

Krzysztof Czyżewski

## **Building Coexistence: Part II**

### *The story continues*

Trying to envisage further lives of the characters from the story of the two monks we may ask: What did they do after the encounter at the riverbank? Did the woman continue along the path which the older monk had showed her? Was she able to return the gift she had received from him? Or did she become isolated because the behavior of the younger monk bred in her a dislike for religion, men or strangers? She might have as well forgotten all about the event never noticing any connection between the assistance she received from a stranger and her own indifference towards others, those in need. Or, even if she supposedly had felt such a connection, she might have not been able to face it, repressing it as a taboo forced by her living conditions, social environment, survival anxiety or other circumstances? And the monks: Did they remain friends? Did the older monk get expelled from the order? Did his closest ones see him as a wise man or just a traitor? What was the life's path of the younger monk? Was it filled with remorse and dialogue with others, or hatred and desire for revenge? The realities of the age of increasing cultural conflicts suggest radical dramatic scenarios including use of violence, exclusion, public lynching, and eruption of low instincts. Did the action determining the identities of the three characters open a process of continuous identity formation or did it enclose their lives within permanently established and intransgressible limits? How, and perhaps, what identity builds coexistence in the contemporary world?

The question of the art of living together unlike the question of individual truth or freedom targets the very core of the story of coexistence. Therefore, we should turn our attention now to what would happen next in the lives of the protagonists of our drama occurring on the borderline of the encounter with the Other man/Other woman, and explore the possibilities of overcoming divisions born as a result of the experience of the encounter.

Clearly, before their meeting with the stranger the monks had been travelling together, sharing the road, their faith and friendship. The woman was alone and had not previously been subjected to a refusal of assistance or rejection of a gift from a stranger. It was the meeting at the broken bridge that made their paths cross, breaking old ties and establishing new ones. To cross the river they had to build an invisible bridge, one that was full of tension and interdependencies. Yet can we say for sure that, given what happened at the river, they

were able to coexist on the other side? We might obviously assume that they would go their separate paths and never become neighbors. In this way, just like the old monk left the woman on the other bank, we could leave behind a tangle of difficult questions and interpersonal encounters. But making such an assumption only allows us to temporally evade questions that keep returning and are rooted in our everyday existence, calling for practical solutions.

Something made both the two monks and the woman continue their journey, become migrants in need of a crossing. This is a sign of the times of globalization, but also touches upon the truth about man in general. "I wish that ship, the Argo'd never spread its sails and soared / between the slate-grey Symplegades, to Colchis". But it did soar, and the plea of Medea's nurse opening Euripides' tragedy about the consequences of travelling beyond the limes of the known world was all in vain. The thousand-years-old recurrent plea to stay at home where everything is safe and familiar. In vain. Thresholds of homes and gates of homelands are crossed, bridges are broken and rebuilt, and life in a multicultural society is an everyday experience of growing numbers of people. Nothing, no visa regimes or strengthening of defensive walls will ever change the fact that cultural boundaries move together with the people who bring them into their new communities. The barriers built on the external borders, whether check points or gate guards are not able to deprive or free people from their cultural boundaries. Moreover, even when being able to deal with them alone, by finding inner strength to cross them or leave them behind, our coexistence with others in a community will make us struggle with them continuously. The older monk could eventually "break free" from the woman by living in seclusion. However, assuming that his path and that of the young monk's are likely to cross in the future means that the woman will continue to remain part of the latter's life because of the presence of the man who reacted to the encounter differently than he would. Let us say it again – we could separate them, supposing they would never meet again. But that would never bring us closer to the truth about coexistence. By coexisting with others in multi-cultural communities, we experience the reality in which the lives of the three characters intertwine.

Let us now look at coexistence by aligning it with the thinking of Józef Tischner. This philosopher and Catholic priest would never have agreed to any character from our story be left alone – the woman on the one bank, the young monk on the other, or the older monk in his seclusion and lofty though lonely wisdom. Tischner would rather have found him a place at the community table.

### **Tischner, or with whom should we live**

When asked: “How to live?” Tischner answered: “It does not matter how, it matters with whom”. He said these words as he was nearing his own death. His reflections on the meaning of existence titled *How to live?* were published a few years earlier. Here we can find the wisdom of the old monk. The most important in Tischner’s thought and attitudes for our discussion is the fact that he makes philosopher and wise man meet a practitioner of spirituality (we could also say: a practitioner of coexistence as his glossary did not differentiate between the two). Tischner-practitioner does not sacrifice coexistence for the sake of truth-seeking, as it often happens with poets and philosophers following the daimonion’s call, but instead endeavors to validate the truth in the interpersonal drama of coexistence. The author of the *Ethics of Solidarity* advocates not so much insistence on moral principles, but supporting sinners, the weak, the lost and all those who happen to violate these principles, or at least who fall short of them at one time or place. As a deeply religious Christian, he saw his place not only and not always among those who shared his beliefs and values, but first of all among those who thought or acted either differently or imperfectly. Tischner, in this way, broke with the traditional philosophical reflection on “how to live” for the sake of opening up to coexistence “with others”. This became of utmost importance to him because it was able to validate or invalidate a philosophical reflection. For Tischner, the Other is not a person with whom we choose to coexist. Nor is it a person we separate ourselves from, made different by certain attributes that we find attractive such as communion of blood, faith or similarity of worldviews. The Other is any person with whom we share our neighborhood, history or an accidental encounter. The Other is different than us. Tischner’s wisdom collected in *How to live* will only acquire its full meaning when it becomes a foundation for our own art of coexisting with the Other.

### **Doctor and Philosopher**

Tischner knew of course that coexistence was not an easy art to live by in the social, political and cultural realities of his times. However, the concerns that he voiced in regards to community life and solidarity when Poland was under communism or undergoing political transformations (his books written in 1970s and 1980s) are equally relevant and surprisingly current when retold in the Poland of 2016. This can be seen in his observations on the closing of modern societies to the outside world and to foreigners. Tischner’s thought in this respect followed from his discussions with Antoni Kępiński – a distinguished Polish psychiatrist and humanist, a precursor of individual and group psychotherapy.

Tischner met Kępiński already in the 1960s through Roman Ingarden. Kępiński's therapeutic ideas seemed to him a type of the Polish philosophy of hope born of the trauma of the Second World War. "He knows more about man than Freud, Heidegger or Lévinas" – he wrote about the Krakow doctor. Kępiński learnt a lot about life from borderlands. He was born in 1918, near Stanisławów (today: Ivano-Frankivsk in Ukraine), during the Polish-Ukrainian war. As a child he was captured by Ukrainians but survived thanks to a Ukrainian nanny. He opposed the discrimination policies towards the Jews during the interwar period and ostentatiously sat in one row with the Jewish students during lectures at the Jagiellonian University. This did not save him from an attack by socialists who once beat him up as they thought that his Medicine Department red hat meant that he was associated with nationalists. He also spent almost three years in a Francoist concentration camp, where he was heavily beaten and spent one month in the starvation cell. After the war, Kępiński was one of the first psychiatrists who worked with former Auschwitz prisoners. He co-edited "Medical Review – Auschwitz", which was twice nominated for Nobel Peace Prize, where he published his studies concerning the survivor syndrome thanks to which it became an internationally recognized mental condition.

In 1969, Kępiński was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer. He left the famous surgery in the basement of the Kraków Psychiatric Clinic, the room used in the Austrian times for the most ill and aggressive patients, and was placed in the top floor of the Nephrology Clinic where he was visited many times, until his death, by Tischner. Tischner paid tribute to his friend in his essay *Filozofia wypróbowanej nadziei* (*Philosophy of Tested Hope*). On the tenth anniversary of Kępiński's death, when Poland was under the Martial Law, Tischner wrote another essay, *Spółczesność dialogu* (*Society of Dialogue*) in which he stressed the idea that they both deeply shared – Gabriel Marcel's rule: "let others be".

### **Pilgrim and Man from Hideouts**

The most important of Tischner's texts that reflects his meetings with Kępiński is *Ludzie z kryjówek* (*People from Hideouts*). This essay, which was first published in 1978 by "Znak", written as if on the margins of his deep reading of Kępiński's *Psychopathy*, presents a penetrating analysis of a deeply divided society. Its members are scared of meeting with the Other or opening up to the outside world, equally obsessively trying to find a scapegoat.

Tischner was aware that Kępiński's language and knowledge derived from the doctor's deep empathy toward his patients and go far beyond individual diseases, approaching universal dimensions. It seemed possible to use them to describe and diagnose people or

communities afflicted with the syndrome of closure or the drama of extremely polarized and mutually exclusive attitudes.

This moment in our story of coexistence, when we have reached the other bank and started to ask questions about the consequences of crossing the river, is perhaps the best one to try and enter into a dialogue with the thought and community practice of the doctor and philosopher, with Kępiński and Tischner.

What happened before the meeting of the monks with the woman can be related to the way Tischner defined the pilgrim's ethos: the attitude of a wandering man, heading towards the unknown, not afraid of getting rid of the burden of the past, able to derive from the moment the content they need to continue their journey. He experiences hope – the most precious, according to the philosopher, gift of life enabling us to build values.

The behavior of the older monk during the crossing perfectly befits the pilgrim's ethos. If only our lives could be described by a story about a woman in need aided by an old monk who lends his hand and in his action follows both prudence and his heart!

The story may remind an episode from the story of Jason, the leader of the Argonauts and later husband to Medea. He, too, at the beginning of his quest for the Golden Fleece, meets a woman on a riverbank, she looks old, but it's just a disguise assumed by the goddess Athena, to try our wanderer. Jason is able to meet her request, he carries her to the other side, earning for himself a patron for his further travels and losing a sandal in the river. Since then he will be known as *monosandalos* – one destined to find part of himself outside the *limes* of the known to him world, in a meeting with the strangers. If only was he able to persist in his character until the end of his life! Instead, however, he becomes entangled in a tragedy of a failed encounter with the Other that ends in a merciful act of Athena who kills him with the hull of the Argo – preventing him from committing a suicide. In the Greek world, Jason was a loser and the won by him Golden Fleece became worthless as on his return he committed a treachery and profaned the gifts of hospitality and love. But in the modern world his failure is not so obvious. He could easily gather support from a great crowd of allies for whom the most precious virtue was his victorious voyage to the top, and not the way he returned i.e. the way he betrayed his earlier vows and promises made to become successful and the way he returned gifts acquired to reach the other, inaccessible shore. He would impress them with the supremacy of his culture over other cultures, which he cunningly used to his advantage, and his confidence in the primacy of the interest of his own nation, kingdom and common good. Even those who find such a mindset personally alien would say: stop idealizing, let's take life the way it is.

“Taking life the way it is” is personified in our story by the younger monk. His behavior shows many of the same traits which are characteristic of the sharp divisions in today’s societies. Noticeably, they are found among those who barricade themselves behind particular interests and opinions or contribute to an overall increase in support for populist politicians all across Europe who build their popularity on increasing fear of strangers turning national and cultural identity into a fortress against the outside world. Tischner would call them “people from hideouts”.

The change that occurred in the younger monk, as he experienced the world from the other side of the riverbank, corresponds perfectly with the behavior of the “people from hideouts”. Upon his encounter with the woman the monk ceased to attentively perceive the outside world. The burden of the past turned his travel into an escape from people and the world. As a result, the “spaces of coexistence” – to use Tischner’s term – of both monks (the pilgrim and the man from a hideout) become very different. While the older monk’s becomes flexible and responsive to his own and others’ needs, the younger monk’s remains inflexible, as if stuck in his old ways, serves as an easy pretext to produce accusations against others while hiding one’s own weaknesses or sins. The young monk will do everything possible to focus attention on the fact that the older monk broke his vows by touching the woman’s body, at the same time hiding breaking his own vows of remaining silent until sunset. Escalation of accusations allows domination over others. It is the most characteristic method of taming your neighbor and the world employed by the people from hideouts.

Tischner, following Kępiński, analyzes different forms of psychological games that lead to domination of one man over another. These include hysteria, which turns the space of coexistence into a peculiar theatre of manipulation of human emotions, where others are forced to perform situations directed by the manipulator’s own anxiety and prejudice against another person who becomes an enemy: either to be subdued or become an object of aggression. What pushes a hysteric onto the stage, for a psychasthenic becomes a reason of withdrawal into oneself. Playing the game the psychasthenic hides behind a mask of submissiveness and a seemingly meek disposition. However, once the mask is removed, his face reveals anger and jealousy – a syndrome of a servant who has been offered a chance to rule his master. The younger monk’s attitude is closest to the obsessive-compulsive disorder known as anakastia.

Anakastic people withdraw into their hideout by an obsessive struggle with evil which they perceive both in themselves and around them. Kępiński wrote about them: “The fact that their environment is so full of evil is a great consolation to them because it makes them feel

superior to their neighbors [...] An anakastic person develops a void between himself and the outside world from his early years; instead of relationships based on emotions, develops relations based on duty, dos and don'ts [...]. An anakastic person is afraid of life because he has no courage to accept emotional ties with his environment, and emotions are first and most essential subjective manifestation of life; he lives "a second-hand" life i.e. following the dos and don'ts of his social environment. His life is empty, futile and artificial".

His egocentrism is different from that of people suffering from hysteria in the way he tends to justify his actions with high-level ideals aimed at saving people and the whole world. They accuse others of wrongdoing, using all possible ways to infect them with a sense of guilt and forcing them to constantly prove their innocence. As a result, the space of coexistence is dominated by the "moral superiority" of the anakastic person and their aspiration to reach the absolute truth. Accompanying it is the feeling of internal conflict produced by inability of getting rid of perceiving evil in others and in oneself which forces the person deeper into his hideout.

The organization of the space of coexistence described by Kępiński and Tischner, is based on fear and on deepening of oppositions. The people from hideouts build their identity on separation, negation and withdrawal. Such people do not trust others, perceiving them only as enemies who need to be subordinated or destroyed. They may even get to know others but that doesn't help, either, because they believe they already know everything about others, even before a meeting takes place. Kępiński strongly believes that our position in the space of coexistence turned into a subordination game, is predetermined against our original will. It is dictated by the social environment and life circumstances, as nobody enters this world with an inborn fear of others. It is the Other who brings out what is dormant in us in its potentiality. Tischner completed Kępiński's analysis with a reflection indicating that "a man possessed" is a lost soul, his closeness is not able to make anyone happy but generates misery instead. "The more you possess a person, the more difficult it is to break the wall separating our close possessed from the close possessors. In such a situation, the most important becomes the question of how to get out of this deadlock. It is the main concern of the philosopher and the doctor which determines their practice of spirituality. This makes us return to our question about the possibility of coexistence of a group of people, when the circumstances of a difficult encounter with otherness, including anxiety and crossing of cultural boundaries, reveal deep divisions inside it.

### **“I” favors the truth if “You” accepts the other**

Tischner knew that in his reflections on the people from hideouts, revealing the crisis of community life in today’s world, he had to go beyond a description of symptoms or a critical analysis of an illness. He was most interested in people’s ability to get out of their hideouts and establish a space of coexistence as an inter-human community. This called for a different language and a different approach. Tischner stressed that: “while psychotherapy knows more about the structure of a pathology than about the process of healing, ethics knows more about the structure of guilt than the process of conversion”. Filling this gap, in his view, is only possible when the doctor and the philosopher come together. He tried that already in his *People from Hideouts*, the text which is of utmost importance for our discussion.

Tischner would not agree with the belittling and relativization of the drama of withdrawal of man and closing of society. He saw it as a deep wound which determines our emotional states and behavior, a wound that is very difficult to heal: “A passage from the space of hope into the space of a hideout means a fall of a man of a very deep ethical significance. And even though this fall is not a fall into a sin, into a conscious and voluntary guilt, it is nevertheless a fall. A human being lives on the level of dullness, beyond good and evil, is neither guilty nor innocent, his responsibility is in a state of decay. This does not mean, however, that he lost in this way his human dignity. The thing is that all human dignity is reduced to the value of suffering one experiences. A striking feature of the people from hideouts is that they suffer and impose their suffering on others. And, worst of all, their suffering is as great as it is unnecessary” .

Another significant step on the path to overcome the closing is to leave the platform of confrontation, on which the “dialectics of oppositions determines the way of coexistence with others”. This is probably the greatest challenge. Even more as it refers to everyone with whom we share existence and everybody with whom we coexist. Those who are right, instead of waiting for recognition from others, have to start building bridges. This is not easy; neither for people from hideouts, nor for those who are looking at them with pity. Neither the language we use, nor our culture – including the media in which we are immersed – are supportive in this regard. What gives us strength to undertake such a challenge? Kępiński believed in liberation from the captive space of coexistence. The precondition is to be a “deep turnaround in the way we experience values”. Tischner follows him in saying that man caught in the network of sick imagination strengthening social divisions “has to digest the self”, i.e. to achieve the level of life where he can feel good about himself and feel at home there.



Enrootment in the truth about oneself strengthens us in our meeting with the other and allows opening.

The deep social polarization that we are experiencing in 2016 is the reason why we find “people from hideouts” not only among the traditional opponents of openness to others and the world, but also in liberal and cosmopolitan circles. Their openness to the world does not necessarily overlap with their reaching out to their neighbors. Replacement of coexistence with frontlines makes us divided by a wall of prejudice, illusions and unfair judgements. As a result, the experience of our own dignity is based on crooked images and messages poisoning what Kępiński called “information metabolism” and what at the biological, emotional and socio-cultural level determines our community life, i.e. a harmonious exchange of information with our environment. Recovery of the harmony of the information metabolism can be achieved only through experiencing the horizons of the truth. This is possible not by external imposition or instruction but by the “digestion of the self”. The next question is: what are the methods that can be used to structure the information metabolism? Kępiński was convinced that it required increased awareness, working on yourself, and a free release of emotional complexes. This cannot be accomplished without a full approval of one’s self as well as winning the approval from others. The deeper we explore the possibilities of recovery from hideouts, the better we understand why Tischner once advised a priest preparing for a retreat on the theme of “How to live” that a much more important question is “With whom to live”. Strengthening one’s spirit of favoring the truth can be accomplished only through another person, and it is also the others that make us withdraw in our hideouts.

Kępiński guided by empathy towards his patients, so often and unfairly excluded from the community, wrote movingly about the lie of the stage that deceives by looking down on others, about the lie of pedestals that establish the space of coexistence along the principle of oppositions. Tischner thought that the mere revealing of how these lies work might be liberating, but he never stopped at that because you cannot build the ethos of solidarity on negation alone.

Both the doctor and the philosopher agree on two conditions necessary to liberate man from the anxiety that enslaves him in his hideout and subjects to the desire of dominating others: opening to the truth and another person. Both conditions are deeply interconnected. We could say that “the self” of the person living in the hideout begins to favor truth only on the condition that “someone/everyone” from the outside of his hideout dares accept the other person and himself becomes the other one who is in demand in the closing society. Thus, we

deal here with a whole set of conditions that make up the process that once started can be transformed into a constructive building of the space of coexistence which once has been marked by resentment of broken relationships, violated boundaries and fear of enslavement. People who have turned actors to manipulate the emotions of others, or shammed service to others to dominate them, or moralized to hide their own sense of guilt to impose it on their alleged enemies – have all to rely on "digesting themselves." And perhaps from this digestion comes the real "glue" of community? Doesn't the meeting of the two monks and the woman on the banks of the river teach us that elimination of any of the inconvenient particles of the whole will not, in the long run, help anyone in their lives, because it will deprive them of a chance of initiation into the art of living together with someone different from us, and lost will be the most important thing in our human existence? That is the real secret of coexistence. However, we said a moment ago: the process once started ... Perhaps, we moved too hastily and ignored the necessity of crossing the threshold of the hideout, the most difficult thing to do. Where shall we start from? How to overcome yourself?

### **Crossing, or Dignity**

As a practitioner of spirituality, Tischner knew that if man can see the end and cannot see the beginning, he will, in spite of all, love illusion more than the truth. Therefrom the nagging question of the beginning offered by the ethics of hope. Looking for the answer we need to return inside the hideout. There is a fear that makes one look there for a place to hide, but there is also another one, equally strong, the fear of entering the open space outside. The latter is stronger the more, the longer and deeper the stay in the hideout was. One unfortunately believes that "the moment he shows people who he really is, when he shows his "inner self", they will rush to deride him. This disbelief in people constitutes his tragedy. The point is that one dares overcome his disbelief. Because the truth spoken about yourself is always something great, it does not matter if it is the truth of human virtue or guilt. Whoever admits it becomes protected by the truth".

There is, however, another, external side of the threshold of the hideout prone to stigmatize man that was trapped within, sending him to the dock or excluding from the community. In other words, the fear of crossing the threshold finds its justification both internally and externally. It is not enough to tell the people from hideouts of the contemporary world how they should live referring them to a philosophical wisdom that can be transformed into action by an old monk or Tischner's pilgrim. They need to have someone to live with.

The threshold situation, we have mentioned, is by no means the beginning of everything. A lot happened earlier. People hid in their hideouts, human relationships got broken, meetings with others failed, anxiety and hostility filled the space of coexistence. The threshold we have reached in our story is a potential new beginning. The three characters standing on the other side of the river await a new gesture whose mystery was perfectly captured by Tischner who said that “it is about a gesture of heart and mind thanks to which man evades the principle of opposites”. Writing these words, the philosopher refers to the state of man in which his will to liberate his internal energy enabling him to cross the threshold depends on his sense of human dignity. Both Kępiński and Tischner would agree that violation of human dignity is the strongest power entrapping man in his hideout, strongest even than anxiety, internal complexes or undeveloped self-awareness.

Once again we are reminded how important for our existence is the man on the outside, on the other side of the hideout’s threshold, the closest neighbor of our difference. He is the only one that can bestow a dignity restoring gesture on the people from hideouts. What happens then can be referred to as "an alignment of space " – both the theatrical stages and pedestals of accusers disappear, the bond based on domination is replaced by the “bond of trusteeship of hope." We can build the situation of a new beginning, letting others be, allowing them to entrust part of their hopes onto the Other, as well as take on themselves part of the latter’s hope, we grow together with the people from hideouts to be able to cross the threshold ...

The knowledge and community practice of the doctor and the philosopher, of Kępiński and Tischner, would never allow to leave both monks and the woman alone. The situation of a new beginning they found on the other bank demands a break-through, liberation of the inner power able to overcome the divisions that dominated their space of coexistence after the drama of their meeting with otherness.

Earlier, during the crossing of the river, this was accomplished by the old monk. Who will dare to grant a gesture of heart and reason that allows an escape from the principle of oppositions and prevent entrapment in the hideouts? They are all now “people who have been through a lot”, who experienced otherness and violation of borders once regarded as inviolable, they experienced anxiety and deep divisions and the consequences of opening or closing to the Other. Helping the younger monk, with whom he is bound by the ties of belonging to the same order and old friendship, can for the older monk turn out to be much more difficult than his helping the woman. On the other hand, the woman and the younger monk will find it much more difficult to bring themselves to grant a similar gesture to others,

because the failure of the meeting on the river could have left unhealed wounds increasing their anxiety and prejudice. The situation they found themselves in together corresponds well to the starting point of our discussion, the reflection on the deep crisis of community life in the contemporary world dominated by the principle of opposites.

Hence, the story of coexistence is a story of two shores. On one shore, we help the Other – we reach out to him or her, breaching our own rules and limitations. We offer help to the weak and the newcomers. As a result, we prepare legal and systematic tools, like the European multicultural policies which include – among others – affirmative action and gender quotas. On the other shore, though, these are not enough. The challenge comes not only from others, but also increasingly from those who have not been included in the society, radicalized in their attitudes to strangers and stiffened the boundaries of their national and cultural identity. All together, we are a society “with a past”. To continue our life together we need an act of breaking through. It does not matter who will undertake this challenge – although we start to notice the community potential of the woman from the other side of the river. She is the one who accepted the gift from the stranger and eventually overcame her fear towards him. Possibly, it would be her who would do the most to help all three build that invisible bridge.

The most crucial, however, is what prepares us for overcoming the paralysis of the deep inter-human divisions that we experience on the other side of the river. Letting others be: allowing them to believe in the indestructibility of human dignity and tie an inter-human thread of trust.

In this way, the story of coexistence returns to its beginning. The Other, who establishes a real community, does not come from nowhere. Together, we cross over the two shores that need invisible bridges. Each requires a different material. Together with the Other, we prepare ourselves to overcome our hideouts. This is where it all begins, and not for the first time. Those not able to see the beginnings, love illusions. A process once started this way can become a constructive process of building coexistence with others whom we encounter in our neighborhood, by fate or on the route. We are offered then a chance to reach good which, as Tischner believed, is *diffusium sui*, self-diffusible, striving to become incorporated in our human coexistence.