

Letters to the Editor

Bergen-Belsen

I was quite moved by Dr. Sham's personal account of his ordeal with kidney cancer in the *The Pharos*, Summer 2023, (pp. 43-44). In his essay, he poignantly describes his having Stage III(T3a) cancer and wondering whether he will have a recurrence, a very understandable concern/fear that never leaves him. He then draws a parallel to Holocaust survivors, with whom he has had considerable contact, especially his deceased friend Henry, a teenage survivor of four notorious concentration/slave labor camps. He describes a sort of hierarchy of survivorship comparing a small skin cancer to fleeing Germany unscathed before *Kristallnacht* in 1938. He compares surviving the most aggressive malignancy to surviving the most lethal extermination camps like Treblinka or Sobibor, in which the element of luck was a major factor. So far so good in his analogy.

Where his comparison breaks down is in his commentary on causation. He correctly asserts that, "Cancer is caused by a mutation, not a spiritual message" (p. 43) and he takes umbrage with those who told him that "everything happens for a reason," etc. As it is not his goal to educate us about the Holocaust, the reader is left in a quandary because Sham does not tell us more about the dynamics of the Holocaust, as he probably assumes we all know about it. Not necessarily so.

The Holocaust was not caused by a mutation in its victims, nor was it a function of random bad fortune. It

was caused by a malignant mutation in a sovereign nation whose leadership legalized mass murder of its purported enemies. The Holocaust was state-sponsored genocidal persecution by the Nazi regime in Germany. The Jews were condemned to death for one reason only—because they were Jews!

I emphasize this distinction because of a recent survey of young people between the ages of 18-years-old and 39-years-old, in which almost one-fourth of them believed the Holocaust was a myth, and almost two-thirds of those surveyed did not know that six million Jews were murdered. Moreover, almost half of the respondents could not name even one concentration camp.

While I know that *The Pharos'* readership is very high level, some of our younger colleagues are in this age group and may not be as well informed as we in the older generation might think they are.

We all have gaps in our cultural literacy, and I wanted to take this opportunity to add my voice, once again, to this most important journal.

Reference

1. Brenner, I. *The Handbook of Psychoanalytic Holocaust Studies- International Perspectives*. London: Routledge: 2020.

Ira Brenner, MD
AQA, Sidney Kimmel Medical College, 1976, Alumnus
Philadelphia, PA