

Imagination and Faith as Survival Tactics: A Psychoanalytical Study of *All But My Life* by Gerda Weissmann Klein

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Abstract- Gerda Weissmann Klein, the survivor of the Nazi's genocide, in her autobiography *All But My Life* narrated how imagination and faith acted as coping mechanisms for survival and how this empowered her mind and body and helped her to live as an immortal spiritual being. She never thought of giving up her hopes and walked ahead through hardships with determination. Thus she survived the torments in Nazi concentration camp, unlike her fellow companions. This paper also focussed attention on major psychological responses shown by individuals when adjusting to loss, ten commonalities of suicide, 'Coping Skills' and 'Applied Relaxation' techniques, soothing power of music and day dreaming over emotional thoughts. This paper also included the main theoretical aspects suggested by Sigmund Freud, Timothy Williamson, Roy Eugene Davis, Jacques Lacan, Wilfred Bion, Immanuel Kant, Donald Robertson, James Bernard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Erin Buckels, Delroy Paulhus and Daniel Jones, and mentioned briefly the life stories of Napoleon Bonaparte, Ethel Muvany and Viktor Frankle, similar to that of Gerda's real life story.

Key words- Faith, Imagination; Survival techniques; Existence; Psychoanalysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Many poems, fictions and fairy tales deal with the theme of imagination. They are regarded as the cornerstones of whole entertainment world. The hero or heroine in fairy tales has often suffered childhood abuse, shame and humiliation, parental rejection or abandonment from a wicked stepmother and evil stepsisters. They are forced to leave house and wander around an unknown forest where they are challenged by evil spirits or demons. Through magical power they overcome all such hindrances and finally attain prosperity. Thus they live "happily ever after". These stories with common elements are enriched by author's imagination. But psychologists and psychoanalysts say that these imaginations act as curable medicine for mentally retarded persons. The fairy tale hero or heroine has much in common with the ritual process of psychotherapy. An individual in psychological pain is always encouraged to identify with the fairy tale protagonist's mastery over terrifying forest experience, and he or she may perceive possibilities for surviving his or her own inner turmoil. Like the fairy tale protagonist who goes through periods of darkness and finally attains transformation, psychotherapy clients or patients often begin a journey from a black mood of depression or personal crisis, onto a new path. That is to say, both the protagonist and the psychotherapy client encounter challenging circumstances which eventually shape their personalities and lead them to a higher development in their private as well as public life. Both of them often encounter a nurturing 'other'. For the fairy tale protagonist this may be a fairy godmother or another helping spirit; for

the therapy client, it is the therapist, who becomes instrumental in a process of change.

The symbolic nature of fairy tales was first discovered by Sigmund Freud (6 May 1856 – 23 Sept 1939), an Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis. According to him the fairy tales touch the most primitive parts of the psyche. Sergei Konstantinovich Pankejeff was a patient of Freud who gave him the pseudonym (case name) "wolf man" to protect his identity, after a dream Pankejeff had of a tree full of white wolves. Pankejeff had been sexually abused by a family member during his childhood. As his older sister Anna committed suicide, he began to show signs of serious depression. In his publication regarding "wolf man", Freud argues that the fairy tale offers the child a way of thinking which corresponds to the representation of himself. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud turns to imaginations to advance dream analysis. Psychoanalysts such as Otto Rank and Carl Jung also looked at fairy tales and myths to represent the anatomy of the psyche. These classic stories encode patterns that enable the restoration of vibrant mental functioning in individuals. An individual in psychotherapy is shown ways to deal with their problems with the help of imagination.

Though life may be unfair and unjust, sufferings can be eased by the awareness that one is not alone. Hope is curative and fairy tales especially have the power to instil hope by the means of 'happy endings' in their stories. Through the combination of imagination with psychotherapy, new sources of strength may surge from one's existential knowledge. Joseph Campbell has said that, perhaps some of us have to go through dark and devious ways before we can find the river of peace or the

high road to the soul's destination. This Oxford professor and British Academy Fellow say that the imagination is not just a random idea generator but an important survival tool.

A reality –directed faculty of imagination has clear survival value. By enabling you to imagine all sorts of scenarios, it alerts you to dangers and opportunities. You come across a cave. You imagine wintering there with a warm-fire opportunity. You imagine a bear waking up inside- danger. Having imagined possibilities, you can take account of them in contingency planning. If a bear is in the cave, how do you deal with it? If you winter there, what do you do for food and drink? Answering those questions involves more imagining, which must be reality-directed. Of course you can imagine kissing the angry bear and becomes your lifelong friend. Better not to rely on such fantasies. Instead, let your imaginings develop in ways more informed by your knowledge of how things really happen (Williamson).

He argues that a poorly developed imagination could have misled early humans into potentially deadly situations. Therefore, only our ancestors with the sharpest and most precise imaginative ability would have survived. Most likely they might have passed this trait to future generations.

In the field of science, the role of imagination has been highlighted in the context of discovery. Unimaginative scientists do not produce radically new ideas. Albert Einstein's interview with *Saturday Evening Post* is notable in this context. "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand" (Viereck 17).

Bible says about faith: "we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever" (The King James Bible, 2 Cor. 4:18). When we cannot see something physically, we have to imagine it in our mind because human power of imagination creates new ideas that can open up new possibilities for survival.

The role of imagination in psychotherapy, scientific discovery, building the nation, entertainment and fiction are quite familiar. There are instances where imagination, intermingled with faith has been used for survival from inevitable death situations; not only in fiction but in real life as well.

Gerda Weissmann Klein, 92 years living legend, survived from death many times with the help of imagination. She was only eighteen years old when she was separated from both her parents. She had been sent to five different labour camps. She adopted faith as her mental strength and weaved imagination with the support of faith and thereby overcame all the tortures and terrors

that she confronted in Nazi's concentration camp and death march. This is a true life story. This paper considers some of the affinities between imagination and faith, and the psychoanalytic theories concerned with inter-subjective phenomena.

Chapter 1

2. A LABYRINTH MIND IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Sigmund Freud had developed ideas on the underlying motives that shape human behaviour and states of mind and he applied them to his study of faith. He said that the motives of individuals differed from person to person but they appeared similar in their thought process. He identified a common link in their "thinking patterns" which he defined as 'faith'. One of his texts highlighted the role of religion in lives of people:

It gives them information about the origin and coming into existence of the universe, it assures them of its protection and of ultimate happiness in the ups and downs of life and it directs their thoughts and actions by precepts which it lays down with its whole authority. Thus it fulfils three functions. ... It satisfies the human thirst for knowledge; it soothes the fear that men feel of the dangers and vicissitudes of life, when it assures them of a happy ending and offers them comfort in unhappiness... [and] it issues precepts and lays down prohibitions and restrictions (Freud 158-182).

So people who are religious are automatically forced to believe that their existence has an origin or a purpose, which nourishes their soul and mind and motivates them to move ahead, no matter how horrible the situations are.

According to psychoanalytic theory, there is a difficult terrain in life which necessitates fine-tuning of the capacities to build the requisite ground on which hope becomes a possibility, and if people are able to make their way through this difficult terrain, they succeed.

Both the psychoanalysts, Wilfred Bion and Jacques Lacan, have attempted to articulate the importance of being able to move beyond whatever is ostensibly known in order to be able to consider and to envision new possibilities. They agreed on faith that creates the possibility of profound growth and transformation (Bion 78-93).

According to Freud, unconscious desires motivate people to act in a certain way. The Freudian theory states that human personality is comprised of the id, ego, and superego (the three aspects of mind). "Id" is responsible for the part of the mind in which innate instinctive impulses and primary processes are manifest. "Superego" is responsible for the part of the mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, reflecting social standards learned from parents and teachers. "Ego" is responsible for creating the balance between pleasure and pain.

Ego helps to maintain a realistic sense about all the things happening around the world. It continues to seek pleasure and satisfaction. Although the ego does not know the difference between right and wrong, it is aware that not all the drives of 'Id' can be met at a given time. The reality principle is what the ego operates by, in order to help satisfy the id's demands as well as compromising according to reality. The ego is a person's "self" composed of unconscious desires. The ego takes into account ethical and cultural ideals in order to balance out the desires originating in the id. Although both the id and the ego are unconscious, the ego has close contact with the perceptual system. The ego has the function of self-preservation, which is why it has the ability to control the instinctual demands from the id. Neuro- Psychoanalists say:

The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface. If we wish to find an anatomical analogy for it we can best identify it with the 'cortical homunculus' of the anatomists, which stands on its head in the cortex, sticks up its heels, faces backwards and, as we know, has its speech-area on the left-hand side. The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, representing the superficies of the mental apparatus (Solmas, and Solms 256).

The superego, which develops around age four or five, incorporates the morals of society. Freud believed that 'superego' allowed the mind to control its impulses that were looked down morally. The superego can be considered as 'the conscience of the mind' because it has the ability to distinguish between realities as well as what is right or wrong. Therefore, without the superego, people would act out with aggression and other immoral behaviours.

Faith and Imagination act as survival techniques when we are challenged by external forces. "Faith is responsible for an individual's psychological and spiritual development" (Bingaman 48). In Psychoanalysis, "Creative Imagination is an aspect of human mind linked with subjective experience and performs the function of problem solving" (Kris 334-51).

There are a lot of biblical references and psychoanalytic perspectives that support the role of imagination and faith in the autobiography of Gerda, which prove that these factors are inevitable in life when challenged by the hardships of destiny. A detailed study of this is done in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

3. PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH OF FAITH AND IMAGINATION

In All But My Life

Gerda Weissmann Klein was Born in Bielitz, Poland, in 1924 and she presently lives in Arizona. She was one of the two children born to a middle-class Jewish family. Her father Julius Weissmann was a business executive and her mother Helene was a homemaker. Gerda is a Holocaust survivor. *All but My Life* (1957) is her autobiographical account of the Holocaust. This book was adapted into a 1995 short film, *One Survivor Remembers*, which received an Academy Award and an Emmy Award, and was selected for the National Film Registry.

In 1939, when the Germans took over her hometown of Bielsko, Poland, Gerda Weissmann was only 15 years old. Approximately 11 million people were killed in the Holocaust. She was separated from both her parents and brother. She was only eighteen at that time. She had been sent to five different labour camps where she underwent tough training. In the first camp she was allotted to a weaving unit. Even though she was mastered in it, her job was not always constrained to weaving. She was forced to do all kinds of work under the sky, like other girls. Every camp member was given fixed targets for different works and if they had not accomplished their targets, then their whole effort was treated as sabotage. Sometimes they lived in bunk and sometimes on the floor. Less nutritious and low quantity food was supplied to them. Adequate treatments were denied to those who were sick and weak, and they eventually ended up in gas chambers. Almost every day she witnessed the death of several girls who accompanied her and she waited for her turn, prepared to grasp the coldness of death. Sometimes the Nazis took their lives without a particular reason.

When each members of her family realised that they would be separated and moved to various camps, her brother Arthur said: "Look at that pillar. It is safe. We have to have faith. Never forget it Gerda" (Klein 17). Those words inspired Gerda and she decided not to give up. She kept faith in God and never lost her will to live. In all terrible situations Gerda imagined that she was surrounded by her family and she was fearless.

Faith in God, especially in life threatening situations, can bring positive energy and provide the ability to tolerate sufferings. It is even a technique used by psychotherapists in treatments. According to Freud, God, the creator is really the father of humans with all the magnificence and they are his children. Their protection and fulfilment of desires solely come from Him. Freud believed that individuals are fond of a protective father figure with whom he or she can be identified. Freud went on explaining that, what unites the three seemingly disparate aspects of religion (instruction, consolation and ethical demands) is the fact that they are all tied to the child's view of his or her father.

Gerda believed that her father, Julius Weissmann was responsible for saving her life. First he insisted Gerda to wear her skiing boots before she left on the transport and then he made her promise that she would never attempt to kill herself. Julius Weissmann anticipated the forthcoming tragedy that could possibly happen to his

daughter. Therefore, he cared her and emphasized the importance of hope and faith. This actually helped Gerda to face challenging situations. Her faith in God, humanity and nature forced her to believe that something good can come from worst people or surroundings.

Faith in God can make the impossible happen. The Bible says: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (The King James Bible, Heb. 11:1). "...and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded" (1 Pet. 2:6). When faced with some serious problems or going through stressful situations people can hear their mind saying "just have faith, it will work out". The psychological approach understands faith in terms of underlying psychological determinants such as needs, wishes and other tendencies. They regard faith as a natural phenomenon, a function of the psychological nature and thus, in effect, are critical of the Christian view of faith as a supernatural encounter.

Gerda led a miserable life in camp without knowing where her father, mother and brother were. She hoped to see them alive somewhere. Though she was exhausted she said: "I am going to live. Mama and Papa are going to live. I am going to live to be with them. And if... if it happens to them I am going to live for revenge. I am going to live!" (Klein 96).

Faith acts as a shield to outwit the enemy and to destroy the devils. This weapon is a key to success. The idea of faith invites people into treacherous territory, as they try to negotiate the lines between hope and fear and possibility and madness. The faith can open up untold possibilities or, alternatively, the fate can leave us at the mercy of forces of destruction.

Gerda knew that Nazi's routine was to send old people to Auschwitz where they were massacred in a gas Chamber. But her mind was not willing to accept the truth that she was helpless to save her parents. In such a context, she found a paper and wrote a letter to her brother Arthur in her camp knowing that she won't be able to send it.

I reminded him that our parents were young, that they would be able to stand the hardship, and that we should soon be together again at home... Mama was barely forty-five and papa fifty -five. They were young people, much too young to die.... They must live and I continued my letter to Arthur (Klein 97).

After finishing the letter she put it in her bosom and felt comforted because that letter provided her, a kind of link with Arthur, Papa, Mama and home.

Psychoanalysts say that the actions of unconscious mind always satisfy the needs and give mental peace. Although such actions give a kind of personal satisfaction, others might feel it awkward. Freud says: "people are simply actors in the drama of [their] own minds, pushed by desire, and pulled by coincidence. Underneath the surface, our personalities represent the power struggle going on deep within us" (Wikipedia).

The key to our survival, in any stressful situation, is our ability to manage our thoughts, our anxiety and our fears. Our ability to take control of our mind is paramount to our ability to survive. The reactions that our body will experience in a survival situation, when used in a healthy way, can actually propel us into doing things we never dreamed possible (Evans).

There was a particular instance where Gerda happened to have a conversation with "moon" in the sky. In Bolkenhain camp, while lying in her bunk, she watched the moon slowly rising up. "I spoke dreamily to her. I asked her if she saw Papa and Mama. It seemed as if she said yes" (Klein 117). Gerda imagined moon as her only loyal friend who listened to her. This fantasy reduced her mental agony and she got some sort of pleasure from it.

According to Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, imagination is a key element in the complex transcendental system of experience and the one that allows 'the self' in question to connect past and future elements, along with things that are not perceptible from a certain point of view, to the present experiences, thereby rendering them meaningful.

There was a time when Gerda lived in a wonderful house with beloved parents and brother and had economic stability. She used to roam around her garden talking to flowers and butterflies. Her cat and kittens purred in her presence and warmed her up. During the time of crisis these colourful memories sustained confidence, hope and positive imaginations in her.

When Gerda stayed in the Marzdorf camp, work supervisor at the looming factory attempted to molest her. When she resisted he warned her that 'she will be sorry'. He offered a piece of bread and apple and tried to seduce her again. But his effort was in vain. Next morning her duty was shifted from loom and sent for the flax details. She was marched to the freight depot just outside the factory. Freight car after freight car arrived, loaded high with bundles of flax. A huge crane lifted the bundles one by one from the cars, and dropped them at ten seconds intervals. A human line quickly passed the bundle until they reached the barn. There they were stacked until they mounted three or four stories high. Crane operator did not care how they sweated under the dropping weight. The operator was completely indifferent to the frail girls who kept up the inhuman pace, with arms that were bloody, swollen, and infected, whipped by the prickly fibres. The dust flew thick, irritating eyes and wounds, and making it difficult to swallow or breathe. After finishing their work, they marched to camp. Sweat mingled with blood and the fine dust from the flax covered their bodies. Their eyes were red and their throats tight. Gerda, exhausted and debilitated, went to her bunk to sleep without even having her supper. But at the same time camp chief appeared and ordered: "Get up; you dirty lazy swine, up to work." They had to march back to the freight yards, to unload coal. She stood on the freight car, the black mass of coal under her

feet, her blistered fingers grasping a shovel. She shovelled the coal onto a high pile on one side of the platform. After so many hours of hard work, her mouth and ear got filled with coal powder. Her throat was dry and when she tried to clear it, the spit came 'black'. She thought that she would collapse soon and die. She spent the days at flax, and the nights, unloading coal. She knew what the supervisor meant when he said: "you will be sorry"! She suffered a lot to protect her chastity. She looked at the railway signals flashing stop and go, red and green. She could wait until a train approached, then jump. No more roll call, no more the horrible Lagerfuhrerin, no more smirking supervisor trying to buy her with soup and a piece of bread, no more flax, and no more coal. Just one fast stabbing pain and then stillness. Gerda filled her mind with thoughts of suicide. Psychologically imbalanced human minds usually rely upon the notion of suicide (the ultimate pain-reliever). People in the grip of a suicidal depression are battling an emotional agony that, to them, is so severe as to make dying a less objectionable alternative than living. Here Gerda was psychologically affected because her life was miserable inside the camp. Almost every day she went through intensified harassments and painful experiences. For her suicide seemed to be 'an ultimate escape' from her sufferings.

Freud's first observations on 'self-destruction' led to psychoanalytic theories and studies that have influenced the exploration of suicide. In his seminal work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud conceptualized the internal forces that promote self-destruction. He postulated that the life and death drives were opposing basic instincts. The life drive was directed at reducing the tension associated with survival needs; the death drive was directed at eliminating the tension of life itself. Freud argued that the universal goal of all organisms is to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world and that repetition compulsion forms the basis of all self-defeating behaviours. He believed that the energy to kill oneself was derived from an earlier repressed desire to destroy another. Suicide represented an internalization of this object and a turning of the external death wish inward, against a fragment of one's own ego.

Dwin S. Shneidman, an American Suicidologist and Thanatologist (1993) defined ten common factors ("commonalities") of suicide: seeking a solution, cessation of consciousness, intolerable psychological pain, frustrated psychological needs, hopelessness and helplessness, ambivalence towards life and death, constriction of viable alternatives, flight from life itself, communication of intent, and dysfunctional lifelong coping patterns (145-47). They suggest that suicide is caused by a psych ache, an intense and intolerable emotional pain that is different from depression and hopelessness. The tortured individual seeks death as a solution to attain relief from all kinds of pain. He postulated two types of needs: primary or biological, and secondary or psychological. The psychological needs that are essential for life include, love and belonging, sense of control, positive self-image, and

meaningful relationships. People are often frustrated when these needs are rejected and this eventually leads to the development of psych ache.

When Gerda was about to jump before the train she felt a strange sensation on her neck. It was quite familiar because she had experienced it before. She recalled how a family committed suicide together when they lost hope. At that time Gerda had finished selling the family's possession to the neighbours to finalize their move to the Ghetto. She half-heartedly wished that her parents would also suggest suicide. When she was considering this, her papa turned her, grasped her neck to make her look into his eyes and forced her to promise that she would never give up. She believed that her father might have contacted her telepathically and that strange sensation she felt, at that precise moment when death seemed the only solution, was not a coincidence.

According to Psychologists, suicide can happen at a particular moment of despair or pain, but effective use of 'Coping skills' before, during or after stressful situations, could help a person to change his mind. Gerda's notion of telepathy reflects these 'Coping skills' or 'Enhanced Coping Resources' that made her mind deviate from suicide. Superego (one of the three parts of the human personality according to Sigmund Freud) helped her to think other than suicide.

Imagination has a realistic base to cope with the pain and despair in human life. It is an aspect of "Coping skills" or 'Enhanced Coping Resources'. Gerda had effectively made use of her imagination which instilled in her a passion for future and love for life.

I thought of Papa, Mama, and Arthur and spun dreams of our reunion at home. At night I dreamed of the future. As each night passed, my dream became more vivid, more real. In a way, I looked forward to going to the work in order to dream through my waking hours, to think of the people whom I would see when I would return home. I designed new dresses, planned trips to faraway places. During those long fall nights a new thought came more and more insistently into focus- the thought of a baby, warm, new, clean as freedom itself. How wonderful it would be to have my own baby (Klein 155).

The psychotherapist Donald Robertson said:

The use of Applied Relaxation in imagination can be seen as a way of mentally rehearsing how you plan to use your coping skills in reality, although it also tends to have the benefit itself of generally reducing anxiety and improving confidence in your coping ability. One potential problem with coping skills like those in Applied Relaxation is that you will simply forget to use them. Mental rehearsal also has the benefit of making it more likely you

will automatically remember to use your strategies in real life stressful situation. The use of Applied Relaxation in imagination helps to reduce stress and overcome terror situations. This method is particularly important to resilience-building as it allows you to anticipate a wide range of potential future stressors and rehearse coping with them effectively. As soon as you are ready to so, you should begin adding the mental rehearsal procedure to the end of your existing progressive relaxation practice sessions. (151)

When she suffered more harassments in Grunberg camp, when her working hours ended with zero resting time, when her showering chances reduced to every two weeks, she practiced 'the coping ability' in full swing and overcame life threatening situations by the technique of Applied Relaxation in Imagination.

The inmates who were old and weak, unable to perform the works given to them, were directly sent to Gas Chambers in Auschwitz. First, the prisoners were asked to undress for showers and when the vents open, there came not water but gas. Their old clothes were delivered daily from Auschwitz to be shredded up and converted into yarn. A number of girls who ran the shredding machines claimed that they had recognized their parent's clothes.

Once, as Gerda passed the shredder, she thought she saw Mama's coat. She turned away, praying and then forced herself to look again. It was a black coat just like her mother's. Although she realised the real fate of her parents, her mind was not ready to accept it. She lived every moment with a hope of their reunion. If that was not possible Gerda would not be able to continue her life.

And as always when in despair, I started to think of my homecoming. I placed and replaced details upon details, playing with the fragments of my dreams. Who would come home first? I always wished that I should come last - walk into the house to find them all there. At times, I thought I would reach home late at night. The house would be dark. I would not wake them. I would go to the garden and wait. I would watch the sunrise. Then I would approach the house. Mama would be wearing her flowered housecoat. No, she wouldn't- We had given it away for a pound of margarine and a loaf of bread. Well, anyway, breakfast would be on the table. Arthur wouldn't be there and Mama would say to me, "Go wake Arthur, you know he never gets down in time." I would run up the stairs. My brother's hair would be tousled, as it always was in the morning. "Arthur," I would whisper. He would mutter something and turn over and pretend to go back to sleep. Then, realizing I had come back, he would

sit up with wide-open eyes, stretching out his arms. It would be as it had always been, from the time when I had brought him my book of fairy tales to read. He had read them to me for years before I learned to read. And we would come downstairs together, holding hands as we had done when we were small, so I should not stumble. We should come down, and Papa and Mama would be holding hands too. We would approach Papa for benediction, as we had done as children. We both would have to bow, for we had gotten too tall. And Papa would kiss the Bible even as his father had before him, when he returned from Siberia. And Papa would speak the words of Jacob: "I had not thought to see your face again, but God.... (Klein 177).

Here, Gerda herself acted as a wonderful psychotherapist who filled her desperate mind with hope and the lovely imagination of her home. When she lived with her Papa and Mama, she never experienced any sort of pain or anxiety but only security. The way she was brought up by her parents, her religious belief, her affinity towards nature and animals thus shaped her "Coping skills".

A similar pattern of psychoanalytical perspective for survival can be noticed in many other incidents. Canadian Ethel Mulvany, a survivor of internment in Singapore (1942-45) had described how she coped with starvation. When Ethel Mulvany, along with some others was interned in Changi, Singapore, there was no sufficient food to eat. They tried to save their life through 'imaginings'. The women prisoners gathered to recite the recipes of their favourite meals. They discussed and dreamed about food and thus helped each other to slacken the pain of hunger. By delineating from the practical and concrete nature of food talk, Mulvany developed insights that were helpful for understanding how a culinary imagination could act as a survival tool. She argued that, the sharing of recipes not only strengthened their social relationships but it fostered a sense of hope that one day some of the women would be free to make at least one of the recipes they had learned. She wrote in her memoir: "Many of us slept with the feeling of having had a meal, after two or three hours of recipe" (Evans).

Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist, a prisoner as well as a holocaust survivor, who had undergone indescribable tolerance in Auschwitz concentration camp, described his psychotherapeutic method which involved identification of a particular purpose in life in order to develop optimistic feelings. According to Frankl, imagination of a person could possibly affect his or her longevity. Prisoners who were in dire need of something would look up to someone superior, for help, like God or family, so that they would never be disappointed. Frankl added that a prisoner's psychological reactions were not solely the result of the conditions of his life, but developed from the freedom of choice that he had in the worse suffering scenario. So if a

prisoner happened to lose that hope in future, he would be doomed.

Frankl always attempted to find a meaning amidst extreme sufferings. He described it in his account of personal experiences he had while working in the harsh conditions of the Auschwitz concentration camp:

We stumbled on in the darkness, over big stones and through large puddles, along the one road leading from the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbour's arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his mouth behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: "If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us." That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise (Frankl 41).

The imagination about a beloved person or an object helps a troubled person to attain self-courage and mental strength. Even Gerda's imagination was always constrained to her family and surroundings.

Gerda's last camp was in Grunberg. After that she was delegated to infamous death march of 359 miles to avoid the advances of the Allied forces. She was one of the 4000 women who marched. Food and water were unavailable. Climate was terrible with severe cold of winter and ice falling. They were no longer counted. They could not keep track of how many were shot dead during that night. On the fifth afternoon she heard shots while they were marching through a thicket. She realised that somebody in their group was killed. In the next moment, one of the SS man pointed a Gun at her and shouted: "come along". She froze with fear and couldn't move. She thought she would be next. He shouted again. She stepped out of line. The SS pulled out three more girls. She heard the column march on. She no longer felt the snow whip upon her face. She felt no rebellion, no wild pounding of her heart. She had no other alternative but to cope the situations with mental power. So she filled her mind with imagination. "I thought of a winter's day at home, and

Schmutzi, my cat, bringing her new born kittens into the kitchen to warm them by the stove. I tried desperately to remember what we had named the kittens, but I couldn't" (Klein 186). But suddenly she had to come out of her imagination into the reality. In front of her, there were dead bodies of two unknown beautiful girls. But she was not at all terrified because she was in wonderful world of comfort. As per the order of SS man those bodies were taken to woods by Gerda and other girls. Gerda thought that the SS man was going to kill them soon after they finish burying the dead bodies instead he ordered them to join with the rest of the people in the column. Here Gerda proved that imagination had the power to create a heaven out of hell.

One night, Gerda had to face a deadly situation unexpectedly. It was too dark when they entered another town. Nobody was seen in the streets while they marched. The wind was howling as they were led to a low hill where a church stood. The SS women and their favourites were lodged in town. Gerda and others were accompanied by the three SS guards who asked them to lie down upon the frozen earth in front of the church. The wind swept the snow over them. After a few minutes they were covered. Gerda and her intimate friend Ilse cuddled close, trying with their bodies to warm up each other. Ilse didn't know how to overcome these deadly situations. Gerda believed that if they could warm up their bodies, then their minds would not deteriorate. She asked all other girls to warm up each other and stay awake because she knew that if they fell asleep then that would be permanent. They all would die. Till dawn broke and the wind stopped, Gerda imagined her home and flew to her childhood memories.

I remembered a lamp burning softly under the yellow shade in my nursery and how Niania, 50 year old woman of neighbour house, read to me the story of the Little March Girl. I could hear Niania's warm tones: "And the little march girl smiled, she did not feel the cold any more.... (Klein 187).

Psychotherapist Donald Roberson said:

Psychological reactions to imagined events are often indistinguishable from those to real events, except perhaps that they are typically less severe. Learning to cope with stress reactions to imagined situations, therefore, tends to promote resilience in the face of similar events in reality but also a more general ability to cope with stress reactions across different situation (152).

Again and again Gerda used the theory of "Applied Relaxation in imagination" to cope up with death-blowing situations. But her power of imagination not only resulted in positive events but also caused some negative events as well.

One night, Gerda imagined that they all were escaping through woods. She told this to her close friends. They thought about it a lot. Some of them decided to take a

risk. But in the morning Gerda heard screams and pathetic begging from the forest. The SS men caught fourteen girls who tried to escape through forest. They were lined up in front of Gerda and others. The commandant took out his pistol. The girls screamed. The commandant fired again and again. Fourteen girls fell, one on top of the other. Gerda closed her eyes. They started marching again as if nothing happened. One girl spotted a can of milk hung from the branch of a tree. She ran out of the lines to see if there was any milk in it. An SS man grabbed her by the neck, forced her to stand on her knees. He shot that poor little girl without mercy and kicked her aside.

Every day Gerda witnessed the cold murders of fellow prisoners by the SS men. All the marching girls shrank to a quarter of their original size. She realised that they all will die either by shots or by starvation. Gerda seemed to lose all hopes, faith and the mental strength to cope up with terrific situations. "Why should I hope? Why should I be free, and the others be dead? Why should I think that I would be a privileged one?" (Klein 192). Questions turned up in her mind and random thoughts made her crazy. Suddenly she remembered how the power of imagination had worked over her and how she overcame deadly situations earlier. She realised that negative thoughts would not save her. She realised the foolishness of negative thinking in the threshold of survival and she took all efforts to retrieve the coping ability with power of imagination. She again went back to some old memories.

But these thoughts are dangerous. I had to hope. I had to go on to the end. If Papa, Mama and Arthur survive, they will wait for me, hoping and praying. I must not disappoint them. "Be strong." Arthur had whispered, almost six years ago. "Be strong." Mama had called over the mass of voices as I left Bielitz (Klein 192).

In his book *Opening the Door to Power of Imagination* James Bernard, a noted artist, author and teacher described that imagination had been so powerful that when applied negatively, it could be quite destructive. It could actually paralyze people with fear and make them gravely ill. That is to say, fear and worry gain their power through the imagination. Phobias have their roots in the idea of imagination. Nothing has a more powerful effect upon the subconscious than the imagination. Imaginations applied in a constructive way can produce beneficial effects than destructions. It would revolutionize our life and would enable us to become 'the super new human' that is just waiting to be revealed (9).

Gerda must have marched about two hundred and fifty kilometres since Grunberg. As she approached the outskirts of Dresden, she heard air-raid sirens blowing warnings. Soon hundreds of planes roared through skies. It was as if the world were coming to an end. Giant bombers roared over them. Heaven and earth shook. Houses collapsed like dominoes. People screamed and some jumped in flames into the icy river. She realised Germany was being destroyed. Though Gerda was not afraid of

these, she had a painful feeling of detachment and utter loneliness.

One afternoon, as Gerda passed through Freiberg, the windows of a pretty house were open and someone inside was playing the piano. Soft music floated in the air. As she came closer, her steps drowned out the music. Only after she passed the house did she begin to hear it again. In her mind she wrote a story to go with the music. It was about someone who tended a plant all his life and it never blossomed. Only after the person died did the flower bloom. Here, music cleared her mind and invoked good imagination in her. Through a simple story she pondered over the transience of life and happiness (Klein 193).

The soothing power of music is well-established in psychoanalytic theory. In 1900, Sigmund Freud discussed some musical phenomena in his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He enjoyed certain operas such as Don Giovanni and The Marriage of Figaro and he used musical metaphors in the context of theory and therapy. He believed that "conversational" and "narrative" forms of music provided some kind of "cognitive control" over the emotional thoughts. Theodor Reik (1888–1969) one of Freud's earliest students, took up the theme of the "haunting melody" in Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1915–1917) to demonstrate that musical structure can represent feelings (wikipedia).

The power of imagination is not something exclusive only to Gerda. Every person has got this power. People need to create and use it in a positive way. Creative thought is powered by imagination, the key to unlocking potential. Imagination helps us to blend calculated thoughts with feelings and visual expression to create something positive and good. Good imagination skills come from keen observation and opportunities. Napoléon Bonaparte, a French military and political leader declares that imagination rules the world.

While Gerda walked on the death march, she forced herself to imagine that by some miracle her brother or her parents would be there to embrace her or to take her back home. "Maybe at this next stop, I will see Arthur or Mama or Papa" (Klein 192). She was fortunate not to be a realist, because she saw far too many realists in the camps who did not survive.

As they marched through hilly station and halted in a meadow, Gerda's intimate friend Ilse had fallen ill. She tried to care her but could not give her some water to drink at her last moment. She was helpless. Even though Gerda had witnessed many deaths daily, Ilse's death was great shock to her. Ilse was the only family that Gerda had, after she got separated from her parents. They lived like sisters. As Ilse died in front of her, Gerda could not hope to see her again after liberation unlike what she felt about her parents' reunion. Even on her deathbed, Ilse expressed her concern for Gerda and her family, forcing Gerda to promise that she would stay alive to see the end of the war. Gerda attributed a sort of otherworldly goodness to Ilse and credited her as life-saver.

According to the text *Understanding Grief and Loss*, when a loved one dies, close relatives and friends often find themselves entangled in a complex web of emotions and reactions. The death of a loved one can be an overwhelming, frightening and painful experience. There are two major psychological responses shown by individuals when adjusting to loss: the use of coping mechanisms and emotional reactions. Coping mechanisms are used to reduce the level of anxiety that individuals feel at particular moment and thereby they psychologically protect individuals. With this individuals would begin the grieving and healing process with disbelief or denial, disorganization, dependence and intellectualization and finally adjust with the loss. Emotional responses coexist with coping mechanisms, but they do not necessarily protect the person from the trauma of loss. They are means of expressing emotions and feelings associated with the loss. Whether an individual copes with a significant loss (death) in a positive and constructive manner or in a negative and destructive manner depends on the types of coping mechanisms used and the quality of support being given (Lingren 52).

When Gerda realised that Ilse had passed away, she ran over to her other friends and group and screamed: "Ilse is dead, Ilse is dead." But nobody reacted to her because death had already become part of their routine and Ilse's death never seemed to be something special. They were all expected to die sooner or later (Klein 205). From their reactions Gerda felt that nobody had a hope to live and enjoy freedom.

Gerda lived in the Nazi concentration camp for almost six years facing death each and every moment. It was the fate of every Jew under Nazi's rule. As a pillar of strength, she was not ready to lose optimism and faith. So she adopted intellectualization method to cope with her deepest loss. Intellectualization method was a coping mechanism in which a grieving person attempted to master the loss by gathering a great deal of knowledge and information and analysed in detail the situations leading to the loss (Lingren 54).

Gerda was weak both psychically and mentally. Her leg was broken. But Ilse's last words on death bed, "promise me, you must try to go on for one more week" (205) inspired Gerda and she regained her mental power. Thus she started marching again.

Three days after Ilse's death, Gerda reached a little town in Czechoslovakia where she overheard the news that Hitler got killed. Gerda and others were really happy at this news but they were also worried because they wondered what if this news could get them killed for revenge.

The SS woman in charge asked them to stand in a row in a meadow. Those who were no longer fit she ordered to stand apart. Gerda was swaying. SS woman shouted at Gerda: "you can't walk anymore, Take off her shoes," she commanded Hanka, who stood beside Gerda (208). Gerda panicked because she could not think of losing her shoes. That shoe embodied in it the memories of

her father. It was a symbol of her father's wisdom that gave her strength, hope, power, tolerance, and safety. It was her father who insisted that she must wear her ski boots despite the fact that it is summer. Nazi's had killed all those girls who were unable to walk. This shoe had actually saved her life. It supported and cared her legs as she walked the march along 350 miles. She always felt her father's presence when she was in those shoes. Those shoes had psychological effects upon her and provided her unusual power to move ahead. So to take off her shoes meant to take off her life. So she refused to remove her shoes and stood in line with the strong determination. Her friend Hanka pushed her behind another girl to hide the shoes.

The SS woman ordered all the sick girls to get inside the truck. Gerda tried to get in, but she could not because there was not enough space for her to stand. Hanka advised her to wait for another wagon. As Gerda was in no hurry she decided to wait. The truck rushed away with one SS man and one SS woman. Gerda waited for the truck to come back but it never returned. She felt that something bad might have happened, otherwise they would have returned. Fear subjugated her positive thinking and hope for liberation. How horrible to die at the threshold of liberation! More adrenaline got released into her the blood stream which caused some serious biological reactions in her body. She was mentally exhausted. If she couldn't control her emotions, then her life would become a by-product of fear. So instead of worrying over the truck she made use of her imagination for relaxation. She went back to her thoughts of Papa and Mama. "I did not feel cold or hungry, only lonely and sad. I allowed myself the rare luxury of thinking of home - of Papa and Mama and Arthur strolling on a spring night in the garden under the darkening sky. I felt strangely consoled" (209).

When the truck failed to return, the remaining hundred and twenty girls were locked inside a large factory building by the SS men. The doors and windows were barricaded so that they wouldn't be able to escape. Gerda was sure that these SS men would probably kill them all when they return.

The SS men and women had sworn eternal faith to Adolf Hitler and they were his most ruthless henchmen, who had often been seen as the very personifications of evil. They were a violent group who rose to power in a democracy and they established institutions of legitimized terror. But these masterminds of death were found to be quite psychologically normal. They were men of fine standing, husbands, who in the morning and night, kissed their wives, fathers who tucked their children into bed. But their aversion towards Jewish community compelled them to exercise brutal physical and mental harassments and they enjoyed it a lot. They shot the Jews randomly and never regarded them as human beings. They let them to die out of starvation. In fact, thousands of people, who had lived side by side with their Jewish neighbours for generations, were quite willing to turn against them and

they committed mass murder, brutalities, cruelties, tortures, atrocities, and other inhuman acts.

The term "Schadenfreude" becomes relevant in this context. It refers to a state in which pleasure is derived from the misfortunes of others. This word is taken from German. It literally means "harm-joy" (Merriam-Webster). It is the feeling of joy or pleasure when one sees another one fail or suffer misfortune. In *On Human Nature*, the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said: "To feel envy is human, to savour schadenfreude is diabolic". He regarded "schadenfreude" as the most evil sin that humans possess. In the Bible, chapter of Proverbs mentions an emotion similar to schadenfreude: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth" (The King James Bible, Prov. 24:17-18).

According to research studies conducted by Erin Buckels of the University of British Columbia, people who score high on a measure of sadism are even willing to expend their efforts to hurt others and derive pleasure from it. According to Herbert, based on the work *Dark Triad of Personality*, Buckels, Delroy Paulhus (the University of British Columbia) and Daniel Jones (the University of Texas El Paso) surmised that sadism is a distinct aspect of personality that joins with three others — psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism — to form a "Dark Tetrad" of personality traits (psychologicalscience.org).

Gerda along with others waited quietly inside the large factory building. They were totally confused and all sat in despair. Then it started raining accompanied by loud thunder. The war plane stopped roaring, the artillery fire ceased. Still Gerda could hear the ticking sound of a bomb outside the building. Suddenly some Czechs came and broke the door open. They urged them to run and escape. Gerda realised that the bomb that was intended to kill them all had not gone off and when the SS men would find about it, they were going to shoot them all.

Some of the girls ran outside and some hid inside the factory. Two other girls and Gerda crawled into a long, metal cylinder lying on the floor. They could hear shooting sounds from a distance and then close by and the planes roared overhead. They all hid in their position without a dare to move. They heard pounding of heavy boots. Someone shouted "Get out, you beasts" and started firing. One bullet went through the cylinder, creasing Gerda's shoulder and one of the other girl's legs. After sometime, the Germans departed.

During the entire period of her agony, she maintained faith and hope and that ultimately saved her. Faith produces neither apathy nor quietness, but a freedom from anxiety and shapes the rest of the soul. Faith can have huge impact upon a person's intelligence as well.

After some time, Gerda heard someone shouting in Czech (210). A man and two women entered the factory calling: "If someone is inside, come out. The war is over". Gerda along with other two girls crawled out of the cylinder, stiff and numb. A white flag of peace waved gently from its steeple. Her throat tightened with emotion and her tears fell on the dusty window sill. That was the

greatest moment in her life. Finally her dream had come true.

In the Epilogue of her autobiography *All But My life*, Gerda stated that she somehow made her way, grappling with feelings that would let her reconcile difficult memories with hope for the future and balancing pain with joy, death with life, loss with gain, tragedy with happiness. Survival was both an exalted privilege and a painful burden (247).

She added that, Imagination could be a distraction that shields one from facing reality. Gerda had tried as much as possible to either live in the past or in the future. She had spent hours thinking about her home, parents, pets and garden and about the dress she should wear (a red dress or a blue dress) to a party after the liberation.

Most people are inclined to think in a negative way because they do not expect success. When they fail, they believe that fate is against them. From the real life experience of Gerda Weissmann, one should understand the power of positive imagination and faith in leading a happy, successful life.

Gerda was only 21 when she endured six years of torture in the Nazi concentration camp, followed by a three-month death march in bitter cold winter. Her hair had turned white and she weighed 68 pounds. She never took a bath in three years. Daily she witnessed the death of her fellow beings including her close friends. But she never cried; instead thought about the coping mechanisms that would help her survive. She applied the theory of Relaxation in imagination and used it in the right ways. She was admitted in a hospital, soon after the liberation. For the first time in six years, her mind realised the reality and she burst into tears.

A nurse brought me a drink of milk. Milk! I hadn't had any in three years. As I drank it something tremendous and uncontrollable broke loose within me. My body shook convulsively. I wanted to stop it but I couldn't. I heard my voice and could do nothing about it. Long pent-up emotions finally burst out. I cried for Ilse, for Suse, for other friends, and finally for my family too. Deep in my heart I had known they were dead, but dreams about happy reunions with them had kept me going (Klein 217).

Kurt Klein, the officer in American Army, who saved her and others at the end of war, often visited Gerda in hospital. Gradually, they had fallen in love with each other. She was happy with him. She got sufficient food to eat, clean bed to sleep, books to read, and Kurt was there for consolation. She never had time to think about her family's tragedy. When Kurt invited her to go to Bavaria, she accepted it without any hesitation. When they were about to step out of the hospital, Gerda looked at the sky and wondered what if it rained and turned cold, because she didn't own a coat or a sweater. But she quickly dismissed the thought. It was the end of July and the

weather was fine. She laughed a bit thinking how she slept out in the snow not so very long (240).

Gerda's life reveals the fact that human mind has the power to adjust in accordance with diverse necessities and situations in life. Gerda has taught the world that it is often in the most hopeless moments that people discover the extent of our strength and the depth of our love. In 2011 President Barack Obama presented Gerda Weissmann Klein with the 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom.

4. CONCLUSION

At some point of time, every person has to make use of their faith and creative power of imagination either consciously or unconsciously. Those who use it consciously are able to have their desires fulfilled and enjoy their life freely. Those who use it unconsciously are self-confined by their undisciplined behaviours. There are two kinds of people who use it unconsciously; who are not aware of the possibility of using it with conscious intention, or who know that it can be done but choose not to be responsible for their actions. They may also be inclined to blame external circumstances for their unhappiness and misfortunes. In order to actualize our fantasy or imagination we need to have clearly defined concepts of what we consider to be essential for our highest good and mastery of attention.

Our mind and body are comprised of conscious and unconscious elements which are ruled by imagination or creativity. Creativity in psychotherapy has got encouraged because it is a discourse that is as vast and infinite as the imagination of the client and the therapist and offers rich therapeutic alliance. One important advantage of the daydream technique is that it provokes intense emotional reactions very easily. This is indispensable for the attainment of certain state of consciousness and is essential to the achievement of a cure. This explains the contribution of imagery-based therapies towards certain behavioural changes. This is a process of mental preparation or covert modelling rehearsal. Every coping mechanisms spurt out from inner mind which has to be reinforced with a celestial power unless it is not easy to attain survival. Gerda makes use of imagination (as a coping mechanism for the survival) with the support of celestial power of faith. Imagination and faith are two factors that play a major role in our life when we are challenged by the problems of reality.

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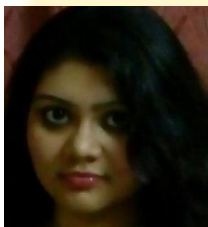
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