

WHAT IS PSYCHOSYNTHESIS?

by

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This monograph was originally written in response to our students at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, who had for some time expressed a wish for a concisely written introduction to psychosynthesis theory. We therefore produced this brief work, an impossible attempt to present the depth and breadth of psychosynthesis in a few brief pages. Since then, we have been gratified by the response not only from graduate students and professionals in training, but by veteran teachers and practitioners as well.

As in the first edition, we here focus on the fundamental concepts in Roberto Assagioli's original conception of psychosynthesis. Although we have broadened and refined certain sections included in the first edition, the major change here is that we have more fully integrated an important development in the theory: the understanding of Self (or Transpersonal Self) as existing not only in the higher unconscious, but as pervading all the levels of the personality and all stages of life. This theoretical shift supports many important conceptions which, while perhaps held informally by different practitioners through the years, now are provided a coherent theoretical base. Some of these conceptions are:

- 1) The differentiation of higher states of consciousness from an ongoing relationship with deeper Self.
- 2) The view that human growth is not a movement into the superconscious, but the coming together of "higher and lower"—an openness to increasing depths and heights of human experience.
- 3) An emphasis upon the healing and emergence of the core personality as central to both self-actualization and Self-realization.
- 4) The insight that the higher and lower unconscious are not naturally occurring phenomena, but represent sectors of the person which have been split-off and repressed as a reaction to psychological wounding (here psychosynthesis finds a relationship with object relations theory and self psychology).

This elaboration of Assagioli's thought has been a part of our teaching for many years, and while it was outlined in the first edition of this monograph, it is presented here in a much more integrated way. We should point out too that the central point—that Self is not limited to the superconscious but pervades all levels of the person—is not simply our own. This understanding was arrived at independently by psychosynthesis theorist Tom Yeomans (see Brown, 1993). Also, as we gather from our discussions with teachers in Europe, this same development in psychosynthesis thought has been adopted by many there as well. All things considered, this broader conception of Self seems a natural evolution in psychosynthesis theory, responding to the experience of clients, students, and practitioners alike; it also grows directly from seeds Assagioli himself planted in his two seminal works, *Psychosynthesis* and *The Act of Will*.

Beyond this shift in the theory, we attempt to present the fundamental topics of psychosynthesis adhering as much as possible to Assagioli's original conceptions. At the same time, our presentation cannot be separated from our own understanding of Assagioli's work, so we take full responsibility for the ideas herein.

Let us again emphasize that this monograph is but a brief introduction to psychosynthesis theory. We refer readers interested in further exploring psychosynthesis to the teachers and therapists in their area; to the growing body of literature published in different languages; and to the centers and institutes found throughout the world.

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WHAT IS PSYCHOSYNTHESIS?

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In 1909, C.G. Jung wrote to Sigmund Freud of “a very pleasant and perhaps valuable acquaintance, our first Italian, a Dr. Assagioli from the psychiatric clinic in Florence” (McGuire, 1974, p. 241). Later however, this same Roberto Assagioli (1888 - 1974) wrote a doctoral dissertation, “*La Psicosintesi*,” in which he began to move away from Freud’s psychoanalysis towards what he called psychosynthesis:

A beginning of my conception of psychosynthesis was contained in my doctoral thesis on Psychoanalysis (1910), in which I pointed out what I considered to be some of the limitations of Freud’s views. (Assagioli, 1965, p. 280)

In developing psychosynthesis, Assagioli agreed with Freud that healing childhood trauma and developing a healthy ego were necessary aims of psychotherapy, but held that human growth could not be limited to this alone. A student of philosophical and spiritual traditions of both East and West, Assagioli sought to address human growth as it proceeded beyond the norm of the well-functioning ego; he wished also to support the blossoming of human potential into what Abraham Maslow later termed “self-actualization,” and further still, into the spiritual or transpersonal dimensions of human existence as well.

In other words, Assagioli envisioned an approach to the human being which could address both the process of personal growth—of personality integration and self-actualization—as well as transpersonal development—that dimension glimpsed

for example in “peak experiences” (Maslow) of inspired creativity, spiritual insight, and unitive states of consciousness. Assagioli called these two dimensions of growth respectively, **personal psychosynthesis** and **transpersonal** or **spiritual psychosynthesis** (Assagioli, 1965, p. 55; 1973a, p. 33). He also spoke of **Self-realization**, which we shall later distinguish from both of these.

Psychosynthesis is therefore one of the earliest forerunners of both humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology, even preceding Jung’s break with Freud by several years. Assagioli’s conception of personal psychosynthesis has an affinity with existential-humanistic psychology and other approaches which attempt to understand the nature of the healthy personality and the actualization of the personal self. Similarly, his conception of transpersonal psychosynthesis is related to the field of transpersonal psychology, with its focus on higher states of consciousness, spirituality, and human development beyond the individual self. Accordingly, Assagioli served on the board of editors for both the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*.

ASSAGIOLI’S DIAGRAM OF THE PERSON

Assagioli’s basic diagram representing the human being has been an integral part of psychosynthesis since its earliest days. Assagioli said of this diagram, “It is, of course, a crude and elementary picture that can give only a structural, static, almost ‘anatomical’ representation of our inner constitution...” (Assagioli, 1965, p. 17).

While Assagioli’s original diagram depicted Self (or Transpersonal Self) in the higher unconscious, the diagram which follows does not do so; in the rendering below, Self is not represented at all, and should be imagined as pervading all the areas of the diagram. The need for this change will be discussed later. Here then is the modified diagram outlining major areas of the human person:

While Assagioli's original diagram depicted Self (or Transpersonal Self) at the apex of the higher unconscious, our diagram does not do so. Here, Self is not represented at all, and should be imagined instead as pervading all the areas of the diagram. The need for this change will be discussed later.

One general comment about the diagram is that the oval is surrounded by the collective unconscious (unlabeled), that realm of archetypes and collective influences explored by C.G. Jung and others. Unlike Jung, however, Assagioli (1967) saw that the collective unconscious, like the personal unconscious, was stratified into different levels; indeed, he criticized Jung for not differentiating between the lower "archaic" levels and the higher "spiritual" levels of the collective. Accordingly, the labels for the three levels of the diagram—lower, middle, and higher—are shown transecting the oval which represents the boundary of the individual.

A last general comment is that the different levels of the unconscious comprise a spectrum of potentially conscious experience. That is, these various strata are termed "unconscious" simply because the material contained in them is not within the immediate field of awareness. Contents from these various

areas may however become conscious under different circumstances, and even if they do not, they nevertheless can cause profound effects in the person's conscious life (e.g., an unconscious chronic feeling of rage may wreak havoc in a person's relationships). Let us now examine each aspect of the diagram in some detail.

THE MIDDLE UNCONSCIOUS

Assagioli's notion of the **middle unconscious** has some of the characteristics described by Freud as the "preconscious." The term indicates those psychosomatic contents which are able to pass most freely in and out of awareness. Take for example a situation in which I have been unknowingly offended by a friend's comment, realizing only later that I have been feeling hurt and angry since the comment was made. Here my hurt and anger have been present all along, but it has taken some period of time for them to surface into the field of awareness—although those around me may have noticed that I have been "in a bad mood" all along. And having emerged into awareness, the feelings may again submerge as I become involved in other activities, surfacing again at different points in my day. When I am unaware of them, these feelings would be defined as contents of the middle unconscious, because they are relatively accessible, needing little effort on my part for them to become conscious again.

Central among the contents of the middle unconscious are what Assagioli (1965) called **subpersonalities**. While subpersonalities are not limited to the middle unconscious, they are often the most striking psychosomatic structures to pass in and out of awareness on a daily basis.

Subpersonalities are sub-systems within the personality, sometimes called "ego states" by later thinkers (e.g., Berne), which act as distinct, semi-autonomous entities. One may become aware of a judging subpersonality, for example, as a painfully self-critical train of thought entering awareness: "Why in the world did you say *that*, you fool!" Here one feels addressed inwardly by an angry judgmental "voice" which causes guilt and shame. This inner voice is not simply a free-standing train of thought, but is the expression of a particular subpersonality. In

other words, the self-criticism is part of a whole complex characterized by a specific motivation and mode of expression; a consistent world view and range of feelings; and a particular life history with roots in one's family of origin. This critical complex is one of the many subpersonalities within the personality, or what John Rowan (1990) has aptly called, "the people inside us."

Subpersonalities are extremely common even in psychologically healthy people, and while their conflicts can be the source of pain, they should not be seen as pathological. They are simply discrete patterns of feeling, thought, and behavior which often operate out of awareness—in the middle unconscious—and break into awareness when triggered by different life situations. More research is needed before we can know whether this multiplicity is inherent to the human personality, or the result of trauma suffered at earlier stages of development.

A common way to become aware of subpersonalities is to notice that one seems to become "different people" in different life situations. One may encounter an authority figure and suddenly be overcome by feelings of anxiety and low self-worth; or interact with one's parents and begin to feel like a child inside an adult body; or drive an automobile and find one's usual patient disposition changing to violent ill-temper and vindictiveness. All such experiences may be understood as moments in which a subpersonality, normally out of awareness, suddenly bursts into awareness and expression. Through a variety of different techniques, subpersonalities can be harmonized into a more consistent expression of the whole person. Such work may or may not involve "integrating" or "fusing" them into a larger whole, but it will tend towards a situation in which each aspect can make its unique contribution to the life of the person.

The Case of Laura

For example, a woman who we shall call Laura entered counseling because she found herself acting like a child while relating to her parents and other perceived authority figures. She would become childlike and passive with such people, and then finally burst out in anger when she found herself ignored. This had been causing difficulties in all her adult relationships, and

especially now with her current boyfriend.

Over the course of counseling, Laura realized that this younger part of herself was a subpersonality with particular feelings of anxiety, shame, and anger. She began to relate to this subpersonality instead of attempting to get rid of it, and became increasingly familiar with how it responded to other people and how it influenced her daily behavior. In listening to the subpersonality, Laura gradually became aware of its deeper needs for acceptance, affection, and safety, and began intentionally making more room in her life for these valid human needs.

This work involved Laura in some brief lower unconscious exploration as well. She uncovered the childhood roots of the negative feelings, and had the painful realization that her parents, although nurturing in many ways, had in truth been emotionally unavailable at a very basic level. She also came to see that her rejection of the subpersonality replicated her parents' rejection of her.

As Laura formed an ongoing empathic relationship with the subpersonality, there was a marked decrease in the feelings of anxiety, shame, and anger, and she found herself less and less overcome by these problematic feelings in her relationships. Furthermore, the positive qualities of the subpersonality—creativity, playfulness, and spontaneity—became more available to her as well, enriching her relationships as never before.

Laura was involved primarily with the middle unconscious in that she sought to develop an ongoing conscious relationship with a subpersonality which moved easily into and out of awareness. Although she also did some lower unconscious investigation (uncovering the childhood conditioning of the subpersonality) and had some contact with the higher unconscious (unlocking the positive potential of the subpersonality), she remained focused upon work with the middle unconscious.

For an excellent comprehensive overview of subpersonality theory, see Rowan (1990); and for a detailed elaboration of subpersonality work in psychosynthesis, see Vargiu (1973) and Carter-Harr (1974).

LOWER AND HIGHER UNCONSCIOUS

Freud and others at the turn of the century were in the midst

of an earth-shaking discovery. This discovery was that the psychological past is not something “over and done with,” but quite the contrary, that the past is an integral part of the present. Specifically, these researchers found that childhood experience is inextricably a part of adult life, exerting a profound and at times disturbing influence on the adult personality. They began to recognize modes of experience belonging to an earlier era in a person’s life which, although normally deeply unconscious, could be accessed in psychotherapy.

Early life experience is not, then, something left behind in a linear progression into the future, but rather forms an abiding psychological substratum to conscious life. This substratum conditions the day-to-day experience of oneself, other people, and the world itself; it is the very “lens” through which one perceives reality.

In many psychological approaches, this substratum is known simply as “the unconscious.” Assagioli recognized, however, that one may not only repress the realm of trauma in self and world, but may also repress the “higher” reaches of human potential—that realm glimpsed in creative inspiration, spiritual insight, and peak experiences. Thus Assagioli’s model includes both a **lower unconscious** and a **higher unconscious** or **superconscious**.

Unlike middle unconscious contents, the contents of the lower and higher unconscious are by definition not easily accessible to awareness, and normally remain only potentially conscious. However, material from both areas can be accessed through the use of various methods, or it can move spontaneously into the field of awareness. But whether or not contents from these two sectors become conscious, they profoundly affect our daily lives. Let us now look further at these two major sectors of the unconscious.

THE LOWER UNCONSCIOUS

Unlike the middle unconscious, containing material which simply happens not to be conscious in the moment, the lower unconscious comprises material which is actively and energetically held out of awareness. A powerful “repression barrier” (Freud) maintains a separation or split between daily aware-

ness and certain painful, traumatic experiences of the past and present. This splitting serves to protect one's consciousness and will from being overwhelmed by deeply painful events, and enables the person to function and survive in the face of the particular trauma.

These traumatic wounds can result from violation of the person's sense of individuality, as seen most vividly in physical mistreatment, sexual molestation, and emotional battering. Or trauma may occur from intentional or unintentional neglect by those in the environment, as in physical or emotional abandonment; an inability of significant others to respond empathically to the person (or to aspects of the person); and a general unresponsiveness and emotional bleakness in the surrounding social milieu. Furthermore, trauma is inflicted by "the best of families"—much of what we have thought to be acceptable and normal in child-rearing is being found to be harmful and "dysfunctional" (see for example the works of Alice Miller). Indeed, it seems that no one among us has escaped some amount of debilitating psychological wounding in our lives.

All such traumatic experience involves a breaking of the empathic relationships by which we know ourselves as human beings; it creates an experience in which we know ourselves not as intrinsically valuable human persons, but instead as non-persons or objects. In these moments we feel ourselves to be "It"s rather than "Thou"s, to use Martin Buber's terms. Trauma thus produces various experiences associated with facing one's own potential non-existence or nonbeing: isolation and abandonment; disintegration and loss of identity; humiliation and low self-worth; feelings of being overwhelmed and trapped; or anxiety and depression.

These traumatic experiences are extremely threatening to the conscious personality, and are therefore split off and repressed, forming the lower unconscious. However, this splitting can only be maintained at a price. In order to prevent these threatening experiences from emerging into awareness, we develop a wide variety of survival strategies or defense mechanisms which can become problematic later. For example, we might develop a "false self" (Winnicott), a socially-acceptable persona which serves to hide our inner vulnerability—but then

we may later begin to feel false or “phoney” in our lives. Or we might develop certain subtle and not-so-subtle addictions, whether to alcohol and drugs; sexuality and food; domination and power; relationships and work; or spirituality and religion. Most psychological dysfunction, whether unusual or more “normal,” seems to revolve around split-off experiences of wounding.

Obviously then, the lower unconscious exists in the present and affects our daily lives. Indeed, this splitting of our experience also makes us blind to current violation and neglect of ourselves by other people and by society in general. For example, we may be relatively unaware of how we are personally affected by the tremendous level of violence pervading modern life, and indeed, may be unaware of this even when we are the direct victims or perpetrators of this violence. This repression of the traumatic thus can support naive optimism, other-worldly spirituality, and chronic patterns of abuse.

Surprised by Pain

If material from the lower unconscious suddenly breaks through this repression barrier, we may be “surprised by pain.” Robert entered therapy because his wife Rachel was complaining of his chronic demeaning attitude towards her and had threatened divorce if he did not correct this. Initially Robert simply saw his behavior as “just joking around,” and Rachel as “too sensitive.” But gradually he became aware of the rage underlying his behavior, and beneath that rage, the feelings of shame and worthlessness from childhood. As he got in touch with this childhood wounding, he recognized the abuse entrenched in his family of origin and so became sensitive to the hidden abuse in his own behavior.

As Robert began to change his behavior, Rachel found it necessary to work on her own attitude of contempt and on her need to control, which often triggered Robert’s worthlessness and rage. Rachel also found herself exploring her own early wounding as she struggled to change her behavior. As they worked through their lower-unconscious trauma and the reactions to this, Robert and Rachel were gradually able to create a safe and healing

environment which could support their own growth and that of their children.

Robert and Rachel were “surprised by pain”—they experienced a disrupting emergence of lower unconscious material into their marriage. These feelings and attitudes had always been present, though operating outside their awareness, and healing here led to a more trusting and intimate relationship.

Many of us are also shocked, and at first disbelieving, when stumbling upon such things as inner forms of self-abuse, ill-will, and addiction; insidious ways we hurt those close to us; hidden abuse among our own family and closest friends; subtle and not-so-subtle forms of sexual harassment in the work-place; the injustice embedded in social institutions; or global ecological disasters. But as this darker side of life is confronted and dealt with, we become more whole; we no longer split off this major sector of existence and begin to live life based on a deeper knowledge of ourselves and others.

So healing in the lower unconscious is not simply a healing of the past, but a healing of the present. In such personal transformation, one’s here-and-now perception of self and world becomes more acute and increasingly accurate; there is a developing freedom from compulsivity and rigidity; and one begins to find a sense of authentic personal identity and power from which to embrace life.

But the lower unconscious is not the only realm of human experience which is hidden from normal everyday awareness. As object relations theorists have discovered (Klein; Fairbairn), we may split off not only the dimension of traumatic wounding, but the positive dimensions of life as well. Perhaps this splitting is a way we seek to protect the positive from an overtly abusive environment, or perhaps it is caused by an environment which covertly invalidates our capacities for wonder, joy, and creativity. This repression of our higher human potential has been discussed as the “repression of the sublime” (Desoille) by psychosynthesis psychotherapist Frank Haronian (1972), and forms what is called the superconscious—a realm of ourselves which, like the lower unconscious, exists now, affects us in the present, and which is cut off from normal everyday awareness.

THE SUPERCONSCIOUS

The **higher unconscious** or **superconscious** denotes that realm of human experiencing encountered most dramatically during special peak moments in life. Such moments indicate that superconscious contents—normally unconscious—have broken through into the field of awareness, have become conscious. Here are two striking examples of superconscious experience, taken from the many accounts gathered in Marghanita Laski's (1968) important study, *Ecstasy*:

...the heart leaps like a fountain—a wordless feeling of sudden tremendous expansion, sudden glory...it is an end of individuality for a moment, because there's sudden glory in both me and the universe, both inextricably mingled. (p. 383)

I don't know how to put it into words—forgetting oneself, no, oneself ceasing to matter and no longer being connected with everyday things, with the commercial sort of life one lives—a feeling that for the first time you're seeing things in proper proportion... (p. 387)

Superconscious experiences are those moments—often difficult to put into words—in which one senses deeper meaning in life, a universality within the particulars of existence, and perhaps a unity between oneself and the cosmos. Here is Assagioli speaking about the superconscious:

From this region we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations—artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethic “imperatives” and urges to humanitarian and heroic action. It is the source of the higher feelings, such as altruistic love; of genius and of the states of contemplation, illumination, and ecstasy. In this realm are latent the higher psychic functions and spiritual energies. (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 17-18)

Note that the superconscious is not some realm of pure qualities or essences completely different from everyday life. The characteristics of love, beauty, or unity found in superconscious experiences are not independent higher qualities drifting down to the world from some heavenly realm; they describe observable modes of sensation, feeling, and cognition in which one engages certain aspects of the world in particular ways. Indeed, such peak moments seem to be lucid glimpses into aspects of reality which are *always* present in our lives, but to which we are usually blind. That is why the term “higher unconscious” is so accurate—it implies a dimension of potential experience existing now, although outside our awareness. So superconscious experience is not an encounter with another, higher world, but a deeper, expanded, or more unitive relationship with *this* world.

Superconscious experience has long been studied by Western psychology, and we will here mention some of the thinkers Assagioli himself regarded as addressing this area. As early as 1901, the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Bucke (1967) published his study of superconscious experiences in his book, *Cosmic Consciousness*, making him perhaps the first transpersonal psychologist. Around the same time as Bucke’s work, psychologist William James (1961) published his classic work on spiritual experience, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. And adopting a term used by Rudolf Otto, C.G. Jung (1969) affirmed superconscious contents as “numinosum” which he said could cause an “alteration of consciousness,” and pointed to the universality of such experiences.

Assagioli also believed that Viktor Frankl, in his system of Logotherapy, referred to the superconscious in speaking of “the ‘noetic’ or ‘noological’ dimension” and of “height psychology” (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 195, 197). Lastly, Abraham Maslow’s study of peak experiences was in Assagioli’s view dealing directly with the superconscious. In Maslow’s words:

The term peak experiences is a generalization for the best moments of the human being, for the happiest moments of life, for experiences of ecstasy, rapture, bliss, and the greatest joy. (Maslow, 1971, p. 105)

This quotation is a clear description of superconscious experience in psychosynthesis terms. Maslow's ground-breaking work was instrumental in the birth of the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Many others, too numerous to name, have made superconscious experience the subject of serious psychological study.

Surprised by Joy

As with the lower unconscious, there is a repression barrier separating the superconscious from awareness—the “repression of the sublime.” And a strong repression of this realm of human experience leads eventually towards an uninspired life, a life from which all altruistic love, child-like wonder, and greater meaning have been excluded. Here the person inhabits only one small dimension of the rich, multidimensional cosmos, adopting an attitude which is matter-of-fact, materialistic, and perhaps cynical. Unaware, one is cut off from the compassionate touch of the infinite and eternal, and comes to assume the deadness of one's own life is a deadness in life itself. Again, the split in ourselves is not simply a split in the past, but a split in the present; it affects how we experience ourselves and the world on a day-to-day basis.

However, as is the case with lower unconscious contents, one can be surprised by the breaking into awareness of superconscious contents—this is precisely what a peak experience is. Here we are “surprised by joy” (C.S. Lewis), and an entire “new” realm of human experience is revealed before our disbelieving eyes. A vast array of people from many different traditions and cultures throughout history have reported such experiences, and witness to the power of these moments to transform human life.

But as Assagioli (1965) pointed out, these higher experiences may surface lower unconscious material as well. As the repression barrier is breached, the reason for the repression—the earlier wounding—may also be brought to light. It is as if our organismic striving for wholeness attempts to bridge this original split between higher and lower, such that an emergence of either sector may often entail the emergence of the other. Indeed, perhaps the very term “psychosynthesis” best denotes the bringing together or “synthesis” of the higher and lower in us.

The superconscious becomes of practical importance, and perhaps a matter for psychotherapy, as individuals encounter this area of human experience and seek to come to terms with it in their lives. The process of contacting and integrating material from the superconscious will be discussed further below.

"I," AWARENESS, AND WILL

Recall the case of Laura which was described in the section on the middle unconscious. Laura recognized a child subpersonality whose behavior was disrupting her adult relationships, and was able to facilitate its harmonious inclusion in her life. Implicit in this change was Laura's realization that she was not simply a childish person, but that the child subpersonality was only a part of her. This realization gave her the freedom to come into relationship with this child part, to take responsibility for working with her, and to learn to nurture her as her parents had been unable to do. In other words, she discovered that her deeper identity was distinct, though not separate, from this subpersonality. Here is a movement from the stance, "I am a child," to "I have a child." This ability to **identify** with, or **disidentify** from, different aspects of the personality, reveals the nature of "I."

"I" (or **personal self**) is the essential being of the person, and is represented by the point at the center of the oval diagram. "I" possesses the two functions of **awareness** and **will** (or **personal will**), whose fields of operation are represented by the two concentric circles around "I." The two fields may be understood as being in constant flux, one or the other becoming larger and more dominant from one moment to the next.

The circle symbolizing awareness is meant to indicate that "I" is the one who is aware of the psychosomatic contents as they pass in and out of awareness; the contents come and go, while "I" may remain present to each experience as it arises. And the circle of will indicates that "I" is dynamic as well as receptive; "I" has the ability to affect the contents of awareness and can even affect awareness itself, by choosing to focus awareness, expand it, or contract it. Let us take up first awareness

and then will, using Laura's work as an example.

Field of Awareness

As "I" disidentified from the child subpersonality, Laura's awareness was no longer simply that of a child who was feeling completely overwhelmed by anxiety, shame, and anger. Instead, her awareness became open to more adult aspects of her personality as well, from which she could then act in relationship to both the subpersonality and the outer environment. Note that in disidentification her awareness did not become dissociated from the feelings of the child subpersonality, but rather her awareness expanded to include the adult perspective as well as the feelings of the subpersonality. This clarification or expansion of awareness takes place as "I" disidentifies from a particular limited identification, and is thereby able to include other perspectives as well.

The Field of Will

This ability to disidentify and become aware of different perspectives demonstrates not only the nature of awareness, but the nature of will. As Laura shifted her identification from "I am a child" to "I have a child part of me," she experienced the freedom to make choices which were not totally controlled by the child subpersonality. She could choose, for example, to relate to the subpersonality, to explore the feelings of the subpersonality, and finally, to make decisions in her life which were not limited to the perspective of that single subpersonality. Laura's freedom reveals what Assagioli means by the term, "will."

So the will of "I" is not the repressive force commonly referred to as "will-power." Will-power usually denotes the domination of one part of the personality by another, as Laura might have done had she attempted to push the subpersonality out of her life completely. Quite the contrary, will is that gentle inner freedom to act from a place which is not completely conditioned by any single part of oneself. Will allows "I" to disidentify from any single perspective, and thereby to be open to *all* the varied

aspects of the personality.

Through these functions of awareness and will, "I" is the focus for engaging all the rich multiplicity of oneself—what Maslow termed "self-actualization." Since "I" is that "who" who is able to identify with, and disidentify from, all the many changing parts of the personality, "I" has the potential of being in communion with all the parts, of knowing and acting from one's wholeness in life.

The Nature of "I"

Addressing "I" in counseling and therapy involves a focus upon personal identity, responsibility for choices, and the existential here-and-now presence of the person. Existential and humanistic psychology have a great deal to say about this level of work, and good psychosynthesis will often draw heavily on the theory and methods of these branches of psychology. Assagioli (1965) himself discussed at some length this affinity between psychosynthesis and the existential approach.

The nature of "I" is also revealed in spiritual practices such as vipassana and Zen meditation in the East, and contemplative or "centering" prayer in the West. An aspect of these types of practice is to allow psychosomatic contents to come and go in awareness without becoming caught up in them. The principle is that one can learn to simply sit in silence, present and mindful to the moment, while allowing sensations and feelings, thoughts and images, to pass unhindered through awareness.

What such practices demonstrate is that "I" is distinct, though not separate, from all these contents of consciousness. If this were not the case, it would be impossible to observe such contents continuously coming and going, while the point of view remains ever-present to each succeeding content. There must be someone who is distinct from the contents, and who remains as observer/experiencer of the contents. "I" is this "who" who is in, but not of, the flow of experience, and therefore can be present to any and all contents of experience.

This distinction between "I" and the contents of experience is implicit in these spiritual practices, but it is also characteristic of any disidentification experience. For example, this distinction is central to Laura's realization that she could be free

from the control of the child subpersonality. Similar to a person in meditation, she could observe the subpersonality's feelings and thoughts pass into and then out of her awareness, and thereby could realize she was distinct from these feelings and thoughts.

All such experiences indicate that "I" is not a content of experience but the subject of experience. Although "I" may indeed be caught up in strong feelings, obsessive thoughts, or strong subpersonalities, "I" is ever the experiencer, distinct but not separate from any of these.

SELF

Pervading all the areas mapped by the oval-shaped diagram, distinct but not separate from all of them, is **Self** (which has also been called **Higher Self** or **Transpersonal Self**). The concept of Self points towards a deeper source of wisdom and guidance within the person, a source which can operate quite beyond the control of the conscious personality.

Both Assagioli and Jung called this source, "Self," and believed this manifested as a deeper direction in the individual's life. One might experience Self as a movement towards increasing psychological wholeness; or towards a growing "fidelity to the law of one's own being" (Jung, 1954); or perhaps towards a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Both men also believed that many psychological disturbances were a result of finding oneself out of harmony with the deeper direction indicated by Self.

Jung (1954) deemed the experience of this direction of Self, "vocation," an invitation from the "voice of the inner man [or woman]" to undertake the way of individuation. Assagioli spoke of this deeper direction as the will of Self, or **transpersonal will**, and saw that this could be responded to—or resisted—by the will of "I," or **personal will**. Here is one example Assagioli uses to illustrate this relationship of personal will and transpersonal will, the relationship of "I" and Self:

Accounts of religious experiences often speak of a "call" from God, or a "pull" from some Higher Power; this sometimes starts a "dia-

logue" between the man [or woman] and this "higher Source"... (Assagioli, 1973a, p. 114)

Of course, neither Jung nor Assagioli limited the I-Self relationship to those dramatic experiences of "call" seen in the lives of great men and women throughout history. Rather, the deeper invitations of Self are potential to every person at all times. As will be discussed later, this deeper direction may be assumed to be present implicitly in every moment of every day, and in every phase of life, even when one does not recognize this. Within one's private inner life of feelings and thoughts, or within one's relationships with other people and the natural world, the call of Self may be discerned and answered.

"I" as an Image of Self

Among all the elements depicted in the oval diagram, "I" has the most direct and profound relationship with Self. In earlier versions of the diagram, this relationship was illustrated by a straight dotted line connecting "I" and Self (the latter was then placed at the apex of the superconscious). Assagioli spoke of the I-Self connection in this way:

The reflection ["I"] appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is, in other words, not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source [Self]. (Assagioli, 1965, p. 20)

That is, "I" is not a differentiation of Self, not one aspect of Self, not an emanation of the "stuff" of Self, but a direct image of Self. The metaphor here is perhaps a candle flame whose image is reflected in a mirror, or the sun's image reflected on the surface of water. "I," essential human identity, is not at bottom an independent self-sustaining entity, but is directly and immediately held in existence by deeper Self.

To approach the metaphor from another angle, one might say that "I" is as indissolubly united to Self as a mirror image is united to that which it reflects. Of this profound level of union, Assagioli says, "There are not really two selves, two indepen-

dent and separate entities. The Self is one..." (1965, p. 20). There are indeed many experiences, known within both religious and non-religious contexts, which seem to indicate this fundamental human dependency upon, and hence unity with, a deeper source of Being.

While Assagioli affirms this essential unity of "I" and Self, he is also extremely careful to emphasize the importance of maintaining the distinction between them. As profound as the I-Self unity is, this unity does not imply that "I" is an illusion. To apply the mirror metaphor: the mirror image has a relative or contingent existence, because it is dependent on the source, but this does not mean its existence is unreal.

Not maintaining this distinction between "I" and Self, both conceptually and experientially, can lead to serious difficulties in a person's life. Assagioli, along with many others, consistently warns about the dangers of confusing the reflected image with the reflecting source, "I" with Self:

In cases where awareness of the difference between the spiritual Self and the personal "I" is lacking, the latter may attribute to itself the qualities and power of the former, with megalomania as the possible end product. (Assagioli, 1976, p. 10. See also Assagioli, 1965, p. 44-45; 1973, p. 128)

So the notion of "I" as a reflected image of Self can be helpful in understanding the paradoxical unity of "I" and Self. The two selves are one, fundamentally united by Self's act of creation; yet they are two, the image ever remaining an image and not the source. And maintaining clarity about the nature of this union is not a mere obscure theoretical exercise, but often has tremendous practical consequences in work with the spiritual dimension.

The Nature of Self

The idea that "I" is a reflection of Self also suggests a way of understanding the nature of Self by analogy to "I." By such an analogy, the nature of "I," which is implicit in personal experi-

ence, can be extrapolated to Self, a deeper center not nearly so available to personal experience.

The first thing which becomes apparent by this analogy is that Self is living, conscious, willing, Being. That is, if individual "I-amness" is a reflection of Self, then Self must be deeper "I-amness." Self is therefore not to be viewed as a blind undifferentiated unity; nor as an energy field, however subtle and rarefied; nor as an organismic totality; nor as some impersonal or inanimate energy source; but rather, as deeper, personal Being.

In other words, Self is not *something*, but *someone*. Self is a "Thou" to whom one may meaningfully relate. It is true that a sense of this "Thou-ness" may be lost in a powerful moment of experienced union with Self, when "I" and Self are felt as one. Nevertheless, the ongoing, intimate, empathic relationship of "I" and Self is an I-Thou—not an I-It—relationship.

This view of Self can be seen in Assagioli's words quoted earlier, in which he affirms the possibility of meaningful "dialogue" with the "higher Source." Such dialoguing is applied in many effective and practical psychosynthesis techniques designed to support a conscious two-way communication with Self (e.g., see Assagioli, 1965, pp. 204-207; and Miller, 1975), and is also found in the broader field of transpersonal psychology (Vaughan, 1985).

Pursuing this analogy of "I" to Self, one comes to a second important insight into the nature of Self. If, as stated above, "I" is distinct but not separate from contents of awareness, then Self too may be understood as distinct but not separate from such contents. One might speculate that since "I" can experience being "in but not of" all the passing sensations, feelings, and thoughts of daily experience, so Self may experience being "in but not of" all the content of all the levels represented in the oval diagram. This omnipresence of Self would imply that Self may be sensed and responded to at any level at all. Whether encountering the bliss of peak experiences, the more mundane events of daily life, or the depths of early childhood trauma, one can assume that Self is present, active, and available to relationship.

As we have mentioned, the original oval-shaped diagram portrayed Self at the apex of the superconscious, but according to the above view, this is misleading. This placement of Self gives the impression that Self is approachable through the su-

perconscious only, implying that Self is remote from the other strata of the person. Self here seems firmly planted on the “heights” at some distance from the “depths.” We, with others in the field, disagree with this former portrayal of Self as existing only at higher levels, and posit that Self is completely present throughout all the levels of the person (see Preface).

However, one must avoid the mistake of then *equating* Self with a totality of the person—Self is not simply the entire oval. Self would be distinct but not separate from such a totality, always transcendent of the totality, yet immanent within the totality. In much the same way that “I” can be simultaneously aware of several different feelings and thoughts at one time, so Self might be simultaneously aware of all the processes of the entire organism at the same time.

In sum, it seems clear that approaching the nature of Self via an analogy to “I” leads to various useful insights, and to the same single conclusion. Whether envisaging a deeper I-amness as the abiding ground of individual I-amness; or envisaging a deeper “distinct-but-not-separateness” as the source of individual “distinct-but-not-separateness;” the conclusion reached is that the I-Self relationship exists throughout all life experiences, in all spheres of life, and in every stage of life. This profoundly intimate relationship is the fundamental axis of the journey called Self-realization which is discussed in more practical terms below.

So we have explored Assagioli’s “anatomical” and “static” model of the human person. But what of the psychological “physiology” of the person, the dynamic changes of human growth and healing? The oval diagram can serve to model the changes of human life as we develop the two major forms of psychosynthesis outlined by Assagioli: **personal psychosynthesis** and **transpersonal psychosynthesis**. Let us examine each in turn.

PERSONAL PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

Human growth which involves work with either the middle unconscious or the lower unconscious is known as **personal psychosynthesis**. In Assagioli’s words,

This [personal psychosynthesis] includes the

development and harmonizing of all human functions and potentialities at all levels of the lower and middle area in the diagram of the constitution of man [and woman]. (Assagioli, 1973a, p. 121)

In this quotation Assagioli is referring to the oval diagram, and is indicating the middle and lower unconscious as the areas involved in personal psychosynthesis. Of course, there is seldom an aspect of the human journey which does not include material from all the levels of the unconscious. Personal psychosynthesis, while more obviously engaging lower and middle unconscious contents, will involve superconscious material as well—for example, one very often encounters superconscious content when working through early trauma. Indeed, one can think of “personal psychosynthesis” as simply referring to where one is currently focused in the overall healing of the split between the lower and higher unconscious.

Personal psychosynthesis does not necessarily involve the application of formal methods of education, counseling, or therapy—surely it most often occurs simply in the living of our lives. In the process of rising to meet the challenges of our personal and professional lives, we overcome feelings of unhealthy guilt and shame; transform fears and anxieties; and develop more harmony within our personalities. In an effort to live authentically, we will often find old wounds healing and personal wholeness blossoming. But in many cases too, much time and struggle can be saved by consciously working at personal psychosynthesis with a trained professional.

The Process

In the case of Laura described earlier, we have already seen an example of personal psychosynthesis as it occurs at the level of the middle unconscious. In her case, a more-or-less conscious aspect of her personality (the child subpersonality) was recognized and brought into an increasingly harmonious relationship with her conscious personality. This type of work can of course involve a variety of different techniques and methods which are not necessarily mentioned in the psychosynthesis lit-

erature at all.

The deeper aspect of personal psychosynthesis can be seen in the case of Robert and Rachel above, and involves the integration of material from the lower unconscious into the conscious personality. Here we are not dealing simply with subpersonalities, with discrete aspects of the personality which present themselves relatively easily to consciousness; rather, we are engaging deeper structures which comprise experiences, attitudes, motivations, and “life scripts” conditioning the personality as a whole. The manifestations of this deeper level may include phenomena such as: overall self-destructive life orientations; compulsions, addictions, and dysfunctional attachments; codependency; depression and anxiety; and disturbing memories of early abuse and neglect.

The lower unconscious is so primary, so deeply conditioning, that one may do a surprising amount of self-exploration, therapy, and spiritual practice, while never fully engaging this level at all. One can for example learn to disidentify and observe subpersonalities; work successfully to harmonize the many middle unconscious contents; make dramatic and useful forays into the lower and higher unconscious; and even become adept at mindful meditation and prayer; while all along being profoundly under the sway of this deeper conditioning. Personal psychosynthesis at these more primary levels is a long-term process, and may involve the following:

- a) The growing awareness of problematic life attitudes and behaviors as they affect daily life, and an awareness of the chronic defenses which have been hiding their damaging effects
- b) A developing acceptance that these chronic attitudes and behaviors will not transform easily, nor disappear via dramatic breakthrough experiences, but will involve a substantial commitment of time and energy
- c) The gradual recognition and acceptance of the thoughts and feelings of the earlier traumatized levels of the personality into consciousness
- d) An ongoing living with the emerging material in such a way that one’s authentic personal potential is actualized in the world

Such growth will often mean incremental change in habitual ways of relating to self and others, and in the very way of living itself. Personal psychosynthesis involving much lower unconscious work is therefore best done within the context of stable, secure life structures such as that provided by long-term psychotherapy, ongoing support groups, and an empathic circle of family and friends.

Self-actualization

Whether addressing the middle or lower unconscious, personal psychosynthesis leads towards the actualization of the personal self or "I," the expression of one's true, unique sense of personal identity in the world. This self-actualization allows among other things: less debilitating conflict within the personality; a growing awareness of the physical, emotional, and mental aspects of experience; a sense of freedom and spontaneity; less toxic self criticism; increasingly realistic self acceptance; and a sense of personal choice and responsibility. Maslow's words sum up the goal of personal psychosynthesis quite well:

Perhaps we could say that the description of the healthy ones is more exhausted by describing them *primarily* as strong identities, people who know who they are, where they are going, what they want, what they are good for, in a word, as strong Selves, using themselves well and authentically and in accordance with their own true nature. (Maslow, 1971, p. 292)

As many have discovered however, personal growth moves quite naturally into transpersonal growth. People working on their psychological healing may encounter unexpected moments of profound serenity and spiritual insight; or, plumbing the depths of psychological trauma, they may find a Ground of Being which has been holding them always, even at tremendous depths of isolation and pain. On the other hand, strong self-actualizers may find a growing emptiness and boredom gnawing at their successful lives, triggering a search for something more basic, something which has meaning beyond their indi-

vidual lives. Whether surprised by joy, or surprised by a lack of joy, one often finds that the path of personal growth intersects the path of transpersonal growth.

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

Whereas personal psychosynthesis involves the integration of material from the middle and lower unconscious, **transpersonal psychosynthesis** (or **spiritual psychosynthesis**) is aimed at integrating material from the superconscious. In Assagioli's words:

The specific therapeutic task...is that of arriving at a harmonious adjustment by means of the proper assimilation of the inflowing superconscious energies and of their integration with the pre-existing aspects of the personality; that is, of accomplishing not only a personal but also a spiritual psychosynthesis. (Assagioli, 1965, p. 53)

As with personal psychosynthesis, transpersonal psychosynthesis may often occur gracefully, with no need for any conscious attention or psychological work on our parts at all. Whether in striking peak experiences, or in a gradual shift in consciousness, the transpersonal dimension reveals itself, and we begin an active engagement with this realm. Through meditation, prayer, ritual, music, art, service, and community, we seek to contact and express a higher, more spiritual dimension of existence.

And as we become more familiar with this higher dimension, we may automatically transform our attitudes and behaviors to reflect more fully this new reality. We gradually become more compassionate, wise, and inclusive, and less controlled by separative attitudes such as greed, rage, and envy. Perhaps a new appreciation for the natural world, an experienced solidarity with other human beings, or a love of The Divine here infuses our lives with little or no disturbance of our personal equilibrium.

However, superconscious experiences can be difficult to inte-

grate at times. For example, if one has an intense experience of solidarity and compassion for all humankind, this may lead afterwards to a heightened sensitivity to one's feelings of hatred or revenge—feelings which obstruct the expression of compassion. Or perhaps a strong experience of one's unity with nature may reveal the personal attitudes and beliefs which have caused one to violate this union in the past—attitudes and beliefs which are obstacles to right relationship with nature. It is as if the older habits, attitudes, and feelings which would obstruct the concrete expression of the new experience are thrown into stark relief by the light of the experience itself. In such cases, active and intentional psychological work on the problematic reactions can help a great deal.

Lower Unconscious Work

Psychological work is most helpful in transpersonal psychosynthesis when the superconscious energizes psychological patterns which have roots in the lower unconscious. For example, the reactions mentioned above—the feelings of hatred and revenge, or the disrespectful attitude towards the natural world—may stem from an underlying rage which has childhood antecedents. Perhaps there is a history of sexual or emotional abuse which has left strong feelings of abandonment and shame in the lower unconscious, and a layer of what is called “narcissistic rage” (Kohut) has been used to protect the wounds from these early events.

Transpersonal psychosynthesis will here involve a psychological exploration of these childhood events in order to uncover and heal the earlier wounding. In this way, the attitudes of hatred and disrespect mentioned above may eventually be ameliorated, and the original experiences of compassion for humanity or closeness with nature may gradually begin to be expressed in the person's life. Thus the modes of perception once glimpsed in peak moments do not remain simply qualities of momentary experiences, but become attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior with which we can live our entire lives.

Idealizing the Superconscious

While transpersonal growth may involve addressing patterns which appear as obstacles to integrating superconscious material, it may also involve work with patterns of idealizing and over-valuing superconscious experience. Such idealization can emerge as one discovers the power and beauty of the superconscious, and begins to feel that one's more mundane daily life is less important or indeed illusory in the light of such experiences. In Assagioli's words, one here becomes caught in "the illusion that everything is an illusion!" (Assagioli, 1973b).

Idealization is also supported by the erroneous notion that the superconscious represents the future potential of the person, while the lower unconscious represents the past. This idea creates the same type of imbalanced focus on the superconscious and obscures the fact that human growth—both psychological and spiritual—can and does proceed in healthy directions with little or no obvious superconscious experiences at all.

If one becomes caught up in superconscious idealization, an obsessive striving for superconscious experience or "enlightenment" may commence, which is also a flight from the problematic world of personal relationships, life responsibilities, and authentic human growth. This phenomenon has been recognized as "polarizing mysticism" by Maslow (1971); as "infatuation with the sublime" by Haronian (1983); and as "dualistic denial" by Firman (1991). In addressing such a difficulty in psychosynthesis therapy, the nature of the superconscious experience would be validated, but in addition, one might work with the painful life conflicts underlying the obsessive quest for the superconscious. Thus the qualities or values of the higher unconscious—love, joy, beauty, etc.—become less idealized, less split off; they become not idealized forms separate from the world, but normal everyday modes of relationship to the world.

Obstacles to Superconscious Contact

A last major aspect of transpersonal psychosynthesis is the exploration of psychological dynamics which prevent contact with the superconscious in the first place. Such resistance to the superconscious is precisely the repression of the sublime and was also termed "counter-valuing" by Maslow (1971). In working through such resistance, one might for example explore

cynicism towards the good and beautiful in oneself and others; or a distrust of one's own deeper inner wisdom; or even a childhood history of religious abuse which left one with a negative, vengeful image of Divinity. This type of work clears away psychological obstacles which prevent a more intimate communion with the superconscious.

In summation, let us point out once more that personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis refer simply to particular points of focus within the larger bridging of the higher and lower unconscious. Personal psychosynthesis begins at the "bottom," so to speak, and tends towards the "top"; while transpersonal psychosynthesis implies beginning at the "top" and working towards the "bottom."

So for example, both personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis may involve working with subpersonalities in the middle unconscious, early trauma in the lower unconscious, and the heights of superconscious experience. Even the repression of the sublime is not simply a superconscious dynamic, because the resistance here is invariably the resistance to experiencing some early traumatic event—e.g., loss of control, being overwhelmed, or loss of identity—which will come to light if the superconscious is contacted. Although each person will have her or his own unique path of growth, this path seems to tend towards a healed relationship between the heights and depths of human being.

SELF-REALIZATION

As has been seen, if both "I" and Self are distinct but not separate from all levels of experience, then the I-Self relationship cannot be equated with any specific type of experience at all. The I-Self relationship is not a discrete event, not a state of consciousness, not even a moment of contentless union with Self, but rather, it is the dynamic interaction between the will of "I" and the will of Self (see Assagioli, 1973a). It is this ongoing relationship between "I" and Self which can be called **Self-realization**.

Since Self does not exist simply in the superconscious but is present and active throughout the many levels, then Self-realization is not to be equated with superconscious dynamics. For

example, Self-realization does not necessarily involve new patterns of potential, superconscious qualities, nor a higher meaning found in the superconscious. Again, it is not that the superconscious represents the future of the person, that the lower unconscious represents the past, and that therefore the direction of growth is away from the lower unconscious towards the superconscious.

Self-realization is independent of any particular level at all, and can occur whether the content is from the lower, middle, or higher unconscious. *Self-realization is thus distinct from both personal psychosynthesis and transpersonal psychosynthesis, and can occur in either.* (As long as psychosynthesis theory holds Self to be within the superconscious only, Self-realization and transpersonal psychosynthesis can be easily confused.)

Self-realization is not then a matter of the content or quality of experience; nor a structuralization of the personality; nor a particular stage of growth. Rather, Self-realization has to do with whether or not one is responding to the invitations of Self in one's life. Self-realization involves the person relating to Self, responding to that fundamental union with Self, in whatever type of experience, state of consciousness, or stage of growth one is engaging.

Seen in this way, Self-realization is a matter of the moment-to-moment, here-and-now relationship to one's deepest sense of truth and meaning in life; in Jung's words, it revolves around "fidelity to the law of one's own being." And one may betray that deeper truth in one moment and realign with it the next, in other words, may be Self-realizing one moment and not Self-realizing the next. Self-realization is not the culmination of a journey, but the journey itself.

It follows also that one may, for example, *not* be Self-realizing when feeling an ineffable union with the cosmos, and actually *be* Self-realizing when feeling utter isolation and fragmentation. Or one may *not* be Self-realizing when involved in transpersonal psychosynthesis, and actually *be* Self-realizing when working at personal psychosynthesis. The question is not, "What type of experience or action do I wish?" The question is instead, "To which type of experience or action am I called?" Virtually any and all experiences may, or may not, be Self-realization. The determining factor is not the quality or content of

the experience, but whether or not one is responding to the deepest source of one's being. However, if Self-realization cannot be equated with a particular state, how is one to recognize it?

Self-realization and Psychotherapy

Although the I-Self relationship exists in all spheres of life, we shall here discuss Self-realization as it occurs within the practice of psychotherapy. The psychotherapy client invariably, if implicitly, embodies some desired sense of direction; there is some sense that things can be better than they are now, that there is something more to be revealed. In psychosynthesis therapy this "something more" or sense of direction will be taken as an invitation from Self, and will be recognized in many different guises.

For example, this direction may be sensed as a feeling that life need not be as painful as it has been; or a need for better interpersonal relationships; or a wish to integrate spirituality more fully into one's life. The issue of Self-realization also commonly appears in statements such as: "I am afraid that at the end of my life I will discover I missed my calling," or "I feel I have something to accomplish in life, but I don't know what it is."

This sense of direction, however inchoate, buried, or even distorted at times, can obviously be present in most anyone. It seems that most people have some sense of identity in the present which includes some notion of the past, and some sense of direction towards something new, however ill-defined and even unconscious that new possibility may be.

So in speaking of a sense of direction, or invitations from Self, we do not mean to imply some ideal vision of how things might be, nor a wish-fulfilling fantasy of the conscious personality. Neither do we mean necessarily to imply some larger perception of meaning in life, or the opening to superconscious qualities. Much more simply and immediately, this direction is the person's best sense of what life might be for her or him, however modest this may seem. And this direction may of course change and clarify as Self-realization becomes more conscious—the I-Self relationship is ever a dynamic, changing interplay.

Self-realization and "I"

The idea that Self-realization may lead one almost anywhere has many ramifications for counseling and therapy. It means that one cannot assume that a person's path leads inexorably "upward" from personal to transpersonal psychosynthesis. The therapist must instead listen with the utmost care to the specific direction unfolding in the unique individual client. And one must be ready to respond to any direction at any time, whether into the depths of childhood pain; the heights of peak experiences; the dynamics of the family system; or the exploration of life values and choices.

Generally speaking however, Self-realization over time seems to lead towards "I" becoming more like Self. It is a matter of the image or reflection of Self becoming clearer and more apparent. Again, if we posit that Self is present throughout the many levels of the person, the more "I" becomes like Self, the more "I" is open to all the many levels of personhood. It is not that "I" becomes Self *qua* Self, but that "I" becomes more *like* Self—more open to the entire spectrum of human existence, more available to experiencing all that life may bring.

Therefore, in using the oval diagram to depict Self-realization, one might show the middle unconscious expanding. That is, the band of the middle unconscious would expand upward to include more of the higher unconscious, and downward to include more of the lower unconscious. This does not mean that either the higher and lower are reduced to the other, nor that they together are synthesized into a larger whole, but that "I" becomes more open to intimate engagement with both. From another point of view, one might say that the change is in the sense of "I" itself; "I" becomes more intense or present, able to participate in a wider spectrum of experience. In any case, the split between higher and lower is bridged as the person becomes more available to both dimensions of human experience.

This expansion of middle unconscious and healing of the higher-lower split represents "I" as having more organismic wholeness available on a daily basis. Such a person would be more open to being touched by the beauty of nature or the inter-relatedness of all life, and open as well to knowing one's own limitations and human brokenness. One would be more open to the truth of one's life, from mistakes to successes, from pain to joy. Here, no matter what the particular type of experience, one would know, "This is my experience; this is who I am in this moment."

Having said all of this, of course, it must be remembered that Self-realization should not be *ipso facto* equated with this deeper sense of personhood represented by an expanded middle unconscious or intensification of "I-amness." Above all, Self-realization revolves around the response—in the passing moments of each day of life—to one's profound underlying unity with deeper Self.

To sum up our discussion of Self-realization, we can say that Self-realization is the ongoing dynamic relationship between "I" and Self throughout all life experiences. This relationship may indeed at times involve an experience of profound unity "in which the sense of individual identity is dimmed and may even seem temporarily lost" (Assagioli, 1973, p. 128), a unity which

temporarily obscures any distinction between "I" and Self at all. But the path of Self-realization may also lead through the abyss, through periods of isolation, fragmentation, and pain. In whatever experience, Self is present and available to relationship; in whatever experience, Self-realization is distinct but not separate from the type or content of experience; in whatever experience, the intimate relationship of "I" and Self abides.

IN CONCLUSION

In this brief monograph we have attempted to explore the broad outlines of psychosynthesis as it exists to date. The structure of the human personality has been presented via an elaboration of the oval-shaped diagram, and the process of healing and growth has been addressed in the descriptions of personal psychosynthesis, transpersonal psychosynthesis, and Self-realization.

Note that throughout this discussion there has been very little mention of specific technique, methodology, or practice. We have described the human journey without mentioning any particular methods of travel, so to speak. One reason for this is that psychosynthesis is fundamentally an orientation, a general approach to the whole human being, and exists apart from any particular concrete applications. Here is Assagioli:

If we now consider psychosynthesis as a whole, with all its implications and developments, we see that it should not be looked upon as a particular psychological doctrine, nor as a single technical procedure.

It is first and foremost a dynamic, even a dramatic conception of our psychological life...
(Assagioli, 1965, p. 30)

Psychosynthesis provides a broad perspective of the human drama, from personal to transpersonal dimensions, from the individual to society at large, and it attempts to base this perspective on phenomenological observation. And as an overall perspective, psychosynthesis may suggest particular techniques and methods, but it nevertheless remains distinct from these.

This fact allows a rich variety of approaches to be used within

the psychosynthesis context. From guided imagery and hypnosis, to art therapy and body work; from cognitive-behavioral techniques, to object relations and family systems; from individual and group psychotherapy, to meditation and self-help groups; psychosynthesis offers an overall view which can help orient oneself within the vast array of different modalities available today.

But more importantly, the breadth of the psychosynthesis perspective allows one to recognize and validate an extensive range of human experience: the vicissitudes of developmental difficulties and early trauma; the confrontation with existential identity, choice, and responsibility; the heights of inspired creativity, peak performance, and spiritual experience; and the search for meaning. None of these important spheres of human life need be reduced to the other, and each can find its right place in the whole. This means that no matter what type of experience is engaged, and no matter what phase of growth is negotiated, the complexity and uniqueness of the individual person may be respected.



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