

THE GODZILLA EFFECT

(Discounting reality)

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Tsunami

Japanese,
tsu = harbour
nami = wave

Introduction

Eric Berne proposed that stories made up by humans can have an effect in their psychology. The stories represent the psychology and/or the psychology represents the story. He looked at stories like Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood as examples of how people learn to live their lives. Freud did the same with greek mythology and thus we have the oedipus conflict based on the myth of Oedipus Rex and the narcissistic personality based on the story or narcissus. In addition Steve Karpman(1976) states, "Fairy tales help inculcate the norms of society into young minds consciously, but subconsciously may provide an attractive stereotyped number of roles, locations, and timetables for an errant life script" (P51).

So it is proposed that children listen to fairy tales in order to learn their life plan. They choose their favourite story and make their own life script similar to that story in varying degrees. The other argument is that over the years story tellers have evolved fairy tales based on their observations of life. So the fairy story is the result of human development not the cause of it. Which ever one agrees with there does seem to be a link between children's stories and life scripts. Perhaps the same exists in Japanese psychology and the story of Godzilla

Godzilla

For those who do not know Godzilla was a huge reptilian monster which stood and walked on its hind legs and breathed fire out of its mouth. It would go into cities and cause massive destruction. It originally came from Japanese movie studios and was actually called "Gojira". It was only later renamed Godzilla for english speaking audiences in remakes of the original 1954 monster movie.

By now everyone reading this would be aware of the tsunami that caused so much destruction in countries bordering the Indian Ocean on December 26th, 2004. Without a doubt a most tragic event indeed that will be in our minds and hearts for a long time to come.

The tsunami & the human psyche

There are a few things that I would like to comment on about this tragedy as due to its nature it seems to have had an extra impact on the human psyche.

1. The tsunami in the Indian Ocean appeared suddenly with no warning at all. Thus you get the shock reflex in human psychology. If one is in a war situation loss of life is not a shock. If you live near an earthquake belt or active volcanos, destructive events are expected

In the story of Godzilla he (I will assume it is a he) usually appears suddenly with great surprise and shock to the masses of people he confronts.

2. The tsunami was a huge destructive force. The pictures we repeatedly saw and reports we repeatedly heard are of the huge power and energy of the force - trains, boats, buses and building are thrown around like match sticks. Humans just swept away with no ability to resist. What resources humans have will have no impact on it. Shooting bombs at it or making barriers will have no impact on it at all. The force is simply too hugely strong. Thus in the human psyche we are completely defenceless and at its will.

Godzilla was the same. Any bullets or bombs shot at it just bounced off and had no effect. The humans could do nothing to stop it.

3. It is completely nonnegotiable. You can not negotiate with a tsunami. The Bali bombing was also very destructive but we can negotiate with that. One can do political or diplomatic negotiations or negotiate with military might. There is no negotiation with a tsunami at all

Godzilla was also completely nonnegotiable. The leaders have no option to try and talk it around or make deals with it. This in the human psyche would seem to lead to a sense of hopelessness. A feeling of "What can we do if we cannot talk to it?".

4. The tsunami 'attacked' highly populated areas. Indeed some of the most highly populated areas on the planet such as in India and Indonesia. This it

could be argued engenders emotions and basic urges of not only individual survival but survival of the species. Obviously very primal urges.

Godzilla usually does the same by walking into highly populated cities and stomping on large groups of people and spraying its fire breath around to kill even more.

5. In any highly populated areas there are also going to be lots of buildings and human construction. Our cities are the symbol of our human potency that we can command our environment. Our tall buildings, vast metropolitan areas, incredible infrastructure of electricity, sewerage, water and roads give us a sense of power and strength over our environment. The tsunami simply wiped them all from the face of the earth. It blew them away like tissue paper. Perhaps our sense of power disappeared in the same vein.

Godzilla does the same, not only stomping and burning large numbers of people but also crushing large buildings and masses of cars and trucks and so forth all at its own whim by simply stepping on them.

What now

What does this leave us with?. It reminds us that we humans are a very small fish in a very big pond and we do not like to be reminded of that. It reminds us that what we thought was our power and potency over the environment is not there at all. When the environment makes a move we just have to sit by and take what it dishes out and that can involve the deaths of many thousands of people. It leaves us with a sense of hopelessness in this way. We are reminded that there will be another tsunami. It's not a matter of if, but when, and we are by and large completely defenceless against it and the human psyche does not like that at all. All we can do is clean up the death and destruction following it. It shows us just how insignificant we really are.

What happens in movies like Godzilla and others like King Kong?. A huge gorilla that suddenly goes berserk and reeks havoc in large cities. Then we have the story of the "War of the worlds". Aliens suddenly arrive on earth and set about destroying many people and our cities and our best bullets and biggest bombs do not even scratch them. What happens in these movies is that despite this the humans in the end win out. Some how the humans do defeat the monster.

What we humans will now do in the Indian ocean is set up tsunami early warning system and this is indeed a good thing that could save a great

deal of death and destruction. That will allow us to get a sense of hope back and again we will start to feel like we can control our environment especially if it is shown to work a number of times. But perhaps this is a discount of reality. We are given a sense of false hope.

Psychology and geology don't mix like oil and water. It is my understanding that the recent tsunami was caused by a shift in the earth's surface of 10 to 30 meters over a length of up to 1,000 kms. In geological terms this is not even a small scratch. When the correct combination of geological circumstances occur there will be a shift in the earth's surface of say 300 meters over a 2,000km distance. The resultant tsunami will cause massive destruction no matter how many early warning systems we have. It could be argued with some conviction that such a thing will happen, it is just a matter of when. It could be happening as you read this now or it could happen in 5,000 years time. This current tsunami reminds us that geology is a force that humans are no match for at all. It is a real life Godzilla that does not get killed in the end.

Discount of reality

But to survive we learn to discount reality. As time passes people will forget and our governments will tell us of all the things they have now done to make us safer. But this discount of reality is a healthy thing. It allows our Child ego states to trick ourselves into believing we are safer than in fact we are. If we do not do such a trick then we have to live in a constant state of anxiety. Over time that would probably kill more people from stress related conditions than the next tsunami will kill.

So whilst as Transactional Analysts we work with clients to stop discounting reality which is seen as one of the most destructive discounts its seems that such discounts do have a healthy corollary as so many of the psycho pathologies do. So over time we will again begin to feel omnipotent and in command of our world (Discount of reality) until the next tsunami arrives and puts us back in our place (Account of reality).

Conclusion

Perhaps at this time with the current tsunami reminder we have lost our ability to discount this reality and thus the shock of the disaster is exacerbated? Perhaps telling stories where the "Godzilla" gets killed in the end allows our Child ego states to feel hopeful about such a thing. Then over time the Child ego state tricks the Adult ego state into changing from a

sense of hope we can beat the destructive force to it is a fact that we can. Thus assisting in the process of discounting reality and getting on with our lives.

Reference

Karpman, S. B.

"Fairy Tales And Script Drama Analysis", Transactional Analysis Bulletin - Selected Articles. 1976. Pp 51 - 56. TA Press: ITAA.