

Topic – “one of the goals of Gestalt Therapy is the Aha! Or realisation whereby alignment of the fragmented parts becomes an integrated whole” (Yontef, 1993).

I consider this statement, at this stage in my ongoing learning, to be the whole point of therapy. I am hungry for meaningful contact with myself and others. In thinking about my Aha realisations, that have occurred during the past year, I am aware that these realisations have struck me profoundly and some have a sense of the spiritual to them. The most poignant Aha moment was created out of using a combination of the Gestalt tools of art therapy and dream-work. As an experiment, this process was heightened with dialogue between myself and the therapist. The dialogue evolved as work between myself and the other (the therapist) in an 'I-Thou' relationship and created an ultimately more satisfying outcome in terms of my own process of self-realisation into the Aha. Perls states that “dreams are the high road to integration”, Houston, G., (1991). My understanding of this statement is that when we work with dreams we are drawing directly from our sub-conscious, where we express ourselves, our beliefs and our fears without censorship. I experienced the dream-work that led to my Aha awareness's to be just that. The process is as follows... The dream has stayed with me for ten years and I had not worked with the dream previously. In drawing the dream, I was felt a freer sense of expression and completion, being able to articulate the vivid elements using colour and shape was easier and more satisfying than describing it in mere words. The figural elements that emerged in the drawing were a wall with three figures walking on it, one of whom I instantly recognised as myself. I worked with this dream with two different therapists and settings – both interactions providing Aha experiences of integration of my self. The emotive responses I experienced were different but no greater or lesser than each other. Out of each separate experience I received insight of who I am, in terms of strength and also more insight of how I stop myself believing in my strength.

I will start with the first session, which occurred in group and directly after drawing out the dream. During this session, the wall in my drawing was figural, Tanya entered into dialogue with me, asking me to describe the attributes of the wall – wise and strong, not high but sturdy, wide enough to walk along without fear of falling, endless in length, warm and warming. I was then invited to state, as the wall, to my self figure walking on the wall, what my purpose is. The reply was “stay with me, walk along me – I go far, I am sturdy and safe. If you slip off I am not too high and you can climb back on. I am here now. I am warm and I am wise”. In group, my response as an Aha was firstly felt as a tightening in my belly, as if I had been struck softly but powerfully, I felt excited as the realisation came that I am the wall and that I am capable of self-support in my recovery journey. I cried tears of humility as another realisation surfaced in my awareness, that of a deep and profound connection with my higher power and/or my higher self, who is embedded deep within the wall, within me. After withdrawing from this contact episode, I felt a sense of peace, satisfaction, gentleness and grace. I recollected how my strength and wisdom has already played out in my life. I took this peace

and awareness with me into the days that followed and was able to draw on my own strength in the days to come, when faced with challenging interactions and as a result I did not abandon myself but stayed in my authentic self.

In working with the second session working with the dream, the Aha that occurred as a result was experienced, emotively with a different flavour but with no less insight. I worked the next piece of the dream with my personal therapist. I was aware of my concern that I wouldn't be able to receive any more insight and I voiced this to my therapist, who suggested we continue with working with the dream and "see what emerges"- (Another introject? As I write this now I am aware that I had also swallowed an introject, that these type of insights must be accompanied by a deep and humbling experience of connection with God! I will attend to this in a later paragraph...). What emerged as figural in this session was the male figure walking on the wall in front of me. I was invited to describe the male figure, what the physical aspects were and what his purpose was. I responded with descriptions of vitality, powerfulness, gorgeous to behold, stallion-like, striding forth, thumbs up in readiness and purpose. Indeed this figure represented all the positive elements of masculine energy to me and in 'real life' he was a man I knew with a strong Leo-sun element. The Aha came to me as my therapist then asked me to acknowledge these elements within myself, as I started doing this I realised I was describing me – my animus! The physical sensation that came with this realisation was tangible as a lighten clarity in my body, more an intellectual Aha than a spiritual Aha. I was not brought to tears with the feeling of grace that I had experienced in my earlier work with the dream. Instead I felt quite delighted, excited and empowered that I had figured this out. The actual integration of these characteristics proved somewhat more challenging and continues to be so.

I then became aware of another fragmented and powerful part of me wanting to disown these glorious elements, to not take ownership for fear of being overpowered. I identified this voice as the 'critic, the opposite and yet not my feminine or anima. There was a feeling of panic from this aspect and I imagined that it had held sway in the high court of my inner self for a very long time. Perls describes this boundary disturbance of introjection eloquently by saying 'In introjection, the neurotic justifies as normal what the concentrating self feels as an alien body it wants to disgorge", Clarkson, P., (1991). This awareness was not apparent enough for me to work on then and there during the dream-work session with my therapist and in fact has only come more powerfully to light as I write – here and now. I identify now an impasse, between my new awareness of the positive masculine that embodies an energy of excitement and want and the old introjection of the critic that sits in fear of not being good enough and is fixated in the past. I realise that I have been able, at times, to move through the impasse by staying in my awareness of what was actually happening and strongly identifying with the excitement and need elements of the masculine energy. This is where my continued work lies, in challenging 'the critic' with new information about myself and moving forward with it. The integration that did occur during and after the session was about verbally stating the positive qualities of my animus and

taking some ownership by reflecting on the times when these energies had been in force, remembering how I felt – big in the world, light, self-responsible. It was by drawing on previous experience that I am more fully able to bring these qualities into my day to day experience with others.

In referring to my earlier statement regarding my belief that spiritual awakening and humility must go hand-in-hand with the Aha for it to be a true Aha, I realised during the writing of this essay that this 'isn't necessarily so...'. One of the reasons I am drawn to Gestalt is due to having, what I termed, epiphanies in my earlier life. These episodes occurred whilst I was by myself, just thinking about myself and where I was going in life. Both times I experienced profound insight, from what I believe was my Higher Power, about deep connection with the universe/god and me and that I was loved and was 'OK'. With these realisations came an incredible joy, peace and humility that felt completely known and understood to me physically, emotionally and spiritually – a sensation I find difficult to describe but what I name an epiphany. I have experienced similar qualities during this year in working with Phil and Tanya, when I had the Aha moments, intellectually and felt an accompanying softness and grace in my heart centre, these experiences strengthened my belief that this what constitutes a 'real Aha'. After discovering my animus in the dream-work with Rhonda and delighting in this despite the absence of 'grace', I realise this was no-less an Aha. This is good information for my own growth and a 'mini Aha' in itself – an insight. I find the phenomenon of Aha/insight/epiphany to be intriguing and welcome more discovery and understanding as my Gestalt learning continues. Miller, W.R. and C' de Baca, J., (2001), describe insight as "the 'aha' is deep and often of such magnitude as to leave the person stunned or breathless. From the moment of realisation, the person is confident of its truth".

In relation to the topic statement about integration of fragmented parts of the self into a whole, it has been through the climax point of the Aha that poignant change has occurred for me. Through working with the group and the therapist to guide and highlight my awareness of my fragmented parts and the creative adjustments I use inhibit intimacy with myself and also using the tools of art therapy and dream-work, enlightenment into Aha manifested. Zinker, J., (1977) stated that "A simple translation of a person's metaphor into a new concrete experience helps him reveal himself to himself", this well describes the process I experienced of the Aha being revealed to me through working with the therapist and using the tools of art therapy and dream-work to unpack my metaphors. And whilst I have *emphasised the significance* of my aha realisations about my inner workings, the method and the path traversed involved is of no less importance, indeed without it I wouldn't arrive to the destination or Illumination. Bowman, C., (2005) articulates this well in stating that "the very essence of Perl's contribution to the theory of psychotherapy is the holistic notion that everything is related to everything else; that all things and beings are mutually dependent upon one another; and that a whole theory is more than the sum of its individual parts". The dream-work/Aha process I have outlined can be summed up within this framework of the Contact Episode. This being; awareness of need – interpretation of dream, movement to satisfy – draw dream and begin dialogue, internal resistance – "I

won't get it right", statement of theme – the internal struggle between of need to own my strengths and the 'put down', impasse - stuck point/stillness/void, climatic experience – moving through and away from the introject, Illumination – yes! These strengths are mine!, acknowledgment – raised awareness of the process and integration. I view the Aha as a gift in the therapeutic process, the physical, emotional and spiritual energy accompanying the realisation serves in heightening my attention about what has been revealed being of importance in my journey of self-discovery.

References

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