

"OF BLACK HOLES AND HOL-I-NESS"

by Paula Hirschboeck, November 2006

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/parables.html>

SCIENCE LESSON: Black Holes are not only destructive forces but are the birthplace of stars.

VALUES: Embracing the paradox of creation/destruction, of life/death, of darkness/light; critiquing race and gender stereotypes; affirming women and the female body; acknowledging the ancient and diverse symbol of the divine feminine; recognizing the importance of imagination in how we understand the Universe and ourselves.

Note on dramatization:

- *Actors needed:* an adult woman, "MOM," a girl about 10-11 years old, "ANNIE," an actor to portray the black hole (see costume note below). The two other voices (the astronomer and the Goddess) can be offstage voices or in costumes and onstage. Facilitator needed to introduce the play.
 - *Setting:* an open space to represent a camp in the forest; two stools, some sticks for making a "fire".
 - *Lights:* pool of light on campfire area, and dark as possible elsewhere. One blackout.
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Facilitator / "M.C.": *Welcomes the audience. If suitable, ask what folks know about Black Holes. Might even explore some of the gender stereotypes which identify masculinity with control of nature, the light, rationality, divinity and identify femininity with wild forces of nature, darkness, instinct and evil. Possibly read this poem by the author of this parable, Paula Hirschboeck:*

Matrix

Where black begins
in the night sky, a star's spark leaps through galaxies;
in the cave and the tunnel, you see the fire or the light at the end;
on the skin of the cheek, tears will glint like diamond chips.

The place where black begins is beyond the stars,
below the cave and down
behind your eyes where a reservoir of unshed tears
seeps like groundwater to be held
in Her ancient rock womb.

The fossils, the ooze, the carbon and clay are black. Here
She makes her diamonds in secret.
The soul's embryo waits in an impenetrable black. Here
She sheds tears to soften the clay
strike the spark,
fuel the fire,
for you to become the diamond.

FACILITATOR introduces the play:

Facilitator: Have you ever gone camping in a really big and dark forest? Were you scared? Annie and her Mom are camping on a cloudy night. There are no stars and it is the dark of the moon. The blackness of the forest is total; it seems to be enveloping them. Shhh...here they come. *(All lights off until the "fire" is built)*

(Annie "A" and Mother "M" are walking in a round-about way toward the stools, carrying a flashlight)

A: Mom, I'm scared. It's so dark tonight. Maybe we should sleep in the car.

M: Take my hand, honey. I can hold the flashlight too. . . . Ah, here's our campsite. Let's build a little fire.

(They sit, build and "light" the "fire"; stage lights now go on.)

M: There, that's better. *(Puts arm around A.)* . . . It's so silent in the darkness.

(Both sit listening.)

A: Did you hear that rustling in the bushes? . . . Maybe a mouse, huh?

(Sound from stage: "WHO COOKS FOR YOU" 2x)

A: That's a Barred Owl!

A: *(calling back in answer: WHO COOKS FOR YOU! (2x)*

M: I guess this big black night isn't really empty. There's lots going on inside the dark places that we can't see.

A: Kind of like you and me at the beginning — it was all dark inside you but I was growing in there. Right, Mom?

M: *(teasing)* You remember that?

A: Naw, but I do know that your womb was dark and closed in — and that I was safe, and you gave me food and air so I could grow my fingers and toes and organs and all.

(M and A interlock fingers, wiggle toes, laughing)

M: That's why in many cultures over thousands of years people liked to think of the Universe, — the source of all the stars, all the life — as a gigantic womb. The Buddhists call it "Alaya Vijanna" which means "The womb of all being". Other cultures

gave the Universe a personal name: In Egypt she's Isis. For the Navajo: Spider Woman. Since we all come from one source, some people like to imagine that source as a Goddess.

A: Do those Goddess people have a picture of Her?

M: Not a real picture, because anything anyone could draw or say about the Universe would be a symbol — a symbol that stands for this amazing mystery of how the Universe keeps creating. But when they do try to imagine Her, what color do you think she is?

A: Hmmmmmm. Purple?

M: Here's a clue: What color absorbs all the other colors?

A: Black! Wow! A Black Goddess! Black as tonight. But what about all those statues of Mary where she is blonde and white and in pretty robes and all sweet?

M: Sure, many people do like that image too. But I've learned that the most ancient statues that humans ever made — more than 30,000 years ago — were of the female body, and they were made of black clay. (1)

A: Whoa . . .

M: Even today, all over the world there are hundreds of Christian shrines in which the statue or the painting of Mary shows her as black. She looks very solemn and strong.

A: Where are these Black Mary's?

M: Often they are near places where people have sensed something especially sacred about the landscape. Maybe a place where somebody heard an owl hoot just when they were thinking about how awesome and unpredictable the world is. There are Black Madonnas at holy wells and springs and on top of special mountains. Some are at places where the people are really poor or suffering because they want her to help them. (2)

A: That's cool, Mom. But you know, some of my white friends don't like black people. They think they are criminals or they think

they should do the dirty, hard jobs. And black is a scary color...witches and black magic and all.

M: It's sad, isn't it? Perhaps your friends are just afraid of those who are different — when really we are all mostly alike!

(M reaches toward the fire, and then puts a dab of black charcoal ash on her own nose, and then on A's nose. They both laugh.)

M: And you know what else? When physicists tried to find out what the universe is made of, they discovered that most of it is as invisible as blackness. The invisible stuff that influences gravity, they call dark matter. And the invisible force that makes the Universe keep expanding, they call dark energy. If the Universe were your shoe, the matter and energy that is visible and that scientists study in planets and stars would be like one shoelace — while dark matter and dark energy would be the whole rest of the shoe! (3)

A: So most of the Universe even scientists can't see! I like that!

(A sound effect of gusting wind blows the "fire" out. BLACKOUT. Annie jumps up frightened.)

A: *(frightened)* Mommmyyyyyyy!

M: *(in the Blackout)* It's OK honey, I'm here.

(M turns on flashlight and the stage lights go back up. M reaches out to beckon Annie to sit down. Pats her knee or in some other way comforts her.)

M: Take a deep breath. . . . Is that better?

A: Yes... It's just that I felt that the darkness was going to swallow me up.

M: But nothing happened, did it?

A: Nooo...but it might have! Maybe a monster with a chainsaw could jump me or —

M: *(Pretending)* Gottcha!

A: Yeah... it was all my imagination, wasn't it?

M: Imagination is a good thing. Even scientists have imaginations. They couldn't do science without it. . . Remember that TV show we watched last week about black holes?

A: Yeah! Black holes are awesome!

M: The scientist on that program used really terrifying words to describe black holes. (4) I think he was influenced by the idea that if something is black, it must be evil — and if it is a huge hole, it is absolutely the worst thing imaginable!

A: *(tone of voice and hand movement suggests 'horror story')*: Black holes are monstrous cosmic vacuum cleaners. If you or your planet go anywhere near them, they will SUCK – YOU – UP! *(sound effects)*

M: *(mimicking horror story tone and movement)* There is nooooo escape! You are trapped forever in horrible blackness!!! *(Grabs A.)*

(Both hug and laugh. Then sit quietly listening to the forest.)

M: Seriously, it upsets me that people still associate blackness — and women, as well — with evil forces.

A: Women too?

M: "Gynophobia" it's called: the "fear of women." Women's power to grow new life in their wombs, to give birth and to feed their babies with food from their own bodies is pretty overwhelming. That's why when many people tried to imagine a symbol for the source of life, they used an image of a Great Cosmic Mother. Take our galaxy, the Milky Way, for example. We can't see it tonight but what does it look like?

A: A huge splash of soft white, like foam across the entire sky.

M: Yes! And guess what? There are legends about how it got the name "Milky Way." People imagined it as the streaming path of the Great Mother's breast milk — a never-ending universe of nourishment. (5)

A: I'm glad that we still call our planet "MOTHER Earth".

M: But look how we treat "Her." Kind of like a mom, I think. Always there providing for us, and when we make a mess of things, Planet Mom is expected to clean up after us.

A: I DO wash out my snack bowl — well, usually I do. . . . But we're away from home right now, so I don't want to think about home stuff. I want to think about the Universe!

(Offstage sound: "WHO COOKS FOR YOU")

A: *(as if speaking to the owl)* Okay, moms are part of the Universe — I know that! *(Turning toward M.)* So, MOM, tell me about moms in the universe.

M: Hmm. That's a very big topic. But I CAN tell you about moms — women — here on Earth. It's a very long story and we don't know all the events. But, as human societies got more complicated, the men wanted to exert greater and greater control over nature and control over women too. In most cultures they got rid of the Goddess and replaced Her with a male God symbol. Maybe the men didn't like to feel so dependent on women or on "mother" nature. Most humans gradually learned to think of women as bad or out of control. Women, and nature too, were more and more dominated by men. Even Christian leaders went along with it. A famous elder named "Tertullian" called women "the devil's gateway". And people call the devil the "prince of darkness."

A: So maybe that's why we think black holes are so horrible?

M: I think so. Maybe it shows that men — and women too — still have deep fears about anything mysterious yet powerful: like new life born of a woman, and nature's own power to not only create but also to take away. Birth and death are a matched pair, after all. You can't have one without the other.

A: Right! You know, by the time I was in third grade I knew enough math to figure out how impossible it would be for any animal, including humans, to keep having babies if the old folks didn't die. I mean, duh! That's like the most basic thing in ecology!

M: And black holes are the way that the universe “takes away” on the biggest scale.

A: Why do people have a problem with that?

M: Maybe we’re afraid to trust how the universe works.

A: Maybe they just heard about black holes in the wrong way. Maybe they needed to hear it like a story — like the full story.

M: Let’s close our eyes and see if we can imagine that story right now.

(M & A close their eyes. Maybe they hum, or some dramatic music comes up.)

(A large Black Hole puppet “floats” onto the stage. COSTUME IDEA— actor wearing all black carries a hula hoop overhead. Black crepe paper streamers dangle from the hoop, making the actor almost invisible. B.H. can speak itself OR a voice can come over a sound system while B.H. floats around. A+M keep eyes closed thru this section.)

B.H.: I’m the massive Black Hole at the center of your Milky Way galaxy. There are millions and millions more like me in millions of other galaxies. Your astronomers got a new look at me in October 2005. I must say, the Royal Astronomical Society did a jolly good job of telling the public about me. Finally, I am getting some good press! Here, listen to what they said:

Astronomers Voice: We now challenge earlier theories that Black Holes are solely destructive forces. At a NASA X-ray observatory we saw disks of gas near the Black Hole, which helped birth a new generation of stars. Black Holes used to be known just for violence and destruction, but this Black Hole also helped create new stars. (6)

(A & M applaud with eyes closed.)

B.H.: *(bows)* Thank you, thank you. I’m so pleased. If you are learning to think in new ways about me, perhaps you can think more positively about blackness and about women and about holes and holiness too. After all, your Universe could have

emerged from a black hole.(7) Lots of wonderful things happen in the dark. Can anyone here name some of them?

[M.C./ Narrator steps in to elicit ideas from audience: e.g. seeds need dark to grow, we sleep in the dark, coal turns into diamond underground, sand turns into pearls in oysters, compost turns into good soil.....this discussion is interrupted by —

Goddess' Voice (*Solemn, slowly, and rich, best over a mike*): I am dark. I am the mysterious, invisible source of existence. You have called me the Great Mother, the Matrix of the unborn. All contradictions exist within me. I embrace all opposites: birth and death, order and chaos, pleasure and pain. My energy is vast and open. Some people say that my mysterious oneness is the wisdom of the cosmos. They feel me in the flow of change in the Universe. Will you trust me? Can you learn how to live from me, without hate and fear? Do you think you can do that?

A+M: (*eyes still closed*) We will try.

Goddess' Voice: Good, very good! And please thank your Black Hole here, and the scientists who are studying it, for showing you such amazing mysteries.

A: Thank you....you really are beautiful, Black Hole.

B.H: (*coughing, humbly*) It's nothing, really. I'm nothing much, but thanks.

(B.H bows and leaves; A+M open their eyes. They are smiling)

A: Look Mom, the clouds must be gone — the stars are out!

M: (*Hugging her tightly*) How do you feel now Annie?

A: Oh, much better. But, Mom, you are squeezing me too tight.

M: Ok. I'll let go, but not all the way. Let me find just the right way to hug you—not too tight, not too loose. That's another bit of wisdom from Great Mother Universe. It's called "the curvature of space." If space were curved in too tightly, we'd be crunched to death.

(M squeezes again; Annie yelps).

M: If space were curved not enough (*she opens her arms*), we wouldn't be held together at all and we'd go flying out in all directions.

(M lets go of A and A pretends to fall over.)

A: *(laughing)* Ok mom. Whatever! *(M holds A easily)* I just know this feels good. Hey look! There's the Milky Way!

THE END

NOTES

1. The earliest known clay fired figurine is a black female about 6" long, "Venus Vestonice," dated 34,000 BCE, found in Moravia. See the work of world renowned archeologist Marija Gimbutas for many other examples. Gimbutas' work is presented in an excellent DVD, "Signs Out of Time."
2. Famous examples of Black Madonnas are Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland, Our Lady of Chartres, sited at an ancient sacred spring, Our Lady of Guadalupe on a site sacred to the Indigenous people. There are over 300 known black Madonna's most in Europe. See The Cult of the Black Virgin by Jungian analyst Ean Begg (NY: Penguin Books, 1996.); Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna by China Galland (NY: Viking Press, 1990); The Moonlit Path: Reflections on the Dark Feminine, edited by Fred Gustafson (Berwick, ME, Nicholas Hays, 2003)
3. O'Murchu, Diarmund. Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics. New York: Crossroad, 2004.
4. A broadcast of "Nova" on PBS, October 2006
5. The ancient Egyptians saw the Milky Way as the outflow of Isis in her bovine form. The same symbol appears in Greek, Norse, Celtic, Arabian mythology. The word for "galaxy" comes from the Greek, "gala," or mother's milk. See The Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects by Barbara Walker. (San Francisco: Harper, 1988.)
5. NASA's Chandra X-Ray Observatory: <http://Chandra.harvard.edu>
6. Stephen Hawking in 1993 referenced in O' Murchu, p. 134.