

Exegesis of the Tao Te Ching, Genesis, With Borders and Without Borders

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This paper will address what it is like to experience the self—with borders and without borders. I intend to address the mythic, historic, and natural development of such separations. I will explore how separations impact transference and countertransference and how the history of such separations have roots in the Bible and in ancient Chinese texts. I suggest a recourse for sustaining our sense of intimacy and our endowed capacity for the simplicity of feelings.

The very notion of creation itself is also the notion of the first border; it is the border between the amorphous everything, and the defined something that now stands apart from the everything as a something. Dating to the 5th Century BCE, the *Tao Te Ching (1988)*, a Chinese cosmogony attributed to Lao Tse,¹ alludes to creation as follows:

There was something featureless yet complete, born before heaven and earth; Silent—amorphous—it stood alone and unchanging. We may regard it as the mother of heaven and earth. Commonly styled "The Way" (Mair, 1990, p. 90).

The Way gave birth to unity, unity gave birth to duality, duality gave birth to trinity, trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures bear yin on their back and embrace yang in their bosoms. They neutralize these vapors and thereby achieve (Mair, 1990, p. 9).

Why, I ask, would unity follow something “*featureless yet complete?*” The answer may be in considering that the notion of unity is a constructed order, it may represent a distinct part of the mind, and suggest other potential constructions—constructions that, therefore, are the result of divisions. It is worthwhile here to note that from the Tao (the formless *Way*) eventually comes the binary (the *Yin* and *Yang*), and that it is not just in Chinese cosmogony, but in many ancient texts. For instance, in ancient Egyptian

¹ Lao Tse 605-531 BC

cosmogony, order springs from the chaos of the “lifeless waters of chaos” called the *Nu* (Fleming & Lothian, 1997, p. 24).

The Old Testament (Genesis: 1,2), states, that the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the earth, and the spirit of the Lord trembled, on the face of the waters. And here too, as in the *Tao Te Ching*, and as in the Egyptian *Nu*, there is an amorphous and indescribable immensity that has no division. So immense and empty that “the spirit of the Lord trembled!” It is also worth noting here that the stomach of an infant spasms from the diaphragm, when that stomach is empty. The body trembles. The Lord trembled right after the separation of *heaven* from *earth*. Does the infant sense emptiness as separation? The sentient infant lives in the amorphous – without borders.

I begin by referencing the *Tao Te Ching* because it relates directly to my over sixty years of working with improvisational movement, an approach that elicits unconscious gestural impulses—from pre-conscious somatized feelings. What emerges from the silence within the body, *like from the lifeless waters of chaos*, is a sensory focus and muscular expression. The *silence* emanates by virtue of a sustained *tactile* sensitivity to *a perceptual sensation of motion* passing through connective tissue, mostly muscles, connecting to the next set of muscles in sequence. This incremental perceptual sensitivity of motion eventuates in a continuity without beginning or end in, what I have called in my method, the *interplay of muscles*. From the amorphous, come this sensory focus that then transforms the physical into a creative expression of preconscious feelings that had no name or route to expression. The process brings to mind the “amorphous” sensation presumed to take place in infants during the initial months of life, when there are no words (Stern, 2014).

The transformative process of the *interplay of muscles* begins with contact of the sole of the feet to the ground. This contact is a tactile sensation and normally is experienced as an irrefutable one. This tactile sensation can be established anew at any time. Perceiving tactile contact through the feet passing

through the ankles, through the musculature of the calves and through the rest of the body necessitates incremental adjustments in the torque of the musculature of the body in order to perceptually sustain the *tactile* sense of motion.

To make and to synch these incremental adjustments, requires that the groupings of muscles be differentiated in perception, and that, from the amorphous some ordering takes place. The ordering via incremental adjustments serve to realign the borders of the now differentiated sets of muscles, to align the long-established muscular and skeletal misalignments that commonly develop unconsciously over a lifetime. The process eventuates in a clearer transferring of motion as we stand and walk and ultimately as we dance. This flow of motion constitutes *the interplay of muscles*.

This highly subjective process, one that taxes our patience, and can present a formidable psychological roadblock to such integration. The most natural way to incorporate this sensory tactile process is while standing and walking.

Experience has convinced me that my description of the interplay of muscles probably evokes the imagination of readers to visualize the direction of motion. However, *tactile* sensitivity is different from imaging motion. Imaging is vision turned inward. Imaging is quick, an anticipation of the end result, a condensation of the textural process, as in dreams, an unwitting objectification of the sensed experience. An acute extreme of vision turned inward is the defense of depersonalization, during which one loses all sense of reality.

The *interplay of muscles* is an improvisational exercise in the psychoanalytically- informed creative movement therapy I practice. Students in their fifties, sixties, seventies, even eighties, seasoned verbal and physical professionals don't know, and often can't describe, what they felt when the improvisation ends. They felt different, unlike their habitual sense of movement or dance. As if the internal monologue

of self-observing ego construct had been silenced. While watching, I am sometimes stunned by the “*I don't know what I felt*” comment, because the feelings evoked in the observer to the organic flow of movement is so compelling. I suspect and assume that some of you have sensed this with patients. The disparity between, ‘*I don't know what I felt*’ and our unquestionable sensed feeling impressions of what the patient provoked in us. We, the observers, feel impelled to jump in to share our empathic associations. However, the disparity between observers and observed doesn't diminish even if that sharing is done. It's as though our observational experience, our emotionally sensed associations to the patient, don't quite pierce the silence of the mover. It's not unlike an interpretation that doesn't correspond to the patient's sentient reality.

Presence is what I call this experience of the person improvising. Presence rivets the observer's emotional attention. The improvisor's non-verbal feelings traverse like quantum energy onto our sentient unconscious. Space and time don't seem to matter. The borders between observer and observed seem to melt away and in the observer, and there is that feeling of the initial unity mentioned at the outset of this paper. Neuro-psychoanalysis tries to explain (Smith & Solms, 2018). Explications fall short of how deeply we are moved. It testifies to the silent sensate transmissions during the first weeks and months of life when such transmissions are borderless and amorphous. It reinforces for me, the depth of our psychoanalytic commitment, as well as the resistances to wholeness with which we contend. We need to reawaken to the amorphous as constant, alongside of our capacity for analytic differentiations and dualities, and embrace our longing for unity. To sustain the tactile requires a physical sensory awareness and the capacity to both differentiate, and to experience the amorphous.

One adult confronted the value of this silent emotionally evocative improvisational expression. “What's the value of what we do unless we are able to know it?” The frustration of “not knowing,” and the suspension of her associations to gestures, shapes, rhythms, space, made her anxious. The body to mind connection felt severed by the strong a focus on the tactile motion. Touch, the basis of tactile, is a

level of experience that precedes cognitive consciousness. I've called the tactile "being in the body" and the latter, "being in the mind."

The isolation defense (Freud, 1961), a late psychosexual developmental defense, speaks of the notion of superseding the sentient experience. The feeling is sensed, but the name or metaphor for the feeling is stronger than the sentient experience itself. I recall one of my supervisors saying, "You listen for the patient's problem so you can solve it. You're not listening to the patient's feeling." I was being told that I was avoiding the intimacy of true empathy. It took me many years to experience the distinction. I went into psychoanalysis "to know!"

The visual shortens, compresses the time of the felt into the symbolic, while the tactile is immersive, giving the feeling its natural, evanescent time. The isolation defense is a fear bordering on terror of being taken over, overwhelmed by the Other. Words can tend, like an unsuspecting virus, to subordinate intimacy. Words can overshadow the infant/toddler's kinesthetic/feeling experience.

A number of years ago, a patient came to me wanting to explore why her hand had mysteriously frozen. She consulted a neurologist, who determined that it was not organic. Physical therapy was prescribed, and her frozen hand got better. Still a tightness in her throat and chest persisted, and that is what she presented when she came for the first session. She recounted standing with an intimate friend, an older teacher. This older woman was formerly a nun, who subsequently got married, had children and was now teaching at a Catholic high school for girls. The principal of the high school, a nun, approached as they stood chatting, and in an unsympathetic tone of voice, told the older teacher, "*I am not renewing your contract for next year.*" The severity of the principal's tone of voice, and the concern for her friend and her potential financial predicament paralyzed the right hand of my patient. Her emotional repression to the principal's unsympathetic, heartless pronouncement seeped through her skin into her arteries, the hysterical conversion was instant and silent. It began in the hand and spread upward

through her arm, into her throat. The hand with which she did her work and created, and expressed herself, was connected to a silenced voice, a silence within!

Jean Piaget (1954) called the period from birth to 18-24 months the *sensorimotor stage* (p. 177). Rene Spitz (1965) found a higher incidence of infant deaths in conditions where there was a lack of touching and playing with the infants. I also found a Spitz video showing the grotesque rigor-mortis posture of an infant to whom attention was not paid for far too long a period of time. A frightening sight. This was long before the now more common infant research studies of Mahler, et al. (1975) and Stern (1985).

The *sensorimotor stage* includes rolling over by 4 months, sitting by 6, followed by creeping, encompassing three stages, and ultimately unimpeded spatial locomotion, crawling, the elation of standing, walking, running, and climbing. Margaret Mahler called the 18-24 months, *the stage of symbiotic omnipotence* (Mahler, 1979, p. 79). A stage of such profound emotional depth that it remains idealized by many, albeit vicariously, in front of the television watching football, baseball, soccer, cricket, and Olympics, into old age. Some of us in our youth developed physical levels of daring and admiration. The cognition researcher Piaget called the following stage of development the *operational stage* from 2-7. Fred Pine (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975), a developmentally focused psychoanalyst, who worked with Mahler, believed that psychological awareness comes into play at the age of seven. It takes time to become psychologically functional, or for the arrogance of the mind to degrade the sensory, through the formation of borders, into objectified concreteness.

These are all separations from the silent amorphous waters mentioned in the Tao Te Ching and in Genesis. As noted earlier in this paper, I have come to call the silent amorphous waters—*presence*.

Borders can divide us from our generic and amorphous life force, what I think of as our inborn absorbing intimacy. When the body is separated from the mind, we split our sentients from our more

conscious relatedness—transference is split off from this life force and our countertransference is silenced by the denial. The fear of being overwhelmed is often met by distancing—a self-conscious withdrawal against the borderless imbalance during which our identity vanishes.

Is the implied message of creation myths—that creation is separation? Is creating borders the unavoidable process of development? Do we, by our gifted ability to differentiate, unwittingly separate the sensory creative drives from the sentient amorphous? Is the infant's existential terror of the sentient experience, the catalyst for the compulsion to act-out physically and vocally to deal with the unbearable emptiness? Is Eve, God's projection of Adam's emptiness? After all Adam was created, God said, "*in our image*," an act of imagination, and an act both of creation and separation.

Is God a part object of the amorphous silence? Is the serpent a rebellious part object of God's grandiosity, the creator, an emerging self out of the void? Is the condemnation to forever slither, a divorce from the lofty grandiosity of imagination to which we will always be connected? I wonder whether these persistent separations are splits from our connection to the silence of our tactile sentient and amorphous being?

The "*lifeless waters of chaos*," the Nu, is the most difficult aspect of psychoanalysis, the silence held within the body, the vault of repression wafting the scent of loneliness. I have come to understand these splits through my improvisation movement work as unconscious bodily manifest dissociations, gestures isolated from the continuous wholeness of motion, or in musculoskeletal terms the result of habituated misalignments. These misalignments are behaviorally characterized as mind/body splitting—a much too common developmental detour which I address in my book, *Out of Aloneness: Using Movement for a Healthier Mind, Body and Spirit* (Wiener, Unpublished Manuscript)

All of us can experience ourselves present by not departing from our psychophysical tactile awareness, despite our marvelous, imaginative fertile minds. We need to sense tactile motion within the muscles, as has been my lifetime journey, even when we are not moving. This tactile perceptual awareness facilitates feelings wordlessly emanating with no concern about borders or separations.

It is the life force of a *pas de deux*. When the transcending motion is alive in each of the partners, we sense the passion, the madness, the coldness, the borderless love. But, when the tactile motion is not present, we grasp the symbolic, the intention, we may even be sufficiently versed to marvel at the choreographic inventions. We will probably feel pride in our discreet perceptions, but that is little consolation for that fact that, without presence, we will not live in the moment that keeps us grounded in the simplicity of feeling.

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