



Three Forms of Stress

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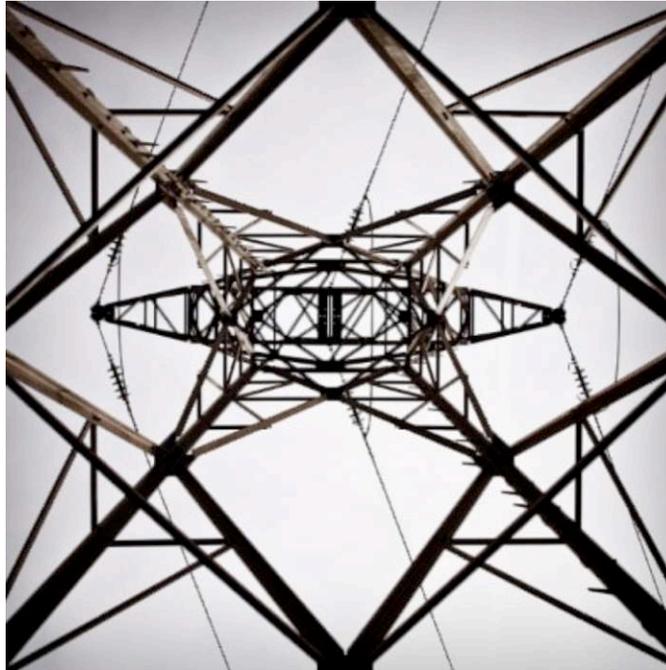


There are many forms of relaxation: mental, physical, visceral, temporal, pertaining to health, exercise, work, play, or relationships, for a start. These feel different, require different means, and have different ends, but we distinguish them only weakly. There are so many kinds of relaxation, that relaxation, as a thing, should have more than one name. So, too, with stress.

Think instead about a familiar stress, its shape, form, and texture, what triggers it, how it feels, and how it changes your perceptions. There are many angles, causes, and responses. Any stress has origins in the past, and likely consequences in the future. Can you really do justice to it, when it's taken out of its larger context?

Pick a stress and picture it at a distance. Does this stress have any sort of internal structure? Look inside it. You might see actions, faces, and shadows. You might see your own mental stages, or you might encounter sights and sounds. There will be aspects. I suggest all stress has components of

tension, compression, and confusion.



Tension

Stress is almost synonymous with tension, but not quite. Tension arises from opposing forces. This may put us in conflict with ourselves, but not necessarily. Tension can come when we're certain in ourselves, but in conflict with others. It's a rare conflict that does not cause us grief, but it's the internal ones that attack our will and power.



To be in tension is to be at cross purposes, caught in a situation where success in one respect is failure in another. If the conflict exists in one dimension, then we hope a reasoned explanation will

avail us certitude. To accelerate or decelerate, to turn or go straight. We search for decisions to release the tension through conclusion, and move with resolution to the consequence.

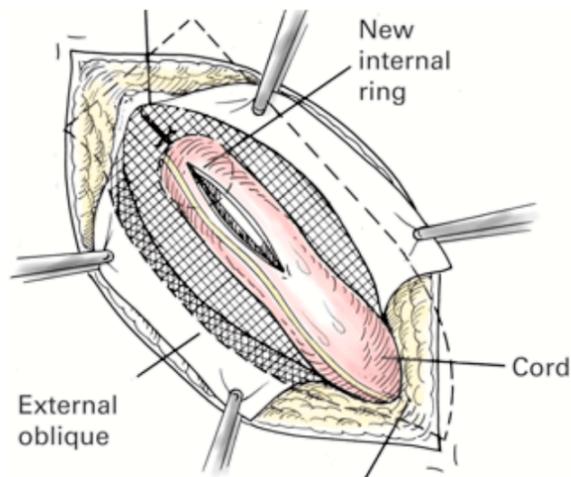
But so often the conflict is not one-dimensional, instead balanced on questions of different measure: risk versus return, danger versus reward, the rational versus the emotional, or a conflict of obligations. And to raise the stakes, the situation is often imperative and immediate, with outcomes unclear and uncertain.

Committed, compelled, or engaged on a forked path, we suddenly confront an unwelcome choice. We see or sense a danger, and fear fills the exercise.



Compression

We often overlook compression as a stress, and instead sense it as fatigue. Rather than being torn, compression is overload, of having more to do, work toward, or take care of than was our plan: an overloaded schedule, more than you can handle, a hernia. Or a narrowing of options, overbearing pressure, a heart attack.



Where freedom liberates, compression imprisons. There is fear again, but a sort that comes with too much focus. If tension comes from too many alternatives, compression comes from too few, and the desire is one of flight: to flee the perfect storm.

Compression allows your certitude, but threatens what you cannot foresee. You know what you should do, but not what you can do. With too much pressure, like compression in concrete, cracks radiate from the center, from the fiber of your constitution. Some materials fail slowly, like wood, in stages. Others, like glass, implode.

We might say where tension takes you apart, compression collapses your sense of self. That tension evokes action and anger, while compression exhausts action, leaving immobility and depression. There's certainly fear in both cases and, in some circumstances, they come full circle. Anger and depression are close cousins.





Relief One: Unity

To relieve from tension, reconcile the opposites. There is the present conflict, and there is the real conflict. The present conflict, which comes in many shapes and forms, reflects a fundamental conflict. Each present conflict form is an aspect, or representation of the fundamental.

To relieve conflict, accept both positions but, as you do, each side will change. A conflict between characters before us represents a conflict of characters inside us. As those characters approach each other as adversaries, you approach understanding them as they feel. When this happens, they either emerge as opposites in one dynamic, or as alternatives in different views of the world.

The process of internal resolution—that is the process of clarity—involves first seeing more deeply from each point of view, and then being more deeply immersed in each. The victim searches for what actions of their own maintains their role, outside of the present conflict. The perpetrator does the same. The roles do not reverse, but they are seen as two aspects necessary for the tension to maintain.



Relief Two: Release

Compression is also a duality, not of warring generals, predator, or prey, but of two emotions. This is also a shifting boundary, and a situation that represents two sides of you: the good and the bad, success and failure, the lovable and the loathsome. The stress comes from the reasons, and the conflicts they create. The resolution comes with deeper feeling, ultimately the feeling of primordial opposites. As before, resolution is not to unify, but to experience fully.

The primordial stress lies at an internal level. Coping mechanisms allow you to navigate a narrow miss, and this expedient may be necessary. It is safety, but not progress. The band-aid of coping will patch you up to fight again, and that is not necessarily bad if fighting is what you need. But understand there will be no “winning.” Stress problems are not solved; they are only made non-lethal. The hell of battle, at whatever level it manifests, will manifest again. Your object is to break the cycle, which may feel like winning or losing, so that you can exit the game.

Eric Honnold displayed a compression problem: finding peace through struggle. For people like Eric, the struggle is a mechanism for coping with an empty center. The conclusion comes with being what you’re trying to achieve, overcoming the need to accomplish anything at all. Being quiet mind.



Relief Three: Comfort

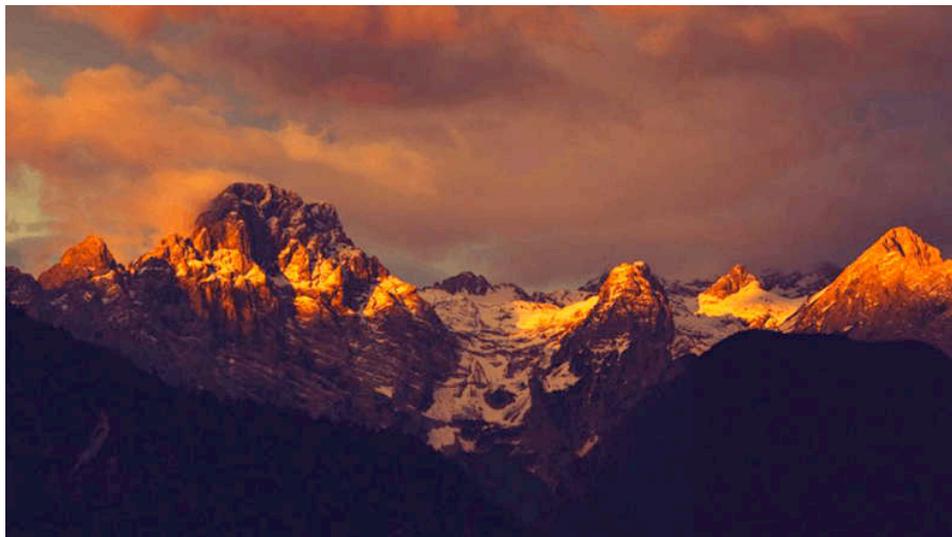
I am most fond of confusion which is, at root, being drawn toward being lost. Toward transformation. The coping strategies for the stress of confusion are useful skills in the territory of being authentically lost.

When you know you are undergoing a transformation, you should make sure to banish all negative forces, within and without. A true transformation involves a rising at right angles to all of the familiar, through landscapes completely foreign. In this your guidance must be otherworldly or, if you prefer, entirely from your core. Recognize the reasoning mind as just the gears, and not the compass. The timepiece, not the time. Let the reasoning mind run, but keep your eyes on the horizon.

The structures that emerge from transformation will be built of you, but not a you you know. In transformation, you aim to dissociate in the presence of your higher wisdom. The first being a process you can aid, like getting the avalanche started. Your higher wisdom, on the other hand, decides for itself when to appear. When it does appear, it will be unspeakably larger than yourself, and unrecognizably familiar. The feeling is one of being newborn. You know it when you feel it.

Resolving confusion—again, a clarifying, not a solving—and enlarging, through depth or breadth,

are one and the same. Contemplation, meditation, isolation, going out or going deep are standard means. In them, one finds means to cope, as well as preparation for letting go. I find reflection specific to this kind of stress, creating space specially suited for it.



Relaxation and Awareness

You can't argue stress away because it has its reasons and you feel vulnerable without it. Address stress emotionally. Find a larger awareness that allows you to feel your emotions without being swept away by them.

There are several aspects to awareness which you don't generally consider. These are an awareness of the things around you, the edges of your awareness, and your own rhythm. The structure of your environment has a resonance, a frequency that's natural to it, and you are pulled toward it. If you can conduct that frequency, then you can direct the activity of things in your environment.

I've created a guided visualization called *Vertical Relaxation* which you can listen to as a downloadable MP3 audio file. It works to detach you from your obsession with stress and give you some breathing room, a place to calm down. You can "purchase" this audio for free, from the shopping page of my website, at: <https://www.mindstrengthbalance.com/product/vertical-relaxation/>

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