

# Psychological Hardiness in these times

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Why do some people survive in a disaster when others near them don't? What can we do to not let major stresses in our lives dominate us? We will discuss some of the practices that contribute to our safety and our living from a more peaceful state of mind.

## Part 1

First, you should know that - **What we find in a disaster is that before anyone else, regular people are on the scene saving one another.**

In Amanda Ripley's book "The Unthinkable - Who Survives when disaster strikes - and why" she tells us about "**the Survival Arc**" we go through from danger to safety.

**Deny - Delay**  
**Evaluate and Seek Options**  
**Decide/Act**

Example: One passenger is thinking "My God, the boat is sinking!"

Surviving passenger is thinking: There's Option 1, there's option 2, GO!"

One problem, we need to counter the Fear Responses of

## Panic and Stupor.

\*One thing you can do, and this isn't in Amanda's book, is that when you are feeling really anxious about something, -concentrate on your breathing, slowly breathe in, slowly breathe out (this sets a calm - from which you can better evaluate danger and identify options)

\*Your life is too important to yourself and to your loved ones to give up - this can be a real motivator to action

\*You can control your actions, you do have some control over the situation. Self-confidence can save your life.

\*You learned from grade school fire drills:

"Stay in line, don't push, we'll all get out."

\*Panic comes from feeling you may be trapped; sensation of great helplessness (especially when this is reflected in people nearby); and a sense of profound isolation. Panic is a glimpse of one's own impending mortality.

One's resting level of anxiety on any given day indicates that one tends to see things as stressful. Find ways to reduce your resting level of anxiety. Prepare yourself, join with others in preparing and then promote sensible actions in others.

\* Ask yourself how can you help others on the scene.

Realistic Practice brings out our faults and makes us stronger. (Ex - Driver Ed trainer, after letting trainee gain some confidence in handling the car in normal driving, creates a skid for students to learn to overcome their fears and do what works to regain control of the car. Repeated practice makes it become automatic.

Terrorism is a psychological war. Fear requires two things:

Awareness of a Threat, and a sense of being powerless to deal with that threat.

Learn about something that scares you, that can help reduce your fear.

When people believe that survival is negotiable, they can be wonderfully creative. All it takes is to imagine that your behavior matters.

Systematically prepare for risks in your area. Conduct dress rehearsals for your brain. ((For example, in Tsunami area, you might imagine you have just felt a strong earthquake - take the 10 minutes you have before a wave would hit to move to higher ground. Time yourself. - Do this alone or with a group. make it a challenge to know where to go from different places, and then see if you can reduce your time to safety.))

The more control you feel you have, the less dread you will feel. And the more control you feel, the better your performance will be should the worst come to pass.

When getting in a plane - look for the nearest exits. Read the safety sheet, pay attention to the flight attendant.

When checking into a hotel or motel, or staying in a new place, trace your path to safety should some danger occur.

Website to check: <http://www.amandaripley.com/author>

Above all, it is essential to take the initiative. Remember that you and your neighbors must save yourselves. Knowing the Survival Arc gives you a better chance of getting to safety.

Keeping these things can increase your confidence in your own abilities to deal with disaster.

**I began to wonder how this material might help us to be survivors of today's larger concerns. Let's start with the Survival Arc and see if it can help us better understand our current world situation.**

## Part 2

The following thoughts are mostly from: Thomas Homer-Dixon's book The Upside of Down, Catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization

There seems little doubt that our human family is facing major stresses - negative trends - like giant Tectonic Plates moving under global society.

Let's apply **the Survival Arc** to our Nation and Globe:

**Deny (confusion/anxiety) - Delay**  
**Evaluate the Situation (get facts not hearsay) - Identify Options**  
**Decide - Act**

Homer-Dixon identifies 5 of these:

**Energy** - on which our entire social lives are based.

**Economic** - viewing it now from within our national financial meltdown

**Population** - inequities and migrations

**Environmental** - damaging our land, water, forests and fisheries

**Climate Stress** - from changes in Earth's atmosphere

To these we can add:

**Cyber-Crash** - intentional (cyber-terrorism) or unintended resulting from overloaded, massively interconnected, hypercomplex information/ communication systems.

**Terrorist Acts** - from governments or groups

And since the risk of these is increasing and they effect each other - a domino or cascading crisis is possible.

Drawing on patterns of the Roman Empire and Forest Ecology, the author talks about **Energy Return on Investment** (and how EROI contributed to Rome's downfall) and "**The Adaptive Cycle**" of living systems which includes phases of Growth, Collapse, Reorganization and Rebirth. He brings into this some aspects of living systems to be aware of, such as Complexity (which increases during the growth cycle), Connectedness - (which needs a certain looseness to decrease risk of cascading collapse -an example is the current global economic crisis), Potential (which offers more options as it increases with the above two aspects), and Resilience (reflects more conscious, anticipatory, and comprehensive decision-making).

**What are some things we can do to better manage our lives?**

1. We can seek to better understand these different stress factors, and stay current with actions which can lessen them. Do some homework, share your concerns with others and learn from them. Set up informal meetings to share awareness and understanding.

2. Cultivate an attitude of Creative Resilience - keep an

open mind to possibilities; Spend more time with people who seem to see things as you do, but who have positive attitudes.

3. Recognize that you are handling many different facts and experiences all the time, so be comfortable with this process.

4. Prepare for those things you can; Take an active part in making a difference in others' lives. These are all healthy things to do.

5. Here's some of what we need to keep in mind:

Expect surprises, they will happen.

Be comfortable with constant change and even breakdowns, because these are now inevitable features of our world.

Constantly anticipate a wide variety of futures (so we're not in such a shock/delay should they happen)

Prepare for alternative futures as best we can

Be ready to turn surprise and breakdown to our advantage, that is, to move toward creative renewal of our technologies, institutions and society in their aftermath.

Work to create and support creative endeavors which address major stresses, such as wiser energy use/ production/ conduction and better insulation of our buildings, etc,. Learn how others are taking actions directed toward each of the major stresses. These can lessen the impacts of a collapse, should it happen.

We can demonstrate and foster openness, creativeness, belief in our human capacities to meet our challenges.

Consider our 4 million year evolution and the fact that we are the survivors of survivors all the way back to the earliest single celled organisms.

### **Nurture resilience thinking:**

Seek to learn from both positive and negative experiences

Seek meaningful purpose in life's turmoil

Talk with others, learn how they handle stress, exchange experiences

Consider it all part of the Game of Life

These are all aspects of opening up to embrace our lives, to playing a more active personal role in determining our lives. For additional insight on our human possibilities, we need an evolutionary-psychologist.

## Part 3

Let me introduce you to Robert Jay Lifton's book Protean Self - Human Resilience in an age of Fragmentation.

### **A new way of seeing ourselves**

Lifton says that because of the last 50 years, we humans are beginning to develop a new kind of "Self". Instead of seeing ourselves as a noun, we seem to be a verb as Bucky Fuller has said about himself. So we are not as much a job, vocation, or solid image, but rather we are more fluid like, a many-sided self in constant motion.

Just as the **ancient Greek god Proteus** could shapeshift as needed, Lifton sees us as having ability to rapidly re-create

ourselves as exterior conditions demand it. By becoming more flexible, or protean, we have the potential to become a more life-affirming species.

Our older vision of Personal Identity has lost its grounding. As we reintegrate ourselves through constant deaths and rebirths, successes and failures, we're developing a new freedom to just move anywhere and feel anything.

Idea systems can be embraced, modified, let go, and re-embraced, all with a new ease, quite unlike the inner struggle people in the past endured with such shifts.

We're moving from linear thinking to holding many images and ideas in mind at one time. This new self is gaining the ability to transmute trauma into various expressions of insight, compassion and innovation.

## **On Fundamentalism**

One way some people deal with today's stresses is what we just talked about, - to open our thinking and feeling, question those with answers, explore many explanations and possibilities - to think for ourselves.

Another way out of the complexity, confusion and stress of our lives is to withdraw from life, constrict ourselves, or buy into someone else's answers. This is where Fundamentalism comes in. It is just the opposite of the Protean-Self approach.

The Fundamentalist approach can be seen as offering answers and assurances that everything will be fine if we just accept a particular vision, or visionary leader who claims to

have insight into the mystical meanings of life, and if we just get in line with their espoused right values, right beliefs and right ways of doing things we will be safe and saved.

"However the self may seem to be falling apart, 'fundamentalism provides explanations that put everything back together again.' The self becomes increasingly totalized, ensconced in an all-embracing ideological structure."

There's a black and white view of everything, God and Satan, good and evil, the Godly and the condemned. There is an End-Time Doctrine and only the true believers will be saved. It is an immortality fellowship.

Faith and belief are demanded, questioning is wrong thinking and is severely chastized. Religious doctrines are selectively quoted to reinforce beliefs, values and practices. Logical, rational discussions are signs of the Devil, so don't be surprised if when trying to discuss things with such a person you are met with 'tape loops' of memorized passages from their sacred text. Peer pressure is constantly applied to reinforce group ways and keep one in the fold. Guilt causing practices are used to internalize one's staying in line. If you wish to learn more about this, I suggest Margaret Singer's book: Cults in our Midst, The Hidden Menace in our Everyday Lives.

It is about Fundamentalist thinking carried to an extreme.

### **In conclusion**

Lifton's perspective gives us insight into constructing a meaningful life for ourselves within the rapid changes of our modern world. What he is saying is that we can use our personal and collective experiences to create unique solutions in each moment. In a sense, life is becoming like Improv-Theatre, and we are the players in this new game of

improvising as we go.

The overall human quest seems to involve a struggle for a larger human connectedness, as though we're seeking immortality through aligning ourselves with movements or systems which transcend our personal life span.

We have new technologies to help us (including but not limited to the internet). We need to apply them to these urgent needs of our human family. We can link up with others striving to make a difference. We can do more things for ourselves so we're not a burden on others should things get tougher.

**Lifton gives us a way to understand our 21st century selves in a new way, and reasons for us to be more comfortable in moving forward with this new identity, an identity which enables us to feel we have a much greater potential for handling the enormous problems we are now facing.**

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