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# A Transpersonal Orientation: Psychosynthesis in the Counselor's Office

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Defining *transpersonal* as simply that which goes beyond the individual or personal, it could be hypothesized that all counselors are, at least in part, transpersonal in their orientation. By and large Americans, in any profession, believe in God and in various other religious and spiritual perspectives (Harper, 2005). Given that this is the case, the transpersonal (or spiritual) dimension, is, almost inevitably, part of a counselor's possible arena of concern. While it is important for counselors to orient themselves specifically towards areas of interest and expertise, it is also clear that broad knowledge and comfort in the widest possible area will serve both the counselor and client. It is therefore important that all counselors have a working knowledge of the transpersonal orientation in counseling and psychotherapy, simply to keep pace with their client's concerns.

It seems clear from the research, that counselors do, in fact, share an interest in and concern for the transpersonal dimension in their clinical work (Winston, 1990; Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002). What is also likely to be true, is that counselors are not trained to work in that dimension nearly as thoroughly as they are trained, for instance, to work in family of origin issues. It is not surprising, at least historically, to find counselors dealing with spiritual or transpersonal issues with their clients, but not talking about that aspect of their work in supervision. And more often than not, there is little if any academic training in the transpersonal orientation in counseling and psychology (Shafranske & Malone, 1990). Boorstein (1996) noted, looking at the history of the field, "that many therapists in this country were practicing transpersonal therapy, but that most of them were hidden from public and professional awareness—as was the field of transpersonal psychology itself" (p.1).

In this country, the movement to rectify this and bring transpersonal psychology into the mainstream and into research and training, started officially in 1969, with the advent of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and the first definition thereof. Sutich, editor for that first journal, defined transpersonal psychology as follows:

Transpersonal Psychology is the title given to an emerging force in the psychology field by a group of psychologists and professional men and women from other fields who are interested in those *ultimate* human

capacities that have no systematic place in positivistic or behavioristic theory ("first force"), classical psychoanalytic theory ("second force"), or humanistic psychology ("third force"). The emerging Transpersonal psychology ("fourth force") is concerned specifically with the *empirical*, scientific study of, and responsible implementation of the findings relevant to becoming, individual and species-wide meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, B-values, ecstasy, mystical experience, awe, being, self-actualization, essence, bliss, wonder, ultimate meaning, transcendence of self, spirit, oneness, cosmic awareness, individual and species-wide synergy, maximal interpersonal encounter, sacralization of everyday life, transcendental phenomena, cosmic self-humor and playfulness, maximal sensory awareness, responsiveness and expression, and related concepts, experiences and activities. (p.16)

In that same issue was an article, *Symbols of Transpersonal Experience*, by Roberto Assagioli, founder of the psychological theory and methodology of psychosynthesis (1969). Assagioli's own work towards the creation of a transpersonal psychology began much earlier. He had coined the term *psychosynthesis* as early as 1911 (Hardy, 1987) and by the advent of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* he had published, in his language of origin, Italian, hundreds of articles and in English, the book *Psychosynthesis* (1965) had been published, to be followed in a few short years by *Act of Will* (1973). And even earlier, in 1907, he had written an essay "where his lifelong habit of approaching theory through both Western and Eastern psychological wisdom is introduced" (Sliker, p.12).

100 years later, psychosynthesis continues to present in the world of psychology as one of the most comprehensive transpersonal theories. And the field of psychology itself has validated the importance of this area of concern, most notably by the inclusion in the 1994 *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* of the category (v code) of Religious or Spiritual Problem (American Psychiatric Association). Not surprisingly, one of the authors of this code, Robert Turner, MD, is himself a trained psychosynthesis practitioner (Lukoff, Lu, & Turner, 1996).

In this chapter, some of the core principles of psychosynthesis will be discussed with a particular emphasis on the theories, principles and techniques that have immediate and accessible value for the clinician. It is hoped that the implicit, perhaps shadowed way in which many practitioners are in fact transpersonally oriented, can be welcomed into the explicit and knowable dimensions of therapeutic practice. This chapter invites a consideration of theory, language, and practice that brings the transpersonal into the therapist's office, in service of the well-being of both client and therapist.

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## *Transpersonal Psychology and the Counselor*

To set the stage for the content of this article, it is important to consider not only what transpersonal psychology is, but also what a transpersonal psychologist, or psychotherapist or counselor is. Though very interesting, it is beyond the scope of this paper to look also at the history and contributing factors that have led to this point in time in the field of transpersonal psychology, with roots stemming from Western psychology, Eastern and Western contemplative traditions, shamanism, and the American cultural experience of the 1960s, among other threads.

Beyond the very broad stroke definition offered by a fledgling journal in the 1960's, there are well matured, professionally tried and tested descriptions and pointers towards the field of transpersonal psychotherapy that orient the practitioner in a current and relevant way. Vaughan noted that transpersonal psychology is "an open-ended endeavor to facilitate human growth and expand awareness beyond limits implied by most traditional Western models of mental health" (1980, p. 182). More recently Walsh and Vaughan make clear that transpersonal psychology is not simply concerned with transpersonal experience. Personal experience is viewed through the lens of a larger (transpersonal) model (1993). Transpersonal psychology becomes then, a holistic perspective, focusing on the whole spectrum of human experience, with an eye towards holding a wider view, one that sees spiritual issues with equal relevance to personality and family of origin issues.

A useful construct for considering the question of what constitutes transpersonal counseling comes from Vaughan, who proposes that a transpersonal therapist is one who holds a transpersonal orientation, works with a client's transpersonal issues *or* uses transpersonal techniques: what she calls, context, content and process (1980). A counselor may: have a worldview that is transpersonal (even a personal, spiritual belief system); work with transpersonal presenting issues (a client presenting with loss of faith, for example); or use transpersonally oriented techniques (meditation, for instance) and, in this definition, by the fact of including any one of these elements, a counselor might consider him or herself to be a transpersonal counselor, or at least, to include the transpersonal dimension in the clinical work they do. Again, it is noted that almost any professional in the mental health field will find him or herself including, at the content, context or process level some aspect of transpersonal psychology. Or more accurately stated, some aspect of the transpersonal dimension in human beings: themselves or their clients.

The inquiry into what it takes to be a transpersonal counselor, then, starts with that wide assumption and is further considered by Walsh and Vaughan, who note, as early as 1993, the need for clinical training guidelines, but offer, as a working start, the idea that those working in the field, allying

themselves with a transpersonal perspective would have “conventional training and accreditation, transpersonal training, experiential work in psychotherapy and a transpersonal discipline, and ethical standards” (p.154).

Suffice it to say, more and more practitioners come to the office with many of those requirements met. Transpersonal training, still these many years later, is likely to be the missing ingredient in the counselor’s toolbox. In service of changing that, this chapter offers a brief introductory training in the principles and practice of psychosynthesis.

### ***Psychosynthesis, a Transpersonal Psychology***

Psychosynthesis was at the forefront of the transpersonal psychology movement, not only by its early theoretical orientation in that direction, but even more importantly by the creation of a methodology by which a transpersonal orientation could be put into place. Battista (1996) in his article, *Abraham Maslow and Roberto Assagioli: Pioneers of Transpersonal Psychology*, states Assagioli’s prominent role quite simply:

Whereas Maslow explored fundamental issues in transpersonal psychology, Roberto Assagioli pioneered the practical application of these concepts in psychotherapy. Assagioli proposed a transpersonal view of personality and discussed psychotherapy in terms of the synthesis of personality at both the personal and spiritual levels. He dealt with the issue of spiritual crises and introduced many active therapeutic techniques for the development of a transcendent center of personality. (1996, p. 52)

Psychosynthesis concerns itself with the arena of the transpersonal, first and foremost, through an ongoing consideration of meaning, purpose and values in the individual’s life. This defining characteristic of the practice of psychosynthesis points to the whole spectrum of psychotherapeutic inquiry, since the accessing and manifesting of purpose, meaning and values is as likely to take the client back to family of origin issues as it is to take them into transpersonal content areas. Psychosynthesis expects the practitioner to work within this whole spectrum. In the book *Psychosynthesis*, Assagioli states: “The starting point of treatment is the ascertainment of *the unique existential situation of each patient*, of the *problems* which it presents and of the ways for their solution. This includes naturally a psychoanalytic phase” (2000, p. 5).

In a general way, then, psychosynthesis assumes as a starting point a “psychoanalytic” phase. Assagioli refers to this first stage as a period of gaining knowledge of one’s personality. In his descriptive way, he notes “We have first to penetrate courageously into the pit of our lower unconscious in order to

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discover the ‘phantasms,’ the ancestral or childish images that possess or silently dominate us, the fears that paralyze us, the conflicts that waste our energy” (p.19). But he goes further, even in his conception of the so-called psychoanalytic phase, and sets the stage for an orientation that is inclusive of all human experience.

Psychoanalysis generally stops here but this limitation is not justified. The regions of the middle and higher unconscious should likewise be explored. In that way we shall discover in ourselves hitherto unknown abilities, our true vocations and our higher potentialities which seek to express themselves but which we often repel and repress through lack of understanding, prejudice or fear. We shall also discover the immense reserve of undifferentiated psychic energy latent in every one of us; that is, the plastic part of our unconscious which lies at our disposal, empowering us with an unlimited capacity to learn and to create. (Assagioli, 2000, p. 19).

Interestingly, this orientation resonates with resiliency theories and the positive psychology movement that are presenting themselves on the psychological scene within the last decade. “The aim of Positive Psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities.” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.2)

In looking at the template of movement in the counseling relationship, psychosynthesis has articulated the stages of work that client and counselor may move through. The stages are not considered to be a simple, linear, ladder-like progression, but a synthetic movement between stages and through all stages, in a multi-layered experience of self-inquiry. The second stage is considered the period of gaining control over these same elements that the client has come to discover in the first stage. The concept of control, in this context, has a very specific meaning, which shall be considered shortly, and it is not the popular meaning generally assigned to that term.

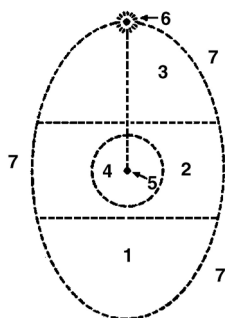
Where psychosynthesis begins to show its transpersonal colors is in the ‘last’ stage of work. Firman and Gila (2002) note that these stages “describe how we may then become conscious of, and respond to, the deeper motivations and meanings in our lives, the source of which is termed the *Self*” (p.45). Assagioli (2000) referred to these stages as “Realization of One’s True Self” and “psychosynthesis” (pp.21-23).

It is the consideration of *Self*; an emphasis on meaning; and the ultimate goal of synthesis of the psyche that anchors psychosynthesis deeply

into the tradition of transpersonal psychology. Purpose, meaning and values are touchstone concepts in psychosynthesis, pointing to the ever-present transpersonal orientation. For even if the work being done in the office is psychoanalytic in nature, as Assagioli mentions, that work is predicated upon and guided by an intention to understand the client's purpose, what has meaning for the client and what the client values. This will inevitably define therapeutic work as transpersonal, even when focused on classic trauma or family of origin issues.

### *Map of the Psyche*

Psychosynthesis posits a division of the psyche into its component levels of unconsciousness. These are the lower unconscious, middle unconscious and higher unconscious or superconscious. Similar to Wilber's prepersonal, personal and transpersonal, (1982, 1983) these states point to the wide experience of humanness from family of origin wounding (and subsequent splitting, repression, denial or dysfunctional development), to the life of the personality, (both conscious and unconscious) in present time, with real-life concerns (house, car, job as Wilber describes it) to the arena of meaning, purpose and values, spirituality and the realm of the transpersonal dimension. Viewed differently than Wilber's original model though, this map is not a developmental map, but a personality theory, a view of psyche, as it is, split into levels of unconsciousness, which are, inevitably and noted by the dotted lines, available to become conscious.



1. lower unconscious
2. middle unconscious
3. higher unconscious or superconscious
4. field of awareness
5. I or self (small "s")
6. higher Self or Self ("capital "S")
7. collective unconscious (Assagioli, 2000, p.15)

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Every client entering a therapy office will potentially need to work at all levels. And healing, transforming, “fixing” any one will, of course, have impact on all the others. Key here is the counselor’s ability to see with wide vision, what is called *bifocal vision* in psychosynthesis (Whitmore, 2004). Bifocal vision invites the practitioner to see the client through the lens of that client’s presenting issues, diagnoses or problems, while at the same time seeing that person as a soul in search of realization. As such, each client brings to the therapy encounter all the qualities of their essential, unwounded nature; all the unique aspects of their being; and all the transpersonal qualities and potential named in that first definition of transpersonal psychology so many years ago. The requirement to hold bifocal vision involves the counselor in a willingness to see beyond diagnoses, beyond difficult or dysfunctional behavior patterns and even beyond the client’s own sense of identification, in whatever way they identify themselves that limits them. At the same time, the practitioner will need to understand diagnoses and be able to treat dysfunctional behaviors. In other words, the counselor is asked to consider the client in all aspects of the above *map of the psyche* diagram.

Some of the simplifications in both the “new age” and the “old way” have been a disservice to the field of transpersonal psychology. Among these include the tendency, in some forms of “healing,” to assume that all healing takes place at the transpersonal level, that spirit (or God) cures all, and that, as one bumper sticker puts it, *It’s never too late to have a happy childhood*. The opposite distortion, sometimes seen in traditional therapies, is that everything that ails the client is prepersonal in origin. Wilber elaborates this insidious dilemma in much of his writing, referring to it as the pre-trans fallacy.

The essence of the pre/trans fallacy is easy enough to state. We begin by simply *assuming* that human beings do in fact have access to three general realms of being and knowing: the sensory, the mental, and the spiritual. These three realms can be stated in any number of different ways: subconscious, self-conscious and super-conscious, or prerational, rational, and transrational, or prepersonal, personal and transpersonal. The point is simply that, for example, since *prerational* and *transrational* are both, in their own ways *nonrational*, then they appear quite similar or even identical to the untutored eye. Once this confusion occurs the confusion of “pre” and “trans” then one of two things inevitably happens: the transrational realms are *reduced* to prepersonal status, or the prerational realms are *elevated* to transrational glory. Either way a complete and overall world view is broken in half and folded in the middle, with one half of the real world (the “pre” or the “trans”) being thus profoundly mistreated and misunderstood. (1983, p.202)

Thus, the psychosynthesis counselor is always alert to (and trained in), assessing both prepersonal and transpersonal, as well as personal levels of need. And the stages of psychosynthesis work support that movement through all three aspects of the being, with an understanding that it is only in the expansion of consciousness to include all, that healing and evolution are possible.

The completed description of the map of the psyche, points to the remainder of the key psychosynthesis concepts. The *I* or self (small “s”) is defined as a center of pure awareness and will, independent of any content of consciousness. And it is this *I* that is, most certainly, the key to all work in psychosynthesis, for *I* is the resting place of one’s experience. It is the “who” that each person is, beyond the content of an individual life. The Self (capital “S”) is the same *I*, anchored at the border of the transpersonal and the universal. Self has been said to be distinct, but not separate from *I*. (Firman and Gila; 2002) More recent versions of this map often remove the “higher” Self, attributing the transpersonal aspects of the Self to the very ground of being. (Brown, 2004; Firman & Gila; 2002) These concepts will be visited in more depth shortly.

The outer dotted line indicates the collective unconscious, a significant nod to Jung’s seminal work in that field (1938, 1968, 1971) and an indication in Assagioli’s understanding, that the individual is not only connected transpersonally to the larger universe, but collectively and archetypally, as well. Both Jung and Assagioli (1967) envision this realm as the large and all encompassing unconscious from which stems much of human creativity, experience and connection. It is in Jungian work that this element is most profoundly explored and used as a therapeutic construct.

### ***Identification and Disidentification***

As the practitioner conceives of clients as more than their diagnoses or presenting issues and views them through the lens of purpose; meaning; and values, techniques and strategies must support that orientation. One of the key therapeutic principles and active techniques in psychosynthesis is the principle of *disidentification*. Literally the principle is a practice of identification, disidentification and Self-identification. Assagioli (2000) says, “We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we disidentify ourselves” (p.19).

For the modern reader, it is important, parenthetically, to remember that Assagioli was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and wrote as a psychiatrist in Italian or in English as a second language. His sometimes-archaic language easily translates beyond the time and place of his historical location to the real work in the field today. The concept of control and domination actually point to the experience of contentlessness and disidentification (or non-attachment) and not to the experience of *power over*. A thousand year-old Buddhist counter-part

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to that same principle, stated more poetically is, “The great way is not difficult for those with no preferences” (Sengtsan).

In the reality of people’s lives, the way identifications are known can be enduring or transient. The most difficult identifications are scripted messages from childhood that stick through thick and thin as the way people knows themselves. These nearly intractable self-concepts can define a lifetime, eliminating possibilities that inherently exist in that person, by the sheer weight of the experience of *this is who I am*. Identification asks clients to fully know how they experience themselves: in body, feelings, mind, self-concepts, beliefs and the like. And by so knowing—consciously—the boundaries of that experience, whatever it may be, an almost inevitable movement towards disidentification becomes apparent. For *who* is it that knows this identification?

It is the assumption of psychosynthesis that everyone lives largely from within their identifications, some healthy others not. A child needs to experience life as a child. A child forced into thinking and feeling like an adult is pushed into an inappropriate identification, what is referred to in the field as a *parentified child*. On the other hand, an adult, knowing him or herself as a parent after the birth of a child, is in an appropriate identification. Every identification has its use and its limits. The so-called *empty-nest syndrome* points to an identification held for too long. The field abounds with catch phrases to describe the various identifications that don’t work: the ways people know and experience themselves that limit them. These very limiting identifications are often the motivation for counseling.

The weight of early identifications, based on the experiences of a child, are the hardest to step beyond. But when a client has the experience of knowing, *I have that wounded child and I am more than that child* or any variation of identification and the subsequent disidentification that follows, that person moves one step closer to Self-identification and becomes, incrementally more connected to the experience of being *I*. The client, in this moment of disidentification, is *more*.

The *I am more* is a key theoretical underpinning of psychosynthesis. It points to the assumption of I and Self. The core principles of psychosynthesis that define it as a transpersonal psychology include this assumption of a center of consciousness (and will) that is contentless. This essential concept implies a potential way of self-knowing that is not simply, or perhaps at all, defined by personal history. The principle of identification (disidentification and Self-identification) aims towards that end point. The exercise, practice or ongoing assumption looks something like this: *I have content, personal history, trauma, strengths, weaknesses, personality inclinations. I have this body, this age, this sex. And I am more than that*. Or as this principle was first articulated by Assagioli, *I have these things but I am NOT these things* (2000).

*Not this, not that!* the Zen Master cries to the hapless student, who is clinging to an identity as some thing, any thing, any one. Eastern religions frequently point to concepts of the *Not* that we are, by way of directing identification away from the passing contents of consciousness to the one (I/Self) who is conscious. St. Francis (pointing to similar truths in the essential or esoteric underpinnings of many Western religions) said, "That which we are looking for, is that which is looking."

The implications for this orientation are profound both philosophically and psychologically. To know oneself beyond content, is to transcend or experience oneself outside of the story of one's life. Disidentification (*I am not this*) steps one back from content and story. Self-identification points to the experience of being the one who is aware (and the one who chooses).

Classic meditation practices, especially those using mindfulness-based techniques (Goleman, 1977; Hayward, 1987) lead to this same point of reference. But in psychotherapy, the potential of this experience is that the client, having accessed the experience of being the one who is aware, has immediately (and especially with support) the possibility of being identified as well as the one who chooses. The experience of I or Self is the identification with contentless awareness and will. It is both transcendent: more than, above and beyond content and story; and immanent: embedded in the exact here and now (Firman & Gila, 2002). Any limiting identification morphs into a self-knowledge that is often described as more spacious, infinite, centered, etc. *I* sees a larger world and has more choice.

The concept of I seen, for the moment, as a center point of psychosynthesis theory lends itself immediately to the other major theoretical aspects of psychosynthesis, as well as to the methodology, strategies and techniques in service of these theoretical underpinnings.

## ***Subpersonality Theory***

Psychological theories abound for why adult human beings experience themselves in a split fashion. In stead of not this/not that, the inner world of adults (in Western culture, to be sure) is of *this and that* and the other thing. And this consciousness moves ever so easily into polarities that impact both internally and externally. Good and bad, light and dark, this and that, and most poignantly and dangerously, *us and them*, leave the client with numerous identifications which are termed *subpersonalities* in psychosynthesis.

Subpersonalities, a concept quite commonly known in the field at this time, is most colloquially noted in language like *inner child*, *victim*, *critic*. Rowan, in his book, *Subpersonalities* mentions the role of psychosynthesis, noting that "one of the first people to have started really making use of subpersonalities for therapy and personal growth was Roberto Assagioli" (1990, p.72). That

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this concept is now so recognizable is a testimony to its relevance for not only therapeutic work, but also for general self-knowledge. This author, teaching psychosynthesis in the 1970s and 80s found little or no name recognition of this concept outside of the field of psychosynthesis. Now, as with many useful constructs, it is embedded in the field (Cortright, 2006).

Subpersonalities, in psychosynthesis theory, have been defined as “structured constellations or agglomerates of attitudes, drives, habit patterns” (Crampton, p.712) and “learned responses to our legitimate needs: survival needs, needs for love and acceptance, and needs for self-actualization and transcendence” (Brown, p.41). They are, most simply stated, the *parts* of every individual, that may or may not be in service of the whole. They are the parts that often take over, leaving the owner of these parts at their mercy. Identification, as noted earlier, is the process of recognizing the subpersonalities as the limited ways one knows oneself. Recognition of a subpersonality, (*Oh, there’s that wounded part of me!*) immediately accesses the knower as outside of the content or story line of the subpersonality. Key to the principle of this work is an assumption that the client must *identify* first, in order to be able to *disidentify* and move towards *Self-identification*. Thus a return to the core concept of disidentification: that which we are unconscious of controls us and that which we know to be ours (identify with) can be controlled.

Work with subpersonalities is often a key element in psychosynthesis counseling, because it is always an invitation to expansion of consciousness. Allowing for the extreme complexity of much counseling work and making it clear that subpersonalities are not to be mistaken for any of the dissociative disorders, the process can be immediately relevant to the counselor and accessible as a technique. Recognition of a subpersonality, allows for the possibility of acceptance of that part. Rather than the typical strategy of rejecting un-liked parts, leading to denial, projection, and more, this recognition and disidentification into *I*, creates an opening for acceptance. From that moment, the possibility of integrating that subpersonality—in a healthy way—exists. *There’s that wounded part of me, moves to How can I heal and integrate that part into my life?* A simple stage process is noted in psychosynthesis: recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration and synthesis (Vargiu,1975). The last three stages mark the movement from negotiating the needs, actions and healing of various subpersonalities, through the more seamless stage of having access to, but not being controlled by various subpersonalities, to the ideal end point as a unified, non-dualistic human being. Note that this process points, *like a finger pointing to the moon*, as the saying goes, simply, but profoundly towards the movement that anchors a client into self-knowledge and choice. And that identification with *I* is larger and more inclusive than any identification with the subpersonality, feeling or role that has become a limitation.

## *The I and Self*

The *I* that each person is can be the internal unifying center that guides a lifetime, in the face of trauma and wounding, cultural and familial norms and the inner chaos that is so often brought into the counselor's office. Reflecting back to the concept of *I*, the key, defining characteristic is that it is contentless. As *I*, one has access to all content, but knows itself otherwise. When Assagioli was interviewed by an American interviewer, she asked him how old he was. His answer, "My body has 85 years" (Besmer, 1974). Thinking his English was limited and thus the odd answer, the interviewer was surprised to find that in fact his English was perfect and that Assagioli's lived experience was of a self that is not a body, an age, a race, a religion, a sex or a story-line. *I have a body and I am not my body.* (Likewise, thoughts and feelings, as well as identification with subpersonalities, roles, nationality, and more.)

Eascott, an early chronicler of Psychosynthesis, in her explanation of what she calls the Odyssean Journey (also known as life), describes the *I* as follows:

The conscious self is our stepping-stone. From it we stand listening, peering into the darkness, trying to see beyond the area around us where a half-light shows. Where have we come from? Where are we going? Who are we anyway? Our unknown journey rings with expectancy, for who can say what lies in the darkness—or is it the light? —beyond our present sphere of knowing, or what stretches between us and the thousand billion stars of the Universe? (1980, p.23)

*I*, then, is the center of awareness and will. It is the *I am*, that is both transcendent and immanent. Awareness and will, like the in-breath and out-breath, are the very lifeblood of this work. One without the other is a half-hearted attempt to be whole and in the history of counseling, it is easy enough to note how often a certain psychological theory biases towards one or the other. In claiming and living in the experience of *I*, awareness is wide and choice is available.

What then is the *Self* (or Higher self)? Assagioli made it clear that there is only an apparent duality between the *I* and *Self* (2000, p.17) and yet experientially, the traveler on the journey of life, lives within the personal realm of existence for most of their lives and is called by the *Self*, as that still, small, inner voice that often does not feel like it is from oneself, but has the strong and compelling pull of inner authority. *Self* has been called: "pure essential beingness" (Whitmore, 1986, p.22); "our true essence beyond all masks and conditionings" (Ferrucci, 1982, p.45); "a permanent centre" (Kowalski, 1993,

p.110): “a source of wisdom and guidance.” (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 38).

The capital S Self has been referred to as Self looking through the lens of the transpersonal or spiritual dimension while the small s self or *I* looks out at the world through the lens of the personal. Both are *I am*: one at the kitchen sink, one on the mountaintop. A metaphoric description that has often been used is that *I* is the conductor of the orchestra, *Self* the composer of the piece, and of course, the orchestra is the many parts, playing a powerful and unique piece of music, in harmony, under direction of *I*, in service of the inspiration of Self. This, of course, is on a good day. The orchestra may sound like a group of contentious, angry, confused adolescents given loud musical instruments, while *I* naps and Self moans. And so the need for counseling arises. And an assumed goal of psychosynthesis counseling is the process of Self-realization.

Self-realization does not imply the concept of enlightenment, the experience of transcendence of earthly concerns into a more ethereal or universal reality. It simply implies the ongoing experience of being responsive to the call of Self towards the evolutionary movement though a lifetime. This movement will take the traveler through dark and light, through the practicalities of life and the miracles of life, through immanence and transcendence. And, in service of Assagioli’s dedication to creating a practical and transpersonal psychology, psychosynthesis does not answer the BIG questions. A note from Assagioli (2000) helps to define the large arena of psychosynthesis practice *and* its limitations. “Psychosynthesis does not aim nor attempt to give a metaphysical or a theological explanation of the great Mystery—it leads to the door, but stops there” (p.5). The gift of not having a theory about the great mystery is that, of course, any definition would be limited and might or might not fit for any individual experiencing themselves as *I*, hearing their own call of Self. And, as the call of Self is heard, the need arises for exploration and vitalizing of the second function of *I*: the will.

## *The Will*

Psychosynthesis brought the concept of will to the front line, particularly with Assagioli’s book *The Act of Will* (1973). The field had, until that time, relied heavily on the awareness side of the coin or the more external aspect of the will, behavior. Awareness and will go hand in hand in psychosynthesis and thus the orchestra is brought into harmony. With the initial stages of counseling; gaining a thorough knowledge of the personality, the work of being a *willer* is birthed. *I have this part and I am more than this part*, immediately invites the reality of choice. The concept of will; the stages of will (purpose, deliberation, choice, affirmation, plan, action); the elements of will (strength, skill and goodness); the stages of knowing Self as will, (will exists, I have will, I am will) and the many other aspects of the theory (Assagioli,

1973) of will are too elaborate for the purposes of this chapter. However, it is important to note that, theory abounding, will is an easy concept to get and an easy one to bring to life in the office. In-breath and out-breath, awareness and will are all part of this. When a client (or the counselor for that matter) has an awareness, an *ah ha*, or even a curiosity born of awareness, that awareness needs to move into action, whether that is a simple question asked by a counselor—an intervention based on the counselor's awareness—or a life plan of change, internal and behavioral, put in place by the client, based on hard won awareness in counseling. Psychosynthesis has a strong bias against relying simply on awareness as a means to change.

The work of building the experience of will, work that spotlights the reality of on-going choice points, is some of the most powerful and immediately accessible work that can be accomplished. As a client comes to know the pulls in his/her inner world; the subpersonalities that have drives of their own; the feelings that come from a younger place; the impulses manifest by the conditioning of past experience, the anchor into *I* is also an anchor into choice. The counselor's job, stated simply, is to help stretch that moment when choice is available. It is the *count to ten* of psychosynthesis. Pulled towards a subpersonality reaction, a client who has just a moment's glimpse (awareness) of that experience as it prepares to take over, has the possibility of stopping the sequence. Conductor redirects the tuba player, to give voice to the flute. This simple concept of choice point is an important element in the conversational and practical domain of the client and counselor. It is not enough to be aware. It is not enough, even, to know why (historically, causally). It is enough to have choice and to continue to fine tune oneself as a willer until the life lived is one that is resonant with the deepest purpose, meaning and values of the client, in that individual's most centered, internally unified Self. Working with the client, as willer, is working to free the client from being simply the outcome of personal history and into being the author of the future.

That said, it would be naïve to assume that this is an easy task. And each counselor working towards this lofty goal with their clients will need to know the personal history of that client and how it has conditioned and limited them. The aware and conscientious counselor will also know the real, external, historical and present limitations that each client faces. These may be biological, circumstantial, or commonplace. They may be economic, social, cultural and political. They may be limiting in minor and inconvenient ways. They may be life threatening. Naiveté is not the invitation in this work. The invitation is to help each person who enters the field of the counselor's influence to be as fully human and realized as they can be, as fully aware and as fully willing as they can be.

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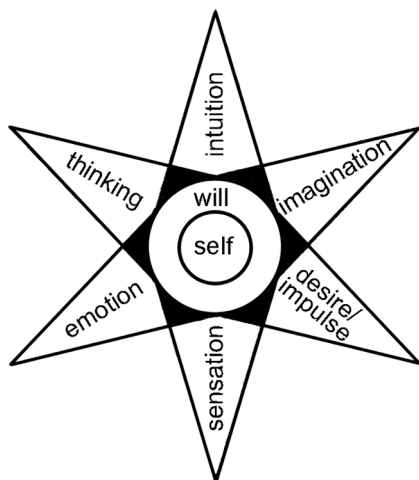
## *The Qualitative Reality*

The 40 year-old client who wants to be 20 again, can NOT be 20, no matter how good the counselor is, nor how well the client lives in relationship to Self. Nor can the client of color live in a world free of racism. Being a willer, knowing oneself as *I*, does not change any of the cold, hard facts that define each individual's life. However, two powerful and life changing outcomes are available from this movement towards Self. The first is a profound increase in the experience of acceptance and compassion towards oneself and towards the world. The second is an increased ability to access the qualities needed for fullness and richness and then to live in relationship to those qualities (sometimes referred to as transpersonal qualities).

In a spiritual orientation, finding the deep, abiding peace that comes from acceptance of what is, is an implicit goal. That same client may, however, discover the call to new aspects of themselves that are somehow represented in the image of being 20. Playfulness, care-freeness, joy, creativity, release from the burden of being over-responsible, delight in the present: these may, in fact, be the call of the Self to express itself. The client's passing wish to be 20 is the Self's call to be whole. The soul in search of realization is not betrayed by the physical facts of reality, but only opened to the possibility of ever expanding qualities of being and expression.

I and Self are contentless, but not empty or flat. Self is the composer of this song of life. And I has access to the transpersonal qualities that exist and that move through each unique individual, as the breath of life. Working with clients to help them identify and live through intrinsically experienced qualities is another key element of psychosynthesis work. In a positive orientation such as this, the obstacles, pain and suffering are seen side by side with the gifts, qualities and essential nature of the client. Each has a life's story *and* the meaning that can be made in a given life. Every life is being carved by trauma and wounding; the circumstances of life; and the flow of qualities. This is a vision of wholeness, not broken-ness. From this wholeness comes the gift of meaning and purpose.

And *I* moves, by nature of the functions of awareness and will, through a variety of ways of internalizing the world and expressing itself back into the world. In psychosynthesis, these *ways of knowing* are referred to as psychological functions.



### *Psychological Functions*

Each person accesses knowing and takes action through a variety of functions. Intuition, imagination, thinking, feeling, sensation, and impulse/desire are the functions that Assagioli (1973) elaborated as ways of knowing and ways of expressing. What this map speaks to is nothing new, but something profoundly important in the counselor's office. Each person is unique. For one, access to Self will be found in the clear path of thinking, for another through sensation, another through feeling. Likewise each client comes with wounding and distortion in one or another (or many) of their psychological functions. One of the tasks in psychosynthesis counseling is to know (and help the client know) the functions they have that serve them well: their strengths, if you will. At the same time, healing the wounds that have accrued over a lifetime may specifically involve healing a psychological function that has been denied or distorted or made grandiose.

Common therapeutic knowledge points us to many of these distortions: cognitive dissonance, emotions gone awry, impulse disorders, to name a few. The invitation in psychosynthesis is to see beyond the distortions and into the value that is available through each and every one of these functions. Many of the psychological functions are center-points in all counseling. And various therapeutic orientations work primarily with one or a few of the functions. Thinking and feeling are, of course, the mainstream of the field of psychology, but several of these functions add a dimension to the therapeutic consideration that is not typical. Little in the field speaks to impulse in a positive light. It is noticed when it goes wrong, yet impulse and desire may be the very experiences that move a person towards a deeper way of knowing. And scant attention is paid to the "mysterious" function of intuition. Yet both the client and counselor access ways of knowing that are not explained sufficiently by any other psychological function.

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A child, who has natural and easy access to the imaginative function and finds himself discounted or worse for those tendencies in himself, will be cut off from one of his clearest paths to Self- realization. The child who is a thinker, may well find herself tracked, in profound and all consuming ways, away from those natural tendencies in herself, also cutting her off from her most basic way of knowing herself. These generalizations are all too familiar in our culture at this time and are only the tip of the iceberg of the experience that children have of being not seen and valued for their natural tendencies. In being *un-mirrored* as they express Self, children, by the very necessity of survival, cut themselves off from Self and build the defensive structure of subpersonalities that manage the world in which their natural knowing is shut down. These subpersonalities, this splitting of inner knowing from safety in the world, create those same intractable identifications that bring clients into therapy. This defended stance, by which most people know themselves, has been called the survival personality (Firman & Gila, 1997, 2002).

Sadly, the survival personality is essentially not readily available for the quest for meaning, purpose and values. Maslow's hierarchy of needs reminds us that purpose, meaning and values are several steps away from the survival needs that first define human development (Maslow, 1970). The work of psychosynthesis invites the possibility of moving beyond those defenses that create a survival-based personality and into the richness of a life fully led. Disidentifying from limiting subpersonalities; anchoring into the experience of I, responding to the call of Self, living with both awareness and will; accessing transpersonal qualities; and living through all psychological functions creates the realization that one is on a path. This path, for each person is the path of meaning, purpose and values.

## **Path**

Carving out a path or way in life is done through the exquisite balance of awareness and will, the work of Self-identification, the willingness to know oneself, in darkness and light, and the continual orientation towards the unique purpose, meaning and values that define an individual more deeply and fully than history and circumstances (Assagioli, 1991).

To know oneself, on a path, is to experience the meaning of one's life and the uniqueness of one's Self. In being supported in being in I, the client is being supported in finding a sense of path or purpose that can contain all aspects of that person's lived experience. At the same time, as an individual walks through a life of meaning, the experience of uniqueness connects also to an experience of community. For every path is one that shares ground with others. Piero Ferrucci, a student of Assagioli, in his book *Inevitable Grace*, elaborates: "The Ways towards the Self are not only individual undertakings

but also aspects in the evolution of the human species. We may look at our highest capacities as expressions of an evolutionary pathway and as indicators of future development” (1990, p.8).

It doesn't take long to see the famous examples of those who have taken the suffering in their life, along with their own unique gifts (or qualities) and created from these resources a path of meaning. Whether it is a Ghandi or the many unknown individuals, each person has the potential to carve out the path that will define the life they live, the meaning it has and the legacy it leaves. Finding the path of one's life is not finding the right job or mate. It is settling into an attitude and way of being that is resonant with Self. And it is not a job that is finished. Like all aspects of psychosynthesis theory, the assumption is that it takes a lifetime to do a life's work. There is no end point to accessing Self, no end to work with subpersonalities, no final destination. The path is the process and the work to be on one's own path, is the work of psychosynthesis.

### *The Psychosynthesis Counselor*

Psychosynthesis does not set itself outside of the bounds of traditional psychotherapy and counseling. Like any therapeutic orientation, it has not only its own theories, techniques and strategies, but also its own orientation for the counselor. And yet, in the end, the psychosynthesis counselor will be, like any good, caring and present therapist, a guide, in the best sense of the word. Bifocal vision, referred to earlier, points to the major mandate for the counselor in psychosynthesis. The belief in the essential nature of client as Self, requires that same work and realization in the counselor. He or she is not a technician or a theorist. Like the client, a soul in search of realization, the counselor travels the same path. That is, the counselor travels the path that is uniquely his or hers and in so doing, finds that this work of healing, of witnessing, of caring for another in a skilled and impersonal (or transpersonal) way, is a path that is resonant.

When the counselor is on the path of meaning, purpose and values, there is revealed, in that professional role, an underpinning of Self that truly allows for an I-thou relationship. Few would disagree that, in fact, the relationship between counselor and client, beyond theory and technique, can, in itself be healing. This idea, the core mandate for the psychosynthesis counselor, has become so many years later, the common wisdom of the field (Duncan, 1997).

The internal unifying center (I), so buried in most adults, is often replaced by an external unifying center, in the form of another person or another element (Assagioli, 2000). In the worst cases, that external unifying center might be harmful: a cult, even the more benign cult of personality. It might be a limited goal, a lover, an idea. It might be a good friend—or a bad one.

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For children, it should have been (in the best of all worlds) the parents, giving way over time, to the ownership, by an emerging adult, of their own internal unifying center. In therapy, it can be and often is, whether either is aware, the counselor. The role of any good unifying center is to orient the other back towards him or herself. The good-enough parent is the holding environment and external unifying center, organizing the child's world to create safety and permission to flourish, all the while preparing the child to take over that role (Firman & Gila, 2002). The good-enough counselor does the same—not as a parent, but as the empathic other who sees, first and foremost that this other, sitting in the office is a Self in search of realization: bifocal vision. The problems are known, validated and worked with. The I is a given and it is to this I that the psychosynthesis counselor speaks, whenever possible. The alliance that is created, when it can be, is one between the I in the client and the I in the counselor, each in a different role, both moving from authenticity.

It is often the counselor who helps the client first note that the subpersonality that takes temporary ownership of the client's voice is NOT the whole of that person. That counselor sees qualities hidden behind distortions, sees essential Self, hidden behind survival personality, sees meaning, purpose and values in the whole history and current reality of the client. The context that the counselor holds inevitably defines for the practitioner a worldview that assumes the best, carries a faith in human nature and embraces the client as another soul. And in the mandate to speak to the I of the client and not to be pulled into the story of subpersonalities as whole truths, but instead, as stories of wounding, the therapist embeds messages that he or she believes deeply to be true. *I have my wounding and I more than my wounding*, is, for the counselor, an underlying assumption about each person who enters the office. *You have your wounding and you are more than your wounding*, is the message always given. Issues of transference and countertransference, biological bases for mental disorders, deeply rooted pathologies, uniqueness of cultural differences, specific disorders and the general complexities of the field of counseling and the world of the counselor are assumed. Ethical guidelines are mandated. Good training and best practices are the bottom line. Add to this simply the vision that comes from having one's own transpersonal orientation, while inviting and respecting that in the client and there sits the transpersonal counselor.

## **Conclusion**

All practitioners, trained however they may have been trained, may welcome in themselves, if the inclination is there, an opening to the transpersonal dimension, both by their own personal inquiry into the dimensions of purpose, meaning, values and spirituality and by the simple exploration of these same things with their clients.

There are simple yet profound practices and orientations in psychosynthesis to support this process. Disidentification; work with subpersonalities, and the essential end point of that work, accessing the experience of *I*; the realization of the many paths on which each human travels towards their own Self-realization; and the revitalizing of will as a means of manifesting purpose, will be the touchstones for moving towards a transpersonal orientation in the counselor's office.

The work of counseling is often difficult, and even grasping an image of desired outcomes may be hard. A technique common in psychosynthesis is the *Ideal Model*. It simply assumes that imagining, thinking about, acting in relationship to one's ideal, will help build that possibility. "Images...tend to produce the physical conditions and the external acts that correspond to them." (Assagioli, 1973, p. 51) As an ideal model of the desired outcome for all human beings, it is likely that psychosynthesis practitioners the world around would agree with the sentiment of their colleague, Dr. Thomas Yeomans, in his monograph *The embodied soul: Spirituality in the twenty-first century*.

In essence, this experience of the spiritual dimension is one of connection to all Life, a powerful sense of participating in the Universe as oneself, a unique being, and of having a place and part in the whole of the living world. From this core experience flow many attributes, such as, courage, wisdom, power, creativity, perspective, joy, and the ability to live fully one's chosen life with vitality and grace. And this is an experience, not an idea—it is the experience of being fully alive as oneself on earth. This very human experience highlights simultaneously the universality and particularity of our existence and the paradoxical fact of our differences from, and union with, all other life forms. It joins us to all others, while at the same time affirming our unique being. Everyone is capable of this connection, though it may be impeded in any number of ways, and it is the birthright we share as human beings (Yeomans, 2004, pp 4-5).

It is in service of this birthright that psychosynthesis exists as a therapeutic modality.

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