

TIME AND THE SENTINEL

The aspect of human psychology which acts like an internal sentinel is a function just outside of time. Its vigilance is turned to the actions of the world and the products of time, but its locus is veiled in timelessness.

Every created thing is carried on time's stream: thoughts, feelings, observations and actions; children, birds, cars, computers, hadron colliders, politics and politicians; loves, hates, births, deaths, chicken casseroles and last month's bank statement—all come and go. The sentinel's vigilance is in stillness and silence, but ever present. No-thing is beyond its gaze, but only some things touch and mobilise its attention.

And when this happens, the whole human system shivers. This is when you catch your breath in the face of a moment of awareness, when the glint of a stream on a summer's day carries you out of your habitual sphere, when your thoughts stop and a sense of the world's mystery and magnificence breaks through. It can happen at any time, and often does, but the blanket of time closes over fast, and suddenly you have forgotten. You walk on and thoughts begin their endless cycling.

Some people cultivate those moments out of time. They read and study, sail close to the wind by courting risk and danger, hungrily collect experiences and interrogate art, charismatic individuals, philosophy or ideology in a quest to provoke an encounter. But all this progeny of time washes past the Sentinel unremarked—until there's a gap in the flow. The gap is silence, the same substance as the Sentinel, and so the alerting awareness is activated. It is a gap between thoughts, between mentations, and in this space we are at one with the awareness from which we are never separated.

To explore the place and action of the sentinel demands more investment than collecting scattered moments, but when there is a movement from unawareness to awareness, or from noise to silence, the sentinel notes the change and offers a choice. It becomes a sort of threshold, a moment of real choice. There is a parallel in quantum physics:—where is the 'mind' of the photon, so to speak, and what determines the outcomes which can be so clearly documented—but only *after* the event in time? Accounting for the timeless breaking into time, not surprisingly, generates an explosion of theories and models.

We live on the edge of a mystery, as sages have told us from time immemorial. We erupt into time, and depart again with death. Or so it seems—except that sages tell us the edge is present in every moment. The choice-point, the determining factor is incorporated into our functioning and part of our being, but hidden from conscious awareness unless we get into conscious relationship with the Sentinel.

Here, finally, is the nucleus of the question. It is possible consciously to cultivate such a relationship, to keep turning attention away from time to the timeless, from noise to silence, from busi-ness to the space between actions. Meditation and the practice of disciplines of awareness work upon this relationship. Sometimes we can encounter a Guardian, warning that we are trying to go too far too fast, and to step into territory our normal psyche is not yet equipped to handle or integrate safely. Best to heed that intuition, and also another forbidding

manifestation of sentinel/guardian which unleashes consequences if we persist across the threshold with a fat self, greedy for gain.

When we begin to sense the potency hidden in the shadows of our being, it is like seeing a beacon in the mist. In an effort to keep the light in view and to guide others to its awareness, we may establish an explicit beacon through words or actions. A beacon may be a guiding light through the rocks of suffering, a fire on a hillside to beckon and cheer, or a chain of fires reaching across the earth wherever wise minds and hearts have come to recognition and try to pass on their knowledge.

If we summon up our own living presence, we will know that the Gate and its Sentinel are also products of time, visions of duality. They are creations of the one who sees.

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MEETING WITH THE SENTINEL

*Metaphorical and sacred symbolism is only of use if it can be related to direct experience. When I finished writing **Time and the Sentinel**, I realised it had to be tested. Such descriptions are always based either on ideas and concepts, or on past experience from memory. If it's the latter, the test is to see if it is current as well.*

The method is to turn the attention back (as in meditation). Then a questioning process can dig deeper and pull out the threads of the experience for recognition (two more descriptive but accurate metaphors!) In this account, the questions have been largely omitted to keep the flow of the narrative.

A 'where' question might be a good place to start with this. 'Where' always locates, and can bring attention into psycho-physical space. (People's perception may vary)

Q. And the Sentinel within, where is that sentinel?

A. I feel a sort of strong presence, I think behind the shoulders/throat, or back of the chest. It is very upright, darkish and waiting, watchful.

Interesting—it feels like 'a' presence, but I can't detect any actual features, eyes etc. Maybe a shadowy sense of a tunic like a roman soldier—I guess that's my idea of what a sentinel might look like. Keeping watch. That's the job. It never sleeps or disappears, but is always awake and alert for danger or movement.

I don't feel it as threatening at all. Not exactly friendly either, but actually it is a bit comforting, to know it is there, keeping watch. The other thing which comes up is that it doesn't feel like 'mine'—my sentinel, or even 'in me'. But I can relate to it, and then I am sensing something outside of time, as if the experience would be available to any human from pre-history to now in time, because the experience is timeless. So in making contact, I am part of a line, a group, like joining an order.

Q. What kind of an Order could that be?

A. Always awake. That's what it stands for. Awakeness, no more or less, just that. And in this minute, I'm part of it, because I've sort of merged with the sentinel presence. I can look out from that place and the separation has disappeared. It feels very strong, upright as I said. And I don't think I'd miss much in any direction, if there was something worth noticing.

I'd like to be able to hold this. I could, I think, if I paid more attention and practised being in and looking out from this place more often.

I'd have to be more awake though—isn't that a bit circular.....!

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