The sun began to raise in the east of the Serengeti plains. It was a beautiful morning, and most of the animals on the Serengeti were hard at work seeking prey for their daily subsistence. The law of survival in the Serengeti was simple, eat-or-be-eaten. Any delicate rules of etiquette were a non sequitur proposition for those wishing to live another day.

Lingering on a blade of grass, sipping its first taste of water, a newborn grasshopper was opening its eyes for the first time to a new world. He was only a few hours old and very happy to be alive. As the grasshopper scanned the horizon, he watched a wondrous spectrum of life bounding through the plains, from very large animals to small flying insects busy skirting from place to place.

As the grasshopper’s legs grew stronger and his wings began to harden, he launched himself from one blade of grass to the next, laughing the whole time.

“Look at how high I jump in one bound,” said the grasshopper. “I can jump from one blade of grass to another with no effort at all. I must have gone three feet on that last jump. Look at those beautiful flowers growing by the side of that path. I’m going to fly over there to experience their beauty first hand.”

The grasshopper hopped and flew from place to place all morning, stopping to drink drops of dew he found on the grass and plants along the way. As the sun began to travel higher in the sky, the morning dew began to vanish, and the grasshopper grew thirsty. Then a new sensation overcame him. He was feeling hunger for the first time. The grasshopper became confused and didn’t know what to do.
A SERENGETI GRASSHOPPER

“I am hungry,” said the grasshopper, “but I don’t know what to eat. I don’t know where to find food, or how to prepare it. I feel estranged and alone, and frightened that I might perish if I don’t find something to eat soon.”

At that moment, an ant was passing by and felt pity on the poor grasshopper.

The ant was very intelligent and enjoyed thinking ever since he was a child. When he was young the ant found he could use his brains to achieve twice what the other scout ants achieved. That left the ant with plenty of spare time. He decided to study the psychological motivations in animals living on the Serengeti. He spent hours poring over psychology books and journals, took an online course from the famed Dung Beetle Academy, and began counseling prey animals to reduce their fears. He was highly successful in his practice and felt he was beginning to make a difference in animal’s lives as they slugged out an existence on the Serengeti.

The ant discovered that fear was usually at the heart of motivation for most animals, with the possible exception of the most ferocious animals at the top of the food chain. If a kind animal felt the need to relax in the shade of a tree, the fear of becoming someone’s prey overrode all thoughts of joy, and the animal soon became drenched in anxiety and fear, soon collapsing into a deep state of despair. After working out his theory over time, the ant found he could help many animals with their depression, and bring some joy into their life.

“Oh, I am so hungry,” continued the grasshopper’s cry, “and there’s no more water droplets on the leaves any longer. It’s getting hot, and despair is beginning to cloud my mind.”
“Hello young grasshopper, can you see me down here?” asked the ant.

“Who’s that talking to me? I knew it. I’m going insane, and I’ve only been alive for a few hours,” said the grasshopper aloud.

“Down here, down here,” shouted the ant. “You’re not going crazy. I’m real, and it’s possible I can help you with your crisis. Look down to the ground.”

As the grasshopper swiveled his head from side to side, then up and down, he finally spotted the ant on the ground. “There you are,” said the grasshopper. “Whew! There for a moment I thought I was going crazy.”

“No you’re not going crazy young grasshopper,” replied the ant. “You’re suffering from hunger, and fatigued from all the hopping and flying around you did this morning. You need to get your blood sugar levels back up, and eating is the only way to achieve that. It’s as simple as that.”

“I don’t know what food is,” answered the grasshopper. The only thing I knew about was water, and it’s vanished into thin air. It’s blazing hot outside, and the heat is making me delusional.”

“It’s a simple fix,” said the ant. “If you’re hungry, you’re supposed to go back to your mother, and she will feed you until you’re old enough to feed yourself. The good news is that you are not facing any psychological problems that would be a cause for concern.”
A SERENGETI GRASSHOPPER

“Thank you for stopping to help me in my plight Mr. Ant,” said the grasshopper. “I have a question. What’s a mother?”

“Woah! If you don’t know that, you might be in more danger than I thought,” said the ant.

Finding an orphan in the Serengeti startled the ant. He knew the survival rate for motherless animals is close to zero. After a few moments of thought, he decided to walk the grasshopper through the basics of life.

“First, a mother is who gives birth to you,” said the ant. “Mothers love their children and nurture them until they are old enough to take care of themselves.”

The ant crawled up a rock to get a better view of the land. He looked far and wide, hoping to find a swarm of grasshoppers or the young grasshopper’s mother.

“I’m sorry. I looked in all directions, and I can’t see any grasshoppers in the area, much less your mother.”

“I wonder what happened to her. It would be nice to have someone nurture me with food right now. I am beginning to starve,” said the grasshopper.

“I’m afraid you are learning a major lesson of life on your first day. It’s a tough life in the Serengeti. Let me explain your situation in a nutshell. One of two things may have happened to your mother. First, grasshoppers are a delectable food for many creatures. Prey may have eaten your mother. In that case, you are lucky to be alive. The second option is that your mother is still alive, and flew off with the swarm of other
A SERENGETI GRASSHOPPER

grasshoppers at the first sign of trouble. It’s possible an opossum, some bats, or a red fox scared them off, who knows. It’s a very natural reaction for grasshoppers.”

“Why would my mother fly off without me,” cried the little green grasshopper. “I’ve never been bad, and all I was doing was playing in the field. I was happy and now this. What should I do?”

“First, let’s get your blood sugar back up. Grasshoppers eat grass, shoots, leaves, and flowers,” said the ant. “The next step is to start chewing the blades of grass and leaves on the stalks around you until you fill your belly to the brim.”

With that, the grasshopper ate and ate until his belly was full. He sat down, burped, and began to calm down.

“That feels so much better. I don’t know what blood sugar is, but I must remember in the future not to let it get low. Nevertheless, Mr. Ant, assuming that my mother is still alive; it’s a little disconcerting to know she abandoned me. How could a mother leave her starving child in the wild? If this is the way it works on the Serengeti, then what is the use of living?”

The ant thought for a moment and realized the grasshopper just moved into his area of psychological expertise.

“Life is tough, that’s for sure,” said the ant, “and many animals have trouble reconciling the need to feel safe with living in a dog-eat-dog reality. When it comes to your abandonment issues, you’ll find that many species, and I believe this is true for grasshoppers, relinquish their individual identities for the good of the group. They call it
collective thinking. Some call it conformity, peer pressure, communism, or herd mentality. The opposing state of mind is individualism. That is, placing the individual’s need above everything else. Other names include egoism, existentialism, capitalism, secular humanism, narcissism, and self-absorbed conceit. It appears your mother’s motivation was for her collective group and it overtook her personal values for child caring. When they flew away, she bolted with them, choosing to leave you here.”

The young grasshopper grew perplexed.

“It’s still rude for a mother grasshopper to abandon her child,” said the grasshopper, and became incensed at the utter disregard shown to him by his mother.

“Not all animals leave their children at the first sign of danger. Elephants, for example,” said the ant, “care for their young and protect them from danger. In fact, they care so much about their children that they don’t mind stomping on an anthill if it’s in the way. I know that from personal experience. Remember, life on the Serengeti is tough.”

“What do I do now?” asked the little green grasshopper. “If it were not for you, I would feel lost and abandoned by the world.”

As the grasshopper and ant were talking, a dung beetle, pushing a huge round ball of dung, yelled at them.

“Get out of my way, both of you,” yelled the dung beetle. “Can’t you see I’m pushing a huge piece of precious dung?”
“You’re very angry,” said the ant. “Sure, I’ll get out of your way, but I would advise you to not get angry like that in the Serengeti. You don’t know what you’ll run into. My cousins, the red ants, might have you for lunch.”

The dung beetle realized how rude he was, and decided to make amends. “You’re right,” said the dung beetle apologetically. “I’m sorry for being harsh. To tell you the truth, the point is that I bust my tail all day, and I know when I get home my wife will start complaining about the dung and start an argument with me. It’s been going on for some time now, and when I get close to home my blood pressure shoots sky high.”

The ant sensed that the dung beetle was good at heart, and thought he might help him with his psychological problem.

“Would you mind telling me more of what’s going on?” asked the ant. “I’ve done research in transference and its relation to domestic tranquility. Maybe I can help you.”

“That’s sounds good,” said the dung beetle. “Let me take a rest and chat with you guys for a second.”

The dung beetle pulled off a chunk from his ball of dung, tossed it in his mouth, and chewed in great delight. “Boy that stuff is good! Would either of you care to try some?”

“Thank you very much Mr. Dung Beetle, but I just finished eating lunch, and I am filled to the brim,” said the grasshopper, waving his head back and forth as his arms flapped in a crisscross motion in the air.
“I would love to try some,” replied the ant, “but I don’t want to ruin my dinner. I need to bring some twigs back to my ant hill, and they’ll have a huge dinner waiting for me.”

“Look, I appreciate your time,” said the dung beetle, chomping away at the delectable dung. “To understand my situation, you have to appreciate the context of my work. Do you realize that every living creature under the sun creates dung? It’s a fact. When a living creature ingests something, its body repels a portion of it onto the land. That’s a lot of dung. It’s everywhere. However, not all dung is the same. It takes time to get the hang of finding the right dung in this arid land. According to my wife, I don’t know one thing about dung, but she’s wrong. For example, this piece of dung is a superb specimen extruded by a very large alpha male lion, the king of all life in the Serengeti plains. It’s a very rare piece of dung. Finding pieces of dung such as this takes a lifetime of practice and discipline. When I get home, I guarantee that my wife will do nothing but complain about this marvelous piece of dung.”

“I don’t understand,” said the grasshopper. “You explained how rare it is, and how hard you worked to bring it to your family. It sounds like you’ve done a fantastic job. So what’s the problem?”

“My wife will tell me it’s not round enough. It has a sooty after-taste. The children prefer hyena dung. That she should have married Sen Juba Natu, her childhood sweetheart, because he owns a huge burrow in the grass where it’s never hot and where hyena dung is plentiful. She doesn’t give me credit for what I’ve done ... ever.” The dung beetle began to shiver and a lonely tear fell from his eye.
“Now, now, Mr. Dung Beetle, don’t feel bad. Let me put a different spin on your story,” said the ant. “Maybe we can help solve this problem with your wife.”

“This is going to be interesting,” said the grasshopper, leaning his head closer to the ground.

“Go right ahead,” said the dung beetle. “What do I have to lose?”

The dung beetle leaned his back on his lion’s dung and crossed his arms waiting to hear what could possibly explain his inextricable situation. The ant began to rub his chin, looked skyward pondering for a solution, then stood up straight and began to address the dung beetle.

“As far as I can tell, your problem is not your career choice, or the type of dung you bring home to your wife. In fact, it has nothing at all to do with you. Your wife is suffering from a very common case of subliminal transference and a dash of delusional dysfunctionality. I say delusional because she feels her fantasies are real, and they are dysfunctional because there is a breakdown of a sound relationship. She believes external obstacles are preventing her from achieving her dreams, and that external element is you, her husband, although she may believe it’s everyone around her like her children, her parents, society at large, and the alpha lion’s precious dung. As I said, it’s a case of classic transference. What she fails to realize is that her insecurity has turned into fear, and fear is stopping her from moving forward. Fear is her core motivator.”

“Go on,” said the dung beetle, chomping on his dung. “This is very interesting.”
“The ant is very smart,” said the grasshopper. “He analyzed my hunger and maternal negligence problems in a flash this morning. Did you know blood sugar is critical for a healthy lifestyle or that mothers naturally nurture and feed their children? If it were not for the ant, I would not have survived the day. That’s pretty serious stuff.”

“Interesting you say that Young Grasshopper,” stated the ant in a consoling manner. “You see Mr. Dung Beetle, apart from learning how to eat, the grasshopper’s abandonment issues create the same fear and loathing that your wife feels. Your wife is acting out to compensate for her perceived personal failures. Fear creates a boogeyman, and that boogeyman is YOU! Here’s the kicker. The reality is that there is no boogeyman. It’s a made up delusion. Every day when you come home, she has to face a successful husband without having a career of her own. You come home with a celebrated piece of dung, while she spent the day dealing with the kids, leveling the dirt floor, and ensuring that everything is in the right place when you arrive. I’ll wager your dung for my anthill that your wife feels isolated and worthless.”

“But she studied at the prestigious Dung Beetle Academy when she was young. Her parents are rich, and she can have anything she wants,” said the dung beetle, shaking his head and somewhat confused.

“That’s just the point. She can have anything she wants — except a noble career,” voiced the ant. “It sounds like everyone around her has always protected her. Maybe she wanted to be a model, maybe she wanted to replace the lion as the king of the Serengeti, I don’t know. No matter what she wanted, it didn’t work out and now she has developed a sense of isolation that grew into a fear of rejection. Again, fear is her core motivator. In her mind, subliminal projection of you as the boogeyman is the obstacle to her dreams coming true. In truth, it is merely the byproduct of her delusion.”
The dung’s beetle’s shoulder shrugged in dismay. The confusion he felt overwhelmed him. The ant looked at the dung beetle with compassion and gave him a hug.

“Everything is going to be alright, Mr. Dung Beetle,” whispered the ant.

“You know, you might be onto something Mr. Ant,” said the dung beetle, as he wiped another tear from his eye. “I honestly never thought of anything outside of her disgust with the dung I bring home every night.”

The dung beetle began to pull bits and pieces from his memory.

“Now that you mention it, she said something the other day,” said the dung beetle. “She mentioned she felt bad for never auditioning at the Serengeti Comedy Troupe Open Mic Night. You’ve heard of them, the Comedy Troupe that travels all over the Serengeti performing for sold-out audiences. I told her that bird had flown, and it was her responsibility as a nurturing mother to stay home and take care of the kids. The Serengeti Comedy Troupe was nothing but a pipedream.”

“Okay, that was not the best thing to say,” said the young grasshopper. “I know that and I don’t even know what a wife is.”

“You hit the nail right on the head young grasshopper,” said the ant. “I recommend we start assessing the psychological issues at play to see if we can deduce a solution set to Mr. Dung Beetle’s problems. Mr. Dung Beetle, I want you to remain open to what I have to say. I want to recast your relationship with your wife in a different way, and this means developing a new context and a new perspective in the way you view your
life. The result of my thought experiment is to regain a healthy relationship between you and your wife.”

“Let’s do this,” said the dung beetle. The dung beetle stood akimbo\(^1\), and looked the ant straight in the eyes waiting to hear the solution to his unsolvable problem.

The young grasshopper leaned his head forward in anticipation eager to learn more about life in the Serengeti.

“Your wife will project her failure onto you because you’re the one bringing home the food that is nurturing her family, and her core problem.” said the ant, “This makes her feel insecure, and over time that insecurity grows morphing into fear. She deflects her problem by assigning blame to everyone and everything around her, which in turn, creates more insecurity. Every time she sublimates her fear, the object becomes a trigger and sets in motion the process of stacking her fears one upon the other until she becomes completely overwhelmed. That’s a tough problem to overcome. My thought is to handle it through behavioral psychology principles.”

“What does that mean Mr. Ant?” asked the dung beetle. “I didn’t go to college, and barely made it through high school. My family wasn’t well-off, so I had to start working when I was three-days old.”

The ant thought for a moment, attempting to break down the cognitive psychological issues into behavioral terms the dung beetle could understand as well as execute.

\(^1\) AKIMBO: Standing with hands on the hips and elbows turned outward.
“First let me explain,” said the ant. “There are two different approaches to the same problem. The first approach is the cognitive approach. A cognitive approach uses reason and logic to directly communicate the problem in raw form. Using the cognitive approach in your case maybe too intimidating for your wife. Let me explain. I don’t think sitting down and telling your wife she’s sublimating her insecurity until it turns into fear that stops all positive actions moving forward is a good idea. Since she is already in a state of despair, she may feel attacked by you, validating her perception of you as a bogeyman. That’s the cognitive approach. It’s attempting to use logic and reason to change the mind, in turn, to change behavior. A behavioralist approach is the exact opposite and changes the behavior to change the mind.”

The little grasshopper held up his hand and looked at the ant in bewilderment. “Let me see if I have this straight. What you’re saying is that the brain flip-flops between cognition and action to increase our ability to survive in the Serengeti.”

“That’s a nice job extrapolating the concept to apply to your own situation young grasshopper. You’re a good student.” said the ant, impressed at the grasshopper’s ability to grasp abstract concepts in such a short time.

“I’m grateful I have two illustrious minds working on my personal problem at home. It’s very touching,” voiced the dung beetle as he lifted his head to the sky with all six of his legs folded together in a thankful manner.

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2 **EXTRAPOLATING**: extending the application of a method or conclusion, especially one based on statistics, to an unknown situation by assuming that the existing trends will continue or similar methods will be applicable.
“If we are all in agreement, let’s get started,” said the ant.

“Let’s go,” responded the grasshopper jumping up and down on his blade of grass.

“I’m sure-shooting ready to start dancing with behavior to wiggle the mind into a happier place,” screeched the dung beetle.

“What you should do when you get home starting tonight is not present her with the best dung in the Serengeti. Instead, tell her that all you could think about while you were rolling up some irrelevant dung was watching her do some improvisational comedy before dinner because she is so hilarious. Tell her that she’s funny, witty, sidesplitting, and hysterical … Uhhh! I assume she is funny,” asked the ant.

“Well, she does joke a lot,” answered the dung beetle. “I thought she was trying to be sarcastic.”

“I’m learning more about life in my first day than probably most grasshoppers learn in a lifetime,” squealed the grasshopper.

All attention once more drew to the ant.

“Now rethink those times in your head,” said the ant. “Maybe she was telling you something. Maybe she was telling you she wanted to try her hand at comedy stardom.”

“You know,” said the dung beetle, suddenly enraptured by his new insight, “now that I think about it, she’s – well, not hilarious – but funny in an entertaining, corny way.
I know this about her, once she puts her mind to it; she’s smart enough to achieve anything.

The grasshopper, bouncing from leaf to leaf, jumped into the conversation.

“I have an idea. It just popped into my head, but if I’m learning anything, using the mind is a critical part of making the right set of events happen. Here’s my idea. Mr. Dung Beetle, you could take your wife to the Serengeti Comedy Troupe Open Mic Night and in time with some practice; she can learn how to be funny.”

The ant swung his head in the direction of the grasshopper and smacked one of his legs on his forehead.

“Young grasshopper, that is a brilliant idea!” gasped the ant. “You created the perfect behavioral modification technique for this situation, and you haven’t studied one word of any noted behavioral psychologists.”

“Thank Mr. Ant. I learned from a master.” The grasshopper looked at the ant in appreciation for the ant’s life lessons.

“Mr. Grasshopper, your insight is amazing.” said the dung beetle. “It’s something I can do as soon as I figure out what to do with the kids.”

The dung beetle felt a sense of joy come over him to find the answer to his nagging problem.
“You sure I can’t give you both some of the best lion dung on the Serengeti to show you my appreciation? I kid you not, you will love this stuff,” thundered the dung beetle in complete delight.

“There you go again,” said the ant shaking his head from side to side. “You’re rewarding us with the wrong enticement. We don’t want your dung. We want your friendship. It’s not often that people share life’s problems with each other here in the Serengeti. Honor the rarity of our interaction, not the ability to fill us full of dung.”

Then, out of nowhere, a thundering sound started to shake the ground as an ominous dark cloud appeared right above the three new friends. The trio looked to the ground and then up to the darkening sky created by a sudden dust storm brewing all around them.

“Look, do you see the black cloud descending from the sky. It’s a swarm of grasshoppers,” screamed the grasshopper. “It’s my mother coming back to take care of me. I’m over here mommy!”

The ant knew immediately what was happening. The swirling dust, the darkness overhead all meant danger. He knew he had to act fast.

“Fly away as far as your wings will take you little grasshopper,” shouted the ant. “Mr. Dung Beetle, dig into the earth as fast as possible.”

“Everybody, do what I instructed,” bellowed the ant. “There is no time to waste.”
A SERENGETI GRASSHOPPER

[Rumble and Elephant Trumpets]

It was the resounding sound of the elephant’s feet pounding the ground where the trio stood seconds before.

The heavy foot of a mother elephant stomped on the three friends. There was no way that anyone could survive a direct hit of an elephant’s plodding steps. All seemed lost. High above the ground, the elephant didn’t notice a thing under her foot. She was happy and walking over to nurture her baby elephant at feeding time, doing what Mother Nature intended all animals to do for their young.

The shaking stopped, the sky turned blue once again, and the Serengeti planes grew quiet with the natural sounds of animals and the wind whistling through the trees. The elephants were far away in the distance. The dirt underneath the elephant’s footprint started to part as the ant’s head emerged from the ground. As the ant surfaced, he began shaking the dust from his body. Not far away, the dung beetle also popped his head out of the ground, and smiled with relief when he saw the ant unharmed and well. Nearby, a grass stock began to rumble, as the grasshopper peeked around a long grass stalk. He saw the ant and the dung beetle alive and well, and laughed with joy that they would all live to see another day. At the edge of the elephant’s huge footprint was the dung beetle’s lion dung sitting unharmed. The near miss caused the new friends to react with joy. The fear they felt throughout the short ordeal gyrated into Nirvanic Bliss. Even though it was not apparent at the time, they bonded for life as those do who share traumatic experiences together.
“That was close!” said the ant. “Hey, it’s good to see you guys made it.”

“I thought we were goners after I realized it wasn’t my mother coming back to nurture me,” said the grasshopper. “I guess life on the Serengeti is as tough as they say.”

“Mr. Ant, I want to thank you for your rapid reaction to the danger. I’ve seen elephants up close before, and witnessed the damage they do to bugs and insects on the ground.”

“If it wasn’t for you Mr. Ant, I may not have lived another day,” said the grasshopper.

“I appreciate that,” replied the ant.

“I think it’s an auspicious sign that the dung survived intact,” said the dung beetle, his voice filled with elation. “We need to rethink the way we approach existence on the Serengeti by bringing our resources together to improve our lives for the better.”

Everyone nodded in unison and laughed at their near-death experience as they shook off the vestiges of fear lingering in the air.
In the coming days, the ant and the grasshopper took the dung beetle’s suggestion for aligning their resources. Mr. and Mrs. Dung Beetle invited the grasshopper to live with them, and learn the nurturing comfort a mother’s care brings. In return, the grasshopper babysat the kids, so Mr. Dung Beetle could take Mrs. Dung Beetle to audition at the Serengeti Comedy Troupe Open Mic Night.

It turned out that Mrs. Dung Beetle was hilarious, and with a bit of training was soon one of the main troupe members performing for sold out crowds across the Serengeti. Mr. and Mrs. Dung Beetle’s marriage became a happy and loving one. The ant joined Mr. and Mrs. Dung Beetle to every performance and grew to love the theater and the other members of the comedy troupe.

As more and more members delved into long personal conversations with the ant, they became aware of the ant’s ability to combat the psychological underpinnings of stage fright and other phobias that prevented them from achieving their full potential as entertainers. The troupe members began setting regular appointments with the ant, and after a few months the fears that haunted them throughout their entertainment career began to fade away. When the troupe won the Serengeti Golden Achievement Award for their outstanding performances throughout the Serengeti, they pronounced the ant the troupe’s official traveling psychologist. The members nicked-named the ant, Dr. A. Gonzo, the “Dr.” because of his highly touted psychological expertise, the “A.” for Ant, and “Gonzo” due to the crazy psycho-cognitive-behavioral modification techniques he used helping them lose all their performance related fears.
A SERENGETI GRASSHOPPER

It didn’t take long before the Serengeti Comedy Troupe became an international sensation performing to sold-out wildlife reserves and zoos throughout the world. Even though Mrs. Dung Beetle became rich and famous, the one thing she cherished more than anything else in the world was the camaraderie of her husband, the ant, and the young grasshopper. As they traveled throughout the world, the joy they brought through their loving friendship and comedy made life less fearful for animals they met. It appears the mind, if given the proper guidance and support, always adapts to optimize its survival, even in the harsh, dog-eat-dog worlds mirrored by the Serengeti.

THE END