



Illustration by Nilesh Juvalekar



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EVERYTHING CONNECTS.

the path of endurance

*In his newest book *Survive to Thrive*, co-authored with Lydia Dishman, Hoque draws upon the experiences of an extraordinary few to drive home the fact that resiliency is an attitude—it is your belief that you can conquer anything; it is the ability to go from days to weeks to months to years to reach your destination, defining and re-defining it along the way.*

A s you have summed up under ‘takeaways’ in the Andy Sack story, compassion and vulnerability appear to be the antithesis of resilience.

How would you explain the positive spin-off of compassion and vulnerability vis-à-vis resilience?

Mental toughness comes from compassion and vulnerability. Vulnerability can be defined as the diminished

capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a hostile situation. Compassion means ‘to suffer together.’

When we put a concentrated effort in recognizing others’ sufferings, it allows us to put our sufferings into perspective. When we empathize with others, our sense of identity is connected. As a result, we feel better in some way and less alone.

You speak about a different awareness that emerges when one rids oneself of mental restlessness and realizes the core oneness that engulfs humankind. Please elaborate on this thought.

When life is turned upside down, maintaining an attitude of genuine thankfulness helps us realize what we have. But one must create the mindset to be thankful. Mindfulness and meditation quiet our mental restlessness. Mental restlessness often includes judgment of others and ourselves, which diminishes our ability to fully connect with the present moment.

True presence allows us to see beyond external layers of difference and identify the core oneness we share with everyone else on this planet. When we recognize the interconnectedness of everything, compassion flows naturally. Being truly in the moment allows us to escape from adversity and conserve our inner energy.

Self-compassion is vital in overcoming adversity, but self-pity is not. How does one make sure that the thin line between self-compassion and self-pity is not breached?

The Dalai Lama says, “Generosity is the most natural outward expression of an inner attitude of compassion and loving-kindness.” Compassion, particularly self-



compassion, allows us to stop asking, “Am I good enough?” By recognizing our imperfect human condition, we can feel more secure and alive, and be more able to rebound from failure.

Self-pity is a negative emotion that does not help us deal with adverse situations. Self-compassion, on the other hand, is a positive emotion to move us forward. Self-pity is a state of mind of an individual in a “perceived adverse situation” who does not have the confidence or competence to cope with it. It is a person’s belief that he or she is the victim of unfortunate circumstances or events.

Laughter diffuses the urge to take ourselves too seriously and puts things into perspective.

Laughter should be a constant companion in the self-healing journey.

How difficult is it to embrace humor when you are grappling with life’s lowest moments?

Like mindfulness and empathy, humor needs to be practiced to increase our resiliency. It is anything but easy. Hence we call it a ‘practice’.

Laughter diffuses the urge to take ourselves too seriously and puts things into perspective. If you do not have someone around to help you laugh, simply sitting quietly and smiling can still stimulate the endorphins, which in turn will brighten your overall mood. Once you are there, it may be easier to find a way out of a dark mental space and discover a path toward success.



Dusting ourselves off every time we fall requires us to discipline our inner energy and drive in order to protect our soul. When we are able to protect our soul with energy, laughter, and acceptance, we can pursue our destiny unencumbered, despite the hurdles that pop up along the way.

Embracing failure in the life journey opens a new world of opportunities. Please expand on this thought.

Barriers and setbacks should be seen as challenges or opportunities for growth and development. Failure—and the way we respond to it—is an important aspect of life’s journey. It creates innumerable chances to rethink our next steps, potentially leading to something greater than we first imagined.

Our greatest accomplishments seldom have to do with simply who we are. It is much more about what we overcome and how. No one is going to hand us our destiny. We have to get up every morning and create it.

Penicillin, sticky notes, X-rays, microwave ovens, and pacemakers were all invented as by-products. Success often results from simple detours or mistakes made by people on alternative quests.

Reinvention is the essence of the resilient mindset. Please elucidate this point.

When we focus on our weaknesses, we end up smothering our potential and preventing it from manifesting. To survive, and ultimately to thrive, is our duty to rise again and again. ‘Changing self-doubt into self-belief is a choice.’ We are accountable for ourselves. Only we can change what and who we are.

A constant reinvention process is a combination of inner and outer awareness. We need to know what our timescale is for what we are doing; we need to know how the competencies we have built can extend in new directions; and we need to attend to how our work/life fits into the larger world. When we do all three, we can

be confident, committed, and flexible in the value that we repeatedly create for others and ourselves.

Your insights on ‘and’ or the Japanese Ma as a powerful principle of resilience.

‘And’ is a powerful principle of resilience. In its function as a conjunction in the English language, it joins two distinct thoughts and binds them together in a sentence.

In music, as in dance, the ‘and’ is the space for preparation for a note, a phrase, a step, or a turn. That room allows us to breathe and prepare,

to reset and continue. It can mean the difference between slumping into submission, or smiling and shrugging off a setback. In Japanese, the word to suggest that interval is *Ma*.

When practicing meditation, we can use ‘and’ or *Ma* to give rise to the inspiration that comes from imagining possibilities. Each time we pause to inhale and exhale is an opportunity to build hope out of darkness, an exercise in counting towards the light. ■



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As told to Anitha Moosath.

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