

Inner Tension

I had the intention of coming up with a fancier title to this short article but decided against it. The reason? Although the current one is generic sounding, it has the advantage of being familiar to everyone because we all experience the effects of tension within our lives. Furthermore, tension does not discriminate except in varying degrees of intensity. It's mediated through a wide gamut of influences from one's personality, family, culture and religion, just to mention the main ones. On the other hand, we have storerooms within us which are ever ready to receive these influences. I'd say the most important storeroom is memory. It keeps careful track of those points of contact with the outside world and registers them for our easy access. How extensive this goes depends upon the intensity and significance of what has impacted us.

How to handle these influences will be explored later in this article. Regardless of the source of tension, of chief concern here is how to recognize it regardless of its stripe and deal with it effectively. The approach taken here doesn't rest upon what other persons have written or said, however authoritative they may be. That I leave aside deliberately. The reason? Not due to arrogance or self-sufficiency, of course. If that were the case, right away I'd fall flat on my face. Each and everyone of us comes outfitted with the necessary "equipment" to explore this fascinating issue. It's a matter of being willing to do so patiently and on one's own. After a while, you can bounce off another person what you've come up with. Finding that person is easier than we think. Since we're dealing with the very depths of our being, something-somewhat-somewhere appears almost like magic to assist us from not going astray.

Later as I read over this article to make corrections, I was uneasy about using the word tension. It awkward and possibly subject to being misunderstood. Then I decided to let it slide, hoping that as the article progresses, it will get me off the hook with regard to any such presumptions. With that necessary caution out of the way, let's begin. Should we examine ourselves more closely unaided or in and by ourselves, we will find that the tension within us enjoys a kind of independent existence. Like an unwelcomed guest it has taken up residence and can't be gotten ride of easily. A problem arises right away with regard to this presence. Our automatic reflexes kick in and can make us liable to imagine the existence of spiritual beings or forces with lives all their own. This, to be sure, is a quick, convenient way of managing what transpires within us and to avoid personal responsibility. It's important...very much so...to keep mind that forever we're looking for a scapegoat instead of taking a closer look at our inherent tension. Something like that is very familiar to anyone who read about the first man and first woman in the Garden of Eden

Perhaps with the exception of so-called primitive societies every man, woman and child on the planet has acquired inner tension in one form or another. Emphasis is upon acquired, for it seems we're not born as such. Despite the evidence, we have a sense, albeit indirectly, that we don't have the whole picture. Yes, we may be affected and sometimes strongly but underneath all is well. Putting it as such may sound like a brush-off but turns out to be true. Unfortunately insights into this come in snippets and aren't consistent enough to bring us to another plane. Yest should we be quick, we just may use them as a means to free ourselves. Indeed, this is quite refreshing. It counters our tendency to gloss over, thinking it to be something fanciful which is why the overwhelming majority of people don't subscribe to it. More on this later, of course because it's so vital.

As for the sources of inner tension, objectively speaking they are external to us and fall under the two broad categories of family and society. That is to say, those who are close to us and those who are not but indeed are essential to the upkeep of society. So if everyone is tense, what's the problem? It provides us with a legitimate excuse to write off tension as "part of the human condition" as the phrase puts it. This universal acceptance makes anyone questioning its existence liable to banishment, of not belonging to the tribe. It turns out that subscribing to this pervasive yet false premise is better than admitting that it doesn't exist. Acknowledging its reality keeps one with the tribe which is more important than anything else, for without it we don't have meaning. However, it's a different story as time goes on.

When it comes to observing this tension the first thing that comes to mind in order to pull it off correctly is to employ concentration or intense focus. It's the usual way we get things done with most stuff, mustering our inner resources to accomplish a goal. However, this approach is not helpful because it introduces added tension. We can't remove tension with tension but need to apply the opposite. But before we do, we should keep in mind that tension is a constriction which binds us. Our very actions and thoughts are tight and every jerky. If we're quick enough, we'd realize the humor of the situation. That may not be self-evident but certainly is true. Indeed, there's something comical about being bound, of being so uptight. You could almost make a movie out of it and most likely that has been done. What makes it all the more entertaining is that we are going about life in an unreflective manner or with blinders on. At this point we're tempted to give up before starting. Why bother with trying to overcome such an insurmountable task? Besides, using tension to relieve tension...a contradiction in and by itself...is a dead-end and gets us nowhere. Still, we have difficulty appreciating any options.

However, options do exist. The one that comes to mind is simple, almost too good to believe. It consists in viewing our inner tension, pure and simple. To this I add no more, no less for emphasis. Some may claim this is way too easy, a cop-out and that we have to exert ourselves. That's what our fathers had done, so what's good for them must be good for us. This approach sounds like we've opted to do nothing because it goes against our grain which automatically wants to intervene where there's no need to intervene. To adopt such a stance is like stepping out into thin air with no support beneath our feet. Again, we won't find it from those closest to us.

Should we have the courage to step out and take the necessary baby steps by adopting this relaxed stance, right away things would start to change. Actually they would change in a way different from what we had anticipated and do so on their own. That's essentially the reason why we're fearful of submitting to the process. Should we consent to let go, even by way of a half-hearted experiment, immediately we would perceive that something more beneficial is going on than we had anticipated. That's how quickly the transition takes effect. It brings us to a state better than we could imagine. We look back and see that all our thoughts and fears are way of preventing us from taking the leap. We have to put it into practice which turns out to be easier than imagined.

This change in our perception to something far better than we had anticipated is a welcome surprise. The stiffness in our behavior loosens on its own, like manacles falling not just from our limbs but from our very hearts. Not terribly long after this discovery we feel as aliens living in an alien land because those closest to us suddenly turn out to be the furthest from us. A sharp contrast indeed with the simultaneous perception that we've become at home with ourselves. The alien side of us sees everyone going about as hijacked...preoccupied...as they are with various concerns and unable to get out from under them. In the meanwhile, we go on as at home because we find everything to our liking just as they are, confusion and all as often is the case. This indeed is a paradox that has to be experienced and left unexplained until we find the time is ripe.

Watching everything in a non-committed fashion might sound cold or indifferent and turns out to be one of the biggest temptations to refrain from adopting it. The problem is, should we reject it, we find ourselves right back from where we had started. We end up mired or better, hijacked by this or that not unlike most folks around us. It makes the frustration grow stronger, and if we're not careful, we can end up on the edge of despair. That's why we can't stay on the sidelines but must jump in and try it out though with the necessary precautions. We'll find out almost immediately if we're cut for this. Chances are we are. However, it's best to rest upon

the witness of others who have gone before us. It might sound like an exaggeration, but these people tend to appear out of nowhere. They are as normal as could be, having integrated their sense of being at home with themselves while simultaneously aware that they are present as aliens in an alien land.

The most refreshing part of this enterprise is that we continue to go along business as usual and without the slightest alternation. On the other hand, something has indeed shifted, seismically so. The alteration has direct bearing upon our attitude which implies we've come to grips with the role of thought and emotion in our lives. Instead of tampering with externals, we leave everything untouched and in its place we look at them as though we were spectators having just arrived from another planet. That image or others like it is helpful but goes only so far. It's inadequate because it suggests a presence which is alien to what after all is our native land. At the same time both are not the same but are of two wholly different orders. All this isn't sorted out off the bat but falls into place in good order.

Should we continue along in this spirit of observation, an important lesson is revealed to us gradually, not at once. The shift we've made or better, have come to accept, is so radical that some time is required for it to sink in. To realize that from the get-go we're whole and entire or without tension, is hard to accept which is why we persist in denying it. We wonder how things which have remained the same continue as the same but are so different. Actually we should be delighted because we're dealing with a profound sense of wonder essential to this enterprise. The best part is that it's portable. We carry it about everywhere we go and can access it under any condition, even if we're desperately ill. The illness doesn't go away but our awareness has managed to situate it out there, away from our inmost self. If that isn't proof enough, I don't know what is. At some stage in the game we'll become ill unto death and have an opportunity to try it out.

Somewhere in the Gospels Jesus said he'll give us greater responsibility if we're faithful over small matters. We can apply this to whether the issue is small or large. Take, for instance the following example, so unimportant compared to what's going on in the world. I was eagerly looking forward to a Zoom meeting of approximately nine people from four countries planned for the next afternoon. However, several participants couldn't be present, so it was canceled...not only that but canceled for the next two weeks. To deny the let-down would be equivalent to denying reality. The disappointment had to work itself out physically in my system, that is, it had to undergo dissipation. That means enduring a barrage of mental images coming to birth, usually of a negative variety, and are backed up by emotions. Also a thousand questions pour in such as why, what went wrong or whom did I offend. It's literally

endless.

The difficult part is the just described release of energy in the form of thoughts and emotions which invariably affected my life for the rest of the day. This release produced a picture of myself emphasizing the negative as well as re-enforcing an existing picture that's already negative. A similar dynamic would take place if the situation had been positive, but close to 100% it's the opposite. Let's face it. The rest of the day is lost and perhaps even part of the upcoming night. All other relationships and events are colored by this failed Zoom meeting. Fortunately I can look back and say how ridiculous. True. If you think of it, such instances happen more often than we're willing to admit.

So where do we find ourselves, for example, at the end of the day or the next day? In a word, nowhere. We're exhausted not by doing anything but by allowing ourselves to have been hijacked. More lasting than this, however, is the embarrassment resulting from having acted in a petty fashion, embarrassed even if no one else is privy to our folly. And the cure for this most awkward of all experiences is precisely that same as before we got into it. That consists in simply taking notice of it and nothing more. Very painful to consider, but miracle of miracles, the pain dissolves as soon as we introduce that sliver of awareness. It's the prospect of staring it down that unnerves us, but thankfully, that's pretty much an illusion.

In a case such as this, we could add some humorous gestures or remarks to help us along. For example, we might invite the cascade of thoughts and accompanying images into our home...our awareness...but under one condition. They are not to take up residence. Instead, we show them the back door, politely escorting them out. This last step is important. We don't offer the slightest compulsion, for they'd take it as a sign of weakness. That's a sure-fire invitation for them to hang around. Again, we just watch them enter, pass through and leave. To actually do this is far more than acting out. Rather, it's a genuine confrontation with what troubles us. You'd be surprised at how quickly and effectively it goes to work.

If viewed impartially, the emergence and disappearance of thoughts and images reveal two currents at work. First we have the common experience where they gush forth constantly, always holding our attention hostage and shifting it from one thing to another. This is so incredibly boring and the bugaboo of all spiritual disciples. As far back as humanity goes it has been and continues to be the primary subject of books on spirituality. On the other hand—and I'm being imprecise here—there seems to exist a state within us which is fixed not just once but for all the time. It is the source of all bothersome thoughts to which we need to direct our attention. If we don't we're

missing the forest for one particular tree or manifestation of a tension. In the case at hand, it's the Zoom meeting described earlier which I had anticipated with some excitement and later was canceled.

The tension I've been describing is dynamic and familiar to us all whereas the state from which it springs is static. By reason of this, it's practically invisible and hence overlooked. Actually that state has a shape and will be described shortly.

Distinguishing between the two seems to be splitting hairs but is important because they are very different. If we don't get the distinction clear in our heads, we end up being buffeted throughout life by tension after tension which prevents us from seeing what underpins them. This source is closed to us as long as we're mesmerized by the turbulence created by a given tension. So instead of bouncing between one manifestation of a specific tension to another we can turn attention to the source itself. This static condition can be conceived as a block, if you will, whose four points are sharp and rub up against us. This rubbing, it seems, is what releases a given tension.

But where is this source, and how do we find it? The answer to the first question is obvious...within us...but we want to know more, where precisely within us. Granted, we're not dealing with physical reality so any question of "where" is nebulous though the reality is very much present. Let's continue describing this static tension in the form of a block laying at the basic of our awareness. First of all, to call a tension static is a contradiction in terms. Tension = movement and block = stability, no movement. A blocks is heavy, difficult to move and should you attempt to lift it, the four points create even more irritation. As for this heaviness, it tends to draw in anything in its vicinity. So if we're hijacked by a concrete incidence, let's say gloominess, any negative information coming from without will tend toward that block and be absorbed by it. It flies there like a pigeon to its roost. And so this block both absorbs and gives off negativity which we can call hijacking.

Can we remove such an unmovable block within us? Let's be honest. The task is more formidable than open heart surgery. Actually entertaining any thought of removing it is a temptation to be avoided, for the more we try, the stronger it becomes.

Confronting such un-movability naturally leads to resignation. We simply go along for the ride or with what emerges from this source of all our tensions, allowing ourselves to be battered from all sides. The problem is that we end up not so much resigned but depressed, and that depression in its immovability mirrors the immovability of the source or block of our tensions.

What I just described puts us in an in-between land, a kind of limbo, where we really

don't know what to do except being tossed to and fro. On one hand forces that are latent in that unmovable block remain as such until an external stimulus activates them. Then they spring forth so quickly that we're unaware of their movement until it is past. Only then...a split second later...do we realize it has actually happened. Being in this in-between land prevents us from making any responsible decision. The forces pulling us to succumb are not rational. They are blind as well as dumb yet are very strong by reason of being concentrated and not having to worry about being lassoed by the mind. Actually they're stronger than our conscious selves including our mind and thereby do all the lasooing.

On the other hand the manifestations or tensions within that immovable block almost always are not good. Because the time gap of their release into awareness is close to being infinitely small, we're ignorant of the source from which they spring. They come from somewhere, of course, but they blot out everything else when becoming manifest, we don't have time to actually grasp them. This dilemma points to the real issue at hand, how to wiggle ourselves out from between the manifestation of a tension and its source. The solution boils down to cultivating even a sliver of awareness. It enables us to diminish the distance or rather, allows the distance to diminish on its own power minus our interference. I mention a sliver of awareness, a speck, if you will. That's potent enough to make us feel more lightsome. We stash it away in our memory for future use where we can pull it out again if and when needed. Perhaps at some other time this awareness becomes more constant and is a manner of life.

It's worth our while to draw our attention away from individual tensions, that is, to withdraw from the way they manifest themselves, and turn to what I've been positing as a block. To put it another way, we are to make a shift from what moves constantly to what does not. Bringing to mind such an image is helpful because it objectifies something difficult to conceive. Recall that the block has four corners and situated (again not physically true) in your breast. That means it's irritating but gives us no problem as long as it's stable. Only when the block moves do we become aware of its presence; other than that, it remains latent.

Should we leave unexamined this unmovable block within us, knowable albeit indirectly through the tensions it produces, can we ever get free from them? Recall the example of my response to a canceled Zoom meeting which set in motion a series of tensions, etc. This and more immediate or threatening examples rile us at the drop of a hat. All our attention is focused on its own without us barely reflecting the mechanism at work. This reveals that the source of all tensions is unmovable the block or the Ultimate Hijacker. Putting it personally to get a better understanding, this

block loves to hide behind the manifestations it cranks out. That's key to seeing how it operates which indeed is quite manipulative.

Here's the key to understanding this conundrum. Such words aren't to be taken as a formula, for that won't make the slightest dent in this unmovable block. Its arch-enemy is distance, that is, putting distance between itself and the tensions it loves to release. So when an interval of time steps in—and keep in mind we're talking about a nanosecond, nothing more—we see at long last that this block is exposed. We can almost hear it shriek upon being so discovered. We're doing absolutely nothing to it but observing its true nature. And that true nature is a permanent state of spasm. By reason of being so tightly contracted, the tension doesn't manifest itself.

Because the tension released is a contraction, it's far more recognizable and easier to undo despite any pain involved. Note that with release of a tension in a hostile situation, even before I open my mouth I have laid out a plan to take revenge. This plan is whole and entire in all its details as though it had been laid out months ago. It is as such by reason of having been in a spastic state before being manifested, and this spastic state mirrors the unmoveable block within us. Later when we've calmed down from the release of a tension we wonder how we got ourselves into this situation which at the least unpleasant, even embarrassing. Some source somewhere is within us that's responsible, and neglecting it is to neglect what this whole dynamic is about.

We're all familiar with what happens next. An escalation has been set in motion that will continue gathering steam until either I or the other person "wins" or is worn out. If we reflect carefully on the more intense parts of the interchange, we see that some force has taken over. It can be us, the other person or both. Once time has passed, we marvel that some entity...an alien being almost...has hijacked us completely. It's difficult to face but if we do, we obtain invaluable information about ourselves. In brief is we've been taken over by a force which is not psychological but has a metaphysical reality transcending ourselves. Scary stuff, really, but welcome to how the universe functions at its rawest.

So what does the image of that block in its permanent spastic state have to do with all this? What we've experienced is the release of a given tension that reacts in such-and-such a way in each person. That which goes off in me doesn't necessarily mean it goes off in you. The important thing to know is that it comes somewhere...has a source...goes off and leave a physical trace. In sum, I leaves a wake. This wake doesn't disappear as it does after a ship has passed a given spot in the ocean but lingers far longer, depending on how strong the release had been. Everyone knows this experience first hand.

When a given tension is released, voila. Nothing new here. We experience them many times throughout a given day. We go on and on like this for most if not our entire lives without giving it further thought, believing such is the human condition. Ideally it's be great to slow down our attention before a tension is released. Here it's a question of how to perceive in an incredible short nanosecond the space as well as time between that block with its four points and a given emotion or tension. Even thinking of the possibility might be too much for us. It seems we need to be endowed with superhuman powers to do so. The best part, of course, is of course not. We are not bound by space and time even if we are unaware of this fact. Even more importantly, the sixty-four thousand dollar question is who or what is doing the perception?

First we have to be on guard not to end up squandering our resources by putting them elsewhere. Instead of this elsewhere which can be beneficial as in the form of therapy or in some cases, physical treatment, our attention is to focus upon the time and space between the block of tensions and the tensions springing from it. A term lifted from Gregory of Nyssa might be helpful here. It's *diastema* or that mysterious space in between as applied to God and creation. There is a connection, but usually it's left unexplained for want of adequate terminology. Nevertheless, *diastema* as transferred to the context of this article can't but help.

Diastema consists of the preposition *dia* or through prefaced to the verbal root which is *histemi*, to stand. Thus we end up to stand apart or better, to stand through. *Diastema* represents a mode of attention where we take up a position or stand along accompanied by a sense of through-ness. This, of course, is putting it literally as well as awkwardly. Or hearkening back earlier in this document, we are introducing that sliver of awareness spoken of earlier which presents the possibility of coming to grips with *diastema*. It so happens that the solution is right under our noses. So when we're pretty much in a normal condition, taking the word "normal" in the original sense of *nomos* or that which is customary and used as such, we can arm ourselves when a troublesome tension arises and bursts forth. In other words, planning ahead always is a good idea especially when we're certain of one thing, that we'll be hijacked in one way or another.

Consider the means of perceiving our source in the religious terminology of St John the Evangelist. In his first letter he speaks of "that which was from the beginning." Such words may not be clear but indeed they are evocative. Without missing a beat John calls this as yet unidentified object as that which was heard, seen, looked upon and touched. As for the latter, the Greek verb is *pselaphao*, to touching by feeling and

handling not unlike as you would do the same to a piece of fruit in the market. In other words, we're dealing with an invisible reality present from the get-go. However, it's not visible (biblically speaking because Christ isn't physically present) though made accessible by using the senses in—and this is putting it rather inadequately—in a symbolic way. I say inadequate because symbol popularly taken is something we make up as we go along and has no objective reality.

So if we keep in mind this block and its pointy-ness—sharp to the touch and something to be wary of on all four sides—we see that it's bristling with countless ways to hijack us. It's like gazing upon a minefield through which we can tread provided we have a map of all the mines. We appreciate this block as representative of all that is not conscious to us, things that always have been problematic or simply downright sore to the touch. When as noted earlier a person insulting us triggers this block (again that which is not present to our awareness but somehow is present), it gets activated or wakes up. However, this waking up almost always catches us by surprise since we've been unaware of its abiding presence. Instead, we've been focusing on a manifestation springing from it which turns out to be an incident when we're hijacked.

What comes from this block is wild or untamed and never is nice to behold. Hemorrhaging might be a more accurate way to describe the tensions issuing forth, for to hemorrhage means to have one's life blood slowly but surely leak out of oneself. We know without the need for explanation that never is it beneficial for us. By applying such commonly used words as "bad" or "not good" we're using terms that apply to the manifestation of a tension (i.e., what's visible) compared with an un-manifestation where adjectives don't apply. What we do know is that the instantaneous release of the tension has purpose and aims toward an end which, of course, is to hijack the host who or which had set out to hijack us. Talk about tit-for-tat.

All this makes you wonder if the reality within us described as a pointy, sharp block is in disguise a transcendent reality, something divine. Its invisibility makes us think that way along with our tendency to ascribe some form of adoration because it's so incredibly powerful. However, we remain suspicious and rightly so because of the negativity involved. Indeed, this block doesn't seem to favor any good tension, if we could put it as such. All in all the block, while extremely powerful, is not omnipotent. The reason? Because of its exclusive focus on negativity as just described. That leads us to wonder what would a person who isn't hijacked might look like. Would he indeed be human? It's natural to think this way, coming up with Jesus or Buddha, for example. However, it's an incorrect approach. To be hijacked is to be human, that's all

there is to it. Instead, this inbuilt natural tendency can be shifted to work in our favor and not squelched by employing that sliver of awareness.

Right away we have to avoid the temptation of manipulating this image of a block, that is, to consider it as a technique. No technique—absolutely and unequivocally none—works here. The sooner we get rid of this idea the better off we'll be, for it tends to hang around longer than it should. Besides, favoring a technique is a useless approach when confronted with the hemorrhaging described above or the issuing of a tension from that block which is an invisible, static reality within us. Instead it's best to let go our focus, simultaneously the easiest yet hardest thing to do. We effect this by staring at it. Staring is not concentrating but an unwavering look that cuts through everything.

It's important to deal with our inner block in terms of making an inner gesture where we note the situation instead of attempting to seize it. Actually we do this not out of any creative genius on our part but simply because we are desperate. Our backs have been pushed to the wall with no other choice, so we have nothing to boast about. Such desperation grounds the enterprise in reality and prepares us for the next-worse-thing-to-come. That, of course, is death when all this talk about blocks, tension and hijacking dissolves. The difficulty with death is not dying but getting there. The often long, drawn-out process is where we dispose ourselves as best as we can not to be hijacked. Speaking of hijacking at the point of death may sound like we're pushing it but not so. It's a time when all that's within comes without and turns on us with a force we may not have experienced throughout life. That's why practicing right now is a good preparation, and everyday life offers plenty of opportunities for it.

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