



HOPE FLOURISHES IN LIFE'S CRACKS: TRANSPERSONAL COACHING, CRAXIAL MOMENTS AND HOPE

Sometimes we reach a turning-point, whether imposed or sought out, where we can choose to listen closely to what our soul is trying to tell us. In these moments, [Hetty Einzig](#) argues that hope plays a crucial role in strengthening our resolve.

There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

-Leonard Cohen, Anthem, 1992

It is in moments that seem completely hopeless that hope shows its mettle. It is easy to be hopeful when the sun shines, the birds sing, flowers bloom and the world around us seems to be flourishing – we soak it up and our wellbeing expands. We feel that, on balance, there are reasons for hope.

But right now- not so much. And yet of course it is when things are especially gloomy or perilous or seem to be downright headed for catastrophe that we need hope most.

In 2022 I wrote a chapter for a book on holding hope in our fracturing world. I called it *Radical Hope: a dimension of the Soul Rooted*¹. My point of departure was the book by American philosopher Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the face of Cultural Devastation*² in which he uses 'radical' in its sense of fundamental, disruptive change. My title also referenced a well-known quote by Czech dissident, activist and playwright, Vaclav Havel, who presided over a period of great turbulence, serving as the last President of communist Czechoslovakia and the first President of the newly formed democratic Czech Republic:

*'The kind of hope that I often think about... I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us, or we don't. It is a dimension of the soul; it's not essentially dependent upon some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation... it is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.'*³

In that chapter I sought to extend our use of the word 'radical' by reminding us of its etymological base in the Latin *radice* for root- and how hope is nurtured by our roots in the soil and our kinship with all that is alive. Here I want to return to the disruptive role of 'radical' and the potential for quiet revolutions, contained in the concept of Craxial Moments[®]. The fresh beginnings that emerge are full of energised hope.

CRAXIAL MOMENTS

Living in an age of constant change and uncertainty we increasingly find ourselves in situations in which our work and life are up for review. Simply doing nothing is no longer an option – choices are being called for. These are Craxial Moments and seminal situations: they sow the seeds of our future.

All our lives contain moments or periods that are craxial – turning points that shape our future in subtle or dramatic ways

We coined the neologism, Craxial Moments to describe both crucible moments- which confront us with a current crisis or the consequences of previous choices, forcing change- and axial moments, which are times when we make space to look ahead and make a conscious choice. Both are Craxial since both offer the opportunity to connect with what is deeper and more purposeful in our lives and work.

Crucible moments happen to us. We find ourselves in untenable, even painful circumstances when the present is not working or even breaking down.

- Do we change jobs or batten down the hatches and weather the storm?
- Does a personal crisis mean we can't continue working as we've been doing?

The metaphor of the alchemist's crucible, speaks to how these times can feel like everything is going wrong at once, as if a whole load of disparate elements are thrown together into the cauldron. The past suddenly catches up with us, or the present flips us a hard card- illness, redundancy, a breakup, failure or forced move. It can be confusing and overwhelming. A transformation needs to take place, but we need to look back before we begin looking forward: to step back, mourn the loss, reflect, deepen, reframe, and open ourselves to watch for what is emergent- for what emerges may be gold.

Axial moments are chosen. We might suddenly realise that our work pays the bills, but it doesn't give us scope to grow or even satisfy us any more.

- Do we aspire for more autonomy?
- Are there opportunities out there we don't know about?

In axial moments we are not reacting, we grasp an opportunity. A chance encounter or sometimes a confluence of events stimulate the desire for change. We are gifted- or actively seek- the psychological space to look ahead, make a course correction, evoke the new, make conscious choices to step into a new direction, re-identify with purpose, and take action.

All our lives contain moments or periods that are craxial- turning points that shape our future in subtle or dramatic ways. In transpersonal coaching we pay special attention to these times of breaking down and breaking open, because, as the incomparable Leonard Cohen said, the cracks are how the light gets in.

THE SOUL COMES CALLING

One way to consider craxial moments is to see them as signs of spiritual emergency. In the face of the medicalisation of modern distress and our tendency to pathologise any deviation from the norm, transpersonal psychology invites us instead to consider the deeper 'why'. Without in any way romanticising or skating over the reality of pain or grief, when the time is right, we invite our clients to view their boredom, discomfort, depression or even despair as possible portals. Can we wonder together what might be seeking to awaken within us, what is being asked of us, what might be emerging – pushing up through the cracks that are widening in the veneer of our everyday lives?

Psychosynthesis, the transpersonal psychology, founded by Roberto Assagioli, which is the foundation of my practice, proposes a model of the psyche [see Fig 1, top of next page] where our 'I', the core of our being, is conceived as a centre of pure Awareness and Will (quite different to Freud's 'ego'). Around this core is a constellation of Sub-personalities (or mini-selves, or parts) which take on roles to act in the world. A key feature of this model is that our 'I' has a hotline to our Higher Self, which sits on the porous border between the individual and the universal, looking inwards and outwards: beyond the personal. The dotted line represents this direct channel of communication with our I.

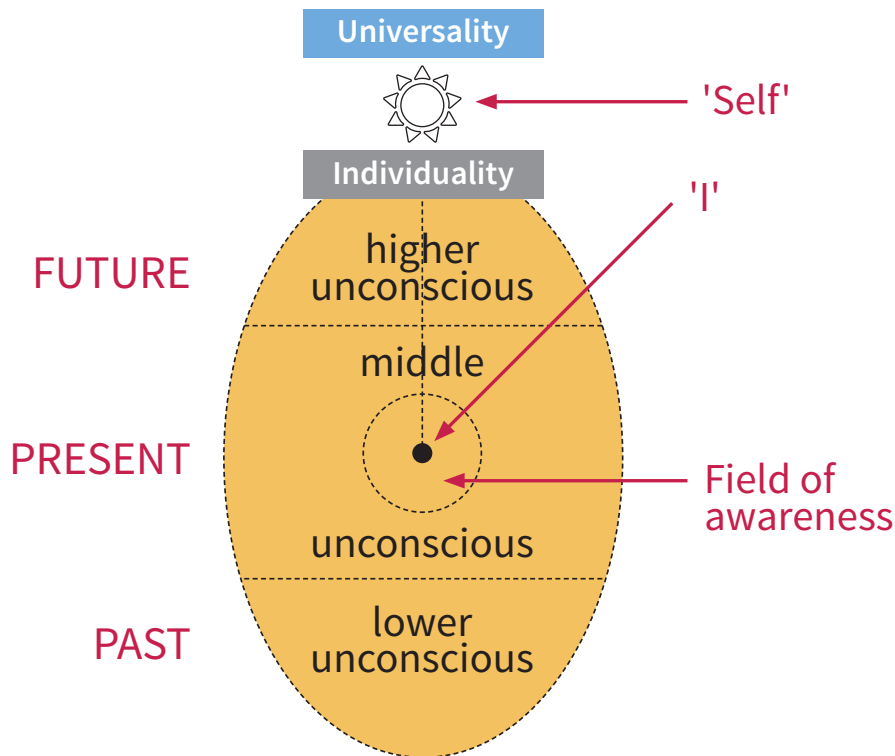


Figure 1 - the psychosynthesis model of the psyche

Like Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli thought Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis was missing something critical by dismissing the spiritual, and in wishing to reclaim this essential spirituality from its incarceration within the rigid structures of the Abrahamic religions, he devised a secular vocabulary for key concepts. The Higher Self is his term for soul – or nafs, atman, nefesh, neshamah, anatta (the Buddhist no-soul) in other spiritual traditions.

The Self is always there, whispering to us, reminding us of the wiser action to take, the kinder gesture, the more enriching path to creativity and contribution – if we are willing to listen and hear

Soul comes from the old English sawol: the spiritual and emotional part of a person, that which animates existence. Seen as the core of life, in ancient German it is connected with the sea (saiwaz), as the resting place of the soul before birth and after death. Soul links with spirit as breath and energy and allies with hope, which breathes life and energy into the future with trust, confidence and desire. In ancient biblical texts hope is seen as a virtue and allied to leadership⁴. All cultures have a place and word for that which is beyond the material and beyond the personal (trans-personal); a word that speaks to the numinous, our capacity for awe, the spark that lifts our nose from the grindstone, that reminds us of beauty and mystery, and of our interdependence with life around us, which thus infuses the life within us.

Enrique Salmon, an academic from the Raràmuri people in the Sierra Madre, Mexico introduces us to the word, iwigara⁵, a concept that expands our Western idea of soul. Iwigara includes origins, history and spiritual guidance, and an embodied richness where language, identity, spirit and actions are enmeshed in a continuous co-creative flow. He coined the term Kincentric Ecology as a reminder that soul is embedded in all of life:

‘Indigenous people view both themselves and nature as part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins... an awareness that life ... is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin.’⁶

In my many decades of coaching and before that as a psychotherapist what I have observed is that the Self is always there, whispering to us, reminding us of the wiser action to take, the kinder gesture, the more enriching path to creativity and contribution – if we are willing to listen and hear. Most of the time we don’t listen of course – that quiet voice gets drowned out by the cacophony of everyday life. If ignored, however, the Self doesn’t just slip away quietly. It usually speaks louder, or knocks harder on the door.

This insistent Self prompts axial moments: we just know we have to choose something different. I’ve had several of these in my life: turning away from the art world frontline to study and train as a psychotherapist and later, leaving the high-profile world of policy as director of a think-do-tank to go into coaching; or the time when, despite uncertainties and lack of funds, I decided to go to California to train with The Pachamama Alliance, deepening my understanding of ecosystemic and indigenous practice. I threw my hat over the wall, as a colleague put it, and then I had to figure out how to get over the wall! It was a choiceless choice.



These are axial moments: choices to follow deeper, richer, different pathways, characterised by excitement and the 'certainty that something makes sense'. Fuelled by the kind of hope that gathers strength from committing to action, 'regardless of how it turns out' as Havel said.

THE CRUCIBLE OF LIFE

What about crucible moments? These by contrast, we often experience as crisis.

The Self or soul is not a passive thing. It, she, is noisy, awkward and rebellious! If we persist in ignoring her knocks on the door, refusing to listen to her wisdom, she may bang down the door altogether and manifest as a full-blown Existential Crisis, or, similar but different, what we call the Crisis of Duality.

The Existential Crisis (TEC) may be triggered by external circumstances, or by illness, severe or chronic. I had a repeated chronic illness through my twenties that forced a complete reassessment of my life as I was living it. As often as not we could be struck by a sudden or creeping sense of meaninglessness. TEC is characterised by such questions as: 'Is this it? Why am I doing this? What is all this about? What is the meaning of my work and life?'

Idealists and visionaries in all walks of life are especially prone to the *Crisis of Duality (CoD)*: when it becomes too hard to hold the chasm between our vision of what the world could be – a flourishing, caring, beautiful plenum- and our realisation of the grubby realities of ignorance, greed and cruelty. Something cracks. Depression or despair grabs our heart and soul. The questions asked are along the lines of: 'What's the point? Are all my efforts useless? Will anything ever change?'

In my experience this is the stuff of burnout. After ten years of immersing myself in the passionate intensity of environmental awareness-raising alongside my mainstream work in corporates, I hit a wall: a deep exhaustion laced with despair and cynicism, imparting a bitter taste in sinews and soul. While people continued to be inspired by the programmes we delivered I felt that nothing had changed – the world continued to spiral from bad to worse.

It took me many years – of distancing and mourning – to see the opportunity contained within my withdrawal from my work with The Pachamama Alliance, and thus to find the energy to reinvest my active hope in the roots of my practice: in my transpersonal coaching work. To do this I needed to reclaim the transpersonal from the worlds of psychotherapy and individual-centred coaching. This involved a re-cognition that while classified within the personal psychotherapeutic canon, the transpersonal ontology is at its heart an ecosystemic, relational, interdependent model for self-in-the-world.

Looking back, I can see what a radical re-framing of my work this was. The transforming of a crucible moment to axial opportunity is all about tapping into the deeper well of purpose and meaning. My craxial moment followed a classic transpersonal course: I moved over time from giving up to letting go, from disengaging to re-engagement; it was a journey from identifying as a mainstream coach, to dis-identification- to allow space for emergence- and eventually re-identifying with the broader, deeper wisdom of the Self and my sense of purpose. I was able to re-conceive and repurpose my coaching, teaching and programmes as a contribution to the growing swell of practice-based regenerative initiatives now flowering around the world.

WORKING CREATIVELY WITH CRISIS – INVESTING IN HOPE

The idea that crises are both moments of danger and opportunity is not new.

Crisis



Danger

Opportunity

However, in the thick of our saturated and noisy lives – a world of polycrises and permacrisis- it can feel impossible to step back enough to consider the opportunities.

At the start of a series of group supervisions for hospital staff I asked what their hopes were for the sessions. One doctor took a deep breath and said quietly but firmly, 'I want a space to talk about failure. As a doctor you are expected to have an answer to everything- in a society that doesn't brook failure. I want for us to be able to show fear rather than hiding it.'

Failure and crisis are a normal part of life, rather than due to personal lack or limitation. We know this. Yet we react as if we didn't. Pain is inevitable, but shame, depression and anxiety need not be. Learning how to face the failures and crises of everyday life with courage and compassion, rather than shame and suppression, is a key skill we could usefully develop- it would serve us well in facing the greater pain and the greater shame of our failure to care for our Earth.

One of the tenets of transpersonal psychology is the idea that we can work creatively with crises, challenges and loss- not only support people through them with empathy and compassion. We work very deliberately with failure and crisis as opportunities for creative breakthrough. Far from being signs of our inadequacy, these are a natural part of life and contribute crucially to our development. There is no breakthrough without breakdown.

If we give in to our aversion to pain or our urge to bury our humiliation by turning to any of the countless numbing distractions our culture presses upon us, or if we follow the typical advice to brush ourselves down and move swiftly on, we will miss the precious opportunity not just to learn something but to discover our deep reserves of courage, wisdom and hope.

*'Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is... an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.'*⁷

And if we invest hope in action, allowing the light in through the cracks, then success might just surprise us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hetty brings 25 years of psychology and executive coaching experience to global leadership development. The best selling author, Hetty's career has spanned the arts, journalism, media, health and policy development in the private, public and voluntary sectors. She designed and delivers leader-coach and global culture change programmes. Key focuses are women's leadership, Transpersonal Coaching and regenerative approaches for contribution. She works ecosystemically and holistically founded on transpersonal psychology and informed by psychoanalysis and embodiment approaches.

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- 3 Havel V (1991) Disturbing the Peace. p.181
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- 6 Ecological Applications,10(5), 2000, pp. 1327–1332q 2000 by the Ecological Society of America
- 7 As (iii) above

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