

Chapter 2

Psychological Preparations

LEARNING WHAT TO EXPECT

The more one knows about the strange and fearful dangers from nuclear weapons and about the strengths and weaknesses of human beings when confronted with the dangers of war, the better chance one has of surviving. Terror, a self-destructive emotion, is almost always the result of unexpected danger. Some people would think the end of the world was upon them if they happened to be in an area downwind from surface bursts of nuclear weapons that sucked millions of tons of pulverized earth into the air. They might give up all hope if they did not understand what they saw. People are more likely to endure and survive if they learn in advance that such huge dust clouds, particularly if combined with smoke from great fires, may turn day into night—as have some volcanic eruptions and the largest forest fires.

People also should expect thunder to crash in strange clouds, and the earth to shake. The sky may be lit with the flickering purples and greens of “artificial auroras” caused by nuclear explosions, especially those that are miles above the earth.

FEAR

Fear often is a life-saving emotion. When we believe death is close at hand, fear can increase our ability to work harder and longer. Driven by fear, we can accomplish feats that would be impossible otherwise. Trembling hands, weak legs, and cold sweat do not mean that a person has become ineffective. Doing hard, necessary work is one of the best ways to keep one’s fears under control.

Brave men and women who are self-confident admit their fears, even when the threat of death is remote. Then they plan and work to lessen the causes

of their fears. (When the author helped Charles A. Lindbergh design a reinforced-concrete blast shelter for his family and neighbors, Lindbergh frankly admitted that he feared both nuclear attack and being trapped. He was able to lessen both of these fears by building an excellent blast shelter with two escape openings.)

TERROR

If the danger is unexpected enough or great enough, normal persons sometimes experience terror as well as fear. Terror prevents the mind from evaluating dangers and thinking logically. It develops in two stages, which have been described by Dr. Walo von Gregerz, a physician with much war experience, in his book *Psychology of Survival*. The first stage is apathy: people become indifferent to their own safety and are unable even to try to save themselves or their families. The second stage is a compulsion to flee.

Anxiety, fear, and terror can result in symptoms very similar to those caused by radiation injury: nausea, vomiting, extreme trembling, diarrhea. Dr. von Gregerz has described terror as being “explosively contagious.” However, persons who learn to understand the nature of our inherent human traits and behavior and symptoms are less likely to become terrorized and ineffective in the event of a nuclear attack.

EMOTIONAL PARALYSIS

The most common reaction to great danger is not terror, but a kind of numbing of the emotions which actually may be helpful. Dr. von Gregerz calls this “emotional paralysis.” This reaction allows many persons, when in the grip of great danger, to avoid being overwhelmed by compassionate emotions and

horrible sights. It permits them to think clearly and act effectively.

ATOM BOMB SURVIVORS

The atomic explosions that destroyed most of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were air bursts and therefore produced no deadly local fallout. So we cannot be sure how people would behave in areas subjected to both blast and fallout from surface bursts. However, the reactions of the Japanese survivors are encouraging, especially in view of the fact that among them the relative number of horribly burned people was greater than is likely to be found among a population that expects a nuclear attack and takes any sort of shelter. Dr. von Gregerz summarizes: "In most cases the victims were, of course, apathetic and often incapable of rational action, but open panic or extremely disorganized behavior occurred only in exceptional cases among the hundreds of thousands of survivors of the two atomic bombing attacks." Also encouraging: "... serious permanent psychological derangements were rare

after the atomic bomb attacks, just as they were after the large-scale conventional bombings."

HELP FROM FELLOW AMERICANS

Some maintain that after an atomic attack America would degenerate into anarchy—an every-man-for-himself struggle for existence. They forget the history of great human catastrophes and the self-sacrificing strengths most human beings are capable of displaying. After a massive nuclear attack starvation would afflict some areas, but America's grain-producing regions still would have an abundance of uncontaminated food. History indicates that Americans in the food-rich areas would help the starving. Like the heroic Russians who drove food trucks to starving Leningrad through bursting Nazi bombs and shells,⁷ many Americans would risk radiation and other dangers to bring truckloads of grain and other necessities to their starving countrymen. Surely, an essential part of psychological preparations for surviving a modern war is a well-founded assurance that many citizens of a strong society will struggle to help each other and will work together with little regard for danger and loss.