

**"Finland and the World
at the Dawn Of 2005"
Two Reports of a Listening Post held on
Wednesday, 12th January 2005**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

REPORT 1

CENTRAL THEMES OF THE EXPERIENCES PRESENTED:

During the first half (45 min), discussion focused mainly on the topic of the catastrophe in South Asia: Unpredictability, uncertainty and changes in life.

Transition to Finnish topics:

WHAT KIND OF "TSUNAMIS" CAN BE SEEN IN OUR TIMES:

- Information flood
- Difficulty in hearing the internal dialogue, what kind of feelings are fed to us
- What do we let through and what do we not let through even though the issue can be perceived
- At the moment there is also a flood of help
- Commercial capitalism
- Will there be a backlash?
- Economic recession
- Reorganising companies and the sacking of employees are "floods" that will take you away
- Dangers of traffic
- Haste and inability to stop
- "Flow" of haste, catastrophe in time
- We do not have the time to perceive the essential
- Breaking the illusion of immortality
- Uncertainty of life has become a reality
- Narrow gap between birth and death
- How to cope with limits and giving things up
- Individuality
- Communality and lack of it
- Need for help and safety
- Different experiences of cultures in the field of, for example, control over one's life (Western: life must be controlled in order to be safe)
- What kinds of feelings have come up?
- Searching for the feeling of sorrow, what is sorrow?
- Guilt and blame (god, nature, media, authorities)
- Fear

- Shame
- Gratitude
- Irritation
- What kinds of things emerge from the subconscious: is a human being a catastrophe to himself?
- Time for stagnation, regeneration
- Tensions:
 - Individuality vs. communality
 - Communal mourning vs. forced empathy
 - Capitalism vs. counterforces, what can be / come
 - Positive aspects of capitalism vs. the tsunami aspects
 - The delightfulness of the wave vs. destructiveness
 - Difficulty to understand that there are exploiters and exploitees
 - Images of threat are overwhelming the glimpses of hope
 - Efficiency vs. sustainable development / good life
 - Death vs. immortality
 - Uncertainty of life vs. struggle to control life

Questions:

- What does a human being shut outside of his perception?
- What should we see now, what tsunamis are influencing now?
- We refuse to see what it is like to be carried by a wave
- Motives of helping
- What is helping, what helps a human being, am I any good as a helper?
- How are we "supposed to" feel about the tsunamis that influence our society today?

Prerequisites:

- You have to see first before you can talk. What would we have talked about if it were not for the tsunami?
- Feeling of obscurity, difficulty to grasp what is going on in society, what can a consultant do: scream or run
- Immense competition
- History of the deterioration of working life
- Performance vs. good life
- Blindness

HYPOTHESES:

- Narcissistic insult: the illusions of invulnerability, communality, coping and sense of control break down
- Significance of mourning: mourning over a lost one can lead to regeneration
- Fear is caused by things that are beyond our control (e.g. natural catastrophes)

- Fear of one's own dark side: you do not see things that you feel are too difficult
- The understanding of issues and phenomena has formed a protective wall against cynicism, but now it is being tested. Depression and cynicism as methods of coping.
- Today there is a demand for helping other people: there has not been an opportunity to do good things collectively for a long time
- The ability to see the need for help equals caring = parenthood, the community represents parenthood
- People need images of threat, they are just different in different times
- Helplessness as the structures of societal change
- There is a need for a tsunami. Through a tsunami, we can experience previous and current shocking events.
- We can learn tolerance towards uncertainty and a willingness to let go through a catastrophe. Every generation needs its own lesson.
- "Good addictions" have disappeared from society, changed
- Hypothesis, the tsunami showed a channel for people's own anxieties
- Catastrophes are needed, there is another side to them too, they show us the good things in our lives

WHAT DOES THAT TELL ABOUT A PERSON?

- When a catastrophe or catastrophes occur, the defence mechanisms of a human being, denial, repression or distortion, are inadequate
- This can cause a strong sense of insecurity, anxiety, distress and fear
- Fear of death wakes you up and keeps your spirit alive
- Concern for other people also tells us that it is more difficult to talk about other people than about yourself
- Longing for communality is a strong feeling. It may be difficult to discover the things it can be connected with.
- You can feel powerful and good by projecting your own sense of helplessness to other people
- Destructive powers in a catastrophe are situated in nature, no need to experience the destructive aspects within oneself
- Need for parenthood manifests itself in the hope for communality
- Need to be seen - identity is created in interaction

REPORT 2

The catastrophe in South Asia led our audience to **basic experiences**. **Disintegration (death) versus hope (life)** became central topics.

The theme was divided into two sub themes:

1. Tsunamis caused by the forces of nature

versus

2. Tsunamis caused by human beings (e.g. market forces, information flood and the growing dependency on technology)

Themes for discussion around these issues:

- How to acquire and use information, what kind of information is useful
- How to avoid becoming paralysed and getting to reparation

The catastrophe in South Asia made the unexpected nature of life concrete for everyone. It broke our illusions of being able to control life with the means available to human beings.

At the same time it revealed how a) people have *collectively* taken advantage of the opportunities presented by science and technology to strengthen the illusion of omnipotence (= ability to control life) and how b) people have had an unnatural attitude towards death and the feeling of helplessness.

It seems that the more science and technology progress the more dependent are we on them. The stronger the unrealistic trust in their ability to control life, the weaker the people's ability to face life and their limits in a realistic way. This phenomenon appears in the avoidance of death and helplessness. We strive to get rid of them quickly. Those dying are taken to the hospital; the elderly and helpless are left to the responsibility of society. Fierce competition marks the culture of our society. From the point of view of an individual, this kind of "development" translates into a compulsive need to act in a selfish way, make it on your own and succeed in competition.

When we had to face the catastrophe in South Asia, we found out that the Westerners (in their alienation from themselves) were more helpless and had less means to provide help than the local people, who have struggled to live and survive all their lives. It became clear that the locals had more self-confidence (confidence in their tacit knowledge based on life experience) than the Westerners who seemed to have let themselves be lulled into the delusion that their knowledge-based equipment (knowledge acquired from the outside) gives them the prerequisites to control life.

A typical first reaction in a catastrophe reflects the inability to face reality: people look for *whom to blame* from those who are responsible for controlling measures. In the case of the catastrophe in South Asia, the people to blame were "discovered" among the authorities whose actions were "slow". The tendency of Westerners to create a feeling of security by maintaining the illusion of omnipotence by placing responsibility outside themselves (e.g. authorities and science) was now apparent both in the expectation of dependency and in the haste in which the Westerners were a) helping, and b) creating a system that could, in the future, predict and thus control these 'tsunamis'. On one hand, a great deal of genuine willingness to help was included in the haste of helping but, on the other hand, also visible were traits of manic actions that suggested a haste in getting the matter over with and getting rid of the anxiety caused by the catastrophe. Manic actions are a consequence of the fact that the omnipotent leaders have failed the expectations set upon them. Similarly, the same bipolarity can be seen in the intention to predict future 'tsunamis': on one hand, there is the realistic possibility to prepare for a future danger but, on the other hand, there is a defensive need to create the feeling of safety by strengthening the faith in people's ability to control the powers of nature.

On this basis, our community raised the concern of the future of mankind. They asked how severe a catastrophe would be needed before people would recognise the fact that our means for controlling life are limited! It was stated that if the dominant reaction model collectively strengthens the faith in "this can never happen again", we will once

again avoid facing the fact that control over life is an illusion. Faith in omnipotence is strengthened by our 'blind' trust in the constant progression of science and the new means it creates. Archaic dependency on science and technology as a representative of charismatic leadership prevents people from growing and maturing as individuals.

People's reactions were divided into two subcategories. The division seemed to be based on people's ability to face the anxiety caused by their own limits/helplessness and work on it in their minds. (Ms. Melanie Klein called this kind of anxiety depressive anxiety)

Clinging to what *other* people do seems to be a central characteristic of *those who cannot face depressive anxiety* by themselves. They seem to have a need to imitate other people as if to ask for permission for what they are allowed to feel in a particular situation or what is the accepted way to act. A sense of safety is sought from solidarity with other people at the expense of their own individuality. They do not have the courage to act differently from other people for fear of exclusion (=helplessness/death). When there is no contact with one's own internal 'knowledge' or if one does not have the courage to listen to it, 'better information' is sought from outside oneself, from other people. Some people reacting in this way grasp all possible information that the media feeds them in order to be sure that they have been saved. On the contrary, some people avoid images of a catastrophe in order to keep their anxiety level tolerable. In both cases, the motive is to escape the anxiety caused by the situation, the difficulty of acknowledging one's own helplessness.

Those who are able to face depressive anxiety react in a different way. They listen to their inner voice. They want to stop and deal with the matter, they want to reflect on it alone and in groups. Because they do not share the illusion of omnipotence, they are able to acknowledge their helplessness, dependency and neediness. They ask for communality to represent the kind of security and caring that children have in their own parents. For adults, community represents a parenthood that they can turn to for security and help. Confidence in reciprocity in giving and getting help strengthens the individual's feeling of safety in his own helplessness. This increases faith in life even in difficult moments.

The situation described above refers to collective reaction and individual differences in cases where the central defence mechanisms of a human being fail when facing a catastrophe. The following discusses on how natural tsunamis and tsunamis caused by human beings differ from each other:

A common characteristic for the natural tsunamis and 'tsunamis' caused by human beings is the experience of anxiety when losing control over one's life, of being exposed to an uncontrollable power. This also happens when market forces mix up our plans or when a computer software programme 'crashes'. The amount of anxiety is related to the size of the part of our life that 'crashes' with these 'tsunamis'.

When there is a natural catastrophe, people are united in aid and reconstruction work, but if people are killed in a country, we avoid getting involved. Why is that? Probably because we know from experience that if we interfere with what other people do, we put ourselves in danger. The essential difference between destruction caused by nature and human beings is that nature does not attack a human being on purpose, but another human being can do that. Nature does not know revenge nor does it take advantage of people's weaknesses. Nature can be surprising too, but people can be unpredictable in

their a) *hostility*, b) *narcissistic selfishness*, that is greater than the consideration of others. - It was noticed in South Asia that the helpers were keen on praising each other (feeding the narcissistic needs of each other) and how some people took advantage of the situation and stole material property as well as kidnapped children (narcissistic aspirations/indifference to the rights of other people).

When nature causes damages, it clearly presents a common problem that people can try to solve through co-operation. Common distress unites people together to work in co-operation and repair damages caused by nature. The actions of human beings, on the other hand, can involve such destructive powers as *competition*, *envy*, *hatred* and *revenge*. Because a single person cannot know how these aspects influence the actions of others, it is difficult for him to know whom to trust. This results in pressure not to trust anybody but himself. Society is structured as a competitive culture whose suction ('tsunami') securely traps individuals against their will. There is no room for helping others in this kind of a culture.

HYPOTHESIS:

A natural catastrophe seems to promote the development of both an individual and society into a more mature, constructive direction, whereas catastrophe caused by human beings seems to direct the development to a regressive direction that strengthens dysfunction. A model of the interaction between an individual and society becomes evident when facing the former. According to Bion, this model can be referred to as normal projective identification. When facing the latter, however, an interactive phenomenon that Bion calls the pathological form of projective identification, the form that develops dysfunction, takes place .

In normal projective identification people identify with one another. They *understand each other at an emphatic level*. Mutual understanding leads to co-operation. A characteristic of pathological projective identification is *denial of issues creating anxiety in one's mind, detaching them and projecting them to the outside world*. These mechanisms, when repeated and recurred through interaction, exacerbate conflicts and lead to a more thorough fragmentation of the psyche of an individual and society. The power of these mechanisms in the interaction of an individual and the society creates a vicious circle of destructive powers that, if continued, gains more power, just like a 'tsunami'. A characteristic of this phenomenon is that the intellectual knowledge and skills of the Westerners have largely been harnessed for the use of destructive powers, in order to maintain the illusion of control and to emphasise the importance of competition and economic growth as a prerequisite of life. This vicious circle is very difficult for an individual to break. The 'tsunami' collectively created by the community threatens to take him away.

It was asked, justifiably, at the seminar whether humans are the creators of their own catastrophe!

Conveners: Harri Hyppia, Ms Leila Keski-Luopa, & Dr Timo Totro