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# ON INSPIRATION

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**S**IR ISAAC NEWTON, on being asked about his scientific discoveries and his considerable reputation as a physicist, replied: 'I am like a child picking pebbles on the seashore. There are thousands and thousands, millions upon millions more of them to be picked up.'

The image of the unlimited vastness of the seashore evokes awe and inspires the mind (of which it is an image) with reverence and humility – the real basis of any truly scientific spirit and any truly artistic spirit.

The wise man knows that everything works under Law and according to Nature. If the Law is known, and if Nature is understood, then all the rest stands revealed. Then the knowing, understanding enquirer will tell others what to look for, where to look, and what they will find. It is only thus that whole generations of discoveries are made possible.

Inspiration is necessary for the processes of discovery not to run down and come to a dead stop. Inspiration comes along with, or as a result of, insight: the power of seeing into an event. It often comes to a man when he is still and far away from tumult and excessive agitation, whether physical (such as loud music, crowds), mental (excitement, thoughts whizzing madly away, daydreams), or spiritual (hatred, jealousy, criticism).

The Latin word, *spirare*, means 'to blow, 'to breathe into, to infuse, to influence'. Words like 'spirit' are derived from it. *In-spirare* therefore means 'to breathe upon or to blow into, to infuse some thought or feeling into a person, as if by breathing'. 'To inspire' also implies 'to animate' (from *anima* meaning 'soul') – to animate as if by some mental or spiritual influences.

The inspiration of the great scientists is quite well known: Newton received such inspiration as a young man during a time when he was away from the university which had closed down temporarily because an epidemic had broken out. He was in the stillness of his own library and what he saw in a few vivid moments took him over fifty years to verify and demonstrate.

Such inspiration comes only to those who work in the right way and it is a prelude to more work – work by which the inspiration is verified, made manifest and therefore transformed into something practical and tangible.

Mozart speaks of the bubbling up of a musical idea when he is 'of good cheer

after a good meal, or during a ride out into the countryside'. He relates how he literally experiences the music as 'a whole' in which all the parts are clear – and all he has to do then is memorize it and later on transcribe it from memory. Such is the power of the mind.

This implies that a man may make use of deeper powers in himself – powers such as inspiration, of which he is not ordinarily aware. It is an inner sight, deep within the mind and a man must be still, quiet, and collected within himself. It is not the privilege of anyone in particular except if one learns how to attend to stillness, how to be free of the hustle and bustle of daily affairs which overlay and habitually hide out such vision. Many know the experiences of sleeping over a problem to wake up finding either that it has dissolved or that the solution to it is simple.

It seems, therefore, that a condition for inspiration is that the superficial layers of the mind be quiesced. It would seem that in most cases we have very little or almost no control over what happens at the subtler, deeper levels of the mind, but we are quite capable of achieving some control of the superficial activity that arrests such moments of inspiration from surfacing more often. It is in this light that Edward Debono, when discussing the various modes of thinking, remarks that 'insight (and therefore inspiration) is more a matter of *finding* the right approach than of method. . . .' Finding the right approach implies finding ways and means of stilling the agitation of mind and heart but unfortunately it is such agitation that is commonly confused with and assumed to be thinking.

Thinking is thought to be all the activity that usually runs on somewhat haphazardly in the mind. Thinking is taken to be all the inner conversing, all the inner deliberations, all the free associating of ideas, images, sounds, and whatnot else that are in fact agitations, superficial movements that truly suffocate inspiration – and therefore violate the reasoning principle – the beginning and end of any true creativity – any true discovery – and true thinking.

'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' *Gen.* vi. 5. '. . . for the imagination of a man's heart is evil from his youth.' *Gen.* viii. 21.

It was this imagination of a man's heart, this agitation, with the ego at its centre, that provoked the deluge.

When the mind is allowed to swell without interruption on that which will suit 'me' (and 'me' implies 'me alone' or 'my group or class *alone*'), on that which is 'mine' – the mind is literally inundated and swept away, drifts away from its moorings in the real world. At best the victim is in a condition of dream, at worst such egoism becomes the gateway to madness.

Usually, most people inhabit the twilight realm between dream and madness where life seems safely patterned and meted out in well-worn designs: career,

politics, religion, friends, enemies, possessions, and so on.

The consequences of this state of affairs are well known since the highway of agitation, struggle, and competition is a well-trodden one. *Our* ideas, *our* opinions, *our* theories, *our* creeds suddenly become good enough reasons for suppressing *any other* ideas, opinions, theories, or creeds just because they are different. Plurality becomes a threat and therefore one has all the reason in the world to suppress all or any 'competitor' if needs be, even violently, using torture and other means. (From the Latin *torquere* 'to twist'; derived from the Sanskrita root form: *tark* meaning, amongst other things, 'to suspect').

The man held in such a spell is a man riddled by suspicion, a man whose natural impulse for a 'Love of Life' has been changed into a desperate 'struggle' for existence, for class, or what have you: a somewhat alienated position from the status of man at his best – man inspired – man creative.

'Thinking' is not what it is generally assumed to be, and since such assumptions (usually tacit); as those that identify 'thinking' with agitation; can usher in unfortunate consequences by the legion, it has always been, and will always be necessary, for man to explore ways and means not only of discovering what thinking is and is about, but also of learning the subtle art of guarding the mind.