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COULD THE HOLOCAUST REALLY HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE THIRD GENERATION?



AN OLIVE PRESS
RESEARCH PAPER

BY
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Dedicated to the memory of my great-grandparents, Henrich and
Henrietta Gutmann, killed in the Holocaust.

And in honour of my grandfather, Franz Gutmann who escaped.

*“Holocaust memory is an
insomniac faculty whose mental
eyes have never slept.”*

Natan Kellermann PhD

INTRODUCTION

In June 1977, an article published in the New York Times caused a stir within the worlds of psychology and counselling. The author, Helen Epstein, opened with the statement made by the Director of Shiava Psychiatric Hospital, Tel Aviv, “The trauma of the Nazi concentration camp is re-experienced in the lives of the children and the grandchildren of camp survivors.” This sent ripples which are still being explored today – just as the impact of the holocaust continues to have an impression on the families who are descended from the survivor generation.

Since the first recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder, and its subsequent effect on the family of the one suffering, there has been an opening awareness that the traumatic experiences of those who survived the holocaust cannot be ignored. Dr Natan Kellermann, an Israeli Clinical Psychologist, who has worked with survivors and their families for around two decades, has spent much of his professional life studying and researching the psychological influence of the Holocaust over the generations. As a second-generation (2G) survivor, he says of his own experience, that although his mother told him very little of her traumatic experience, her Holocaust trauma “has painfully permeated my inner life...gruesome Holocaust associations fill my waking and sleeping life, and human suffering is a constant companion. As have so many other children of survivors, I have apparently absorbed some of the psychological burdens of my parents and share their grief and terror.”

To some people reading this, it might seem a bit of a “pie in the sky” attitude to think that generations of people who have never lived through the holocaust, can still experience the impact of this in their lives, so many decades after the camps were liberated.

And why would I be interested enough to write about this anyway, especially as the Holocaust happened so long ago, and propose it as a paper for CMJ supporters to read?

For those who don't know anything about who I am, I myself am a 3Ger. My grandfather, Franz, escaped Nazi Germany and arrived in Finchley, where he met and married his third wife, and had two sons with her (my dad and my uncle). He'd had children from a previous marriage – and they made America their home, but as for his parents, they were murdered by the Nazis. My great-grandmother, Henriette Gutmann, had been detained at Maly Trostinets (located on the outskirts of Minsk,

in Belarus), before being murdered on her way to Theresienstadt. As far as the family is aware, my great-grandfather, Henrich Gutmann, was murdered at, or on the way to Theresienstadt – the details of when and where are unknown. I don't know about any other relatives or siblings my grandfather had, and unfortunately he died when my dad was only six years old, so what we have are fractured pieces of information about the survivor of our family line.

As far as I am concerned – he is a hero – although I have no idea how this man who studied sociology and wrote a book before the war managed to escape the horrors the rest of our family were drawn into. The fact is, I am alive because my grandfather managed to escape his homeland, make it across Europe, and settle here in the UK.

While I have no understanding of the finer details of his life (though I would love to be able to find out more), the fact that our family exists because my grandfather was an escapee has always been a part of my understanding of the heritage I have been born with. I've never had a "shocking" revelation, as I know some 2Gers or 3Gers have had. We've just always known. I remember my brothers quizzing my dad over dinner about how Granddad had escaped, and being told that we don't fully know, but the story goes that Franz had actually gone back into Germany and escaped a second time from the Nazi camps.

When it came to watching certain war films based on the holocaust, I would generally avoid them as I hated to see someone's perception of what my great-grandparents would have endured. It would be far too real for such a personal history. So when, in 2016, I encountered a night-vision, I knew there had to be something deeper at work in what had happened than just a "bad dream". It was an experience which felt much more realistic than any dream or vision I've had, and it was the most horrible moment I have ever encountered.

I was transported back in time, and found myself in a Nazi concentration camp. I was emaciated, beyond hungry, cold, exhausted but couldn't sleep, sharing a top bunk with two other people who were also extremely emaciated, all skin and bone. It was dark, damp and cold in the room and the smell was horrendous. I was there. I was spiritually and physically there. And it was horrible.

When I woke up I was shaking and sweating, and afraid to go back to sleep because each time I closed my eyes, I was back on that top bunk. Even into the next night I struggled to fall asleep because I still felt myself, whenever I closed my eyes, being transported back to that same space, in a dark, damp, crowded, cold, smelly room.

A couple of days after this experience, I was with my sister-in-law after Church, and started to tell her about my experience, which is something I didn't think I would be able to talk about. It was the right thing to do, as she told me my brother had experienced something very similar. This cannot be coincidence, surely? A third generation brother and sister – direct descendants of people murdered in the holocaust – experiencing the same kind of spiritual nightmare at different times? I needed to know more.

Back to Kellermann. In 2001, he published an article for AMCHA (National Israeli Center for Psychological Support of Survivors of the Holocaust and the Second Generation), entitled “Transmission of Holocaust Trauma.” In it he quotes part of a psychotherapy session he had with a man who had shared details of dreams he'd been having. Kellerman states,

“From the content of this dream the man could have been a Holocaust survivor. But he was not. He was the child of a survivor...he himself, was born long after the war had ended in a country far removed from the horrors of the Holocaust.”

In 2009, Kellermann published, *Holocaust Trauma: Psychological Effects and Treatment*, in which he writes about the many 2Gers who have suffered from nightmares, as if they had experienced the traumatic holocaust events themselves. He is convinced there has been a transgenerational passing on of the holocaust memories and experiences from the parent generation to their children. In more recent years, he has also been looking into this transgenerational transfer to the third generation too.

There have been numerous accounts of the survivors generation locking down their experiences deeply within them, unable to share with their children the trauma and horrific nature of their past experiences. Emotionally, there was a dividing wall between many survivors and their children. Psychologically, there was a distance separating the generations. The third generation, too, felt the impact of this division between their parents and grandparents. And while there was a difficulty in opening up between parent and child, as time gathered pace, and the potential for stories to

die with their owners, stories became easier to share with the generation removed. The overwhelming misunderstanding can be summed up from Kellermann's book, in which during one of the workshops he regularly holds for Holocaust survivors and their family across generations, one grandmother "attempted to soothe [her] tearful granddaughter, and herself, by defensively exclaiming: 'No, no, no, we did not pass on any of our trauma to you, and you do not need to be upset.'"

But for me, as the granddaughter of a survivor whom I have never met, nor have ever spoken to, the trauma and impact of the Holocaust literally runs through our bones.

Doesn't it?

In the silence of stories untold, the nightmares remain. The fervour to not allow the silence to over-power and deafen the reality of past experiences stirs 3Gers as if the memories were our own. Even at the time of writing this paper, reports have flooded the media and internet, which are incredibly disturbing, such as the news that Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was one of Germany's best sellers after it started to be re-printed last year; and more recently, the worrying trend for "Holocaust Hoax" books being sold quickly and cheaply across internet companies like Amazon.

And this is the thing, which Jewish people have understood for centuries: The memories really are our own. During the recounting of the escape from Egypt millennia ago, the ownership of the Exodus belongs to us. And with the re-enactment of Purim, the attack on God's Chosen People is not something which just happened back then. It's something which continues to affect Jewish people even now.

In his contributing essay for a collection of essays in the book, *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes*, The Right Honourable David Milliband quotes Former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,

*"History is his story – an event that happened sometime else to someone else.
Memory is my story – something that happened to me and is a part of who I am.
History is information. Memory, by contrast, is part of identity."*

Milliband is drawing on this link between history and memory, derived from the same Hebrew word "zachor" as a reminder that while "the chain of memory is broken by the passing of time and generations, so history and its lessons become more important."

This link between the past and the present is foundational to this research paper, as while the “chain of memory” really is in danger of being broken, as the survivor generation dies out, the burden of history falls on my generation to ensure the memories of the stories we know, or half-know, continue to be proclaimed. But maybe, this is more than a collection of memories; maybe the transition of memory ensures the emotion, pain and trauma of what happened will burn forever in the dark, distant future. Maybe, spiritually speaking, the memories are actually being transferred from one generation to the next within our DNA, so we never lose the drive to keep the passion for healing alive, along with the need to pass on the lessons and stories.

Of course, with the traumatic nature of the Holocaust, it leads one to wonder whether there is something more than just a memory being passed on between the generations. And this is where things become fascinating, with my background in psychology now coming to the forefront of my investigation. So I hope to explore some of the research being carried out by psychologists, epigeneticists and biologists, presenting a basic overview of their findings, thus allowing you to draw your own conclusions about the transgenerational transference of the effect of the Holocaust.

Now, what I cannot do very easily, in the space I have, is to go fully into the detail of the last 40+ years of research into what is a fascinating field. So I hope this paper encourages some of you to look deeper into this for yourselves.

But the fact there are different scientists who are uncovering similar truths across a variety of fields, indicates there may be a deeper impact on the families of those who survived the Holocaust. Both positively and negatively.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

It stands to reason, that psychology would be a good place to begin the exploration, as this is where much research into human behaviours stems. The whole nature versus nurture debate has launched many hypotheses, experiments, observations, and research into a whole range of what people do, don't do, or are capable of doing.

The process by which trauma has affected or impacted children of those who have suffered life-threatening situations, is not strictly limited to those who are affected

by the Holocaust. Researchers have explored other types of survivors – such as those who have been involved in terror attacks, or extreme abuse. But for the purpose of this paper, I will be focussing on the research carried out among the families of Holocaust survivors.

One of the key researchers, who I have already spoken of and quoted, is Dr Natan Kellerman.

Speaking of the 2Gers he has been working with, Dr Kellermann writes,

It seems that these individuals, who are now adults, have somehow absorbed the repressed and insufficiently worked-through Holocaust trauma of their parents, as if they have actually inherited the unconscious minds of their parents... Moreover, the transmission may continue beyond the second generation and also include the grandchildren, great-grandchildren and perhaps others as well. This process of transgenerational transmission of trauma has been repeatedly described in the academic literature for more than half a century.

As far back as the 1980s, psychologists began to try and understand how the survivor generation had been affected, and what impact this had had on their children. In 1985, in his article published by the Psychoanalytic Review (1985), R.M. Prince begins to explore the complex nature of “Second Generation Effects of Historical Trauma”. He states,

“The mechanism of second generation effects is seen as an extremely complex one in which cumulative trauma of parental communication, the aspect of the parent-child relationship determined by the Holocaust context, and the historical imagery provided by the parent and by other cultural processes are mediated by interaction with normative developmental conflicts, family dynamics independent of the Holocaust, variables of social class, culture, Jewish heritage, and immigrant status”.

In other words, how much of this is really down to the Holocaust, and how much is as a result of other factors?

Since then, the relationship between the trauma of the Holocaust on children of survivors has gathered more and more acceptance among the professionals. The main arguments focusses less on “Is there?” and more on, “How are they?”

Within psychology, there are four main theories of transmission:

Psychodynamic – Children unconsciously absorb the repressed and insufficiently worked-through Holocaust experiences of their survivor parents. Within this introjection, children live in their parents' Holocaust past, and feel the need to deal with the trauma as if they themselves personally lived through them. According to Vardi, these children become “memorial candles in a Holocaust cape.”

Sociocultural – Children learn and form their own interpretation of how to behave based on the conscious and direct influence of one generation on another. As far back as the 1950s, countless studies have confirmed the correlation between the way a child is parented and the way they behave (eg: Sears et al. *Patterns of Child-Rearing*, 1957) Kellerman believes, based on his own research, “we can assume... Holocaust survivor parents influenced their children not only through what they did to them in terms of actual childrearing behaviours, but also through who they were in terms of inadequate role models” (eg: low tolerance for stressful situations, or over-protectiveness etc..)

Family Communication Systems – Where the children grow up in tightly-guarded family islands, with little contact with “the outside world”. In this type of family dynamic, parents begin to live through the children, and children live through their parents, which lead to problems around individuation, separation and attachment. I see this as being the potential “foundation” of some of the stereo-typical ways Jewish mammas are portrayed...especially in relation to their sons!

In their 2012 research into the potential for Holocaust-related trauma on 3Gers, Perlstein and Motta found that many of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish grandchildren they assessed clearly had higher levels of being,

“more fearful, displayed neurotic behaviours, aggressive tendencies, social withdrawal, inhibition, and depressed affect. These ratings, consistent with clinical impression-based observations that children of survivors and their children tend to exhibit social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem, suggest a level of transmission of holocaust trauma to the third generation.”

Biological or genetic – Which we will look at in more detail in the next section, as it relates to a fairly recently established field of research, but it relates to the idea there may be a biological level effect on survivor families.

There has been research into the impact on the biology of traumatic events, which essentially has such a deep level of impact, it literally changes the person at a biological level, be it through anxiety, memory or becoming more (or less) prone to illnesses. This change is then passed onto other generations.

Eva Hoffman, an author, and lecturer at Kingston University near London, herself a 2nd Gen writes,

“In my adult development, I was very much a person of my generation...in other words, I didn’t want to be defined by my past. I still don’t – or at least, I don’t want to be determined by it. But it was a revealing surprise to discover how much weight the parental Holocaust legacy, and those first formative feelings I experienced in relation to it, continued to have in my psyche.”

So are the so-called transition of memories, Holocaust-related trauma (a form of PTSD) and impacts of what the Holocaust survivors passed on to the next generation, a result of nature or nurture? Have children and grandchildren of survivors learned how to respond in a stressful way to certain types of stimuli, as a result of the way they were brought up, or what they observed of their own parents? Or is there an actual alteration within the DNA coding, which is being passed through the genes of survivor families? Could the horrific nature of the Holocaust have had this level of impact on the survivor generations to impact this deep within a family’s genetic make-up?

EPIGENETIC RESEARCH

The relatively new field of research, epigenetics, is scientifically leaning toward the idea that particularly traumatic experiences can actually alter the DNA of a person, which is then passed from one generation to the next. It is not just the survivors of the Holocaust who are being investigated; there has been ground-breaking research into the Aboriginal population, as well as children of abuse victims.

In her research into the DNA of trauma victims, Dr. Rachel Yehuda and her team at New York's Mount Sinai hospital detail the change in the structure of one specific region of a gene normally associated with stress hormones. In specifically analysing this gene, Yehuda discovered epigenetic tags on the exact same part of the gene in both Holocaust survivors and their children, which was not found on a control group they simultaneously studied.

Abbey Silverstein, in her research from a neurochemical perspective agrees that the trauma is stored on a molecular level: "The survivor's central nervous system was flooded with neurohormones...in order to preserve one's existence. This response became a memory on the cellular level."

WHAT ABOUT A SPIRITUAL LINK?

One of the aspects, which most people are probably unaware of, is the consequence of the horrors of the Holocaust on people's faith. We could be forgiven for thinking that the vast majority of people would have "lost their faith" and given up on the "God who turned His back on them". And there have been many Gentiles who have used this argument to try to prove God's anger and hatred toward mankind, on "behalf" of the Jewish people they don't even know.

But consider this quote from Menachem Z. Rosensaft, Editor of *God, Faith and Identity* from the Ashes, who says,

"I concluded [my guest sermon at New York City's Park Avenue Synagogue, on the Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that] ... God was in fact present during the Holocaust within those men and women who, even at Auschwitz and Treblinka, sought to save the lives of their fellow prisoners or to somehow alleviate their suffering. ... Viewing the Shoah through the decidedly Jewish theological prism, Pope Francis effectively affirmed that God was not in the horrors, in the gas chambers and crematorium, and that He did not cause the mass murder of millions. Nor did God reside within the perpetrators of the Holocaust or other genocides... Rather, the divine presence can only be found in the unfathomable inner strength of those who do not allow themselves to be dehumanized by evil."

The personal reflections and stories which have been handed down through the generations, by grandparents to the children's children, are as inspiring as they are humbling. Even there, in the most horrific of humanities deprivation, as Member of Kinnest, Rabbi Dov Liman wrote, our relatives are known to have "remained devout despite what they experienced. Their love for the Torah study, passion for daily prayer, and commitment to mitzvah observance has helped me maintain my connection to these values in difficult and trying times."

American Judge, Karen "Chaya" Friedman, who in 2010 was appointed to the US Memorial Council, wrote in her essay for God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes, "To me, my grandparents and their generation were unbelievable heroes...what truly amazed me is that although they lost everything – literally – the one thing they never lost is their faith in G-d". She goes on to write about her own faith,

"There are times when I doubt and when I question. I don't question the presence of G-d and His total control over the universe. It's the particulars – the details – I have issue with... The one thing I always come back to ...is the vision of my grandfather willing to starve to death during the war, rather than break G-d's commandments... His steadfast belief in G-d translated into a strict observance of the details – before the war, during the war, and after the war. No change. No divergence. No distractions. That knowledge has always made a deep impression on me."

What about the impact of the Holocaust on the faith of the 3Gs? I personally can see there is a correlation between what the Bible says in, for example Exodus 34:7, "He never lets the guilty go unpunished, punishing children and grandchildren for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation." Now please hear me when I say: I am not blaming God! Nor am I saying the 2G and 3G are carrying the sin of the generation before. NO WAY! What I am saying is the sin of the world against the Jewish people of my great-grandparents' and my grandfather's generations had such an impact on them that it has (potentially) been passed on – spiritually – down the generations.

The Holocaust, I don't believe, is the result of the sin of the Jewish people. But it was definitely the sin of Hitler and the Nazis he led, which caused such a traumatic and historic turning point for God's chosen people. The ripple effect of which are still being felt three or four generations on, by BOTH SIDES. We cannot forget that the children and grandchildren of the Nazi Soldiers who carried out such

atrocities are also being affected by the guilt and shame what their family did to fellow-human beings.

Or as the Jewish Proverb puts it, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?” (Ezekiel 18:2, Jeremiah 31: 29)

IN CONCLUSION...

While much of the research being carried out has focussed on the somewhat negative impact our grandparents may have passed on, I would like to end with the positives and thoughts of some of the 3Gers themselves. After all, we are the product of a resilient people who somehow, against the evil tide of anti-Semitism, survived; for every survivor, there is a different story behind the “somehow”. These are the heroes of our heritage. These are the strength of who we have become. These are the remnant of God’s story with His Chosen People. We cannot allow the story to die out with our grandparents, we are duty-bound to continue the fight against anti-Semitism, and acknowledge our sense of resilience may just be embedded in our DNA.

In her doctorate dissertation, in 2011, Melissa C. Kahne-Nissenbaum carried out her own research among 3Gs, and found,

“Third Generation Survivors in this study appear to be in awe of their grandparents for having the strength to survive the Holocaust... The[y] appear to be reconstructing their grandparents’ history, resurfacing their legacy, and in doing so they are seeing the strength and heroic battles their grandparents fought in order to get to the place they are today.”

She continues, in her conclusion, “Transmission of strength, pride and resilience is also a part of the legacy.”

In an open Facebook post of the Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors Facebook page, many have shared of the relationship they have enjoyed with their survivor grandparents.

Such as the reflection of Colin Mathias who states, “My generation is still trying to figure out how not to be frozen in grief.” Or the anonymous response from someone who says, “My parents’ generation lived in fear...It’s my generation...that’s finally putting the pieces together...getting into therapy, learning to understand the damage and how to undo the damage so we don’t pass it onto our children.”

In his 2012 paper addressing the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, *Redemption for the Wounds of the Next Generation: Children of Holocaust*, Rabbi Chaim Urbach declares, “healing for the wounds of the Holocaust is possible and available, and it begins with the realization that suffering is not in vain.” He goes on to quote Haim Dasburg who declares, “The survivors children are bent almost double under the weight of the burden placed on their shoulders, yet at the same time – due precisely to this burden itself...they are becoming stronger.”

AS FOR ME?

In 2011, I had the honour of visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, for the first time. I arrived just a couple of hours before they closed for Shabbat, so I made the conscious decision to rush through most of what was on display to the parts of the memorial which were specific to my family’s personal story. As I looked in horror at the board games my family would have seen their German friends and neighbours buying, and playing, to the yellow stars they had been forced to wear, looking at the charts of blonde hair and blue eyes I could have been measured against, had I been born in a different point in history, wondering how my own blue eyes and blonde(ish) hair would have fared me against the Nazi’s... as you can see, the story of the Yad Vashem quickly become very personal as I wondered about the fate on my great-grandparents, and their family.

As I walked past the hundreds of shoes, I wondered whether any of them could have belonged to Henriette, would she – who with her husband had been one of Munich’s proud clothing merchants before Nazi Germany turned on them – have rivalled me in my love for shoes. What of the glasses, or the personal diaries which had been collected, so their owners’ appointments and thoughts were visible for today’s generations to remember.

The Yad Vashem carries the visitor on a journey, and as I worked my way past the carriages, and bunk beds, not unlike those which my family would have been forced to use, I made my way to the part of the memorial dedicated to both the camps my great-grandparents had ended their days at. Theresienstadt. And it was in this dedicated space, I found it difficult to move. Whereas before I had been rushing through – passing by on my way to a more personal place – now, I was faced with the reality of what had been experienced in my own heritage. I grieved. I grieved for the family I had never known. I grieved for the story we had been forced to remember. I grieved for the hope which had been ripped away from them. I grieved as I wondered how deeply they had known God, and whether there had been a moment when Yeshua had revealed Himself to them. Is this why our foundation is so deep?

I made my way to the next part of the Yad Vashem I was desperate to see: The Hall of Names. I spent 20 minutes looking around, and around, and around at all the folders containing all the names of the six million plus Jewish men, women and children who had been killed.

I was looking for one name in particular.

My family name.

And when I found it I clung to the bar in the centre of the room, unable to remove my eyes from the folder which contained the names of Henrich and Henreitte Gutmann. If you have not yet been, but do go, have a look above the door by which you enter into the Hall of Names – you will need to turn around to look back from the way in which you came into the room. And there, right above the door, is a folder containing the name of the person who wrote this paper you are reading. GUTMANN.

In 2014 I visited the Yad Vashem a second time. This time, I made it only to one room: The Hall of the Eternal Flame. And as I stared at the name of the camp which had been the last place my Great-Grandparents had been, I sobbed. The whole hour and a half I was in there.

I thank God for the Yad Vashem, and the sensitive way in which it honours and preserves the memory of the millions of people, including my own family, as it has provided my generation with a tangible way to connect back with our family's stories.

It affords those who consider themselves far removed from what happened, to make their own connection to the harsh lessons we can never forget.

As a 3G, I firmly believe there has been a kind of passing on between the generations, a heritage which has come about as a result of the Holocaust. Along with the memories, and spiritual impact of what happened, I believe there is also a sense of resilience and inner strength which is embedded in our DNA. I have three brothers. Two of us are most definitely Gutmanns. Two of us are more like our mother's side. And for the two of us who are most definitely Gutmanns, the impact of the Holocaust on us has meant we are fervently doing whatever we can to ensure anti-Semitism does not ever over power our family line either now or in the future. From this generation, to the many generations yet to come before Messiah returns.

Whether from the evidence I have presented you think the impact of the Holocaust is psychological, epigenetic, biological, spiritual or imaginative – I will leave for your own discernment. But maybe, like me, the one thing we can see of the lasting impression on the third generation, is an innate desire to “keep the eternal flame” of the stories of the generations before us, of whom we are so proud, burning bright, a determination to never forget, or allow the world to forget, and the strength of will to make a stand against anti-Semitism gaining ground in our generation.

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