

Hidden Complexes?

In a sense, this document may be considered a second chapter to the one just before it, *Over an Extended Period of Time*. Why so? There I had mentioned a friend who's into Carl Jung big time. Some years ago he struggled with a lot of personal problems and found help in his writings. Although his interest is not professional, I and others can testify that he can speak of Jung in a way that's amazing. I have neither the training nor the correct terminology to give an accurate assessment of this, but it's simply self-evident. The same applies to many others who've had contact with him. In fact, a friend of mine recently gave him the nickname "Doctor." On occasion this friend will refer to a conversation with him as a "session" as in therapy. Not true in the technical sense but very much so in the concrete.

During a number of conversations we brought up the idea of complexes as Jung had defined them. While memory of these interchanges remain quite vivid, it's clear I don't have the ability to communicate them as clearly as I wish. For this reason I decided to put a question mark after the title. That may help insofar it shows I'm aiming for a descriptive approach, one hopefully that will be suitable for someone like me who is not in-the-know. Regardless, our discussions—while often covering the same material—are as fresh as if they took place for the very first time. For this I remain deeply grateful. It seems the more you go over the same material, the deeper you go. There is, of course, a major difference when doing this with a trusted friend.

With these brief introductory remarks out of the way, let's proceed for what it's worth. It so happened that several hours after our most recent discussion I witnessed an up close argument between two casual acquaintances. It started off with one claiming that the other fellow took the liberty of using a vehicle without authorization. This was met with a prompt denial. Such a defiant attitude was equivalent to adding an accelerant to a fire, for within a nanosecond I was witness to a heated argument that could have come to blows. I was seated about fifteen feet away and was amazed at how it took off like a rocket. Talk about a lift-off. The two were completely oblivious to my presence as well as anyone else who may have heard their raised voices. Fortunately the place where this occurred was empty, so no one else was around to listen in. I was pretty certain it wouldn't come to a show of physical force, but it was easy to see how such a situation could devolve into that. Finally it ended by one of them walking away. As for the situation at hand, it seemed to have gone unresolved. The grim look on the two faces made that self-evident. Obviously what struck me was how thoughts and emotions must have consumed the two as they repeatedly mulled over the near-to-blows clash. Surely it lasted hours if

not several days. And so each man put a judgment on the other that would last even longer.

I bring up this first hand experience because we've all been guilty of setting in motion something similar if not worse. Again, what struck me was the rapidity with which something that could be resolved easily accelerated into a full-blown shouting match. Before you know it, voila. We're at each other's throats with no one backing down. I was eager to blow this by my friend to see what he...Carl Jung, if you will...had to say. He brought up those complexes which remain tucked away inside us, much out-of-sight, out-of-mind. We go through life pretty much unaware of them until an event or even a word triggers them off. From what I could observe, this recent argument seems to have set off such a complex in both participants. Because I was familiar with their respective pasts, I could see these complexes or at least a manifestation here and there lurking in the background waiting for the fuse to be lit.

The lesson learned? Walk away from such a circumstance and let them work out any issue between them with or without a mediator. From what I observed, it ended in a draw as often the case with such things, but certainly the animosity will linger. I considered this incident to be a personal lesson. In sum, avoid such confrontations as best you can or what's far more important, avoid those triggers that may set you or someone else off. This means you have to be watchful, very much so, day and night. The price you pay is high but not as high as an explosion which would consume you indefinitely. Memory of it, in turn, has a way of priming you for another incident. It strips you of any protection and before you know it, you're on a path from which it's difficult to extract yourself.

One take-away from the encounter just described is a reminder of our personal vulnerability. The advantage of being older—not always true, of course but one that's available—is that you become more an observer than a participant concerning such interactions. When younger, you'd stumble upon a conflict and be drawn to it as a moth to a flame. Once you do, you've become a participant (prisoner?) and cannot escape. In the meanwhile, constantly you're beating yourself up with why and how did I get into such a mess, the pain of regret being quite strong. At this point such whining is useless. Hopefully being aware of this danger suffices so as not to give in to this desire to intervene. It's not unlike being drawn to jump off a cliff when you're on the edge. You feel those tugs to do so and hope you don't give into them. Even later such an experience stays with you as you wonder what would happen if you yielded to the temptation. We all know the answer, so no need to get into that.

If I understand this correctly the argument just described sets off one if not more of those complexes. While it's activated, we're so taken up with ramming our case down the throat of the other person that we're unable to think of anything else. Often people will report they aren't responsible for doing it. Some other force...a complex...has taken them over which indeed is true. So while this is going on it seems that other complexes can get activated (the more the merrier). They are ever present lurking just out of sight beneath the surface. So no matter what we do or where we go we carry around these complexes while being unmindful of them. Even we activated and later have died down, we move on as usual. It's precisely this phenomenon that's so fascinating and of interest here.

Let's return to the painful confrontation to which I had been a witness. Even for an observer completely not involved is affected by it. So it turns out that a confrontation where just two people are involved spreads out like a virus. Even more so when another incident happens. It triggers yet another complex...let's say an occasion that makes us jealous. We hadn't thought of ourselves as such but an incident evokes this, catching us by surprise. Just as with the first incident, eventually we let go even if we've stewed over it for some time. This is what it means to be hijacked which will be discussed more below. Some Christian writers were aware this contagion and labeled it original sin, a sin that is original. Looking at it as such makes sense. You can see how a complex arising between two individuals...the only ones in existence...affected their offspring which includes us. Indeed, a nifty myth if there ever was one.

We go about our regular lives in a more or less humdrum fashion while at the same time carry around a large amount of baggage, baggage in the form of complexes. Staying with this analogy, on a daily basis we may be aware of totting a carry-on while forgetting that we've stowed away in the baggage compartment—out of side, out of mind—several large suitcases. As we go on in life, there's a danger of being weighed down by all this weight. While we'd like to shed this excess, we find it difficult to do so.

Essentially the baggage at hand turns out to be memories accumulated from way-back-when. And keeping in line with this image, they accompany us no matter where we go or what we do. Being aware of this is the first step toward freedom. We hear a lot about it all the time but rarely grasp what it means until we reach this critical juncture. It turns out we've just reached the threshold of freedom, but it's better than nothing. Most of our experience with them has been negative, so we tend

to think of them in this light. For that reason we're on edge and being on edge makes us more susceptible for further confrontations.

So while complexes can be either favorable or unfavorable (I prefer these terms over 'good' or 'bad' because they evoke a less absolute view of reality), we lean toward the latter possibly because it's troublesome nature catches our attention more rapidly and can provoke us to violence. However, it seems best to set aside such talk and get to the heart of the matter as it pertains to what interests us. We can spend oodles of time on this, fascinating in its own right, but miss the most important stuff.

First and foremost notice the amazing rapidity with which a given complex comes upon us. As noted above, the best term we can come up with is hijacking. The strange thing is, we experience this time after time but rarely are moved to do anything about it. We remain passive and that's that. It seems we'd rather forget past experiences, preferring to be almost oblivious to them. The scenario is familiar. We lament the last hijacking and let it go without doing anything about it. The same happens with the next incident. We simply seem powerless to take action in order to prevent this incredibly boring situation. I maintain the same applies to favorable memories as well. That could be designated as another kind of hijacking, a favorable one. In a way, this could be worse because it reinforces a benign pattern that repeats over and over. And this is precisely what we wish to avoid.

It was the Doctor (see first paragraph!) who had suggested this image of hijacking which turned out to be a valuable personal insight, something I had been looking for to describe what was taking place in my own life. That unfortunate incident that had escalated into a confrontation to which I was witness brought this home directly. I was just as liable to do the same...not now but who knows if and when? Perhaps it'd be within the same hour. Continuing with this a bit, I could see the heart of the problem consisting in a failure to insert any time gap in between exchanges. Our minds work too quickly in an attempt to seal up any intervals which are perceived as caving in. And so one incendiary remark passes on to another and so forth. Things would have turned out better say if one of them could pause, mentally that is, for a nanosecond or two before moving on. Obviously this is easier said than done.

Still, it might be possible to insert a time gap of sorts, for some insight is necessary if we are to avoid such confrontations. This image of distance between ourselves and what happens to us is important in that it recognizes a natural kind of space essential to all living beings in order to go about their business. Even when people find themselves crammed in involuntarily they devise mental spaces in order to retain a

sense of self. This, of course, is extreme while here we're more interested in seeing how the application of space (and time) works with regard to complexes which seem immune to such basic premises. We can be assured of the following. One if not more of those complexes will indeed emerge. It behooves us to be aware of this fact.

One of the ways, if not the best way, to see how these complexes work is within the context of a religious environment. Religion in general is a way of tying our limited world in with the much larger (actually limitless) one of transcendence. It does posit a space, often taken literally, between God and us or God-up-there and we-down-here. That's the familiar space into which we've all been born. Establishing or better reestablishing such a basic principle is helpful in a time when we have so many choices. It allows us to reconnect to something appealing to each one of us which is why I bring it up. While it's getting off track a bit, I can't help but think of Giambattista Vico (d. 1744) who in his **New Science** posted the primacy of thunder for civilizations. People recognized that thunder (and lightning) comes from "up there" to us "down here." That awareness which combines both terror and delight (i.e., the rain it produces) gets a given society going. Having frequent recourse to this experience and what it signifies is essential to renew a society as well as us as individuals because it makes us aware of the true nature of reality.

So if we view the fundamental goal of religion as offering a way to function within this context of up/down, transcendent/limited reality, we've taken a big step. Indeed, Vico is correct. It's foundational to all societies meaning that those which stick by it hang in there while those that don't wither more quickly. More than anything people want from it to be in a safe space even if external circumstances should be unfavorable. Other factors may impinge on this which tend to overshadow this most basic of needs, but the one of personal safety is tantamount. Self-preservation might be another way of looking at it.

I wish to single out Christianity as a whole since it's the religion with which I'm most familiar. The issue at hand is challenging to articulate because it's so comprehensive and difficult to lay hold of. Somewhere along the line...historically and culturally...we've gotten into a bind where we find ourselves living constantly on the edge with regard to the practice of religion. From the get-go Christianity has been missionary by nature although it has made room for the contemplative dimension of life. That's the heritage handed down to us. Even though always there have been places devoted to prayer and contemplation (monasteries and convents), these too have at their core the missionary outlook. For example, they exist to pray for those engaged in missionary activity and so forth. On top of this we have

religious orders which seek to combine the active and contemplative dimensions, so throughout the centuries efforts have been made to combine the two but practically speaking, it doesn't pan out. It may have been differently early on but not so today.

Also if you examine most Christian texts from the earliest time, they're orientated toward a missionary cause. After all, the phrase "good news" is closely associated with this religion, and if you have news that's good, you want to pass it on as quickly and efficiently as possible. So Christians started out with this in mind which gave birth to the ideal of martyrdom, the ultimate cutting edge (no pun intended). Even those who had retired into the desert were considered "white martyrs" insofar as the didn't shed their blood but essentially were on the same plane as those who had done so. Many people continue to find this inspiring right down to the present day. For example, it's not uncommon to hear that the past century had seen the greatest amount of martyrs.

You can spice this up by throwing in sin which even to a casual observer is part and parcel of Christianity. This association wasn't as close at the beginning but intensified and took on different guises in later centuries, especially after the Reformation. Admittedly that looks so passé even in light of the just noted fairly contemporary swell in real martyrs. So if you can't help but wonder whether the missionary nature of Christianity has a future. Has it peaked out? Is it time for something else to take its place? In the meanwhile we're left holding the bag with how to handle the news which is good.

Obviously the answer to the question above can't be answered satisfactorily. I throw it out because somehow it ties in with what gave rise to this article, the subject of hidden complexes. Actually it makes you wonder if religion itself is a complex. If not, certainly it has contributed a lot to them, a subject I'll let ride for now. The main point of concern is that while Christianity has had and continues to have a certain cutting edge to it, nowadays it has become wearisome. Not just that but all this happened in what seems the blink of an eye. All the usual talk about whether or not God exists, problems within the Church and so forth fall away in light of this overarching issue. Yes, many of these issues still plague us but essentially cause a genuine weariness when you bring them up, let alone think of them. Again, I throw in the word passé to describe this. Whether or not this proves true has yet to be determined. We won't have to wait for long to find out.

So if we subscribe to the fact that the cutting edge associated with Christianity no longer is relevant because people don't subscribe to it as in earlier times (and those

times aren't that far back), what next? There comes to mind proclaiming the good news which is so much identified with Christianity. Two alternatives are possible, these offered from a strictly personal point of view which admittedly aren't as well informed as it should be. The first is that instead of focusing upon good news and getting it out there (by now it's really not such), emphasis may be put upon the telling of stories. From the dawn of human history this has knitted communities together and had given them identity. Admittedly this is the strong point of so-called paganism with all its divinities. It's multiply choice almost to the extreme. When Christianity came along it adopted a lot of pagan practices, really a brilliant move on those who had insight into this. At the same time these innovators fostered paganism's multiplicity by cultivating devotion to saints, etc.

So early on Christianity had adopted the ability to tell stories, obviously about Jesus Christ and his relationship with his so-called Old Testament predecessors. It threw in martyrs for the faith, heroic lives of faith, let alone angels and saints. All this made for an attractive package which kept on growing. Perhaps now we're at the tail end of this period which to many appears quaint but essentially is passé. Along the way the Church gave birth to the university and fostered interest in science, all very dynamic and essential to what we have today. Now it's a shadow of its former self. Although the church had lost much of its momentum, it might pull off a kind of revival in a world that has in many ways lost its moorings. To effect this means it'd have to divest itself of that cutting edge, the first step for allowing something new to come to birth.

The real bugaboo which turns out to be a direct challenge to Christianity's cutting edge consists of meditative practices coming from the East. It's an issue that has been around for some time now though has receded somewhat. Nevertheless, just to bring up the matter sharpens Christianity's cutting edge all the more, chiefly as a defensive measure. Living like this isn't exactly appealing despite many examples of people who are sincere as to their Christian witness. So despite any hostility and superficial experimentation, the way Christianity might blunt her cutting edge is to cultivate a long term serious relationship with the just mentioned meditative practices and more importantly, some of the religious and philosophical ideas behind them.

The question to ask is it possible or desirable to live without this cutting edge where you're constantly on the defensive or on some occasions, on the offensive with this same cutting edge? No middle or neutral ground seems possible. It's either yes or no. To be without it suggests that you don't quite subscribe to the Christian thing but come under suspicion, more as an outsider looking in. Yet this is a mistaken

perception. Instead of this cutting edge you might consider adopting a buffer zone. Appealing, but the problem remains how to describe it. It does work but eludes description through conventional language. Still, it's worth an attempt because this just may be where those complexes arise, especially the ones associated with religion.

When at a lost to speak about something, one good approach is to seek access to the appropriate imagery. It doesn't have to be complex but adequate and simple enough to carry around with you. Actually I got this from a recent article about the Catholic Church, more specifically, here ability over the centuries to tell stories. Indeed it has been present from the beginning but later got overshadowed by emphasis upon doctrine, polemics and a whole host of issues. It can be recovered, of course, but will take creative minds working together.

Also I add the ability to pretend. Too bad we don't utilize this inbuilt ability to mimic reality we used to do on a regular basis when we were young. Despite having not activated it, to be sure we retain the ability to pretend. It's one of those things that never goes away. As for implementing these two gifts that have been dormant so long, we can, for example, picture ourselves walking around with invisible buffers. They protect us by gently bumping aside any threat arising from any one or more of these complexes.

“Bumping” is an important word. It suggests a gentle pushing aside, not just casting it out of sight. This image has the potential of giving us great delight because it prevents us from being hijacked. Something constantly being banged about but not violently just can't muster the strength nor ability to hijack us. The essence of this approach is one of humor, of not causing harm to people, while our foremost intent is not to be harmed. When you really look at it, the complexes...not people...are the ones which harm us even when a real life human being treats us ill. This may seem an artificial distinction but complexes seem to go way back...way back to include everything thing that has ever lived and is present to us right now.

Right away a legitimate objection arises. Nice talk about this twofold story-telling and pretending, but what about real life? Does it work? Admittedly the failure rate is high, very much so. Despite this we neglect to take into account the long term effect. Over time—and it turns out to be remarkably short—practicing both takes root and does offer a descent level of protection. We can't expect 100% immunity because of an important fact about these complexes that's overlooked. By that I mean our habituation to them. Early on in life we're trained to behave in such-and-such a fashion which generally speaking serves us well. Then as we go beyond our more

immediate family we run into constraints put on us by society. Again, much of it is well-intentioned even though it's drilled into us with a desire to exert control, fear of breaking the rules being one of the biggest obstacles.

Once these societal rules are put in place, we go about our business. On occasion we run into a situation where fear of doing such-and-such a thing hijacks us. Mostly it comes upon us from the clear blue. Usually we're at a loss what to do next, realizing that we haven't cultivated the ability to handle things in a story-like fashion, let alone pretend it's happening to someone else. We fall for it hook-line-and-sinker. Also we run the risk of becoming rambunctious as we feel these two elements mocking us by not offering any protection. The frustration certainly is real, but unlike children who cry and move on, we remain stuck, helplessly so.

So if something similar happens in a religious context, we're in big trouble. Actually a lot of people love to associate religion as a principle actor in this hijacking process as it conspires behind our backs. A lot of it has to do with authority figures that have loomed large in our lives from early on, figures that are more formidable than our parents. We're all familiar with this and the abuses that follow, so there's no need to get into it here. Despite being real and often frightful, in the final analysis it's quite boring.

Does what has been presented here have any ultimate meaning or goal? It's a natural question to ask. If you've managed to start practicing the "cure" proposed—that consists of story-telling and pretending—you'll find out for yourself. It's a kind of secret available only to practitioners but available to everyone right across the board. You really can't talk about it but have to remain silent because the twofold nature of what's involved isn't complicated but simply hard to grasp. And hard to grasp doesn't mean difficult. Instead, it means that we haven't explored other options by reason of being too pinned down by conventional ways of thinking. At the same time, trying to get a handle on all this is no easy task which is why what's presented here is fraught with defects. The only way to overcome them is by pressing on but always with an awareness not to become serious. That, of course, is deadly and part of the cutting edge discussed above.

Another challenge we run into is trying to sort out which complex is set off more easily than others. Does such-and-such a one have greater effect than another? While perfectly valid, such talk is a waste of precious time. I'm interested in a kind of universal blockage no matter what the source, even if it's very good. In other words, all blockages aren't bad though we tend to think this way. Running along with a good

blockage blinds us just as much if not more than a negative one. Hitting upon one which is good, noble and true can hold us in even a tighter bond than a negative one chiefly because we encourage them to do so.

So the point of story-telling and the ability to bump off both positive and negative stuff admittedly sound. The reason? Words tend to fall off when discussing such matters because they deal with a reality just beyond their grasp. Besides, most people lack the inclination to go there or think they're incapable of doing so. Nothing wrong. It's the way things are. All we can do is point out the twofold nature of the plan of attack available to us at all times.

Without getting morbid, all this prepares us for a different outlook on death. Sometimes we wonder if there really is such a thing, that what we are *hic et nunc* continues through that barrier albeit in a different fashion. The more you yield to story-telling *cum* bumping, the more immune you become to what life throws at you, good and bad. It's this common-ness that's important, not favoring the former over the latter. That takes care of itself, so why bother about it? Again, one has to try it out to see the results. No amount of asking or questioning will bring what we really want. Indeed, this is the real goal available to wherever we happen to be at the moment.

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“The ignorant eschew phenomena but not thought; the wise eschew thought but not phenomena.” **Zen Teaching of Huang Po**, p. 48