

Deus ex Machina: When religion doesn't work, consider cosmic mediation



Dear B and C;

It has been two weeks since I totaled my car and I am still shaken. Luckily, no one was hurt, but I could have been killed, or worse – killed someone else. I feel sort of numb, which is weird, since it was a huge jolt at the time. I'm not sure how to process my emotions, so I'm just drawing a blank. I know some people turn toward religion, like, "God saved me!" But that makes no sense to me because why didn't God just prevent the accident to begin with?

Perplexed

Dr. B says: When I was a teen, I got the money for my first car after an uncle whom I barely knew died and left me money in his will. One week later, I smashed up the car. I had an epiphany in the midst of my devastation and realized that it could have been much worse. Neither I nor the other driver was injured and the car was like new again after a few thousand in repairs. I processed the experience by visualizing that I was destined for very serious trouble, but my uncle had negotiated for me and managed to secure this outcome which, amongst myriad possible horrible losses, had the least damaging consequences. The thing is, the situation could have had a much worse outcome, and when I add personalization and appreciation, I end up thanking the powers that be for their intervention. I have used similar visualization in other times since this crisis. It's like religion without the religion. Humans are wired this way, so it's a useful tool to tap into and it really helps. I call it cosmic mediation.

C says: In politics and the world of publicity, cosmic mediation is called "spin doctoring." You look at a bad situation and see if there is something in the whole mess that you can pick out to use as a segue into a more optimistic picture. When politicians and spokespersons do this, they are often using it as a

form of sophistry. Just consider the evasive moves that Kayleigh McEnany must have had to pull when asked about Trump's more questionable tweets and tirades. How do you turn a collection of lies and inane observations into fodder that will feed the political supporters? Call in a spin doctor. They can work magic, if you don't mind that you can end up with a fairly tainted "truth" that may actually be rotten at the core.

We all tell ourselves stories in order to live with the unlivable. Right after my second divorce, when I felt alone and lost in the now-empty place that had once been the home of my marriage, I would tell myself a story: I was an immigrant from another country who had narrowly escaped with her life from a terrible war-ravaged village. A rescue organization had given me passage to the US, and I was incredibly fortunate to have been loaned the use of an apartment by a compassionate member of the group. I now had a chance to recover and start over again in a new world, and I had this whole place to myself! I wasn't out on the streets, unprotected and struggling. I could go anywhere I wanted from here! Looking at things that way, I felt lucky and grateful rather than suicidal. I would start telling myself this story every time I got really depressed, sometimes lavishly embellishing my possible future outcomes. It was pretty silly, but a much better alternative than putting a gun to my head or drinking myself senseless, both of which I was at times tempted to do.

Any lawyer knows that if you come up with a plausible explanation, you can turn it into an acquittal - if the jury believes it, too. In the case of "cosmic mediation," we are our own lawyer as well as our own jury. With that much control over the courtroom, a positive verdict is nearly always possible.

PS - Sometimes when feelings are too overwhelming, we put them on hold until we reach a point where we can handle them. Don't be surprised if you suddenly burst into tears out of nowhere one day.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com