

## **PSYCHOSYNTHESIS: SOME KEY ASPECTS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The foundations of psychosynthesis were laid in the second decade of this century by the Italian psychiatrist, Roberto Assagioli, whose work was far ahead of its time. The founder was one of those rare persons who can truly be called a "sage". His wisdom, his radiant love, his down-to-earth simplicity were appreciated by all who knew him. Psychosynthesis was not merely an abstract doctrine to him but a practical philosophy that he applied in his, daily living. Assagioli died in 1974 at the age of 86.

When psychosynthesis spread to North America in the 1960s, it attracted many people who had a background in the new therapies and growth disciplines such as Gestalt, the abreaction therapies, transactional analysis, etc., some aspects of which have enriched psychosynthesis as it is currently practiced in North America. Many people within the human potential movement found in psychosynthesis a framework which was comprehensive enough to include what they had found of value in other approaches and which provided an orientation for deciding which methods, among the vast spectrum of available ones, were best suited to particular people in particular situations.

Psychosynthesis now has practitioners in many countries, with centers and training institutes in the United States, Canada, Europe and South America. The approach has applications in a variety of mental health and human service fields including psychotherapy, counselling, education, organizational development, personal growth, and spiritual formation.

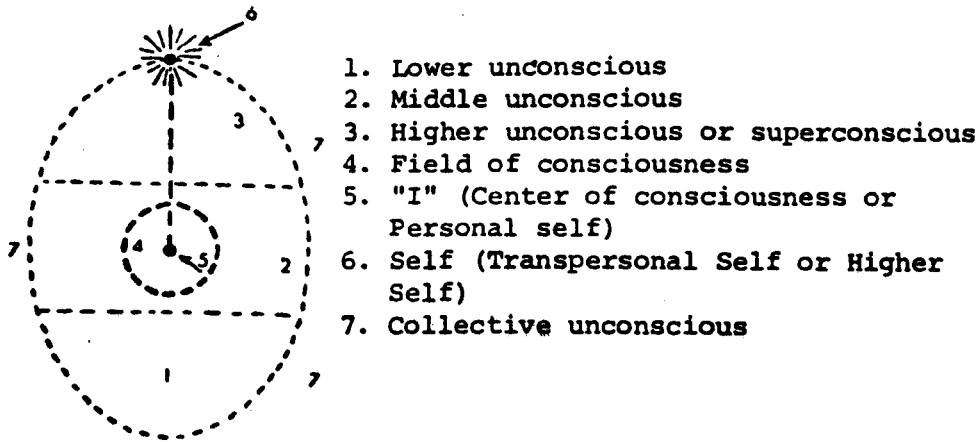
Assagioli's thought had its roots in many traditions, both Western and Eastern. He knew Freud, was active in the early psychoanalytic circles and was one of the first Italians to introduce psychoanalysis to the medical profession in his country. He included the Freudian conception of the unconscious within his framework, but felt it was incomplete. He expanded his own conception of the unconscious to include what has since been called by Maslow "the farther reaches of human nature" (Maslow, 1972). He distinguished between the primitive or lower unconscious—the repository of our basic biological drives and our unresolved complexes and what he called the superconscious—a realm which he postulated as being above or beyond our normal level of conscious awareness.

The superconscious, as he viewed it, is the source of our higher human functions and activities. It includes the drive for purpose and meaning in life; our authentic values; our superior intuitions in the realms of artistic creation, scientific discovery, philosophical or spiritual insight; and our altruistic promptings to humanitarian service. He also thought of it as the realm of genius, of the contemplative states experienced by the great mystics, and of what Maslow refers to as "peak experiences" (Maslow, 1970). Assagioli's conception of the unconscious has much in common with teachings from the esoteric and spiritual traditions of both East and West. Like the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who spoke of the "prospective" or "forward-looking" unconscious, Assagioli believed that the superconscious is creative and that it bears those latent positive energies which have yet to emerge, that the future can bring into manifestation.

Although Assagioli was a psychiatrist, his model of the human being was not based exclusively on the data of the psychiatric couch. He believed it was necessary to study the functioning of healthy individuals, including

the most self-realized members of the human race, in order to gain a complete understanding of the full range and potentials of human nature. He deplored the tendency of diagnostic psychiatry to see people as equated with their illness. Instead, Assagioli viewed the person as a whole and considered pathological manifestations to be simply one aspect of the total person. As his perspective was one of growth, he tended to view symptoms not so much as something undesirable to be "gotten ride of", but rather as an indication of an energy blockage that needs to be explored. His emphasis was on releasing the constructive forces, on development of the person's positive resources, which he found would often cause symptoms to fall away.

Assagioli summarized his view of the human psychological constitution in the following diagram which has come to be called the "egg diagram".



The area within the central circle is the field of consciousness, at the center of which is the "I" or personal self. The "I" is the point of pure awareness and will which is the subject of our field of consciousness and the integrating center of our personality. We can realize what is meant by the "I" if we step back to that place within us from which we can register and observe the various aspects of our experience. We can become aware, for example, that we are experiencing various sensations in our body, and that these sensations—the content of consciousness—are something different from the source or subject of consciousness. These sensations are constantly changing; they may be pleasant one moment and unpleasant the next. The observer, however—the one who is aware—remains the same. We can experience a center of stable identity within us which does not fluctuate with the changing contents of consciousness, with our momentary and transient experiences. Just as we can register awareness of our physical experiences, so we can register awareness of emotional and mental experience. If we observe our emotional states, we will realize that these too are constantly changing. One moment we are happy, the next moment we are sad. We may experience fear, anger, love, and joy all within the same day, but our center of identity, the Observer of these experiences, remains the same. In a similar way, we can observe the endless sequence of thoughts and images that flow by in our mind stream. Our mental life is full of movement; the mind finds it difficult to stand still for even a minute. Yet the "I" consciousness that underlies these experiences, remains the same. Like the projection screen on which a film plays, it provides us with a sense of permanence and stability in spite of the fact that the contents of our consciousness are ceaselessly in flux.

Returning to the "egg diagram", it can be seen that the "I" or personal self is connected by a dotted line to a point above it—the higher or transpersonal Self. This transpersonal. Self, like the personal self, is a center of consciousness and of will with the difference that its domain is more inclusive. The transpersonal Self is able to extend its awareness to include the whole realm of the personal unconscious as well as the more limited field of consciousness. It is the center around which integration takes place at the stage of the transpersonal or spiritual psychosynthesis. Many people have had no direct conscious experience of their transpersonal Self, as this is

something that generally comes in the more advanced stages of inner evolution. Assagioli's inference of the existence of the transpersonal Self is based on the testimony of those who have experienced it. Reports have been given by the mystics who speak of a blissful, unitive experience of pure Being in which all polarities and contradictions seem to be resolved and which has a powerful integrating effect upon the personality (Bucke, 1923). Other persons who have practiced various psychological techniques such as mental imagery or meditation have reported similar experiences. We can also surmise the existence of a deeper center of identity within ourselves from the fact that the conscious "I" may disappear, as in sleep or under anesthesia, without causing us to lose the sense of continuity of our existence.

The area of the egg diagram which falls within the oval represents the personal unconscious, or that part of the unconscious which relates specifically to the individual, to his life experience, and to the unfoldment of his inner qualities. Beyond this is what Jung has called the "collective unconscious" which is the psychic environment beyond the individual. The personal unconscious is divided into three levels: the lower unconscious or subconscious, the middle unconscious and the superconscious. The middle unconscious contains those elements which are similar to our normal waking state of consciousness. The lower unconscious and the superconscious have already been described.

Assagioli, like the psychoanalysts and other depth psychologists, agreed with the view that an important goal of therapy is to "make the unconscious conscious", to extend the frontiers of our consciousness into areas that were formerly unconscious. He differed from the psychoanalytic position in that he believed we must have a "height" psychology as well as a "depth" psychology—that we must go "up" as well as "down" in the psyche. He developed techniques for evocation of the superconscious that helped people to directly contact the latent positive and constructive energies within themselves. He found that contact with the superconscious often gave people the strength and inspiration to deal with the more disturbing aspects of themselves. He also considered it necessary, at least for those persons who wished to undertake a spiritual psychosynthesis, to look "upward" toward the transpersonal Self as a source of direction and meaning in their lives.

A further way in which Assagioli's approach to the unconscious differs from that of psychoanalysis is the emphasis he places on the need to assume conscious responsibility for the contents of the unconscious and on the use of active approaches to do this. He did not agree with the assumption of most depth psychologies that making the unconscious conscious was sufficient in itself to effect change. He believed that awareness was only part of the picture and that awareness had to be balanced with will for the personality to become effectively integrated. He found that unless his clients established a connection with the source of will within themselves, their insights would tend to get lost and be wasted. There was a need to arouse the person's motivation to take responsibility for his or her own life and to help the person "ground" the insights achieved through active techniques and by applying these insights in the course of day-to-day living.

Assagioli's insights into the nature and training of the will are perhaps his greatest contribution to modern psychology. His understanding of the will is both profound and radically different from most previous conceptions. He saw the intimate connection between the will and the source of identity, viewing the will as an expression of the I or the Self, depending on its level. He realized that the will was an unpopular topic in psychology, attributing this in part to the Victorian misconception of the will as a harsh taskmaster that forces us to do things we don't really want to do. He endeavored to show that the true will is serene and unstrained, that it enables us to choose what is in harmony with our own deepest needs rather than imposing something foreign upon us. In his book, *The Act Of Will* (Assagioli, 1973) he delineates the various stages and aspects involved in the process of willing, along with methods for educating and developing the will in its different aspects.

## **SOME KEY STRUCTURAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS**

### **A word on "maps in general"**

A variety of "maps" are used in psychosynthesis to help us understand and describe what is going on in a person. In discussing these, it is important to bear in mind that a map is only useful if it happens to fit the situation. The skillful psychosynthesist will be careful not to impose a preconceived conceptual system on the person he or she is working with, and will attempt to sense the unique reality of a particular individual rather than distorting the person to fit a rigid mold.

### **The subpersonality map**

We are all familiar with the many inner voices that clamour for our attention, often bearing messages in contradiction to one another. There may be a voice, for example, saying "I am really worn out; I think I will take a week off at Christmas and go to Florida". Another voice will reply "But it costs too much, I can't afford to go." And yet another will be saying, "I really ought to buckle down during the holiday and finish fixing the kitchen so my wife will stop nagging me.". This may be answered by a voice that says, "I don't care what she wants; I'm tired of her always telling me what to do anyway" This kind of inner dialogue, which spends so much of our energy, is going on within most of us a good deal of the time. As Gurdjieff has said:

Man is divided into a multiplicity of small I's. And each separate small I is able to call itself by the name of the Whole, to act in the name of the Whole, to agree or disagree, to give promises, to make decisions, with which another I or the Whole will have to deal. This explains why people so often make decisions and so seldom carry them out. A man decides to get up early beginning from the following day. One I, or a group of I's, decide this. But getting up is the business of another I who entirely disagrees with the decision and may even know absolutely nothing about it. Of course the man will again go on sleeping in the morning and in the evening he will again decide to get up early. In some cases this may assume very unpleasant consequences. A small accidental I may promise something, not to itself but to someone else at a certain moment simply out of vanity or for amusement. Then it disappears, but the man, that is, the whole combination of other I's who are quite innocent of this, may have to pay for it all his life. It is the tragedy of the human being that any small I has the right to sign checks and promissory notes and the man, that is, the Whole, has to meet them. People's whole lives often consist in paying off the promissory notes of small accidental I's."(Ouspensky, 1949, p. 60)

Psychosynthesis uses the term "subpersonalities" to refer to these "small I's" that speak for the part rather than for the whole. The subpersonalities are generally named. In the above example, we might say that the person has a "pleaser" subpersonality that wants to ingratiate his wife, a "rebel" subpersonality that resents this, possibly a "striver" subpersonality that causes him to work too hard and become exhausted and possibly a "martyr" subpersonality that won't allow him to indulge in the expense of a vacation. Of course we would have to know the person well in order to identify the subpersonalities accurately.

We can describe subpersonalities as being structured constellations or agglomerates of attitudes, drives, habit patterns, logical elements, which are organized in adaptation to forces in the internal and external environment (Vargiu, 1974). They are similar to the "complexes" of psychoanalysis or the "games" of transactional analysis in that they contain crystallized energy which is "split off" from the whole of the personality.

When the child is unable to satisfy his basic needs and drives in a healthy, direct way, because of the inadequacies of his parents or "significant others", he develops indirect and covert means of attempting to satisfy these needs. These means are the best available to protect his psyche from injury at the time, given his lack of experience, the immaturity of his organism, his internal dynamics, and the limitations of his environment. These patterns of attitude and behavior organized around a drive or need and serving a defensive

function, are called subpersonalities. They enable the immature organism to cope and survive in a frustrating world, but they become increasingly ineffective means of meeting basic needs as the person grows up and develops new resources. Though the small child is emotionally dependent on his parents and will pay almost any price to gain some semblance of love from them, the adult no longer needs to do this. The price one pays for the subpersonality adaptation in terms of inner limitation and conflict is too great when the person becomes stronger and the primitive defensive measures are no longer required. The subpersonalities function in much the same way as a suit of armour, protecting but at the same time confining. They encapsulate energy within the boundaries of their rigid and mechanical structure so that this energy is not freely available to flow into other forms where it is needed. Much of the work in psychosynthesis is aimed at liberating the energy which is bound within the subpersonality structures so that it becomes available to the total personality. An example to illustrate the process of subpersonality formation is the child who becomes the "good boy". Such a child is usually praised for obedient behavior and threatened with loss of love for expressing his own will. In order to obtain love, he learns to conform to the wishes of his parents. He develops a desire to please, to do what others want him to do, even when this means ignoring his own needs, because it is the only way he knows of gaining acceptance. The same child may later develop a "rebel" or "bad boy" subpersonality, as subpersonalities often develop in pairs of opposites, with the tendencies of one balancing out the tendencies of the opposite pole. The child who is experiencing an inner compulsion to submit to authority will suffer from this restriction and may try to counterbalance this by a provocative and rebellious attitude, or by acting out a tough dare-devil role. One "good boy" I worked with—a man in his thirties who still played an abjectly servile role toward his mother, attempted to create a more "manly" image for himself by "tough" behaviors such as car-racing and heavy drinking. Another "good boy" in his twenties attempted to break free from this pattern by engaging in outlandish, irresponsible behaviors to shock his conservative father. "Les extrêmes se touchent" ("opposites touch") and neither extreme of submission or rebellion is an expression of true freedom. At the time the subpersonality is formed, the "good boy" pattern attempts to satisfy a real need—the need to assert oneself against oppressive forces and to gain some psychological breathing space. It attempts to protect the psyche from being crushed and to spare the person the feelings of shame and weakness that accompany a subservient role. Each subpersonality has some valuable qualities which are important to preserve in the process of personality transmutation.

We will discuss some of the ways in which this concept is applied in therapeutic work in our sections below dealing with the process and the techniques of psychosynthesis.

### **The "personality vehicles" map**

We use the term "personality vehicles" to refer to the body, the emotions, and the mind. These three components, which make up the personality, are like "vehicles" for the Self because they are its media of manifestation on the material plane. It is important that each vehicle be adequately developed and coordinated with the others so that the personality expression is balanced and harmonious. Some people are so identified with one of the personality components that they are cut off from other aspects. Such a split is most common between the mind and the emotions. A person who has been rewarded in life primarily for mental performance may be very mistrustful of his or her emotions, thinking that they are dangerous and would completely take over if given a chance. A mentally-identified person will need help in accepting and in educating the emotional side of the personality. People who are strongly identified with their emotions, on the other hand, may reject the mind and fear that mental activity would eliminate the vitality of their emotional life. Such people are likely to be flooded with uncontrolled emotionality and will need help in accepting the mental side of their personality. The emotionally-identified person must learn that a well-balanced mind does not cut off all emotional expression and that it can be used to bring clarity, control and perspective, as well as added richness and enjoyment to the emotional life.

A practitioner of psychosynthesis must discern when the client needs to deal with the integration of subpersonalities or when the issue is one of accepting and integrating the personality vehicles as such.

### **The "I"-Self map**

The concepts of the "I" (or personal self) and the Self (also called the transpersonal or higher Self) were presented briefly in the discussion of Assagioli's egg diagram. Psychosynthesis posits that the process of synthesis requires an integrating center around which the synthesis can take place. Two such centers are postulated within the human psyche: the "I" and the Self. The "I" is considered to be a projection within the field of consciousness of the Self and functions as its deputy at the personality level. Both centers have the dual functions of will and consciousness. They are capable of awareness within their particular domain and of action upon it.

The psychosynthetic process can be considered as involving two stages which are successive but not rigidly separated: the personal psychosynthesis and the transpersonal psychosynthesis. In the personal psychosynthesis, the "I" serves as the integrating center around which the process takes place. During this stage, the subpersonalities and personality vehicles are harmonized and integrated so that the person becomes able to function effectively in the realms of work and personal relationships and develops a relatively well-integrated personality.

During the transpersonal psychosynthesis, the focus of personality integration gradually shifts from the "I" to the transpersonal Self. The "I" continues to collaborate in the process, but the transpersonal Self increasingly assumes a foreground role, becoming the new center around which integration takes place. The "I" is like the mayor of a city who at first believes that he has full power and autonomy in his area of jurisdiction. He happily proceeds in the governing of the "citizens" (the various elements of the personality that require integration) until one day he discovers that many of the laws of his city are determined by the policy of the Federal government. He learns that he is part of a greater whole. Some of the townspeople and city officials may be quite disturbed by this news as they perceive it as an offense to their freedom and dignity. The mayor must then help them to understand that it is really in their best interest to cooperate with the Federal government and to work to bring their energies into alignment with the needs and purposes of the greater whole. So, during the transpersonal psychosynthesis the "I" has the task of aligning the personality with the more inclusive purpose of the transpersonal Self, with which it has now entered into conscious relationship. The personality sometimes rebels and struggles to maintain its autonomy. It must learn that in cooperating with the greater whole, in harmonizing and blending its energies with those of the transpersonal Self, it will achieve greater fulfillment than in seeking to maintain the illusion of independence. For it is through our connection with the transpersonal Self that we experience real purpose and meaning in life, that we transcend the boundaries of our small ego and discover our deeper relatedness to the universe. The person who seeks to unify his or her personal will with the will of the transpersonal Self receives inner direction and inspiration from this source. Though the trials on the way are numerous, there is no greater joy known to man than to take this journey. In the long run, there is no alternative, as the personality does not exist in isolation: it is but one organ in that greater organism of which the transpersonal Self is the organizing center. Just as the stomach or the liver in the human body cannot exist without the context of the whole body, so the personality cannot exist without the context of the transpersonal Self which is the source and ground of its being.

The guide aims at helping the client experience the reality of the "I" as early as possible, since the "I" plays such a central role in the psychosynthesis process. It is particularly important to cultivate and to reinforce this experience when we are dealing with issues of will, of inner direction, and of identity. It can help people gain a sense of their own worth and identity, of their human dignity, and of their capacity to take responsibility for the direction of their own lives. Without this awareness of the "I", we are like the person in our discussion of subpersonalities who was inwardly debating whether to take a vacation in Florida. Many of our inner voices use

the word "I", though none of them speak for the real "I", Once a person has established the ability to identify with the "I", a sense of strength and clarity emerges. It is through this center that true identity and will are experienced, that the person discovers the capacity to create his or her own life. The experience of the "I" often brings a great sense of exhilaration and freedom. One woman who had this experience exclaimed, "It's so incredible to know that I am myself. I'm different from every other person and I'm the only one who can decide what is right for me I feel like I can become whatever I choose—that there are no limits. There's so much freedom and excitement in this I just want to shout for joys" Other people may find that, mixed with the discovery of personal power and freedom is some fear of taking on the responsibility this implies. This fear is a factor in the repression of the "I" experience which occurs in many cases. Such people need help in reassuring those parts of themselves that are afraid so that they can appropriate their own freedom.

Once the client's identity with the "I" is firmly established, the personality is gradually harmonized and integrated through the will of this organizing center. In the course of the process, the consciousness of the "I" is expanded, the area in which its will is active is correspondingly increased, and the "I" moves "up" or closer to the transpersonal Self, eventually to reunite with its parent entity. The expansion of the "I's" field of awareness is analogous to what occurs when a mountain climber approaches the top of a mountain. With each step upward, broader vistas appear and one can see the surrounding areas from a more clear and comprehensive perspective. To pursue the analogy, we could say that the closer a person's "I" is to the Self, the more full and enlightened will be that person's perspective on the total context of his or her life, the more understanding and acceptance will there be of the past, and the more clarity will there be about emerging directions.

An interesting point is that as our field of consciousness expands more into the "heights", we are thereby enabled to descend further into the "depths" when there is a need to do so. As we increasingly contact the energies of the superconscious, we gain the ability to approach the confusion, the pain, and the distortions of our past with clearer vision and with greater compassion and understanding.

This point is illustrated in the stages one goes through in working out the relationships with the parent figures. As we will discuss later in the section dealing with emotional release, a client will often go through a period of expressing strong primal emotions such as rage and pain. The field of consciousness at this stage of the work is relatively restricted, as the person is identified with his or her own strong feelings and is unable to see the point of view of the parents. Later, when the person is more in touch with transpersonal energies, it becomes possible to disidentify from the "hurt child" attitude, to empathize with the situation of the parents and to forgive them. At a still higher level of consciousness we can integrate more fully the experiences of our childhood, moving beyond simple forgiveness of and reconciliation with our parents to an understanding of deeper meaning and purpose in the fact that we were born to these particular parents. We become reconciled with our life as a whole. We are then able not merely to accept, but actively to embrace our own destiny. We can see how even our most difficult and painful experiences have contributed to the development of qualities we cherish and have prepared us for the part we are called to play in life. It is as though the greater light and power of the superconscious energies enables us to extract the pure gold from the depths of our lower unconscious, from the mine of our past.

### **The concept of center**

We often use the term "center" in psychosynthesis in such ways as "being centered" or "moving to center". The concept of center refers to a position rather than to an entity like the "I" or the Self. We can experience "center" at any point along the central axis linking the "I" and the Self, as shown in the "egg diagram", according to the person's general evolutionary development and transient conditions which may bring temporary shifts in the level of consciousness. When we are "in center", we are disidentified from the various partial aspects of our self such as the subpersonalities or personality vehicles. This means that we are functioning with the awareness and will of the "I" (or some approximation to it) rather than with the restricted viewpoint of one of the "small "I" s"

that speak for the part instead of the whole. In these persons whose "I" is aligned with the Self, being centered will also mean that the energies of the Self are available. Such a person will be concerned with higher and more humanitarian values than the person who is still at the stage of seeking to establish the personal will.

### **The transpersonal qualities map**

Sometimes in working with a client we seem to be dealing not so much with the need to contact a source of essential identity, but rather with the need to develop certain qualities, strengths, or attitudes that represent a "next step" in terms of the person's growth. It may be necessary, for example, for a particular person to cultivate serenity if he or she tends to be agitated, to develop compassion if he or she is too judgmental, or to practice discernment if he or she is too gullible.

It is postulated by psychosynthesis that these "virtues" or "transpersonal qualities" exist within the superconscious as potential energy fields that can be tapped and stepped down to be utilized at the personality level. Certain people are more attuned than others to particular qualities and are therefore more capable of manifesting those qualities through their personality expression in the world. One person may have the potential to radiate a great deal of love, while another person, though less loving, will have special gifts of mental clarity and discernment. The transpersonal qualities that emerge in our lives seem to have their own rhythm of unfoldment. They are evoked and developed within us, when the timing is right, by the experiences and challenges that life presents us.

People are often directed by inner guidance to directly cultivate particular transpersonal qualities that they need when the moment for the emergence of these qualities has come. A number of techniques, including meditation, imagination exercises, body movement, and role-playing may be used for this purpose.

## **THE PSYCHOSYNTHESIS PROCESS**

Having touched briefly on some of the main structural maps used in psychosynthesis, we will discuss some of the key points of the psychosynthetic process.

### **The personality assessment**

Assessment of the client's personality, needs, and existential situation is the first step in psychosynthesis after the initial contact has been established. It is an ongoing process which has value not only in terms of guiding the initial direction of the work but also in terms of evaluating the progress and needs at various stages of the psychosynthesis.

Assessment is different from diagnosis, the traditional psychiatric approach, in several ways. First of all, it does not focus primarily on pathology, but indicates the areas of strength and potential as well as the areas of conflict and limitation. It has a positive emphasis oriented toward constructive steps that can be taken. Assessment recognizes the uniqueness of the individual and bears in mind that categorization or labels of any kind can be damaging if taken too literally or seen in a static way. Unlike diagnosis, which is often something "done to" the client by an authority, the psychosynthesis assessment is a process in which the guide and client are mutually involved and it respects the client's perceptions of his own needs and goals. It also has a therapeutic value in that the ongoing aspect of the assessment process helps to keep the client's will aligned with the work that needs to be done.

In the beginning, the client is often asked to provide certain written materials which may be useful in the assessment process. These include a questionnaire dealing with the client's self-perceptions, problems, values, and aspirations, as well as an autobiography dealing with family relationships and other major influences on the person's life. Further information is gained by talking with the client, observing behavior in the interview,



gathering information on his or her existential situation, and exploration of the unconscious through such means as dreams, fantasy, symbolic artwork, movement, etc.

The assessment is concerned with the person's life direction and growth potentials and with the major obstacles to realizing these potentials. Unlike many therapies, psychosynthesis tends to deemphasize the focus on "problems" as such. It seeks instead to understand problems in the broader context of personality structure and dynamics as well as in the context of the person's evolutionary unfoldment. Life is too short to attempt to eliminate every human imperfection; the important elements to focus on are those that prevent us from going where we need to go. The ideal of the perfectly rounded personality appears to be a false one, as far as the Self is concerned, though it is evident that a certain development of the various aspects of the personality is necessary for harmonious functioning. It may not be necessary or desirable, for example, for a person of genius whose main direction is connected with intellectual discovery to invest a great deal of energy in intensive development of the physical and emotional vehicles, though of course it would be important to maintain good health. For Einstein to have spent much time in body-building programs or encounter groups might very well have been a waste of his energy and a distraction from his life purpose. If, on the other hand, he had suddenly felt a calling to work in the area of human relations, it would have been necessary for him to develop the relevant skills.

We use the concept of "life purpose" to refer to the person's potentials, i.e. the transpersonal qualities that the Self is seeking to manifest through the personality. The various forms of the person's life are examined to determine the extent to which they express or fail to express the "purpose" and how they need to be changed in order to more fully manifest the qualities which the person has available. We can think of forms as existing in both the internal and external worlds: inner forms are structures of thought, feeling, attitude, etc., while outer forms are the roles, activities, and relationships which make up the person's life. The goal of psychosynthesis could be described as bridging spirit and matter, as creating a world of form at the personality level which is fully expressive of the person's spiritual being.

### **Unfoldment of the process**

Although the guide may obtain some insights into the client's personality structure and needs in the course of the assessment and may have formed certain hypotheses about such areas as subpersonality dynamics, integration of the personality vehicles, degree of contact with the "I" and the Self, etc., the way in which the material actually unfolds depends on the client's own process.

It is assumed that the real guide of a psychosynthesis interview is the client's higher Self and that the Self, at any particular time, is directing the person's attention in certain directions. With this in mind, the external guide, whose role is to support the client's inner process, is attentive to what seems to "want to happen" in the session. He or she attempts to be as fully present as possible, with the antennae of the intuition alert, to discern "where the energy is" in the material the client presents. Frequently the client him/herself does not know what issue is most important to explore; the presenting issue may be far removed from the live issue, from what really needs to happen for the person. By following the cues contained in the client's verbal and non-verbal communications, and by assessing the involvement of the client's will, the guide attempts to focus the session where it seems that the client's higher Self is directing the energy.

The actual sequence in which the issues emerge may come as a surprise. It is important that the guide refrain from imposing pre-conceived structures on the situation, remaining open to allow the client's process to *unfold from within*. For one client the most urgent need may be to get more in touch with powerful emotions for another client the need will be to step back from emotional reactions so that he or she can perceive them more clearly and better understand what they are expressing. One client will need to explore the relationship with a

parent figure directly, while another will need to work this out at the interpersonal level. Sensitivity to timing and to the level at which particular issues can best be resolved at a particular time is crucial.

### **Identification and Disidentification**

The concept of disidentification is a central one in psychosynthesis and it is probably one of the most important contributions made by psychosynthesis to psychological thought.

Disidentification can be understood best in relationship to its polar opposite: identification. We are identified with something when we are unable to separate ourselves from that thing, when our sense of identity is bound up in it. Some men are so identified with their cars that if somebody scratches their car they experience this as though they had been personally defaced, as though they were diminished by the fact that their car was scratched. A woman who is identified with the appearance of her body may feel that her worth as a human being is lessened if she develops wrinkles on her face or gets grey hairs. It is as though these people believed "I am my car" or "I am my body."

A basic principle in psychosynthesis is that we are dominated and controlled by that with which we are identified. The man in the example is controlled by what happens to his car because it affects his emotional reactions, his self-image, and his sense of well-being, just as the woman is controlled by the effects of the aging process on her physical appearance. It follows that in order to achieve inner freedom we must cease to identify with ("disidentify from") all that is not our essence.

One of the major problems people seem to have is that they need to identify with some partial aspect of themselves, excluding other aspects from awareness. It is as though our lives were lived in compartments, with each compartment containing only a very small portion of our total experience. According to the conditions of the moment, according to the button that is pressed by people or events, we move from one compartment to the next. When we are in the red room, everything looks red and we forget temporarily that there is any other color in life. When we are in the blue room, everything appears blue, and all memory of the red room may be temporarily wiped out. This brings a good deal of inner conflict in our lives, as the values, perceptions, and goals of the person in the red room are often very different from and may be in contradiction to those of the person in the blue room.

What we are metaphorically speaking of as the "colored rooms" can represent any partial aspect of ourself that takes itself to be the whole or which has a limited and distorted perspective of the whole. Most commonly the rooms are subpersonalities, though they can be one of the personality vehicles (body, emotions, or mind), a particular strong emotion such as anger or fear, or a role in life.

We have spoken in the section on the personality vehicles about the situation that occurs when a person is mentally or emotionally identified. It is more rare to be identified with one's body, but this can also occur, as in the case of certain athletes or the beauty queen, to whom advancing age may be very threatening.

When we are identified with an emotion, it does not mean necessarily that we are identified with the emotional vehicle as such. We may simply be overly controlled by a particular emotional reaction. It may be very helpful to people to learn to step back from such emotional reactions, even when they have not yet worked through all the causes of these reactions.

Someone who is afraid to get angry can be helped to take the risk of expressing anger if he or she can realize that there is no need to become identified with the anger to do this, that the anger need not be allowed to take over completely. It is then possible to acknowledge the feelings of anger and to have the security of knowing that one is something more than the feelings one is experiencing at a particular moment. A client of mine who

suffered from agoraphobia—the fear of open spaces—to the point where she was unable to go to market, was enabled to function again when she realized that she did not have to identify with her fear. Rather than allowing the fear to paralyze her, she could stand outside her fear and be the observer of her emotional reactions. At first she was still afraid when she went to market but she was able to live with this fear and did not allow it to cripple and dominate her. Gradually she came to understand and to overcome it.

In the work of integrating our subpersonalities, disidentification plays an important role. We must be able to "stand back from" our subpersonalities in order to see them more clearly and to find the vantage point from which we can do something to transmute them. A man who was identified with a manipulative "salesman" subpersonality always aroused defensive reactions in people until he was able to disidentify from the need to sell himself. When he saw what he had been doing, he found it very comical and felt motivated to change his way of relating to others. When he realized that he could now choose not to play this role, he experienced a great sense of relief and inner freedom. When we are identified with a subpersonality, we are in a state of bondage; we have no choice but to act out this subpersonality when we are in a situation that triggers it. The man who was identified with his "salesman" subpersonality did not experience this as playing a role which he could voluntarily choose. His bull-doing behavior had become so habitual that he actually felt that he was a person who needed to sell himself and force others to see things his way. There is always a sense of increased inner freedom when a person realizes that limiting and inauthentic behaviors are not necessary, that alternatives are available, and that one has the power of choice.

The other partial aspect of ourselves with which we most often tend to identify is our social roles. The concept of role is in some ways similar to, though it is distinct from, the concept of subpersonalities. We all play various roles in life such as parent or child, employer or employee; social roles are necessary and inevitable. We can either play these roles in a centered way or act out our subpersonalities through them. One can play the role of employer in an enlightened manner, expressing authentic values through this activity, or one can use the role as a vehicle for subpersonalities such as the "autocrat" or the "striver". In the case of persons who become identified with the roles they play, it is likely that a subpersonality has been expressing through that role. An example would be the situation of a woman who has experienced her identity entirely through her role as mother and who is devastated by the prospect of her children growing up. Such a woman is likely to have been overprotective in the mother role or may have a martyr subpersonality, sacrificing herself for her children or being overly concerned about them rather than cultivating interests of her own. When she is faced with the reality of her children leaving home, it is as though she had, nothing more to live for, no sense of identity independent of her role as mother.

So we can see the importance of learning to disidentify from any of the partial aspects of ourselves, of being able to step out of the "colored rooms" in our life, in order to experience our freedom and our true identity.

In addition to the various forms of unconscious and blind identification with some partial aspect of the personality, we can speak of the process of voluntary or conscious identification. At certain points in the psychosynthetic process, we may encourage a client to voluntarily identify him/herself with some particular element of experience in order to achieve a specific purpose. We may suggest, for example, that he or she identify with a subpersonality, acting it out in body movement or dramatic improvisation, or the person may be encouraged to identify with a particular image in a mental imagery scenario. Such use of voluntary identification can serve the purpose of exploring and externalizing some aspect of ourself that we need to know better. We may also choose to identify with a particular feeling for purposes of emotional release.

A basic principle is that we must "own" our experience, we must be aware of what is there and recognize it as part of ourselves, before we attempt to disidentify from it. We may come to know our experience either by consciously identifying with what is there or by taking the first step in the disidentification process—the step of

separating ourself from our experience to view it as an objective observer. Paradoxically, we are often able to be more in contact with our feelings when we are not identified with them. Though some people who hear about disidentification for the first time are concerned that it might result in an unhealthy detachment or a "spaced out" state, the goal is just the opposite. Disidentification serves to bring us more in contact, not less, with our experience. What is most important is that contact with the *full range* of our experience becomes possible when we are not identified with some partial awareness. The person who is spaced out is not in contact with all aspects of his or her experience. Rather, there is likely to be a state of identification with a subpersonality, bringing a limited and partial awareness. Whenever we are identified with only part of our experience, we are unable to see the whole picture clearly. Our vision is distorted and we will come across to others in a biased way. A person who is identified with a strong emotion such as anger, for example, may lose touch with other aspects of his personal reality, such as pain and caring. There is, in consequence, less contact with oneself as well as less effective contact with other people. When we are in touch with a greater range of experience than a single overpowering emotion, we are better able to present a balanced picture and to communicate with others in a way that, instead of merely arousing defensive reactions, is likely to be constructive.

### **Activation of the Will**

The will is one of the central themes in psychosynthesis and it plays a pivotal role in the psychosynthetic process.

The guide must be constantly alert to subtle changes in the client's contact with his or her own will, patiently seeking out and supporting the will of the "I". The guide presents the client with many choices during the session in order to determine what issues he/she is ready and willing to explore, and in order to develop the sense of being able to choose one's own direction.

The process of eliciting and reinforcing the client's experience of intentionality creates vitally important side-effects or "incidental learning". The fact that someone is interested in the client's choices and is concerned to respect them gives the person a sense of being valued as a human being and helps to build feelings of self-worth and dignity.

The guide serves as a mirror to the vicissitudes of willing, helping the client to become aware when a non-centered attitude has taken over and encouraging expression of the will of the "I". This serves to strengthen the client's awareness of the "I" and of his/her capacity to make decisions.

As we mentioned earlier, the true will comes only from the "I" or the Self. Distortions of will, such as the strong-arm approach of the person with "will-power", come from the subpersonalities. People who are governed by identifications with subpersonalities find it difficult to make choices that do not come into conflict with some other part of themselves. This is often related to the fact that subpersonalities tend to exist in polarity, with one extreme evoking the opposite. The person who has a striver/perfectionist subpersonality that sets unattainable standards of performance, may have a saboteur subpersonality on the other side. The sabotage may manifest as apparent laziness, procrastination, or getting sick—anything to avoid undertaking an impossible task. To use the Gestalt terms, the "underdog" wins the battle with the "top-dog".

A client's motivation to work, at the beginning of a session, is often coming from a subpersonality rather than from the "I". This may take many forms. A striver subpersonality may be trying to elicit the guide's support to eliminate a "lazy" subpersonality or a superman subpersonality may be seeking to eliminate the person's "weakness." A dependent client may passively wait for the guide to do something to make things better or a controlling client will try to push the session in a pre-set direction, rather than being open to his own process or to the guide. The most obvious motive of many clients at the beginning of their work is to get rid of some pain or symptom rather than to explore the meaning of the pain. When the motivation of the client in coming to the

session is not in line with what really needs to happen (i.e. the purpose of the Self for that session), the guide must find a way to help the person sort out the various strands of conflicting motivation and find the way back to center. When the fog lifts in the process of coming to center, the person can see more clearly what is happening and is in a better position to make wise choices.

The subpersonalities generally have a very narrow and egocentric view of life. They tend to see things only from their own perspective, without taking into consideration the needs and viewpoints of other parts of the personality. Frequently they are motivated to get rid of some other subpersonality which they regard as threatening or distasteful. The will of the "I" is different from the distorted will of the subpersonalities in that it works in an integrative rather than a divisive manner. The "I" does not ignore or deny certain parts of the personality, as it takes into consideration the needs of the whole person. The "I", when educated to develop skillful will, is diplomatic and a good mediator. It patiently and gently dialogues with resistant parts of the personality, answering their objections and giving them reassurance, until the resistance is dissolved and they can freely choose to cooperate.

Another important aspect in working with the will is the role of "grounding" or putting into practice the insights which have been achieved. One must always seek to balance the dimensions of will and awareness, which might be compared to the two legs on which the path to integration is walked. If we have too little will or too little awareness, the work will be shallow and incomplete. It is necessary both to extend the frontiers of consciousness and to use this knowledge to transmute our personalities and our relationships with the world. Knowledge or awareness which remains stuck in our head, without being applied in daily living, can produce psychological indigestion. This stems from taking in too much without allowing for digestion and assimilation. Under these conditions, although there is much input, the psyche remains malnourished. A further consequence is that the person who fails to use knowledge received is likely to lose contact with the intuition. It is as though the intake channels become clogged when there is no output in practice.

Psychosynthesis utilizes a variety of methods to facilitate the grounding process. Within the session itself, we often use role-playing to help the client practice new attitudes or behaviors. If the work is done in a group setting, the group members can provide an opportunity for trying out new ways. Writing is also a useful means of anchoring the insights that come in a session. Most important of all is the application in the client's daily life, which the guide will attempt to keep informed of, giving extra grounding help to those persons who have trouble applying their insights in action.

It is not a simple matter to attempt to harmonize and integrate the elements of the personality in the profound and global way that we seek in psychosynthesis. One does not overcome the habitual reaction patterns of a lifetime without real work. Perhaps we can take comfort in the fact that the effort seems to be part of the plan, for the spiritual will is evoked by our deep aspiration and striving to move toward wholeness. The choice of our will to take the "upper path" seems to open the door to new levels of consciousness.

### **Abreaction or emotional release**

With many persons, there is a need early in the therapeutic process to release strong emotions which have never been fully expressed since they bind so much of the person's energy. These emotions are usually related to painful relationships with the parent figures or to other traumatic situations in the person's life. At the stage when strong emotions of pain and anger are being expressed, the work may appear similar to primal therapy or other abreaction therapies. The philosophy of emotional release is different in psychosynthesis, however, as we consider that the expression of hatred, pain, and anger is just a first step and not the ultimate goal. It may be a necessary step if a person's feelings in these areas are blocked, but one must move beyond the negative feelings so that the energy bound in hatred and resentment can be released for creative purposes. We find that real healing only occurs when forgiveness and reconciliation take place. An important part of this resolution of the

parental "imago" (internal representation of the parent figure) is often when the parent (as the client imagines him or her in fantasy) acknowledges the hurt which the client, as a child, experienced. (When the term "parent" is used in this section, it refers to the client's internal representation of the parent figure.) Often the parent expresses that he or she was not aware how much the child suffered and feels really sorry when this is realized. Another significant step is when the parent communicates to the child why he or she was unable to do any better. The parent figure encountered in an imagery session will often say to the child that he or she is sorry that the child was hurt through the parent's inadequacies, and would have liked to have done things differently if this had been possible. Then the parent may describe his or her own childhood in such a way that the client is able to understand and accept that the parent was unable to function more adequately because of the limitations imposed by the parent's own background. At this point, the client usually experiences a feeling of compassion for the parent's plight, and forgiveness comes. The personality differences and conflicts become insignificant when contact with the inner being of the parent is experienced and the person realizes that the parent is simply a fellow human being struggling, sometimes blindly, on his or her own path in life and faced with all the difficulties that are part of the human condition.

The stage of abreaction or violent release of strong emotions connected with primal pain does not seem to be necessary for all clients. Certain persons, who have had less traumatic experiences with their parents, may work through the feelings associated with the "parental imago" in more gradual and less dramatic ways.

### **The processes of integration and synthesis**

The process of psychosynthesis, as the name implies, is one in which the conflicting and disharmonious elements of the personality undergo a process of harmonization, integration, and synthesis. In the course of this they are brought into alignment with the person's higher Self, so that the personality becomes an instrument or channel through which the Self can manifest in the physical world.

There are many polarities within the personality requiring integration. The exact nature of these varies from one individual to the next. Most of these can in some way be related to the most universal polarities which the Chinese call "yin" and "yang". On the "yin" side are all those elements relating to the "feminine principle": receptivity, sensitivity, awareness, love, emotions, non-focus, non-direction, flow, etc. On the "yang" side are those elements relating to the "masculine principle": activity, assertion, will, reason, structure, power, focus, direction, etc. (Note: The terms "masculine principle" and "feminine principle" as used in this context do not imply that these qualities belong to men or women. Persons of both sexes need to balance these elements within themselves.) When these polarities are split off from one another and are isolated in subpersonality structures or other unintegrated parts of the personality, their energies may appear to be antagonistic. When they are brought together, when they are harmonized and integrated through the joint activity of the "I" and the Self, the apparent conflict disappears and their essential complementarity is manifested. They become helpful and balancing to one another rather than antagonistic.

There are several dimensions of the personality involved in this process of integration. The primary ones are: the subpersonalities, the personality vehicles, the personality and the Self; and the transpersonal qualities. We can also think of integration in terms of the person's relationships with individuals and groups in his environment. It is not possible to discuss all of these in detail in a paper of this length. To illustrate the principles, let us examine briefly what happens in the case of the subpersonalities.

Much of the personality-level work in psychosynthesis is concerned with the release of "bound" energy which is encapsulated in the complexes or subpersonalities so that it becomes available for creative purposes which are in alignment with the needs of the person as a whole. This work takes place in several stages: recognition of the elements requiring transmutation; acceptance of these elements; coordination of these elements by the "I", and finally, integration and synthesis of these elements. In choosing which elements to focus on, we are guided

primarily by what the client presents through the products of the unconscious (dreams, symptoms, tensions, symbolic expressions, etc.) and by what seems to be interfering with achievement of the person's goals in life.

Having identified the elements of the personality that require transmutation, it is important that the client be able to accept these without self-condemnation. Unless the subpersonalities are fully accepted, they do not feel "heard" or understood and they will resist change. Each subpersonality has some important message, some need that it is attempting to meet, however inadequately. If we attempt to "cut off" some aspect of ourself without transmuting the energy, this part will avenge itself and wreck havoc in our lives. We see this illustrated in the lives of people who have chosen a celibate life-style without a true vocation to celibacy. They often endure great suffering, stifling their love and spontaneity in an abortive effort to suppress or repress their sexuality. It is only when the sexuality is owned and accepted that it can be sublimated into other channels of creative expression. So acceptance is a very important stage in the transmutation of energy.

When elements of the personality have been truly accepted, we can begin to integrate them with other elements. This work is carried out by the joint activity of the "I" and the Self. In the early stages, the Self remains behind the scenes, presenting material from the unconscious as the person becomes ready to assimilate it, and constellating life experiences that provide needed learning opportunities. The direct work of coordination and integration is done by the will of the "I". It is only at the stage of synthesis, where there is an actual fusion of polarities that the process is carried out through the direct agency of the Self.

The "I" stands in a central position among the various parts of the personality. Its role is rather like that of an orchestra conductor who coordinates and harmonizes the various instruments. When the conductor is absent, the instruments or subpersonalities may all attempt to play at once, each clamouring to be heard and attempting to drown out the others. The result is a terrible cacophony, which creates the impression that the instruments are in conflict with one another. When the conductor returns, we discover the beautiful harmonies that can be created by the right blending of the instruments. When they are artfully coordinated, each instrument adds a richness to the whole symphony, making its own unique contribution to enhance rather than to detract from or compete with the others. When the instruments are under the direction of the conductor, it is possible to play a piece of inspired music the composer of which, to pursue our analogy, is the transpersonal Self. It is as though the Self has a plan for our ideal form of personality expression, though this is revealed progressively—a step at a time—lest we be overwhelmed. This is like an invisible score that we play through the instrument of our personality when it has become a channel of expression for the higher Self.

To the extent that the instruments are mastered and their uncoordinated clatter is stilled, we will be able to follow the score and to play our own symphony. If we play a false note, we will receive messages from within and without about this, providing we have learned how to hear the feedback. Much of the work in psychosynthesis is directed toward helping the person to recognize these messages and toward freeing the will to act upon them.

At the stage of coordination, the first objective is to help the opposing elements to enter into communication with one another so that they can begin to work out a plan for better cooperation. One often finds that opposite poles are barely aware of each other and may need, first of all, to simply recognize the other's existence. In extreme situations, we have cases of "multiple personality" where the opposites are so split that when the person is identified with one subpersonality, he or she may totally repress awareness of other subpersonalities. Although such cases are rare, the pattern is found to a lesser degree in many people. Subpersonalities are often embarrassed by the presence of their opposite number and would prefer to deny that it exists.

One woman, for example, had a subpersonality she called "Strong Jane" who was highly competent and could take on any challenge. This was the side of herself that she generally showed to the world. People believed that

Jane could do anything and were always imposing on her, not recognizing that she had needs of her own. Strong Jane did not like to admit that she had needs, as that made her feel weak, so she kept up an omnipotent facade and played Mother to a host of dependent people. There was, however, an opposite side to her that she kept well hidden from the world and which she called "Weak Jane". Weak Jane developed during the client's childhood when she experienced feelings of helplessness, humiliation, and lack of worth in her relations with her mother, who made her stand in the corner for long periods of time without any explanation. Because the client had felt so devastated by these feelings, she developed a super-strong facade so that she would never again have to experience being weak and helpless. Though Strong Jane at first wanted to deny the reality of Weak Jane, she gradually came to accept her. When the client took the "center" position, she began to see that there were limitations in the strong facade, as this cut her off from other people and did not allow her to receive nurturance for herself in a relationship. She also began to see positive aspects in the "weak" part of herself - qualities of sensitivity and receptivity which she needed to integrate within her personality. She realized that it was not really a sign of weakness to acknowledge that she had needs and limitations like other human beings, and that so doing could help other people to feel closer to her and less threatened by her.

After subpersonalities have made contact with one another and have acknowledged that the other is there to be dealt with, the next stage usually involves a dialogue between them so that each can hear the other's point of view and learn to treat it with respect. Sometimes it is possible to work out a reasonable accommodation between the polarities themselves, though it usually helps to have the client take the position of an objective and benevolent witness. Various solutions such as "time-sharing" can be worked out at the level of coordination. One example of this is a young man who had a hermit-like side to his nature, requiring solitude for contemplation, as well as a gregarious side. He was never happy when he was with people because he felt the need to be alone. When he was alone, he made himself miserable by thinking that he "ought" to be spending more time with people. In fact, he never could fully experience the satisfactions of either state because of this inner conflict. The solution in this case was simple: he recognized the legitimacy of both of these needs, planning his life in such a way that he allowed time for both solitude and companionship, without having to feel anxious or guilty about either.

At a higher level than simple coordination, or learning to live with one another in a friendly way, are the stages of integration and synthesis. When integration takes place between personality elements, each gives to the other, so that the functioning of each is enhanced by the contribution of the other. In the case of Jane, with her "strong" and "weak" subpersonalities some integration took place. When the strong side could own some of the qualities of her weak side, it became more human, and when the weak side could own some of the better qualities of her strong side, it did not have to feel powerless.

Another example is a man who had a very impulsive, somewhat reckless subpersonality on one side and a skeptical, doubting subpersonality on the other. By integrating the two, he was able to extract the best qualities from each. From the impulsive side he gained spontaneity, and from the doubting side he derived a healthy degree of caution and reality-testing. Each had tended to act extremely because it had feared the reaction of the other, and each had acted unilaterally. The impulsive side was sometimes reckless because it feared that the critic might clamp down with rigid restrictions, and the critic, was sometimes activated in destructive ways because it feared the excesses of the reckless side. When the two got together, they began to see that each had something of value to offer. If they acted as a team, consulting with each other, the results would likely be better than if either acted alone. They discovered that they could balance and complement one another instead of acting in opposition.

This example illustrates the fact that integration of polarities often causes the negative aspects of both to drop away and liberates the positive qualities that each contains. Every subpersonality contains elements that are negative or limiting as well as elements that are potentially valuable to the personality. Traits which appear



negative on the surface contain the seeds of some transpersonal quality when the energy is purified and raised to the higher correspondence at superconscious levels. What manifests as stubbornness, for example, when it is split off from the whole, can become steadfastness and perseverance when this energy is directed from center. Or energy that expresses as destructive aggression when it is encapsulated in a subpersonality can transmute to constructive assertion when it is integrated within the total personality. Thus, the process of coordinating and integrating the opposing elements of the personality has the effect of eliminating the excesses and imbalances within them. The tendencies of one pole balance and complement the tendencies of the other so that each loses its excessive aspect and the positive qualities within each polarity are liberated.

## THE TECHNIQUES OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

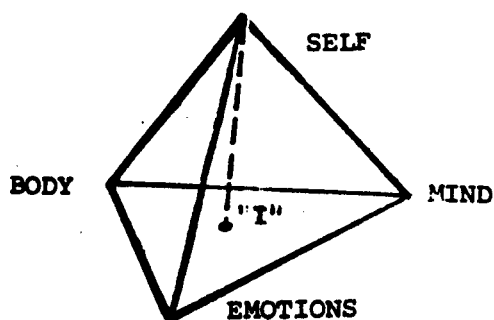
### Multiplicity of techniques

There are a great many techniques employed in psychosynthesis, as we find that no one technique fits all purposes or all persons. Some clients may work very well with certain techniques and not at all well with others. This depends both upon the psychological type and the level of development. A therapist who wishes to be fully responsive to the needs of a particular client must therefore be able to use a variety of approaches. It is important to bear in mind as well that new methods and techniques are constantly being developed in psychosynthesis. It holds to the principle that techniques are made to fit the person rather than the person being made to fit the techniques. Often the most effective approach is one that the guide develops on the spur of the moment to meet the needs of a particular situation. It is one of the beauties of psychosynthesis that it is not a closed system with rigid, crystallized methods. It provides an open structure that can integrate effective methods from other disciplines and leaves room for the creativity of the practitioner.

### A holistic approach

Psychosynthesis can be considered a holistic approach in that it is concerned with balanced development of the various aspects of human experience: physical, emotional, mental, and essential (related to essence, identity, being, will). The choice of techniques will, bear in mind the development of these dimensions, stimulating those that are underdeveloped, using those that are well developed as entry points, and attempting to orchestrate them all in an integrated way.

If we consider the entry points for therapeutic intervention, these can be at physical, emotional or mental levels. In addition, the or the Self can serve this purpose. This can be summarized in the diagram below:



Most current therapies tend to focus on the link between two of the three dimensions on the points of the triangle. Approaches like psychoanalysis, TA and Rogerian therapy emphasize the mental-emotional link; methods such as Gestalt, bioenergetics, and primal therapy utilize primarily the link between the body and the emotions; and approaches like the martial arts, the Alexander technique, and the Feldenkrais method are based on the link between the mind and the body. Psychosynthesis recognizes all these links and uses whichever of

them seem most appropriate to the situation. In most cases, there is an attempt to complete the circuit and to have the person work through the material at all levels, regardless of the entry point. Psychosynthesis differs from several other current therapies in that it values the role of mental understanding. Though a client may work through an issue primarily in a physical or emotional mode, it is important to understand the patterns and dynamics involved in order to be able to generalize from this experience and to ground it in daily living.

### **Eyes open and eyes closed techniques**

We sometimes make a distinction between techniques that are used with "eyes open" and those which are used with "eyes closed". The former, which include role-playing techniques and the creative expression modalities, are used primarily for "horizontal" work—for the coordination and integration of the various elements of the personality. The latter, of which guided imagery is the primary form, are most useful for "vertical" work—for exploring the depths and heights of the unconscious. We find that guided imagery, which may be combined with certain physical techniques, is generally the most effective way for clients to contact and release the powerful emotions related to childhood experience. In addition to their function of contacting the "depths" of primal emotion, the guided imagery techniques provide the best way for many people to contact the "heights" of the superconscious. They frequently lead to experiences of intense joy, love, peace, and union—the "peak experiences" that come when there is contact with the Self and with the transpersonal qualities.

Like most rules, this one has exceptions. Though the majority of clients will experience more full release and transformation of primal emotion through the "eyes closed" techniques, it is also possible for some people to do this with "eyes open" techniques such as role-playing. Conversely, certain "eyes open" techniques such as expressive movement, sensory awareness, and profound interpersonal encounter, can bring about intense ecstatic and transpersonal experiences. And we can sometimes use guided imagery not only for "vertical" work, but for the "horizontal" work of coordinating and integrating personality elements. Role-playing is more effective in general for this purpose as it distinguishes the various elements more clearly through spatialization (having the client act out each element from a different position in space). On the other hand, guided imagery has the advantage that the transmutation and integration of the various elements can often be vividly experienced through changes that occur in the images.

### **The technique of guided imagery**

The technique of guided imagery consists in having the client utilize visual and auditory imagination to get in contact with an inner world of fantasy. It is assumed that the images encountered in this way are symbolic expressions of dynamic patterns within the client's personality. In using this method, it is generally preferable that the person be lying down and in a room with dimmed lighting. Instructions are given that he or she relax and allow the imagery to unfold on its own, just as though watching a film on the mind-screen. There is no attempt to control the depth content of the imagery, which wells up spontaneously from the unconscious and follows its own laws. The guide may suggest that the client attempt to do certain things such as establish communication between different elements in the imagery, identify with a particular person in order to experience his or her emotions more deeply, or explore particular aspects of the imagery in more detail. This method allows one to work directly on the symbolic contents of the psyche, exploring the qualities and inter-relationships of the various elements, and attempting to bring a greater degree of harmony and integration among them. The guided imagery technique is able to reveal unconscious material in the same way as night dreams do, while it offers the advantage of permitting the person's consciousness and will to interact directly with this material. Thus it creates a bridge between the conscious and unconscious levels of the mind.

The role of the guide in a guided imagery session is to help the traveler maintain contact with the flow of his or her inner process, keep a productive focus, deepen the emotional connections, clarify issues when necessary, and "ground" the experience or relate it to the client's everyday life.

An example of this technique is the session of a client who used imagery as a vehicle for exploring polarities of assertiveness and passivity within herself. In real life she tended to relate to other people in either a parent or child role instead of as an equal. She visualized her passive side as a weak, dependent child who felt very needy and saw her assertive side as a knight in armour. When she was identified with the knight, she feared that she would be insensitive to others and ruthlessly assert her own will without taking their feelings into consideration. When she was identified with the needy child, she felt totally dependent upon others to meet her needs and was afraid of being pushed around by them. What was needed for her was to experience some integration or synthesis of these polarities. In this case, we used the technique of suggesting that she take these symbols of the two "opposite" sides of herself on a journey up the mountain together. As she did this, she became aware of the transpersonal core of each of these subpersonalities which had seemed so negative when they had been experienced in isolation from the qualities of the other. She began to see that her weak, needy side contained the seeds of gentleness, receptivity, and sensitivity, while her destructively aggressive side began to show elements of a quieter kind of strength and constructive assertion. She saw the knight take off his suit of armour as the two symbols climbed up the mountain and the two held each other in a warm embrace. When she reached the top, the two symbols seemed to merge into an image of herself, in which she felt very powerful energy. She called forth from the top of the mountain "I love you" in a strong clear voice which seemed to express a synthesis of love and will. She also experienced a yellow light in the point between her eyes which gave her a sense of clarity in looking at her life. As she imagined casting this yellow light on specific relationships in her life, she sensed the need to be more straightforward in clarifying her position with certain people, and felt the ability to do this. Whereas prior to the session she had been feeling identified with the weak pole, with little energy and low blood pressure, she experienced the influx of a great deal of energy through the integration of the assertive pole and ended the session looking and feeling much stronger.

The following account of Jeanne's psychosynthesis, in which guided imagery was used extensively, will illustrate the use of this method to explore childhood material and to make contact with archetypes of inner wisdom. Jeanne, a young woman in her mid-twenties, was referred by another therapist because of her refusal to speak during sessions. She was very rigid and withdrawn, seemingly suffering from painful and violent emotions that she was unable to contact. After our relationship was established and Jeanne's will was mobilized in the therapeutic process, she agreed to use imagery methods to attempt to get in touch with her repressed emotions. Though she stated at first that she had no recall of the early years of her life, the imagery took her right back to a series of traumatic memories.

She saw an image of a small child huddling in the corner watching a man beat up a woman. Then she recalled that when she was three years old, her father had been drinking and had a violent fight with her mother in which he almost killed her. They separated after that and Jeanne was sent to the convent school to be raised by nuns, never to see her father again and only rarely seeing her mother. She got in touch with the feelings of fear and anger and pain that she had had at that time. She expressed anger to both parents for abandoning her and not caring about her feelings. Having done this, she got in touch with the feelings of love she had for her father and expressed resentment toward her mother for being jealous of this love and trying to keep her away from her father. She felt her father's warmth, but sensed that he was placing impossible demands upon her to fill a vacuum in his own life. She felt the burden of having to meet the strong emotional needs of her father and expressed resentment at having been used in this way. The father figure in her imagery said that he was sorry—that he didn't realize what he was doing to her and that the reason he left home was not that he didn't love her. She started to feel more warmly toward him, but still had some residual anger, the reason for which did not emerge until our next session. She came to the session feeling quite agitated, with a sense that she still had to uncover something more. She was aware of anger toward her father but felt that something was stuck in her throat when she tried to express it. I asked her to let an image come that would help her get in touch with what it was that was blocking her. She then saw an erect penis and recalled having been sexually abused by her father. This released the energy and she was able to complete the expression of anger toward him. The

following session was the turning point for her in terms of the transmutation of her anger. In this session, we took as a starting point a dream she had reported in which she was in a room which had a door covered over with wall-paper. I had her imagine that she was going through this door and she followed a tunnel leading down to a room in which several old men were seated. One of these men, who appeared to be very wise, came over to her and told her that she had a firm foundation now and no longer needed to be angry. She was at first unwilling to accept this, as she still felt resentment at having been pushed around by so many people in her life. He explained to her that it was natural for her to have had these feelings when she was small and powerless, but that she was strong now and it was no longer appropriate. He told her that to continue holding on to her anger would only be a waste of energy. He then showed her some sort of plan or model which demonstrated to her that she really did have a strong foundation. As she opened herself to this realization, she felt that she could love without fear. She felt that she could trust other people now that she was able to trust herself. After that she was able to forgive her father and no longer saw him as a threat. Jeanne's process illustrates the usual progression in working with the parental "imagoes" from expression of negative feelings through to reconciliation and forgiveness. The Self or integrating center of the personality (symbolized by the Wise Old Man figure in the imagery) seems to know when the stage of expressing anger is completed and can guide the person to the next stage.

Another example of the use of guided imagery for contacting transpersonal energies as sources of inner wisdom and healing is found in the case of Mary, a client who was suffering from acute kidney disorder. Mary related a dream in which a little animal was being attacked by larger animals. Using imagery to extend the dream, we discovered that the little animal represented Mary's "sick" subpersonality. The larger animals represented various "top dog" subpersonalities, to use the Gestalt term, which were crushing her. These top dogs were related to driving, perfectionistic tendencies that caused her to take on too many responsibilities and to judge herself too harshly so that she felt exhausted and inadequate. She realized that she had a tendency to use sickness as a means to escape from the excessive demands of her "driver" subpersonality as well as a way to get taken care of. At this point a host of divine beings garbed in white appeared in the imagery and attempted to give her a key. She was afraid to take the key at first as she realized that this would imply giving up her attachment to sickness and pain as a means of manipulating people and gaining nurturance. When she expressed to the white beings her fear of giving up the only sure way she knew of to get cared for, they assured her that she no longer needed to use this form of manipulation to establish human contact. They told her that she could now meet her needs through opening herself to more mature forms of love. At this point, an image of Christ appeared, embracing Mary and healing her. He then threw her into a pool of water (symbolic of cleansing) and people on the shore were rejoicing. They threw her a bar of soap with a radiant cross upon it, as she symbolically washed away her attachment to suffering. Then the cross detached itself from the soap and went inside Mary's body where she felt its radiant energy healing her. Her whole body became vibrant and relaxed and she felt the pain leave her kidney. Through recognition of an outgrown pattern and contact with the transpersonal powers mediated through the symbols of the white beings, Christ, water, and the cross, Mary's psychosomatic disorder was healed and she found much greater peace of mind.

We have described at some length the method of guided imagery, as it is quite characteristic of psychosynthesis practice. Yet some clients may go through their psychosynthesis without using this method at all and will be able to work through their material more effectively with some of the "eyes open" techniques.

### **The multiple seat technique**

A commonly used technique in which the eyes remain open is the use of different cushions or chairs to act out different subpersonalities. The client is helped to get in touch with one subpersonality at a time by acting it out, using techniques of dramatic improvisation, body awareness, and symbolic movement or gesture. Imagery or drawing may also help fill out the picture about how this subpersonality is experienced. It is often helpful to have the person take a special seat which is designated as the seat of the "fair witness", the observer, or the

"center", through which a more clear and wise perspective can be gained. The "center" speaks to the subpersonalities involved, helping them to understand the dynamics of what is happening, and suggesting ways in which they can cooperate better and meet their needs more effectively. It is important to make sure that the subpersonalities are given a chance to express all their fears and resistance so that the center can respond to these and help them understand that the proposed changes will really be in their own best interest. Of course, the "center" position taken by the client is only an approximation to the true center position. This is not an appropriate technique to use if the client is unable, because of a strong tendency to self-condemnation or other distortions, to perceive and speak in a fairly centered way when attempting to take this position.

### **Body approaches**

There are a variety of techniques sometimes employed by psychosynthesis practitioners which involve the body. These include techniques based on relaxation and sensory concentration such as the Vittoz method (Vittoz, 1967) and autogenic training (Schultz and Luthe, 1959). Such methods may provide useful preparation, when the client is tense or scattered, for sessions using guided imagery or other techniques which require the ability to let go of conscious control while maintaining a clear focus.

A certain form of body movement therapy is sometimes used by the writer, which is very similar in its methodology to the guided imagery technique, except that the vehicle of expression is body movement rather than visual and auditory imagery. This method is particularly useful with clients who tend to intellectualize or with people who have difficulty in visualizing, for whom methods based on visual imagery are inappropriate. In this method, the client is asked to stand up and to be in touch with his or her body. The instructions are then to allow the body to move in any way that it is spontaneously inclined to do, making any sounds that come and reporting the feelings that accompany these movements. We seek to obtain what dance! movement therapists call authentic movement which is not consciously controlled and which comes from deep psychodynamic and archetypal levels. The method leads rapidly to very profound states, which may be either regressive or transpersonal.

### **Other techniques**

It is impossible in a paper of this length to describe or even to list all of the techniques employed in psychosynthesis. There are a great many of these, some of which are described in the references listed at the end of this paper. New methods and techniques are constantly being developed as the spirit underlying psychosynthesis finds new forms through which to express.

### **The spirit behind the method**

It is important to remember that what is far more important than the particular techniques employed is the spirit underlying their use. It would be possible, in fact, to eliminate all the techniques presently used and still to have psychosynthesis. For psychosynthesis is essentially a way of looking at human nature and human relationships; it cannot be identified with any technique or set of techniques. The quality of the helping relationship, based on unconditional love for and close attunement to the client, is the indispensable context without which techniques are mere mechanical gimmicks which will lack true healing power. The level of the guide's personal integration is a crucial element which determines the amount of clarity and love he/she is able to bring to the traveler on the Path.

The psychosynthesist will seek to have that "bifocal vision" which enables one to see the client simultaneously as a personality and as a higher Self. We need to be aware of the problems and weaknesses that exist at the personality level as well as to sense the person's strengths, both actual and potential. If we can remember that a creative life force and transpersonal qualities are seeking to manifest through the personality, however distorted it may be, we will tend to evoke the client's highest potentials and enable him or her to contact the hidden sources of wisdom, strength, and direction which lie within. The guide who believes, and who can help the

client to discover, that the truth lies within is giving the greatest of all gifts to that person. For many of us have been so conditioned from our earliest years to believe that the answers lie outside us, that somebody else (whether it be parents, teachers, or a therapist) knows what is best, that this attitude must be unlearned before we can travel the inner path. The radical respect for the client which is cultivated in psychosynthesis is an important factor in enabling the person to find self-acceptance, to seek meaning from within, and to take responsibility for his or her own life.

Above all and regardless of what techniques may be employed, the psychosynthetic approach will view the person as a totality. A particular intervention may take place at the level of the body or the feelings or the mind, but the eventual goal will be to integrate all of these dimensions and to include them in a transpersonal perspective. Psychosynthesis seeks to support and to actively nurture the evolutionary process which it sees as moving from fragmentation and separateness toward wholeness, inclusiveness, and unification.

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"And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.  
And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand."  
—Mark 3: 24, 25

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