

Human Compassion Amidst Human Atrocities

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In a stereotypical society, people often assume that courageous qualities only belong to certain types of individuals. The fireman, the police officer, and the doctor are among those who conform to the idea of a brave person. Societal notions about heroism tend to revolve around these professionals - people who pull children out of burning buildings, stop robberies in progress, or perform life-saving surgeries. However, a hero is also someone who uses moral courage to defend personal philosophies. Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, stated, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented" (Abrams, 2008). By refusing to remain silent in times of injustice, ordinary people can use moral courage to save the lives of others. During the Holocaust, Gizella Varga, a Hungarian, Christian woman, chose to overcome her fears and break through the silence, ultimately saving her former Jewish doctor, Bela Gomori, from an uncertain fate in the Jewish Ghetto. Through her display of moral courage, Mrs. Varga not only saved her doctor, but also showed that ordinary people can triumph over injustice.

Rather than rely on her society's imposed messages as a proxy for her conscience, Mrs. Varga refused to succumb to the Nazi's injustices. Twice a week, Mrs. Varga brought food and clothing to Dr. Gomori, who was forced to live in a Nazi-controlled ghetto. Seven months pregnant, Mrs. Varga lived alone in a small apartment in Budapest because her husband was away at war as a soldier. On December 12th, 1944, Dr. Gomori, thirty years old at the time, received a warning that he would be transported from the ghetto to a concentration camp within the following weeks. Refusing to accept this injustice, Mrs. Varga decided to overcome her fears and follow her own sense of morality. With a basket filled with her husband's clothing and ID, Mrs. Varga dauntlessly visited Dr. Gomori at the ghetto one last time. While Dr. Gomori removed the yellow Jewish identification star from his clothing and changed into Mr. Varga's suit and large hat, Mrs. Varga anxiously waited, filled with hope that her plan would work, and simultaneously filled with fear that Nazis would kill both her and Dr. Gomori. Pretending that Dr. Gomori was her husband, Mrs. Varga courageously walked past the Nazis, showing them her own and her husband's IDs. After overcoming a series of Nazi interrogations, Mrs. Varga arrived at her apartment with Dr. Gomori, where she hid him in her basement and provided him with food and clothing. Mrs.

Varga continued to display moral courage when Nazis moved into a building across the street from her apartment. The Nazis searched every building for hidden Jews and immediately shot all the Jews they found, along with the people who had tried to help them hide. Despite this threat to her life, Mrs. Varga continued to protect her former doctor. Displaying moral courage, Mrs. Varga refused to obey the Nazis' inhumane orders and protected Dr. Gomori until February 8th, 1945, when the USSR's soldiers liberated the Jews in Budapest, including Dr. Gomori, who went on to practice medicine for the rest of his life (Gomori, 2008).

By following her own sense of morality, Mrs. Varga risked her life to save her former physician from the atrocities of the Holocaust. Furthermore, Mrs. Varga's demonstration of moral courage shows that ordinary people can act as heroes by questioning injustice. During the Holocaust, the power structure of Dr. Gomori's relationship with his patient, Mrs. Varga, was eliminated and even reversed. Dr. Gomori could help Mrs. Varga as a physician, but during the Holocaust, Mrs. Varga had the potential to help Dr. Gomori as a humanitarian. Traditionally, a physician wears a white coat. Symbolizing prestige and power, this white coat was removed from Dr. Gomori and replaced by a yellow star that represented abhorrence and loathing. Mrs. Varga provided Dr. Gomori with the opportunity to remove the yellow star and to eventually regain his white coat. She rose to the moral challenge placed before her and saved her physician's life. While Dr. Gomori could never repay Mrs. Varga for her courage, he remained her physician, always making room in his busy operating schedule to see her as a patient.

I come from a long line of people who wear white coats. My grandmother and my mother are physicians, and my sister is in medical school. All three of them share stories about how they have helped to save a patient's life. However, my grandfather's doctor-patient story is different. His story involves the ordinary person, Mrs. Varga, saving my grandfather, Dr. Gomori. If Mrs. Varga had not been courageous enough to break unjust rules and risk her life, my grandfather would have suffered through the atrocities of the concentration camps, and he may not have lived to create a long line of physicians following in his humanitarian footsteps. Along with the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, my grandfather could have been tortured and ultimately murdered. Although neither he nor his hero is alive today to tell the story of their unique doctor-patient relationship, Mrs. Varga's moral courage will forever inspire the succeeding generations of my family. Like Mrs. Varga, I too can overcome

dangerous obstacles by maintaining a strong sense of morality and following my conscience despite the consequences. My grandmother and mother's stories about their professions inspire me to work diligently with the hopes of eventually having a job that allows me to be a hero too. However, my grandfather's story teaches a much more important lesson; education, money, and high social status are not needed to help another person. Through moral courage, an ordinary person can become a hero if he/she is willing to resist the masses of society, to break unjust rules, and to stand up for his/her beliefs. Following her inner moral compass, Mrs. Varga placed her own life in jeopardy to save a fellow human being who was her doctor, her friend, and my grandfather.

Bibliography

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