

From Whole to Hole to Whole?

So often in therapy, therapeutic or training groups when people become distressed or despairing they speak of entering a deep, dark place within themselves. A pit. A hole. A vacuum. Very often, a deep, dark, black hole. They feel terribly alone. Scared. Bewildered, often, frightened. Hopeless and helpless. Lost.

Very often this process of 'entering the black hole' or 'going beyond the precipice' is described as 'falling apart' or 'going to pieces'. And it is way too scary a leap to take: what if I am unable to become whole again?

From whole to hole to whole...

I have discovered that, for me, the above 'formula' is erroneous: I do not *enter* my black hole - I ***am*** my black hole. I do not fall to pieces - rather, all the pieces fall away, I shed all of my pieces - and I am left with the stark reality that is the very me.

Nothing.

Yet it is more than Nothing. I am more than Nothing.

Once, many years ago, I entered my black hole. And that is how it felt at the time - like entering a part of me that I did not recall having entered before, or a part of my that I had not allowed myself to be consciously aware of - not fully, at least. I had avoided... Denied, if you will. I stayed in my deep, dark place for around four days - which felt like an eternity - beginning to own and becoming my black hole through the process.

How can I describe this place? *There was no light.* There was no warmth. There was no cold, either. There were no sounds, no smells, no feelings, no thoughts, no physical presence. There was no love or hate. There was no hope. There wasn't anything. There wasn't even anything within which this vacuum could be said to exist. It was a truly lonesome place. Dark. Hopeless. Alone.

Yet...

Yet, after about four days of eternity, I felt a curious sense of movement, a kind of sense of drift. *What could this possibly be?*

I stayed for a while with my curious sense of drift, this kind of floating, too. This drift was kind of directionless - yet a definite drift, nonetheless...

It felt important: I somehow wanted and needed to name this sense of drift. The closest I got to it at the time was to call my curious sense of drift **CURIOSITY**. Yes, that made sense. For the day I lose my curiosity, I may as well die. After all, didn't curiosity somehow get us to where we are today?

Now, some twenty-three years later, I link this sense of curious drift with my 'actualising tendency' - an innate impulse to move, to grow.

When I have *fallen apart* or *gone to pieces*, there comes a time when I 'pull myself together again' or 'compose myself' - in preparation for going back to the world, I guess...

... What a wonderful, joyous glimpse of liberation and freedom:

I CAN COMPOSE MYSELF!

This is why I don't think that I do 'fall apart' or 'enter' something...

No - when I access the black hole deep within me I ***de***compose my various selves. Whack!

There goes a personal construct... Whoosh! There goes a condition of worth... Zap! There goes an introjected value... Snap! There goes a defence, a barrier... Shit! Where has my damn self-concept gone?

I am left alone with me.

This feels, to me, akin to Sartre's *nausea*. The inevitable existential awareness that there is Nothing.

Yet...

Now I'd like to mention candles. The symbol of light seems inevitable too - seems to crop up in conjunction with darkness (the absence of light). All too often I hear 'I need a candle to show me the way' - and so often the need expressed is for the therapist or facilitator to be that candle. 'I desperately want someone to show me the way out of - or lead me out of - this deep, dark, terrifying place'.

Here I depart again. I depart again with great and wondrous joy. I depart with immense strength. *Vast* resources. If I can be free and liberated enough to compose myself - why, I can **BE** my own candle! I no longer *need* anyone else to be my shining light - I can be my *own* shining light! If you want to come over to my place and shine with me, that's cool! I can come over to your place, too - I know now that I can breathe in your vacuum and that I won't get lost in your space... I can be a candle when I want to be.

When Two Black Holes Collide...

So: *Being the darkness is in-itself enlightening.*

So often people bemoan and bewail the seeming fact that we cannot connect with one another at deep, profound levels – or if we do make such contact, it is not sustained. I pose this question:

If I am not able or willing to enter or become my own black hole with any sense of security and comfort, how the hell do I enter yours?

Let me propose a hypothesis:

We all have within us some deep, dark place – some place where I divest myself all my selves until I am left alone with me.

If *my* precious place is deep, frightening, dark, terrifying, isolated, hopeless, full of despair, scary, hopelessly alone...

If I sense coming into contact with *your* black hole, *your* inner space that is deep, frightening, dark, terrifying, isolated, hopeless, full of despair, scary, hopelessly alone...

Your black hole will trigger the black hole within *me*. If I am afraid to enter or become my own inner space, I may well deny it exists. Therefore I am not being wholly me when I attempt to engage with you. We will lack depth. I will be an outsider and you will still feel very alone. So will I.

If I become lost in my own black hole and if my black hole collides with yours... We will become one black hole. A deep, frightening, dark, terrifying, isolated, hopeless, full of despair, scary, hopelessly alone compendium, if you will...

If I am your shining light, your candle, if I show you the way or lead you, then you are not accessing the vast resources within yourself... I am, somehow, colluding with the thwarting of your freedom to compose yourself.

I now redefine my inner space, my black hole: It is a place where darkness and light can meet and become indivisible. I can generate darkness and light. I *am* my darkness. I *am* my light. It is a place where pain and joy meet and become indivisible. It is a place where anguish and hope become as one...

It is my very hopelessness, the complete absence of hope, that generates terrific hope – for once I am Nothing I can become anything.

Freedom and Hope: Give and Take

I want to visit another dimension of client-centred theory - an often somewhat neglected dimension, in my view. This dimension feels both radical and profoundly exciting to me:

Accepted person-centred wisdom, based on the work of Carl Rogers and colleagues, is that through my needs for positive regard and positive self-regard, my self-concept is formed. This self-concept all too often serves to thwart my actualising tendency and I become *self*-actualising.

And all too often, it seems, the person-centred approach is 'accused' of being *self*-centred – all about *me, me, me...*

So damn *self*ish!

Yet the *actualising tendency*, the very nature of being, is deemed to be positive and forward-moving, constructive, co-operative, sociable, responsible and trustworthy.

Trustworthy.

I have described how my inner space is a place where darkness and light, where pain and joy, where anguish and hope become indivisible...

***It is also a place where my needs to be loved
and my needs to love
meet and become as one.***

It is a place where passion and compassion become as one. It is a place where I need to love as well as be loved - a place where I want to love as well as be loved...

... A place where I want to be caring as well as be cared for. A place where I generate compassion as well as welcome compassion. It is a place where experiencing love is a free-flowing, multi-directional, reciprocal process.

It is my place.

I believe and hope it can be your place too.

Love
Steve