participate in a 2008 panel discussion of the Shoah in psychoanalysis held at the William Alanson White Institute. Using original sources—letters, minutes from meetings, and other biographical data—he compared the responses of the psychoanalytic community in the second half of the twentieth century to those of a Holocaust “survivor family.” In both groups, Prince noted, trauma became over- or under-emphasized at the expense of a fuller and more varied awareness (Prince, 2009; see also Bergmann & Jucovy, 1982). The presentation became the basis of Prince's (2009) paper, “Psychoanalysis Traumatized; The Legacy of the Holocaust.”

At the start of our interview (2011), I asked Prince the same question that I had posed to Drescher: “When did you first find out about your parent's Holocaust history?” I received a very similar reply:

Part of me feels that I always knew. I guess I discovered the detailed horrors of the Holocaust at age four or five, very young ... I looked in my parent's night table and found photos of my lost family in Hungary, mixed in with photos from my great uncle's press agency, naked victims of the camps interspersed with touristy glossies of monuments and animals from the great zoos of Budapest and Germany ...

While Prince's mother escaped encroaching persecution by fleeing to the US, his father was

conscripted to Jewish slave labor in the late 1930s. That was tough enough, but he only felt the full force of the Shoah later, when in 1941 he was marched into Russia as a human mine sweeper ... Conditions became totally inhuman by 1944, and he only survived because one of his guards had worked for him in their home town. His wife was able to pay the guard's wife for some extra food. He never saw his only child, who was born after he was conscripted. Her name was Julika, and she was murdered with her mother in Auschwitz.

Asked how he managed this knowledge, Prince said:

There were those shocking discoveries, but it was really a slow accumulation of awareness. I lived with it, an implicit process that became part of me. There were accidental discoveries, like that he had been married before. I tried to talk to my father but he didn't tell me much. And that was as much an issue of my not wanting to know. Also, there was an implicit message from my mother to be considerate of my father because he went through a lot. She was able to come to the United States before the war, but was traumatized in her own right ...

An only child, Prince felt he had to grow up in America more or less by himself, because his immigrant parents were themselves confused by an alien culture. Indeed, he translated the world to them. His defenses, he said, were very intellectual—"I tried to feel safe by thinking, by making sense of the enormity of things." He is certain this is part of what motivated him to become a psychoanalyst, an aspiration he developed in early adolescence. He read *Civilization and its Discontents* at age 16:

I misunderstood Freud, of course, and put him more in the context of the burgeoning youth movement of my time—the emphasis on society's role in repression, in subjugating oneself, that personality was shaped by the constraints of civilization. This all spoke to me. I actually wrote to Columbia Psychoanalytic to ask about the process of becoming an analyst, and they sent me a nice reply.

Today, better able to formulate what he had been doing, Prince looks back at himself and sees a young person split between idealism and a prematurely dark and cynical perspective. Psychoanalysis—Freud, especially—was sufficiently complex to provide a map:

This was the beginning of the core of my work, an intersection or confluence of historical and personal dynamics. Obviously my own aggression fueled part of it, and projection, it's all so intertwined and inseparable, all of it determining, organizing my conscious and unconscious life ...

If refusing to be a victim is part of Drescher's success as a psychoanalytic innovator, Prince explains that "becoming an analyst and understanding especially the dark side of civilization, of people, I somehow felt conferred protection and power on me." Like Parens, who wished to help his mother and then all mothers, Prince also volunteers that he had "rescue fantasies" toward his parents:

a need to heal them sublimated into a healing profession. I had a searing awareness of the abandonment of the Jews, and the image of the bystander was intolerable to me. I had a particular interest in the severely mentally ill, treating people who no one understood or cared about. Becoming an analyst meant counteracting the image of the bystander, turning from passive to active.

He wanted to restore some order, some hope:

When I was young I thought, "If I were a German I would have helped the Jews." I still have unconscious idealism, I'm sure, but now it's consciously tempered by experience. I cringe at "do-gooders."

I know it's often defensive, refusing to acknowledge the narcissism and aggression in it. But being more anchored in life, I understand the risks and have become more tolerant.

When I asked Prince how his family experience affects his behavior as an analyst, he replied:

I think I can listen to anything. I know anything can happen. Nothing is off limits. Nothing is impossible, or rather the range of possibilities is so great. I found myself able to work with schizophrenics when others wouldn't, or couldn't, for instance. I wanted to make sense of communication that might otherwise feel too crazy or disorganizing. I never viewed the interactions as outrageous. I found this same tendency in my research, when I discovered the large number of children of survivors drawn to psychoanalysis and medicine. No suffering was off limits for them, either; there was such a need to repair, but also to understand what seems unbearable ... beyond understanding.

Prince continued:

And, I guess the Holocaust also drew me to interpersonal psychoanalysis. Because, as the famous saying goes, "What really happens really matters." Even if it's a mix of fantasy and reality. As much as I love reading Freud, it struck me how little he spoke in his theory about the real suffering of life, suffering he had endured, beginning in WWI. In his letters to Binswanger he captures those lean times—at one point he says he is grateful, for instance, to admirers who could send him a cigar. He lost his daughter, Sophie, and his grandson to sickness. Maybe he thought it was heroic to turn to science, to turn to intellectual pursuit and to become interior. But it does seem defensive, too, especially since in the Post WWII era, émigré analysts took the avoidance of reality to the hilt.

As he has matured as an analyst, Prince feels consideration of the person's real life circumstances has become more and more important as a background for his understanding of their psychological reality. He reminded me of Parens, who likewise makes the point that he assumes that every patient's personal history contributes uniquely to the patient's psychic life. Parens, too, told me that this principle guides how he conducts analysis with each individual.

The Canonical Centrality of the Psychosexual Unconscious

In 1972, Prince received a less than enthusiastic response to his doctoral research proposal to interview children of survivors. He was told that the

odds of producing an acceptable dissertation from this material were long, and that the scarce psychological literature that existed indicated no significant differences between survivors and control groups. He was warned, moreover, that psychoanalysts were not supportive of his interest in exploring the impact of history on the individual—what Prince at the time termed “Historical Trauma”—because, as he put it,

It entailed shifting focus from the canonical centrality of the psychosexual unconscious . . . It also brought up the whole issue of adult onset trauma, rather than infantile trauma, which was the official developmental line—we were really off the beaten path, not to mention stirring things up among the many émigré analysts.

Proceeding forward anyway, Prince came to feel very alone amid an unbending faculty, which offered little input and scant literature upon which he might build. At times Prince was surprised, and confused, by an occasional positive response from faculty that would be at odds with their more public negative reactions to his work. Just before his oral defense, for example, one doctoral committee member privately described his dissertation as “the most beautiful thing I ever read.” But only an hour later during the defense, the same faculty member joined the chorus of suspicion regarding Prince’s interview data, and concurred that the intergenerational transmission of trauma was not possible. “It was actually the ‘outside’ reader, DeWitt Crandell,” Prince explained, “a patrician Southerner and Chair of Psychiatric Epidemiology at Columbia, who threw his status behind my work.”

He was also deeply touched by the generosity of Columbia psychiatrist Robert Liebert, who volunteered a half a dozen hours to discuss interview material. Liebert shared an office with another psychoanalyst, Robert Jay Lifton, author of *The Nazi Doctors* (1986), an extensive exploration of the medicalization of genocide during the Third Reich. Indeed, Lifton’s “psychohistorical interview” formed the basis of Prince’s methodology. Yet Lifton, like others in the field, seemed uninterested in Prince’s notion of generational transmission of Holocaust trauma. Liebert also facilitated a contact with Erik Erikson, but this proved similarly disappointing. Erikson declined a meeting with a note saying that his schedule did not permit it, though he also implied that the topic might prove too painful for him. Indeed, the field was simply not ready for Prince’s message and he encountered multiple refusals to even consider his work for publication. It took ten years before Peter Nathan, editor of the *Research in Clinic Psychology Series*, agreed to finally publish the study as a book.

A Powerhouse of a Woman

Around the time that the first edition of his book was published, Prince met the psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg. This occurred when he brought

his infant son to her “well baby nursery and study center,” a facility that also served as a place for research on child survivors of the Shoah. Kestenberg had come from Poland in 1937 to study with Paul Schindler at Bellevue. When the Nazis invaded her homeland in September 1939, she tried but could not get back there. Thus she was saved, while her family was murdered in Europe. Prince describes Kestenberg as “a powerhouse of a woman ... as generous as she was tough, providing me with a model of a psychoanalyst who had the courage to see through the blinders imposed by tradition and convention.” Most especially this included the kind of courage that allowed her to penetrate the tendency to avoid, repress, or at various levels to dissociate from Holocaust material. Prince feels Kestenberg’s courage and self-possession sustained his ability to hold on to his own convictions, and to further develop his findings.

Prince also admired Kestenberg’s husband, Milton, a real estate lawyer who became instrumental in acquiring German restitution for victims. Milton represented a trace of a lost past: “He was a European gentleman, completely oblivious to the devalued representations of fragile survivors. He was the opposite, educated, self-possessed, genteel ... the personification of a type that I reconstructed from novels and these wonderful photographs of my father’s family.”

Nourished by these and other role models, Prince went on to challenge clichés about children of survivors, finding the group to be more heterogeneous, capable of meeting the task of adaptation in many ways. The then popular idea of “survivor guilt”—in both generations—turned out to be less pervasive according to his research than was generally thought, and far more nuanced emotionally than the term implies. In fact, Prince claims that “rather than a conventional form of guilt, it seemed to reflect a form of attachment.”

Prince’s unique method of analyzing his data allowed him to detect what he refers to as “shared themes” that become typical modalities of transmission of Holocaust “knowledge” across generations. His most important discovery had to do specifically with “the traumatic image, absorbed unconsciously, and based on parents’ actual experience mediated by personal and family dynamics. This image becomes an organizing narrative for familial and individual identity.” Here I am reminded of the image of naked bodies that Jack Drescher reports still seeing before his mind’s eye.

Prince’s academic and personal connections have helped him to manage the pain of his family history, as has his work with patients:

People untouched by the Holocaust, who have a choice, prefer to look the other way. But having this family background involves an incredible loneliness and isolation. When you are relatively young, the knowledge can make you lose belief in the world, in civilization.

And very few people want to know, or want to hear about this experience. As for me, I have found the intimacy in doing psychoanalytic work an antidote to this aloneness, being with people who are struggling, deeply. It's a way of staying hopeful, connected ...

Prince added that survivors often felt "like outsiders wherever they went." In addition to unspeakable trauma, these survivors had lost their homelands forever. Prince recalls an inadvertently painful moment when traveling as an adult on holiday. He had engaged a tour guide in Sicily who expressed pride for his nation, remarking to Prince, his seemingly ordinary American client, "I feel bad for those without a country." As I listened to Prince's story, I recalled another moment from a conversation I had with Dori Laub (2010), the psychoanalyst and survivor who has written extensively on the Shoah, and who began the Fortunoff archives of Holocaust Testimony at Yale University. Laub and I talked about his childhood in Romania amid the Nazis, the death of his father, his time in Israel and in America. I shared my family's struggle in Poland, France, and the US. When I thanked Laub for the very moving and informative talks we had shared, he responded, "Talking to you is like coming home."

Four Sects of Judaism

Douglas Kirsner, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychoanalytic Studies and Philosophy at Deakin University in Melbourne, a continent as far from his European father's home as one can imagine. Kirsner's father was one of the Jewish children saved by a *Kindertransport* sent to England in 1939. A year later, however, he was interned with many others as "an enemy alien" and sent on a boat, *The Dunera*, with sealed orders to travel to Australia. Kirsner's father rarely spoke of this extended ordeal, or the culture and family he had lost, nor did he wish to provide his son with a Jewish education. In fact, the family was Marxist, adhering to that ideology with great piety for a time. Kirsner and I laughed about the doctrinal attitude pervading both our secular, leftist families, although his parents became disillusioned with their new faith over time. Not mine. My usually deep-thinking grandmother, who viewed any belief in a deity as regressive, never accepted that "Papa" Stalin was a murderer, no matter how many times she was confronted with documented proof.

Kirsner's important 2001 book, *Unfree Associations*, would seem to be informed by his understanding of the tendency to render seemingly rational movements and reasoned commitments sacerdotal, this time among atheistic Jewish psychoanalysts. Kirsner's volume, a result of extensive research, repeatedly illustrates that becoming a "true believer" in metapsychology tended to become more important than scholarship or a spirit of inquiry. Indeed, many of the leaders of the four main US institutes Kirsner

studied—New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles—would seem to have contributed very little to the further development of analytic ideas, valuing doctrinal loyalty more than creativity. By way of exegesis in our interview, Kirsner invoked the old joke, “There are four sects of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Psychoanalysis.” He continued:

And there was no room for the personal, the subjective, only the theory, even though every Jew lives in the shadow of the Holocaust—especially if you have come from Europe, which so many of the analysts had. Freud might say that those émigrés who came to America preferred to avoid reality, and instead lived in an illusion of safety—as if immune. It’s easier to live with illusions, at least in the short run. This was part of Freud’s genius and fearlessness, his quest for a kind of truth, a greater awareness. But if émigrés were traumatized, those sorts of experiences are repressed, or split off in some way. That shuts down inquiry and openness . . . They could go on as if nothing bad had happened, that they were not even Jews, let alone émigrés, everything was the same. This also meant not publishing much that was new, and autocratically blocking any outsiders.

Kirsner added his view that everyone in psychoanalysis, not only Holocaust survivors or émigrés, participated in the denial of being a Jew from Europe. “It was too hard to face for the longest time,” he said. “Even those who wrote about the effects of immigration,” Kirsner added, “like Russell Jacoby, who wrote about Fenichel’s ordeal, focused on the so-called political Freudians’ loss of their leftist ideals and not on their loss of their Jewish families or entire community to genocide. I myself,” Kirsner added, was “slow to firmly embrace my own Jewish history and identity.” Marxism, by comparison, was less ridden with tragedy. It was an acceptable, nonsectarian form of “salvation,” as Kirsner put it, that could take one away “from all the horror.”

Fetishizing Talk

Evelyn Berger Hartman is another psychologist and psychoanalyst whose parents, Rachel and Marcus Berger, endured the Shoah. Hartman notes that her mother and father did not easily acknowledge their pasts, “not to the world, not to each other.” She explains,

Many years later when I asked my mother about this silence, she told me it was because survivors felt so dehumanized by the experience, so diminished, as if they weren’t equal to the people they’d be speaking to about it. They felt they didn’t have the status, they didn’t feel entitled, they didn’t have the right to speak about it.

Then, in our conversation, Hartman thought a moment and added, “It was also more than that. Some trauma is unspeakable, it’s beyond speaking.” Hartman refers not only to the difficulty mentalizing overwhelming affect, but also the inadequacy of language—the futile struggle to organize the unthinkable into words.

Similarly, the British medical sociologist, author, and child of survivors, Anne Karph (1996), notes her impatience with her survivor parents’ carefully constructed, repetitive stories of the camps, “as if the horror were finite.” She adds:

Whenever, over the past few years, I’ve gone to conferences and lectures on Holocaust survivors and their families, I’ve been maddened by the way they so often fetishise talk, as if the key factor determining the psychological health of both parents and children was whether the parents had spoken about the experiences to their children. But there were different ways of talking.

(p. 96)

Hartman’s mother would make comments while she was busy with housework, with the books and learning she craved but were denied her because of the war (though, with her daughter’s encouragement, she eventually earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature at Hunter College). It was during these unexpected junctures, perhaps while folding laundry, that she would stop and speak to Hartman about her life in the Polish resort town Otwosk, outside Warsaw. “I can’t imagine my father walking his young children into the camps,” she lamented. Her father had been a loving, learned man, venerated in the family. Then she resumed what she had been doing, bringing herself back to the moment.

Hartman thought a bit more, remembering music—and singing—as another way of communicating. Her mother, she told me, encouraged her to perform Yiddish songs at regular meetings of a society established by survivors and émigrés living in the greater New York area:

Both my parents were from small towns—there weren’t enough survivors from their towns to form a society, so my mother went to the one for survivors from Cracow where she had a friend. My mother lived on her own in Warsaw as a teenager before the war and loved city life – she hoped the people in the Cracow society would be interesting and cosmopolitan.

Hartman recalls singing *Oyfn Pripetchik* and *Rozhinkes mit Mandlen*² for the group. These lullabies, standards in any Eastern European Jewish home, would evoke the audience’s lost world. Little Evelyn (she was but a school girl at the time) could see this in their faces, but she also observed that they kept extraordinarily busy as they listened—“serving the danish,

commenting on the quality of the danish, moving chairs. They were different than American audiences,” she reflected. The palpably painful memories were bearable only when mixed with the distractions of everyday life. Hartman learned much about how to approach and receive others’ pain and yearning during these performances, knowledge invaluable to the psychoanalyst she would become.

Hartman realizes that her loving father, a hardworking, generous man of few words, helped her to sense this sadness below the surface: “When I was with him I always sensed that he bore the sadness of losing his entire family, although he never spoke about it. It was in his eyes.” He actually did cry, Hartman recalled, when a pre-war phone directory from *Borinya*, his shtetl, was unearthed for him to view. His murdered family had lived in *Borinya* for centuries, so their surname was listed throughout the book’s pages—farmers, lumberers, carpenters, shopkeepers, shoemakers—all with his last name, Berger.

Somehow what I learned from both my mother and my father was how important it was to listen and accept where a person is at ... whether in words or actions ... to receive what they had to tell me in the way they needed to tell it. This was good practice for becoming an analyst, I think, not to push too fast, not to organize or interpret the material for my comfort ... especially when witnessing, when helping people with trauma.

Look and Listen

Hartman also invokes a mentoring relationship with the survivor and psychoanalyst Alberta Szalita, a tie that helped her think about the many ways of making contact in the face of ineffable trauma. Szalita, as Blechner (2011) summarizes,

received her M.D. from the University of Warsaw where she practiced as a neurologist. After losing most of her family during the Holocaust, she came to the United States, met Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and embarked on analytic training. She worked at Maryland’s famed private hospital, Chestnut Lodge from 1949 to 1953, where she demonstrated an extraordinary ability to communicate with psychotic patients. She later became Supervising and Training analyst at both the William Alanson White Institute, and the Columbia Psychoanalytic Institute, both in New York.

(p. 1)

Hartman, who was supervised by Szalita during her own training at the White Institute, describes her teacher’s willingness to share personal

moments as key to helping her supervisee “look and listen” to patients beyond words. One such story dated to a time during the war “when Alberta was lying in an infirmary in Russia, gravely ill, near death’s door. The doctors spoke reassuring phrases to her, but the way she really knew whether or not she would live was by looking in their eyes.”

Szalita’s capacity for empathy, for feeling herself into the experience of another, was apparently extraordinary. In an essay (1981) on the subject, she comments, “I view empathy as one of the important mechanisms through which we bridge the gap between experience and thought,” describing its presence “not as a result of intellectual exertion. Rather, it enters consciousness as if from nowhere, drawing on life experience, imagination, memory” (p. 8). Hartman and I agreed that while it was just this kind of sensibility that drew her to psychology and psychotherapy in the first place, it took considerable time for theories of psychoanalytic technique to evolve to the point of being able to appreciate factors separate from any ostensible, or organized, communication or comprehension.

Over time during their work together, Hartman learned that Szalita’s acute sensibility was likewise directed inward, towards her own unconscious or unformulated internal chafings. Wondering about a tendency to balk at a woman patient’s wish for her to be her protective older sister, for instance, Szalita came to identify her own split-off guilt towards her sisters, killed by the Germans, as contributing to this pattern. “So Alberta taught me to listen more carefully, more subtly to myself, not just to the patient.”

Hartman also learned about timing, and about creating a safe analytic space, in a parallel process between herself and Szalita:

I was interviewing her for a journal article. We were talking about Sullivan, about her work with Fromm Reichmann, Searles, but towards the end we got away from her professional contributions to her personal life. She told me about how she had been away at a medical conference in Russia when the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939. She couldn’t get back home to Poland and her entire family — her parents, her sisters, and her husband were all murdered. She began to speak about her sisters, and then we had no more time for the day. When I returned in a week or so, I immediately resumed with the story of her sister’s death, to which she said, “Let’s not start right there ... let’s ease into it.” All of this was very moving, and reminded me of my mother’s more indirect way of telling, but it was also good supervision for me.

Hartman continued that if Szalita was famous for her incisive observations—Blechner (2011, p. 2) refers to her reputation as “the queen of the one-liner”—she was likewise careful to stay with the patient’s pace,

perhaps accounting for her therapeutic success, even when she was pointed or frank. Such intuitive responsiveness was perhaps gleaned from first-hand experience with disorganizing pain, including surviving a psychotic Nazi reality. No wonder she achieved success with “untreatable” schizophrenics alongside Fromm-Reichmann at Chestnut Lodge in Maryland.³ There she reached inpatients awash in their own disorganized, disorganizing nightmare. Recall that Robert Prince is explicit about the impact of *his* family trauma on his effectiveness with similar individuals.⁴

Hartman told me that when Szalita came to America, she actually suffered a severe depression because of all her losses: “She was so alone, so invisible.” But then Szalita met the Jewish émigré and psychoanalyst Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, who helped her find an analyst:

What stood out in Szalita’s description of her treatment was how much work Szalita herself, as the patient, did. In fact she said that she never met a patient who worked as hard as she did. Hers was a time limited analysis—only a few months—because she had to go back to her degree program, and so she pushed herself to do what she needed to do: She wrote notes in between sessions about each of her losses, so that she could live her life without the cloud of depression.

This, too, had an impact on Hartman’s understanding of the work she does:

From my parents, I learned viscerally about the human capacity for change, but I wanted to hear from Szalita, first-hand and psychoanalytically and conceptually, how one changes, how one can move through loss to live fully, as she said, “to start to see colors again,” to focus, to be “with it, not without it.” The overriding message I got from both Szalita and my parents was: Hard work, very hard work. In my supervision with her, Szalita pushed me towards this end. When the work with patients became more challenging or deflating, she kept reminding me, “You want to be an analyst ... a *good* analyst.”

Over the course of her career, Szalita earned a reputation as “an analyst’s analyst,” and later in life (1968) she wrote about the many colleagues who came to her for additional treatment after terminating their training analyses. Some of these colleague-patients, she writes, had not sufficiently worked through their losses.

Mourning and confrontation with death are not too popular themes in many analyses. We are biographers who have to manage to interest the patient in his own life and help him relive it dramatically and meaningfully. The tendency to avoid feelings and thoughts on death is

natural to man. It brings out the deepest helplessness in his destiny. It was Spinoza who said that a wise man thinks about life, not about death. I don't believe it is possible to think freely about life if one excludes death and denies it. Only too often both the analyst and the patient are in complicity about this omission.

(p. 97)

Looking back from a contemporary perspective, one wonders if at least some such analysts were hampered by a post-war metapsychology that privileged intrapsychic conflict over traumatic loss. One wonders, too, if that metapsychology may also have offered a diversion or respite from the tragedy of their own lives. Many of these analysts may have legitimately wished to start over, to align and ally themselves with less beleaguered colleagues in a new rather than a lost world, thereby inadvertently leaving it to the next generation to address the lingering influences of that hope, and that loss. Yet Szalita, as well as Judith Kestenberg, the pioneering voice mentioned by Prince earlier in this chapter, displayed exceptional openness to the pain of their pasts that may have facilitated this process among the next generation—their supervisees and analysts.

Another psychoanalyst and survivor who was a child in the Shoah, but asked to remain anonymous, told me in an interview that the most astonishing aspect of her history was not that she survived Auschwitz, but rather that she decided to have her own children. It required, she told me,

a kind of crazy hope, and a kind of looking forward, not back. Of course I am glad I did it, but I could only do it because I turned off parts of myself. I had four kids, can you believe it? And they are all doing reasonably well, they are the best thing in my life!

Yet, she added,

Of course my children forced me to acknowledge what I was running from, to mourn, ultimately, if for no other reason than that they reminded me of my lost parents and siblings—one of my sons looks and acts so like my father. It was a struggle, and bittersweet. And I think my children, all of whom have gone into helping professions, felt conflicted about their roles—to make up for my losses by doing good, yes, but also to be the container for that pain. I think someone used the phrase “memorial candles”⁵ to refer to the second generation for this reason. We have had to confront this together, the burden I put on them, somewhat out of my awareness. In fact my son asked me to join a therapy group with him, for survivors and their children, and we struggled together there.

Broken Vessels

What is it that the “children” must do, and what cannot or should not be expected of them, not only in survivor families, but also in the psychoanalytic “family” after the Holocaust? In *Kaddish*, his long and poetic meditation on the Jewish mourner’s prayer, writer Leon Wieseltier (1998) struggles with his obligations after his father’s death. He begins with a reference to a Talmudic discussion in which it is suggested that evocations of the lost parent should include the phrase, “I am the atonement for where he rests” (p. x). Wieseltier notes the ways in which Jewish children are considered the deceased parent’s emissary on earth, bringing honor and credit to them. The prayers are an expression of appreciation and tenderness, and not just a matter of law or duty on the part of the children, who in turn are soothed and supported by fellow Jews who pray with them in the synagogue.⁶ But is this a mixed blessing?

As Israeli psychoanalyst Dina Wardi’s (1992) book attests, the child who becomes “a memorial candle” has been deprived of some of his or her own singular identity. Wieseltier locates other concerns about the child mourner’s state of mind in Talmudic debate. Is the son, for instance, too bereft to lead the worship? Indeed, one Rabbi states that whoever else knows the prayer is preferable to the unfit “minor” for whom the *kaddish* was initially intended. But Wieseltier juxtaposes this view to the voice of Luria, “the great Talmudist from Poland,” who, citing words from the psalms as proof, claims that “the King of Kings prefers broken vessels” (p. 366) as leaders of prayer. How similar to Luria’s view are Prince’s, Szalita’s, Drescher’s, and Hartman’s, all of whom sense that the losses they experienced, or that their parents experienced, leave them better able to empathize and embrace the analytic process, in fact to embrace others in general.

Whether sorrow and loss depletes or deepens the individual is the way Wieseltier frames the Rabbinic controversy. A related dilemma regards the degree of identification with the dead, or with the victim, versus the effort to regroup in order to move forward. In psychoanalytic theory and praxis this relationship, essentially between attachment versus separation and individuation, has long been presented in binary form, as two roads that diverge. Autonomy has often been the valorized choice at the expense of shifting relatedness, or an “interdependence” between both generations (Surrey, 1985; Chodorow, 1990). The question becomes: How can we foster more of a dialectic, particularly regarding traumatic loss? How can we find what Gerson (2009) refers to as a “space between the scream and the silence” (p. 1342)? A space that allows the “hard work” of mourning, as Szalita and Hartman describe the whole of working through past and present. We would seem to need such a space if the unspeakable conflagration that swept over psychoanalysis’s literal and cultural home is to find its enduring value in today’s teaching and treatment settings.

Wieseltier (1998), who is not a psychoanalyst, speaks of returning to his space—the synagogue—on such terms. For a long while, he had rejected his observant Jewish upbringing. However, after his father's death, prayer becomes for him a “shawl” for warmth and comfort as he reflects and mourns. Prayer, he discovers, is not a stultifying “shroud,” not the garment in which a Jew is buried (p. 494).

Wieseltier evokes in his text the special gate for mourners at the second Temple in Jerusalem, erected so that the community could easily identify those who needed to be told, “May he who dwells in the house comfort you” as they entered to pray. The Talmud has extensive discussions of the importance of this gate, he notes, in which the “equivalence between the mourner and the pariah is frequently considered.” One need only recall the treatment of Holocaust survivors in the post-war psychoanalytic world to confirm how real this equivalence can be. Wieseltier explains: “The mourner and the pariah are representatives of a dissolution, and so they are figures of the periphery, the shattered and the shattering who are barred from participation in the ordinary activities of the community” (pp. 501–502). Yet if becoming a mourner restricts certain daily activities, in the Jewish tradition the bereft also remain part of the community: They are living in the past *and* in the present, honoring the dead and lost while praying among the living. This is the very kind of space, I think, that we need to find.

Indeed, Wieseltier specifically considers the value of ritual mourning during, and not only after, the Shoah. During the massacre in the Kovno Ghetto, for instance, survivors asked their Rabbi if it was correct for a father to say *kaddish* for his son. When in another instance an entire community was on the train to Treblinka to be murdered, a community leader suggested they say *kaddish* for themselves (p. 471). If this sounds like a useless ritual, even “legal hair splitting,” according to Wieseltier it may also preserve a mindfulness, a sense of self and other fostered by tradition, the very things that the Nazis, and traumatic experience in general, rob from us.

Perhaps when Freud and his followers let go what they experienced as parochial or oppressive religion in exchange for “scientific” inquiry towards “universal” truth, they did not recognize what else they were leaving at the temple gate. Can the door to the psychoanalytic consulting room—more generally to a psychoanalytic sensibility—open to another sort of sanctified space that can capture, and transcend, the terrible historical moment that altered psychoanalysis forever?

Psychoanalytically-oriented narratives, including the many presented in this volume, may allow for such possibility precisely because of their relation to the traditional Jewish dialogue between past and present. My hope is that the conversations in this book have indeed allowed entrée into the world of psychoanalysis before, during, and after the Shoah. We struggle in our

attempt to know this legacy, for it reveals the terrific and at times horrific range of possibilities within and between people. Still, a more responsive and more responsible mind because of such knowledge was Freud's premise and his promise, and here, too, it may be the next generation's best hope.

Notes

- 1 Parens gives his own example of the rigidity of post-war praxis in America, recalling that members of his Philadelphia psychoanalytic community were once wary of his role as a parent-educator. Today, he adds, there is a much greater range and tolerance for what is deemed appropriate for the psychoanalyst. He also agrees that perhaps earlier rigidity among the ranks can be partially attributed to émigré analysts' reactions to their own massive trauma.
- 2 *Rozbinkes mit Mandlen* is a lullaby about a goat who will buy raisins and almonds for a sleepy baby. *Oyfen Pripichek* tells of a Rebbe teaching youngsters not only their ABCs, but, in the last verse, of the tears and sorrow in each letter.
- 3 Hannah Greenberg's novel *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, a fictionalized account of her actual analysis with Fromm-Reichmann, supposedly conjures a version of Szalita as the doctor who fills in when the primary analyst is on vacation. At least that is the conventional wisdom among my colleagues, though I have found no absolute proof.
- 4 After reading a preliminary version of this manuscript, Drescher added that he, too, attributes his ability to help actively suicidal patients in part to his family's Holocaust legacy. His comfort working with psychotics, he added, also makes sense to him in light of his early exposure to the psychosis of the Shoah.
- 5 The Jerusalem psychotherapist Dina Wardi uses this phrase as the title of her (1992) book on the topic. Her synopsis of these second-generation patients reads: "During their childhood their parents have unconsciously transmitted to them much of their own trauma, investing them with all their memories and hopes, so that they become 'memorial candles' to those who did not survive."
- 6 In traditional Judaism, it is the son who is commanded to say *Kaddish* in the congregation, but not the daughter, who is forbidden from leading worship. This convention is only now being challenged in some Orthodox circles.