

Multiple voices

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When the multiple voices speak to us they value our fragmented humanity we have the opportunity to recognise that our soul is, in part, shared with the people of the world and, on a real experiential level, with the world itself.

How can this be? Is it not the case that the 'self' and the soul are to be integrated, understood, distilled to their essence? The 20th Century task was always around the **self** – to understand the why and wherefore of the voices that speak to us in our dreams and relationships 'as if' from somewhere hidden and unconscious. And then, when they emerge, to integrate them into the single voice that we can recognise as our own. This is the task of individuation, of becoming a person, of being as we are seen in the world – the singularity – me - I. Its an individual task that recognises our aloneness in the world, encourages us to develop our selves in order to deal with this recognition, and values individuality above all.

Somewhere along the way, in this world made up of individual selves, the paradigm of the primacy of emotion also crept in. The height of human experience became the emotional understanding and expression of the self. Emotional intelligence and emotional literacy became the watchwords and goals of the late 20th Century: this thing we call 'emotion' now had a seat in the brain, and the modern obsession with the impact and implications of emotion was further consolidated. In this view of 'person-hood', self became defined by emotion – the 'real me' became an emotional 'me', and the emotions 'I' had repressed were to be processed and expressed. In the process, therefore, many people pored over their childhood experiences to find the clues to their self-development; some discovering along the way that they were angry with their parents or other adults for what they had done to them as children, whilst others worked long and hard to be 'in touch' with their emotions, as if this would make them more 'real'.

One effect of this was to encourage the internalisation of dangerous realities of the world, reducing psychology to emotion; separating out cognition, behaviour and emotion in a way similar to the way our predecessors separated mind and body (with such 'fatal' results for the modern soul and psyche). Yet emotions cannot be regarded as the be all and end all of psychology, nor can they be reduced to the physiology of fight, flight and the chemistry of falling in love or lust.

If we can recognise, however, that emotions are so powerful and scary because they are almost mythically dark and powerful, perhaps we are onto something. Emotions can then be seen for the dark pathways to the soul that they are. On one level, emotion can be reduced to biochemistry and physiology if we want it to be, but that is the least interesting aspect of its phenomenology. Much more exciting (and terrifying) is knowing that emotion leads us to the deepest metaphors of our existence, and hence to the archetypal (rather than just the biological and historical) truths at the heart of becoming and being human. And therein might lie the clues to why we might repress emotion – not just in the murky depths of some traumatic early childhood experience, but in the terrifying, existential power of the world viewed through mythical and archetypal eyes. We fear it deeply, yes, but we also yearn to know of its power and truth.

It's a little like the way scientists theorise about what happened at the beginning of the universe and time –the 'big bang'. We know that all they are really able to do is to measure, observe and hypothesise about the aftermath and echo of that imagined (and mythical) event, and yet their speculation and theories can excite us and leave us awestruck. Our birth, the awesome moment of becoming human, is a bit like that – we will never **really** know what we were born as, or the power of the moment when the world touches us for the first time. It is so powerful that humankind needs our gods, monsters and mythologies to make sense of it and its antithesis, death. And like the big bang, we strive vainly to understand that moment of singularity; the imagined essence at the heart of a human being at the beginning (and end) of life.

The modern humanistic illusion, embroidered by the myth of emotionally intelligence as the ultimate psychological goal, is that we become ourselves - growing **up** to the heights of our potential and our achievement. The myth that might mean more, however, is that we strive all our lives to touch what we were at our own personal 'big bang'. And if we are lucky and can live with ourselves in each moment sufficiently we may - as James Hillman puts it – grow **down** into the world, and engage with it, ourselves and others just enough for happiness before we die. Existentially, of course, it's a game of chance: while some of us will have three-score years and ten to undertake this grand and wonderful journey, others will have so little time; their lives curtailed prematurely by the random brutality of our beautiful world, and who will then enter into the seedbeds and cycles of myth that will fuel another hopeful generation and their own anthology of stories, metaphors and theories to explain what is like to be human.

And in the final analysis we may find that the soul and the self is not singular at all. If science suggests that there is no single seat of the self in the brain, so maybe the metaphor we would do better to follow is that ALL the voices are me, are us; and that like the genes that carry our biological inheritance, the voices and stories of the multiple 'self' emerge from and are shared with all our fellow humans – and, moreover, the whole living world. Perhaps, after all, I am not alone.

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