

The Trap of One's Story

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Memories have a tendency to unfold its own dynamics.

I remember a carved wooden doll which I loved dearly as a child. Relatives from Canada had sent me a "proper" doll, a real treasure in Germany at the beginning of the fifties. She had hair to be combed; she could say "mom," she wore a ball-dress and had an everyday-dress to change into. Yet despite all these advantages, she could not compete with my wooden doll whose body was handy and robust and whose limbs swung at the nails which joined them to the trunk. And most important, I loved her.

One day, this precious doll disappeared and was recalled to memory only thirty years later during my psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis and therapies in general tend to plough through our lives on its shadow side, searching for memories which can be held responsible for unfulfilled dreams and wishes, for the failure of plans and projects, and one's own deficiencies or life hardships.

And here it was. The memory, the quintessential proof of how little my mother had loved me, and appreciated and honoured my needs. One day, SHE had burnt the doll. Could anything have better expressed her relationship to me than this act of carelessness? And yes! During the psychoanalysis I progressed to the point of counting this as an oversight and not as intended malevolence. It was a step in the direction of forgiveness, but not yet a reconciliation.

One day, when I was preparing to move into the Findhorn community in the Northeast of Scotland, my mother brought a large package from the attic storage and said, "I have kept your toys for you. I thought that it would be lovely for you to have them as mementos." Oh, what painful embarrassment shook me as I rummaged through the box. On its floor lay the wooden doll. Nothing was left of the splendour which had invested the early childhood days, but she had endured through this long time unharmed.

The shock shattered the story of the rejected daughter, and with it came the collapse of the carefully built card-house of my memories, my story. It opened my eyes to what had really happened. However, it took some more years of deep and intense work before I could recognize that the fears and scares of my childhood had had little to do with my family, that my mother had loved and valued me as much as I could have wished for, and that she and I were just as human as are all mothers and daughters, with our strengths and weaknesses, personal challenges, failures and successes.

This incident stayed in my mind as a warning while I listened to other people telling their story during therapeutic sessions. I knew now how the brain deludes us by selecting and assembling single aspects of events in such a way that it supports our core beliefs. And the more frequently we tell our story to others, the more we are convinced of its truthfulness. I found that to the same degree that I could penetrate the construction of my own story and release it, I could support others in giving up their story.

This is not as simple as it sounds. We are often fundamentally attached to our perception of reality. It gives us identity, it excuses our weaknesses and it justifies our human laziness. Surely, it is the others who are responsible for our suffering! Why then should we strain ourselves to change our life?

To give up our story means taking responsibility for our life, for all that has happened to us, and for all that we have made out of it. To do this, it is often necessary to broaden our perspectives from the level of the personality to that of the soul, which is the higher plan that guides our fate.

A difficult childhood or traumatic events leave traces. They determine how much we trust others and ourselves, how far we allow other people to enter and share our space, how deeply we buried grief, rage or revenge, how firmly we keep our heart closed and how much our deeds and ways are determined by fears. Often these drives, patterns and constrictions are pushed into the unconscious, together with the events that caused them. We conceal them with our story, in which we put together events in such a way that our dignity is guaranteed. Nobody can be easier cheated than we through us.

To see the events in a new light, we must give up our story. The first step is to trace how we produce the events that happen over and over again. This requires some practice, especially when our life's guiding principle is that others are responsible for our suffering.

The second step is to find out how we produce the situations that happen to us over and over again. People tend to evade the answer to this question by making general statements. The devil sits in the details, particularly in the feelings that are connected to the details. Feelings are the glue that holds together painful and unpleasant memories. We would like to bypass them by making general statements.

The third step is to move back into the situations which lie at the root of the 'evil'. In my sessions with clients, I invite their Higher Self to join me. The Higher Self is a bridge between soul and mind and is an expression of the True Self or core of the person. It is closer to the truth than our Ego, for whom it is more important to save face than know the truth.

I ask the Higher Self to lead us back into the situation where we can find the key for the present experience. This key opens the door to what lies underneath the outward symptoms, diseases or problematic life strategies. Such a situation could be a familiar repetitive incident from childhood which now appears in a new light, or a traumatizing experience that has been repressed from consciousness or classified as unimportant.

One such example is the story of a young man who felt that his mother had restricted his spontaneity and vibrant self-expression to the point where he had physical sensations of paralysis and being crushed. In an inner image, this situation presented itself as a large round stone which had been rolled over a tiger and buried its body. As we looked closer, the stone changed into topsoil which carried a new germ, the germ of a large tree, which was now ready to grow. All the oppressive and constricting forces which the stone symbolically represented were at the same time the mother-ground for the unfoldment of his potential.

You cannot recognize this side of the story if you look at it from the perspective of the victim. Only if you put the story into a larger context, if you shift your perspective, can you value the gift that is hidden in it. When you acknowledge and appreciate the positive intent, you can liberate yourself from the entanglements of the past.

In cases where the experiences cut so deeply and were so painful that they are repressed from consciousness, it will take longer to reach the source. You will probably need some guidance, or undertake your own training and practice. Our inner wisdom opens the door to the unconscious only when we are one hundred percent ready to see the truth. A part of the work

is just bringing our resistance into conscious awareness. Resistance is another word for fear. Fear has many faces: Fear of the unknown, fear of responsibility or of being held responsible. We are afraid to change our life and to let go of attachments. And we fear that we will not know who we are without our familiar story.

All these fears are legitimate because they carry a grain of truth. It is important to acknowledge and appreciate them, without getting trapped by them or surrendering our power to them. If we dare to look at them, they lose their power and terror. Upon closer inspection, we find out that underneath the threatening fantasies are events which, seen in the light of day, are human. The knowledge relieves and liberates us.

A child interprets events according to the mental capacities that are available at the time when traumatic experiences occur. As adults we are more able to accept human limits. To the degree to which we develop understanding and sympathy for our own weaknesses, we can also accept that our parents or the other important people of our childhood were not perfect. At this point we allow ourselves to see the larger truth and say good-bye to our story. At this point we attain the freedom to bring about overdue changes, to dare the new and to take responsibility for our life.

For further readings on this subject, see the book: [Growing through Joy](#) . Findhorn Press 1999