



PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

QUARTERLY

The Digital Magazine of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis

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Kerstin Shands on **Fear and Anxiety: Causes and Cures**

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Psychosynthesis Quarterly

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Making some policy decisions can help us keep organized, but of course reality often jumps in and shows us that sometimes it can be better to let our ideas get stretched or even set aside. So to keep things manageable for us, we announced that we wanted to limit the length of articles in the *Quarterly* to 4500 words (see the banner at left), and this month Dr. Ferrucci sent us an article that was just wonderful, and twice the length I wanted. As you can see, we set the policy aside. We decided that our small volunteer staff of editors cannot handle more than 50 pages at a time, and so when we have 50 pages of material we will limit articles to 4500 words, but when we have room we will run longer pieces. But then your fearless editor saw what he had on his plate and decided that he could not exclude any of the wonderful material that was given to us for this issue. But in future we will make a greater effort to keep the length of the *Quarterly* under 50 pages, which will entail accepting longer works only when we have space, and also delaying publication of some pieces until future issues.

So if you have a longer piece to share, please check in with me at newsletter@aap-psychosynthesis.org to see what we have on hand.

As we noted last month, we have articles that have been written with several different styles of English. As editors we have been confronted with decisions
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PSYCHOSYNTHESIS IN THE LIGHT OF NEUROSCIENCE

by Piero Ferrucci

Recent developments in neuroscience research have highlighted a new and paradoxical fact: the principles that Roberto Assagioli and his pupils have enunciated in the last hundred years now find a precise correspondence in the data and models of neuroscience. The paradox is that psychosynthesis, which focuses on the individual's uniqueness, has always been based on soft, subjective evidence: the story of individual and group sessions, and the outcome of various techniques and exercises. Now, *a posteriori*, comes hard experimental confirmation of its principles.

This new development is part of a vaster tendency: whereas psychotherapeutic practice and neurophysiological research were largely strangers to one another in the past, now we find communication and convergence between the two worlds. As a consequence of this upheaval, we are witnessing changes and radical revisions that would have been unthinkable in earlier times, and which have radically altered and amplified the scientific image of human nature. This evolution is due in great part to advances in techniques of investigating the brain itself, in particular, brain imaging, which allows scientists to observe ongoing cerebral activity, thus enabling them to study correlations between subjective states and physiological events.

Many studies in neuroscience show us psychosynthesis in action (without calling it that) in all its important aspects. Studying neuroscience in this context is like learning psychosynthesis again from a different, more concrete perspective. In this essay—by no means an exhaustive treatment of the subject, which would require much more space—I will highlight some basic themes that psychosynthesis and neuroscience have in common.

Empathy

According to Roberto Assagioli, empathy is “the identification, more or less temporary and to varying degrees, of one person with another.” It is at the basis of the I-Thou relationship, the truest relation between human beings. It is possible because of the essential unity of human nature beyond all differences, and it means that “in each of us *all* elements and human qualities potentially exist”.¹ Empathy can be consciously cultivated in all interpersonal relationships and deliberately evoked in psychotherapy. A large part of last century psychology is implicitly founded on the assumption of basic human selfishness: “*Homo homini lupus*,”[♦] in Hobbes' words. It is an ancient postulate, reinforced by a one-sided reading of the evolutionary struggle. In this view, evolution is a cruel war, in which the only survivors are those who prevail over others. All manifestations of altruism, empathy and care for others have underlying self-serving purposes. For Freud, empathy starts to show around seven years of age; it means caring about others' needs for the sake of interested compromise within social coexistence, and it arises with the formation of the super-ego. For Piaget, empathy has first of all to do with spatial representation; that is, the capacity to see the surrounding world from other people's viewpoints: for example, I cannot see behind my back, but someone looking at me can.

For a long time, few believed in the genuinely prosocial motivation or the propensity for spontaneous empathy in human beings. One of the minority was Carl Rogers, who chose empathy as a central theme for his work. Since the eighties this area has changed radically: studies on the spontaneous altruism of children, on animal behaviour (above all on primates), on ordinary citizens who risked their lives to help Jews during the German occupation, on blood and bone marrow donors, on the central role of social contact and the sense of belonging, on the importance of maternal care and breastfeeding (earlier developed by Bowlby's pioneering

[♦] Man is a wolf to [his fellow] man — *ed.*

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work), and various others, show that the empathic and prosocial disposition exists alongside the most selfish tendencies, and that it has played a central role in the development of interpersonal relations and thus in human evolution.

In this arena, the discovery of mirror neurons in the work of Giacomo Rizzolatti takes on special importance. According to Rizzolatti mirror neurons have the capacity to re-create an activity that we perceive in the environment. If I see someone raise her arm, my mirror neurons reproduce the same gesture in my brain. That happens only if I perceive that gesture as intentional: this in turn is a crucial point, because it shows that our brain is equipped to discriminate between voluntary and involuntary action – a capacity present from the third year of life.²

So empathy is a basic capacity of the nervous system, not a learned social behaviour, nor a purely mental capability. The meaning of this discovery is revolutionary, because it makes the ability to enter into resonance with others central to human nature. This capacity forms the basis of interpersonal relations, communication between people, language learning and socialization, and it lends credence to the idea that original prosocial tendencies are at the core of human nature.

To be precise, there are discordant opinions on this subject. The significance of mirror neurons must be carefully evaluated, beyond the journalistic simplifications so widespread in the past few years. It is interesting however, to quote the authoritative opinion of V.S. Ramachandran, who believes that the empathy generated by the mirror neurons is the main cause of the evolutionary leap made by humanity in the last five hundred thousand years, and also the more recent one in the last 2500 years. According to him, mirror neurons make it possible for us to communicate with and learn from others, and so transmit knowledge by example and imitation. According to Ramachandran the appearance of mirror neurons signaled the passage from biological evolution, based solely on genetic transmission, to cultural evolution, which is immensely faster, and based on learning by communication. Ramachandran calls mirror neurons “Gandhi neurons,” because they erase the boundary between me and the others—not just in a metaphorical sense, but literally, since these neurons are unable to recognize the difference. Ramachandran predicts that “mirror neurons will do for psychology what DNA has done for biology: they will provide a unifying framework and help explain a host of mental abilities that have hitherto remained mysterious and inaccessible to experiments.”³

Unfortunately we must also note that neuroscience has made some of its discoveries, including those on empathy, by inflicting unspeakable suffering on evolved animals such as primates and other mammals: craniotomy, finger amputation, electric shocks, etc. The paradox is that these operations are performed in some cases within the study of empathy: research done for proving the existence of empathy, but without any empathy at all. This poses basic questions about the ethical limits of research, and shows us that empathy in humans is not a universal and necessary given.

Still, within the area of interpersonal relationships, a recent research of great interest for all who work in the area of counseling and psychotherapy, has shown: 1) human beings (as compared to all other primates) have a strong need to communicate their own experiences, and 2) this self-disclosure activates the mesolimbic dopamine system—the same neuronal area which is activated by anticipation or receipt of reward (such as food, money, sex, nicotine). In other words, to talk about oneself (as opposed to talking about any other subject not related to oneself) evokes a sense of wellbeing similar to other common rewards, and is observable through brain imaging technology.⁴ We also know that disclosure about ourselves to another person will make our attitude towards that person more favorable.

Plasticity

Until not long ago, a dogma reigned in the scientific study of the brain: once maturation is complete in adolescence, the brain stays the same for life, till the start of gradual senile degeneration. All that contrasted markedly with observed psychotherapeutic success; that is, the possibility of profound change in human beings’ attitudes, in our beliefs and values, in our way of living, and the possibility of overcoming many of our limits and pathologies.

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This fundamental difference has done nothing but impede communication and exchange between neuroscience and psychotherapy.

In this context of estranged fields of research, Roberto Assagioli spoke since 1909 of the “plastic unconscious,” in other words the area of our unconscious that, like a photographic plate (digital photography did not yet exist), can remain impressed and can therefore influence our emotions and behaviours. The plastic unconscious gives us an indefinite capacity to learn, elaborate, and create. Assagioli formulated a series of laws that regulate our possibilities of impressing the plastic unconscious and directing it according to our will. Among these laws we find Law I, which holds that images and ideas produce corresponding physical conditions and external acts; Law III, which states that ideas and images tend to awaken emotions that correspond to them; Law VI, according to which concentrated attention on ideas and images feeds and strengthens them; and Law VII: repetition of acts intensifies the tendency to perform them until they come to be performed unconsciously.⁵ The existence of a plastic unconscious alongside the structured one suggests concrete, extraordinary possibilities for transformation, and conscious, deliberate change of mental attitudes, emotional dispositions and behaviours, in the fields of education, self-realization and psychotherapy.

Since the nineties, the idea of the brain’s structural immutability has been replaced by the idea of its plasticity. The work of Eric Kandel in the field of memory is at the origin of this monumental change. Experimenting on the marine snail *aplysia*, endowed with particularly large neurons, and subjecting these creatures to a series of electric shocks, Kandel noticed that their nervous system changed and the synaptic connections between motor neurons and sensory neurons multiplied. He thus found that a strengthening of the connections between neurons became structural. “What particularly fascinated me ...,” says Kandel, “was the possibility that psychotherapy, which presumably works in part by creating an environment in which people learn to change, produces structural changes in the brain, and which one might now be in a position to evaluate those changes directly.”⁶

The famous studies on London taxi drivers (who must memorize vast quantities of information on roads) compared to bus drivers (who habitually drive the same route) show that the taxi drivers’ brains have formed more developed neural circuits because of their learning, internalization and prolonged use of road maps. The same has been found comparing cerebral maps of musicians and non-musicians; experts and non-experts in computer technology; medical students preparing for an exam and other students who are not preparing for one; and so forth. In all these cases, the neuronal circuits have shown differences due to the repetition of thoughts and behaviours. In short, the brain is plastic. It can be moulded by what we do and what we think. Repeated activities and thoughts leave a deep trace in the organization of the neural circuitry. What before seemed rigidly unchangeable now is seen as susceptible to voluntary transformation. The brain can change itself, as the title of a famous book on the subject proclaims. Clearly these findings force us to revisit the concept of human nature: to stop seeing it as an unalterable structure in which we are imprisoned, but as a physiological matrix of countless possibilities and transformations. This orientation coincides with psychosynthetic thought.

Disidentification

A central theme of psychosynthesis is disidentification. Assagioli held that our “I” habitually identifies with bodily sensations, emotions, desires and impulses, and thoughts. We identify with our roles, too. Also common is identification with pathological nuclei: anxieties and phobias, destructive and limiting self-created images, depressive fantasies and feelings, infantile emotional habits, uncontrollable impulses, compulsive rituals, etc. It is possible to learn to distance ourselves from all these psychic realities, and to watch them while interposing distance between our “I” and any observed content. Assagioli taught that it is possible for the “I” to find a different placement within one’s inner space. The distance helps us reduce the size and power of elements that would otherwise control us. The various psychic contents change from internal to external. Feelings and ideas are not “inside” anymore, but “outside:” we are no longer shaped and controlled by them, but we perceive them as transient forms that we can direct and transform. Assagioli believed that we are dominated by everything

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with which we identify; we can dominate everything from which we have disidentified. The practice of the disidentification exercise guides us in freeing ourselves from forces which would otherwise dominate us: “I have a body, but I am not my body; I have emotions, but I am not my emotions...” etc. The goal of this exercise is the realization of the “I” as a center of pure self-consciousness and will. This process can give all who use it a sense of mastery and inner freedom. Techniques and attitudes of this kind are found in various spiritual traditions, both Eastern and Western. A very similar technique has been adopted by various neuroscientists, and their studies and experimentation use concepts and methods that are in harmony with psychosynthesis techniques. For example, Daniel Siegel (UCLA School of Medicine) has coined the term *mindsight*: the capacity to watch one’s emotions and thoughts and so to reflect on one’s own experiences. According to Siegel, the capacity for *mindsight* is based on a threefold disposition: openness—looking at the inner world as it is, not as one would like it to be; observation—perceiving psychic processes in a wider context, and detaching oneself from automatic behaviour as well as habitual reactions; and objectivity—understanding that psychic processes are temporary, and that they do not constitute our identity. Siegel believes that *mindsight* shifts the center of brain activity from the limbic area, which we have in common with all mammals, and which represents an older part of our evolution, to the prefrontal cortex area, the result of our most recent evolution. To this latter area belong the understanding of time, the sense of identity, moral tendencies, and the capacity for reflection. The central part of this area is especially important because it communicates with all the other parts and thus has an integrative function. This is the site of *mindsight*.⁷

Jeffrey Schwartz also adopts psychological detachment as a healing tool. Schwartz uses a four-point sequence to guide a subject who wants to master an impulse, a thought or an emotion he sees as undesirable and debilitating. It all begins with the experimental verification of the fact that giving a name to an emotional state helps us reduce its power over us. The four stages are: 1) Relabel: become aware and define the emotions, thoughts and impulses we want to master; 2) Reframe: the subject is invited to consider the specific content and realize that “this is not me, it is my brain”. For example, if the patient has a panic attack, he first says to himself, “anxiety” or “panic”; then a phrase like: “it is the brain which is causing this panic attack, but I am not my brain;” 3) Refocus: one shifts the attention in other directions—physical exercise, reading a book, writing in a diary, etc. and 4) Revalue: The last stage consists in a new appraisal of the situation, and includes a dialogue with the “Wise Advocate,” a character who represents the wisest part of oneself and who helps us see our condition in a wider context. Schwartz began working with obsessive-compulsive patients, but extended his method to various pathologies. His technique also consists in showing the patient printouts of brain imaging before and after treatment, to show them that brain areas which were previously overexcited (mainly the right caudal nucleus in the case of obsessive-compulsive disturbance) are no longer in an overexcited state as a result of the treatment. Both Schwartz and Siegel have adopted the attitude of detached observation (the equivalent of disidentification) from the Buddhist practice of *vipassana*.⁸⁺⁹

Mario Beauregard of the University of Montreal has conducted a two-fold series of experiments. To one group of men (monitored with functional magnetic resonance) he showed brief films with explicit sexual content, alternating them with other films of neutral content. Brain imaging revealed a normal state of sexual arousal. Afterwards Beauregard showed subjects other films, equally explicit, but after having asked them to watch in a detached manner both the film and their own reactions. Brain imaging revealed a great reduction in sexual arousal, and this was confirmed by the participants’ subjective experience. The experiment had no repressive or moralistic aims: its main purpose was to show that the male reaction to sexual arousal is controllable, and that therefore in cases of sexual violence the standard excuse of “I couldn’t help it, this is human nature” is invalid.

In another experiment, Beauregard showed groups of women sad and moving films. In this case too, images of the cerebral areas showed the corresponding strong emotional reaction. Then Beauregard repeated the experiment, having first asked subjects to observe with detachment everything that happened: both the film and their own reactions to it. Here too, the emotional state was much less. Brain imaging revealed activation in the anterior temporal lobe, and also the right side of the amygdala, of the insula, and of the right

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ventrolateral prefrontal cortex. In the second experiment, emotional self-regulation stimulated completely different areas: the lateral prefrontal cortex and the right orbitofrontal cortex, that is, areas of the brain that belong to a later/posterior evolutionary phase. In short, it is possible to stop oneself from being dominated by depressive feelings.

The goal of both experiments was to show that it is possible to distance oneself from one's own psychic contents, and that the distance aids control, and that therefore we are not at the mercy of emotions and impulses, but we can learn to master our psyche instead of being its victim.¹⁰

The construction of reality

The universe in which we live is not given, but constructed. We could say that all of last century saw a crucial epistemological transition: from naive realism to mental constructivism. Scores of studies in various fields have shown how our world is not an external objective reality, but a subjective universe generated by us. Our body, our memory of our lives, our sense of identity and self-image we have of ourselves, others, society, all of reality, are nothing other than constructions of our mind. This subjectivity is the basic condition for psychotherapy, which confronts and transforms the mental maps we have of ourselves, others and our existential situation. Often these maps are not adequate, they are incomplete, distorted, or dysfunctional, and this greatly harms and impoverishes us. Psychotherapy can be seen as an attempt to make our representation of reality richer and more efficient. Psychosynthesis, in particular, studies our mental constructions and helps us see them as such (in itself a therapeutic development) and then to replace them with other, more functional and complete ones.

The development of the neurosciences has further deepened these ideas. The whole of our life is a creation of our brain, and the world we inhabit is a microcosm created by our cerebral circuits. According to Antonio Damasio, director of the Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California, the main feature of the human brain is its amazing capacity for constructing maps. The brain makes maps of everything: objects, situations, pieces of music, people, mathematical formulae, places, machines, and so on. "The brain is a born cartographer", says Damasio.¹¹ From the maps emerge actual mental images. For Damasio, the brain is not a mirror that reflects reality, but a configuration of Lego pieces with which we continually reconstruct surrounding reality inside ourselves.¹² Of particular interest is the theory of pain that emerges from this view. Ramachandran believes that physical pain is not a real and direct datum, but an opinion that the body has about the health of the organism. In short, pain is an illusion because our very sensation of the body is a mental image and the brain is a virtual reality producing machine.¹³ Realizing that everything we call "reality" is our own subjective construction helps us understand that we live in a world we make ourselves; that this world does not have an objective, definitive and universal truth, that it can be deconstructed and reconstructed, and that other people live in worlds very different from ours.

Will

For psychosynthesis, will is the central faculty of the human being, closer to our identity than all the others. The will is often not developed enough, or else it is oppressed and deadened in the course of our life. Assagioli believes this is an important reason for discomfort and pathology. The impossibility of self-affirmation or mastery of one's impulses, psychological subjection to other people, dependency, lack of initiative or self-discipline, existential resignation, the absence of a goal in life, are all examples of lack of will. Assagioli points out, too, that he doesn't see will as a moralistic force (the Victorian will) or as "willpower," but as the directing and integrating center of the whole personality. Free will exists and can be developed. For psychosynthesis, the lack or suppression of the will are a main cause of pathology. The problem of the existence of free will has always been a subject of debate. Without free will there can be no moral or legal responsibility. But anyone with a scientific background finds it hard and incongruent to think of free will in a universe governed by

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deterministic laws (at least in pre-quantum science). Furthermore, free will is by definition unpredictable: and unpredictability is exactly what science tries to diminish or eliminate. The deterministic view would seem to contradict our subjective experience of having the power to choose freely. Many exponents of the neurosciences have often embraced the hypothesis that free will does not exist, that it is a mere epiphenomenon—a mental event which, though existing, has no influence on reality. Will is thus reduced to the status of subjective illusion: We think we are choosing, but everything is already decided. A famous experiment by Benjamin Libet found that before the conscious decision to move a finger, the corresponding motor area of the brain is already activated about half a second earlier. In other words, the brain has already initiated the act, and only afterwards the conscious “I” decides – or has the impression of deciding. When subjects thought they were choosing, their brain had already decided. It is as if, when a train is leaving from a railway station, I were to decide that the train should leave, and when it does leave, I thought that I was the one who made it move. (The Libet experiment was repeated in subsequent years with more sophisticated equipment and in different modalities.) Nevertheless, Libet became a proponent of free choice, and in 1993 edited the publication of the book: *The Volitional Brain*, containing essays by various authors. There is at least one reason: Libet’s experiments also found that the conscious “I” had power of veto: it can inhibit activation of a motor area of the brain.¹⁴ Several studies show the existence of volitional activity in the brain. To start with, they show what happens when will is dysfunctional or absent. Examples: In the Foix-Chavany-Marie syndrome, the patient is unable to smile voluntarily, though he can smile involuntarily. Certain lesions in the corpus callosum give rise to a conflict between the two hands, so that one hand performs a gesture and the other involuntarily undoes what the first hand did.¹⁵ In Alzheimer’s disease, there is decline in the “executive function:” that is, according to Elkhonon Goldberg, the reduced capacity to decide is one of the first symptoms of Alzheimer’s, even before cognitive degeneration. The pathological absence of the decision-making capacity shows how essential it is in the normal functioning of human life.¹⁶ Another study shows that a volitional act uses a certain amount of blood glucose. According to R. Baumeister, the author of this research, the will not only exists but can be developed “like a muscle.”¹⁷ In another study, made on subjects invited to choose between various items at the virtual supermarket (Coca Cola or Pepsi?), it was found that between the presentation of the choice and the moment of decision, an interval of about 2.5 seconds passed; in the first 800 milliseconds the cerebral cortex corresponding to visual activity was activated—within the 800 milliseconds, the right parietal cortex—but only when the subject made a choice. The researchers concluded that this is the decisional area of the cerebral cortex.¹⁸ Of particular interest, too, are the essays by Adina Roskies on free will. Roskies wonders if neuroscientific studies undermine the idea of free will. Her answer is that, first of all, the term “will” or “volition” is too vague, and that it must be split into five different meanings: as the endogenous beginning of an action (in contrast to reaction to a stimulus, which is exogenous), as intention, decision, executive control, or subjective experience. Roskies says no neuroscientific discovery doubts the existence of the will in each of the senses mentioned above.¹⁹ Many studies have begun to look at the possibility of influencing the brain in the matter of commercial choices—so called neuromarketing. This method, the ethical implications of which are doubtless in question, uses brain imaging to study the cerebral reaction to various images and logos. Those that evoke in the brain the sites linked with identity are the most promising from the commercial point of view, because they evoke identification with the logo and the lifestyle it symbolizes: hence the phenomenon of brand loyalty. The brain reaction is not in relation to the product or the service offered by the logo, but merely to the logo itself and the emotional contents it represents. This is an example of the commercial appropriation of the will, and assumes that free will exists, but can be manipulated.²⁰

Visualization

In psychosynthesis, visualization is a major technique, and it is used in many ways. One of the most efficacious is the technique of the ideal model, in which we may visualize the person we would like to become. The ideal model affirms the project of a human being constructing his own future. Often this project is

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unconscious, nonexistent, involuntary, distorted, or based on false self-images. This faulty representation creates discomfort and disorientation. Often, the faculty of projecting oneself is damaged by trauma, and must be reinstated. The ability to conceive and visualize one's future is energizing and helps give order and harmony to the human psyche. Visualization of symbolic images can be a great help and a guide, and can produce significant therapeutic effects. The efficacy derives also from the fact that symbols are the language of the unconscious.

In general the imaginary world (symbolic or not) can be an excellent laboratory in which to experiment and cultivate new attitudes and behaviours.

The kinaesthetic representation of movements has been amply studied by neuroscience, and is often used in neurological rehabilitation, because imaginative simulation of movement stimulates the same motor area of the brain as the actual movement itself. Visualization of complex actions is very useful in the reeducation of brain-damaged patients. In the case of stroke it has been found that visualizing the movement of a paralyzed limb, while not offering total rehabilitation, causes blood flow to the cerebral zones immediately next to the affected areas, and thus limits the damage.²¹ Furthermore, visualization of images activates processes similar to perception, as was found by showing people drawings of ordinary objects and then asking them to visualize those same images.²² Finally, the subject of a visualization (for instance a human face or a landscape) determines which area of the brain is activated.²³

Even language may or may not be activated by visualization. The fascinating studies by A. Just compared brain reactions to phrases with visual content—such as “The number 8, when rotated 90°, looks like a pair of glasses”—and to sentences with less visual impact—such as “Though the marathon is a sport these days, it began at the time of Ancient Greece when messengers brought news.” He found that the sentence with greater visual content stimulates very different areas from those that requires less visualization. This is a relevant fact for anyone interested in learning and education.²⁴

Visualization has often been used to improve sporting performance. Athletes vividly and in detail imagine themselves performing an action at their very best—for instance throwing the ball into the basket—and the visualization has value as proper training. An essential condition is that the athlete be familiar with the performance, and that the visualization happen in first person and with inner perspective. An interesting research by C.J. Olssen et al., using fMRI, studied athletes active in high jump, and compared them to subjects without experience in this sporting specialty. When they were asked to visualize high jumping, the athletes activated the cerebral motor zones, the non-athletes only those corresponding to visual activity: they were visualizing from the outside.²⁵

Reading and writing

Book therapy is a technique of psychosynthesis. It relies on the capacity of books to evoke emotions, convey ideas, develop reflection, facilitate personal growth, stimulate action, and show new ways of relating with others and viewing the world. Reading can give great enrichment: anyone whose life has changed from reading a book knows this. Book therapy is not an easy psychotherapeutic technique because it requires, first, a deep knowledge of a fair number of books, and secondly, the intuition necessary for choosing the right book for the existential situation and for the patient's taste. Assagioli advised therapists to have a “book cabinet” comparable to the medicine cabinet, so as to have books available for offer in the course of therapy (Naturally this can be extended to DVD's, which did not exist in Assagioli's time.). In recent years book therapy and associated activities have developed greatly. It is very helpful in fighting depression. It has also been found that for people with chronic pain, reading can be more useful than acupuncture, painkillers, physiotherapy or hyperbaric chamber. Reading groups where readers share experiences about books they have read and read out loud from their favourite books, offer the chance of socializing. In the rapid transition from the era of books to the digital age, reading hard copy is an invitation to reflect and slow down. Reading on the computer, even digital books, is often more fragmented and scattered and less deep than reading books in hard copy.

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In the neurological field much attention is given to reading—an activity that is unnatural and fairly complex, and therefore (especially for the English-speaking countries) not easily acquired. A study at Carnegie Mellon found that after a six-month reading program for people who had reading difficulties, the cerebral area for language had grown.²⁶ Also a study conducted by Mayo Clinic shows that reading can bring about an increase in “cognitive reserves,” thus serving as prevention of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), which often precedes Alzheimer’s syndrome.²⁷ Reading could also help prevent cerebral damage: a study looked at 112 smelter workers who had suffered lead poisoning, all of them with damage to the motor apparatus; but those who were in the habit of reading had suffered much less cognitive damage.²⁸ From this evidence the researchers concluded that reading can provide a certain protection to the brain and an increase of cognitive reserves. For the time being, neuroscientific studies on reading show benefits of function, whereas book therapy elicits benefits mainly, if not only, linked to content.

Writing has been used in psychosynthesis with therapeutic intent. Autobiography, journaling, and other kinds of writing are useful for several reasons: first, they all express psychic contents which would otherwise be repressed and could cause psychosomatic disturbances. Let us remember Assagioli's ninth psychological law: “Instincts, impulses, desires and emotions tend to be expressed and *demand expression* [italics mine].”²⁹ Moreover writing can be a method for exploring the unconscious and an invitation to reflection.

Recently several researches have proven the therapeutic efficacy of writing.³⁰ Some neuroscientific studies show that writing about one’s emotions can foster psychological balance and good brain function. In subjects monitored with visualization of cerebral activity, reduced stimulation of the amygdala has been found. This points to a reduction in emotional activity, and the stimulation of other cerebral areas that regulate the emotions. According to Matthew Lieberman of UCLA, it is the act of naming emotions and putting them down on paper that helps in mastering them.³¹

Transpersonal experiences

Assagioli believed that our true identity is constituted by the spiritual or transpersonal Self. The Self manifests through the superconscious, which is the source of enlightened states, aesthetic experiences, creativity, altruistic attitudes and behaviors, ecstasy, intuition, etc. and especially the understanding of our life’s meaning, without which we are prey to alienation and despair.

Transpersonal experiences have been called “religious” (in the non-confessional, vaster sense of the word) by William James, “oceanic” by Sigmund Freud (who interpreted them as regressive), “numinous” by R. Otto and C. G. Jung, “peak experiences” by A. H. Maslow, “transpersonal” by Stan Grof, and, with perhaps a more limited meaning, “flow” by M. Csikszentmihalyi. For Assagioli these inner events, far from being casual and secondary episodes, take on a profound relevance, because they form milestones on life’s path of each one of us. They are sources of revelation, hope and positive interaction with others. According to Assagioli, transpersonal experiences are a legitimate field of scientific investigation, independent of any religious creed. True “ways” of realization exist, such as the way of meditation or action, dance or prayer, beauty or science. Furthermore, the transpersonal dimension, when not elaborated and assimilated in a balanced and conscious way, can cause pathology.

Transpersonal experiences have been the object of research also in the field of neuroscience. Especially interesting are the investigations by Mario Beauregard on cerebral activity during contemplation and mystical union. Beauregard asked a group of fifteen cloistered Carmelite sisters to recall and try to re-create the most intense spiritual experiences of their lives. A while later he also asked them to enter, as far as possible, into a contemplative state during fMRI. The chief characteristics of these experiences were (according to the Hood Mysticism Scale):

“I know I am having an experience of the sacred.”

“I have had an experience in which it seemed I was absorbed in something greater than myself.”

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“I felt deep joy.”

All these states had exact correspondence in the visualization of cerebral activity.³²

Some spiritual traditions warn against the excessive use of the rational mind, and offer techniques to inhibit its activity. The rational or discursive mind can filter, distort or veil the transpersonal dimension. The same or similar phenomenon is apparently detected by research in the field of neuroscience, especially the ones on the flow state. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the state of flow is attained when body or mind reach their limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult or worthwhile.³³ The cortical activity in the median-frontal area has been found to subside during the state of flow.³⁴ The following sections also concern the transpersonal dimension.

Meditation

Meditation, seen as an inner targeted activity, is another crucial theme of psychosynthesis. Often the need for an inner life, for silence, reflection, solitude and inner space, is squashed or ignored or regarded with suspicion in our society, so bent on extraversion. When that happens, problems inevitably arise, because many individuals, mainly introverts, find that their chances of compensating for a scattered and chaotic life, by creating a private space in which to recharge and regenerate, are inhibited. Psychosynthesis acknowledges this need for an inner world and offers several kinds of meditation, besides recommending the meditations of various spiritual traditions, like Buddhism or Vedanta.

In the past few years there has been keen interest in meditation by the medical, psychotherapeutic, and neuroscientific fields. A. Newberg, author of various studies on this theme, says that the brain is equipped for survival. Spiritual experiences show us that our life has a purpose and that the universe has meaning; that is, they make an inhospitable and frightening place more benign, and they help us to better cope with it. It is for this reason that spiritual experiences have an adaptive function.³⁵ Yet meditation has often been approached in a superficial way, merely in a few of its mechanical aspects, as a relaxation technique, detached from its spiritual roots, and its deep meaning has been forgotten. But even with these reservations, we have seen a proliferation of highly interesting work. For example, in a study conducted by the Medical College of Georgia, students who had learned a simple meditation (relaxation, deep breathing, repetition of a mantra) showed reduction in school absence and improved behaviour. A longitudinal study made in schools found that pupils who practised meditation showed fewer signs of exam anxiety and better ability for concentration.³⁶ In 2011 another study conducted under the Massachusetts General Hospital Neuroimaging Program, a group of subjects took a course in vipassana meditation for eight weeks (the control group did no meditation). At the end, the subjects who had meditated for an average of 27 minutes a day, showed psychological and cognitive benefits, and, at the cerebral level, increased density of the grey matter in the hippocampus and the areas corresponding to awareness and compassion, as well as a decreased density in the amygdala. Although several studies have already shown that the brain of meditators is organized differently, this is actually the first one showing structural cerebral change caused by meditation while it happens.³⁷

Beauty

Another transpersonal experience is that of beauty. For Assagioli, beauty is a centrally important factor in human experience from an educational, developmental, and therapeutic point of view. For him, aesthetic contemplation is liberating: “The sense of beauty illuminates, nourishes and enlivens human life.” In my research on the experience of beauty and aesthetic intelligence, I have fully verified this phenomenon. A considerable number of recent studies have shown that certain artistic activities, as well as contact with nature, improve academic performance, have a calming and regenerative effect, prevent some childhood pathologies, encourage prosocial attitudes, reduce aggression, and even raise IQ. The field of neuroscience, too, has

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recognized the aesthetic experience as an observable cerebral fact. Semir Zeki coined the term “neuroaesthetics.” In a study on a small number of university students he invited the subjects to look at images, which he distributed in three categories: beautiful, ugly and neutral. The subjects then looked at those images while monitored by fMRI. Brain imaging showed the reaction to beautiful images was different from that to ugly ones.³⁸ V.S. Ramachandran talks of a neurological theory of aesthetic experience formulated in eight governing laws.³⁹ In an elegant experiment by Cinzia Di Dio, Emiliano Macaluso and Giacomo Rizzolatti, and published under the title “The Golden Beauty,” subjects monitored with fMRI were shown fifteen images of sculptures of male and female bodies, all respecting the classical canon of the golden mean (1:1.68), and then the same images after they had been slightly shortened or elongated (1:0.74 and 1:0.36) so that they no longer adhered to the golden mean. The subjects first had to look, then give an aesthetic evaluation, and secondly another evaluation of figure proportion. fMRIs showed a difference in brain activity between exposure to the canonical and the distorted images. The experimenters conclude that the brain has a specific response to beauty (at least the visual beauty of pictorial proportions), and it can be located in the joint activity of the insula and areas 45 and 46 of the prefrontal cortex (objective evaluation of beauty) and the amygdala (subjective response).⁴⁰

Eric Kandel has researched this subject as well, and has recently published a book in which he examines in detail the biological significance of aesthetic experience, also in relation to psychoanalysis and perception psychology. According to Kandel, art has an adaptive function for survival because it helps us tune into other people’s minds and share experiences.⁴¹

Play, smiling, humour

From the start of last century, Assagioli brought to light the regenerative importance of laughter, smiling, playfulness and good mood—all attitudes that improve our physical and mental health—at a time when the main subject in psychology was suffering and pathology: i.e. anxiety, anguish, depression, alienation, etc. Assagioli was interested also in laughter and smiling, regarding them elements of fundamental import:

Modern man has to learn three things above all in order to be healthy and whole:

The art of rest.

The art of contemplation.

The art of laughter and smiling.

Laughter relieves stress and gives great relief, produces beneficial inner relaxation, replacing the activity of worn out faculties with that of other, fresh ones, far too seldom used at all.”⁴²

It should be pointed out that by “play” Assagioli did not mean any particular kind of game like chess or soccer, but the attitude of playfulness. Play expresses a state of well being and activity with no ulterior motive, but rather an end in itself: any activity can therefore become a game, from walking in the mountains to artistic expression, from reading to watching movies, from travelling to collecting stamps, and even work itself can be approached and experienced in a playful mode.

For Assagioli, the capacity to laugh at ourselves allows for greater disidentification, therefore, it frees us from everything that can sadden, burden or anguish us. Playfulness, joy, and philosophical humour are true transpersonal qualities. These states of fulfillment and happiness facilitate and strengthen psychophysical health. A sense of humour brings lightness and the ability to see connections that are otherwise invisible; so it is creative. Joy is perhaps the central quality of being. Repression of these states can produce pathology.

The beneficial effects of play, as documented by research, are an increase in intelligence, the possibility of coming to know the world and trying various kinds of behaviour, and the development of the capacity to adapt to change.⁴³

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The importance of play for the brain has been amply proven. Since the pioneer studies by Marian Diamond in the 1960's, it has been shown that rats raised in rich and stimulating environments and with many possibilities for play develop larger brain mass and are much more intelligent than rats kept in a poor, unstimulating environment.⁴⁴ Play fosters the growth of the neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a substance that favours the growth and maintenance of cerebral cells.⁴⁵ Some studies also show that various games, including puzzles, increase resistance to neurodegenerative disturbance. John Byers has performed detailed analyses of play in animals and corresponding brain development. He has found that the quantity of play directly correlates with development of the prefrontal cortex.⁴⁶

In another study, subjects saw a funny film of their choice. In a nearby room control subjects waited with no stimulation. From all of them blood samples were taken for analysis every ten minutes. In those who watched the funny film, several immune functions were strengthened and the level of cortisol (which increases with stress) had diminished, whereas all the data on the control subjects remained unchanged. It really is true that laughter is good medicine and that smiling is a powerful stimulant of the neural circuits that facilitate social interaction and empathy.^{47 + 48}

From a psychotherapist's point of view, the new frontiers of neuroscience give a wider and more complete picture. Suddenly the subjective events, with which we have had familiarity in ourselves and in our patients for a long time, assume a clearer and more detailed physical dimension.

Wary of being either a neuromaniac nor a neurophobe, we may ask: Is it of any use to know which brain areas are activated in correspondence to a inner event? I believe it is. An inner event happens: an emotion, an ability to distance the self from subjective experience, the perception of beauty, an act of will, a memory, a mental image. Meanwhile we have a precise, outer graphic representation of this same event. It is as though events in our inner world were receiving a new ontological status: a confirmation that they are not merely vague, indefinable processes, but concrete happenings and shapes on a map. The soul has at last started to incarnate. ■



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Piero Ferrucci is a psychotherapist and philosopher. He has been a student and collaborator of Roberto Assagioli, the founder of psychosynthesis. He is the author of *What We May Be*, *Inevitable Grace*, *What Our Children Teach Us*, *The Power of Kindness*, *Beauty and the Soul*; the co-author, with Laura Huxley, of *The Child of Your Dreams* and the editor of *The Human Situation*, a book of Aldous Huxley's lectures. He lives near Florence with his wife and two sons.



aap cochairs quarterly report

The Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis (AAP) is a Massachusetts nonprofit corporation governed by a Steering Committee, headed by two cochairs. This is their regular report to the members. AAP is operated by volunteers and sustained by memberships and donations.

A year ago, the Steering Committee conducted a survey to gather elements for a renewed vision of AAP. The vision has seven pillars which support our long-standing purpose of furthering the awareness, application, and integration of psychosynthesis in North America and the world.

The vision, briefly, is: (a) collaborating globally; (b) incorporating cyber-technology; (c) publishing cutting-edge research; (d) maintaining an archive; (e) providing accredited training programs; (f) meeting the needs of the present social crises; and (g) demonstrating a dynamic model of social psychosynthesis. These are not goals; rather, they are centers of continuing growth and unfolding.

We then asked members and others to identify obstacles to this vision becoming a reality. We created our goals for 2012 to move toward actualizing the vision, mindful of the need to deal with these obstacles. Four major obstacles have been identified that keep the vision from operating at full capacity. They are (a) resistance to the use of the gifts of cyber-technology; (b) an outdated organizational structure; (c) fear of diverse perspectives; and (d) an ingrown group relationship patterns.

While we *resist learning and using cyber-technology*, we also have held successful teleconferences and study groups. Members hold on-line training courses. We have an impressive new quarterly digital magazine. Finally, anyone familiar with the internet can be trained to edit and update our website.

While we operate from *an outdated organizational structure*, we are experimenting with ways to increase participation in the decision-making process, arrive at a consensus related to what is needed, collaborate globally, respond to a world waiting for psychosynthesis, and adopt more of a pioneering attitude as a co-creative community for this purpose.

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While we *fear the diverse perspectives emerging* as we tailor our presentations of psychosynthesis to other disciplines, as a whole we are slowly recovering a sense of unconditional positive regard for those who are pioneering new perspectives. We are, as well, beginning to trust these pioneers to hold the foundational principles of psychosynthesis in these new packages. Others are publishing books and papers which synthesize traditional and emerging perspectives.

Regarding *ingrown relationship patterns*, there is an unqualified respect for the Spirit Giants that have brought psychosynthesis to this point. There is a huge wave of new leadership emerging, world-wide, which is equally passionate and qualified to lead the way to creating sustainable growth and expansion of psychosynthesis. The AAP Steering Committee is committed to highlighting where social psychosynthesis is being practiced and to functioning as a psychosynthesis-driven team.

The 2012 Rome Conference, *Psychosynthesis in the World*, created a sense of global community, one which depends on cyberspace to keep us connected in a timely fashion. The global psychosynthesis community includes many perspectives and approaches to advancing psychosynthesis. These approaches were presented at the Conference in practical demonstrations of "what may be," holding an attitude of psychosynthesis at their heart. New organizational forms will emerge for interaction and growth.

A highlight of the conference was the sense that those closest to the beginnings of psychosynthesis shared the roots of psychosynthesis in a way that we all felt a sense of being among the branches of this great and sacred tree planted by the genius of Roberto Assagioli.

We are looking forward to AAP's 2013 Conference, *Psychosynthesis at the Heart of Systems Transformation*. It holds the promise of creating the next phase in individual and social synthesis, one that will show how to respond to this planet's most critical and unavoidable crises. Now is the time to go to the new website, locate the proposal form, complete it, and send it in to claim your place as a presenter in this transformational moment in our history. We also welcome your volunteering spirit on one of the committees to make it happen. You may do this by emailing cochairs@aap-psychosynthesis.org or calling (386) 916-3747. This is a long distance line where you can leave a message. It is designated specifically for AAP during this next year.

The Steering Committee met September 6-9 in Montreal. Of course, as members, you are welcome to participate by sending your ideas, issues, and models for our consideration in creating a 2013 plan.

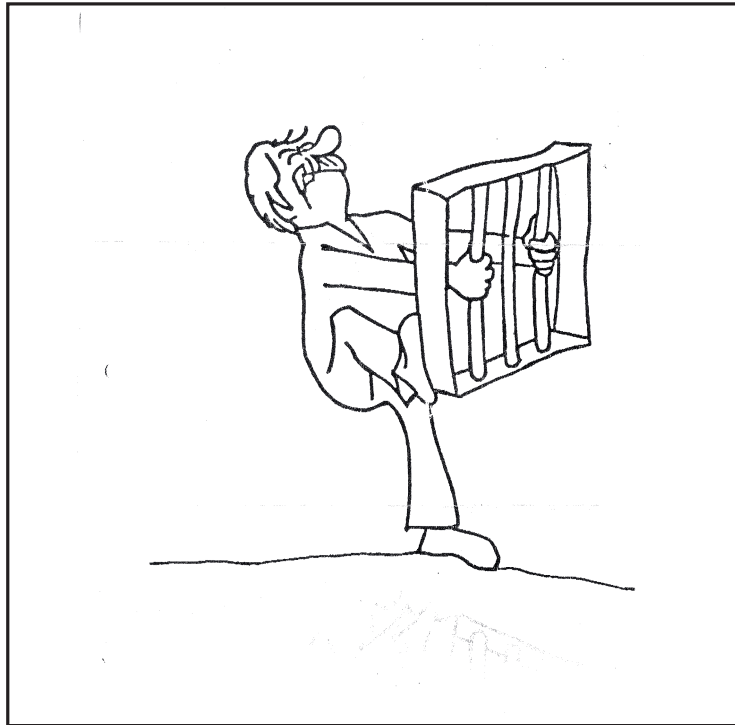
So much is beginning to happen in our psychosynthesis community. AAP is a global group, and yet we are increasingly growing as a North American-based organization among a network of centers and organizations in the world. This is a great moment in history for being a member of AAP. Service in the world is our privilege, one which we forge together.

With deep regard for our Common Purpose and Vision,

Dirk and Judi

Dirk Kelder and Judi White





**LAST ISSUE WE PRINTED THIS CARTOON
WITH AN INVITATION TO READERS TO SUPPLY A CAPTION FOR IT:
WE GOT A BUNCH! READ ON, BELOW:**

"Let me Out...."
(shadow: "...Let me In...")
—caption by Euro Perozzi, Italy

Let me OUT of this jail!!!!... (or *not*)
—caption by Phyllis Clay, USA

1. The doc said I'd do this exercise regularly to stop thinking about changing my therapist again and again.
2. When I'm out of here I'll publish my tale and become rich!
3. Hold on, I'm coming!
4. This is the last one, the last one, the ...
5. How was this back stretching exercise again?
6. Sure beats constipation!
7. I visited jail and all I got was this disproportional magnetic grid.
8. If I can only bend it a wee bit more it will fit my grandson perfectly.

—captions by Trond Øverland, Sweden

book announcement

MEAGHAN'S STORY, A STORY OF SURVIVAL

by Shamai Currim PhD

In a story of hope, a child's story of going from the effects of extreme abuse to an understanding of the healing process, Dr. Currim takes us through the process of finding true purpose in life. "Meaghan is a part that arose as I was doing my healing work, saying, 'it's me, again.' Healing from ritual abuse is a job that takes a lot of work, a lot of support, and a belief that it is worth it."

Throughout the book are healing collages, pictures done using online service (www.polyvore.com), for creating collages by importing pictures from the internet. The accompanying words speak to the process, the movement from victim, to survivor, to thriver.

Shamai Currim, PhD, has worked as an educator, teacher, trainer, and administrator in the field of early childhood and family life education both in North America and abroad, and as a therapist in private practice, focusing on those who are healing from extreme abuse. She has worked with children and families with special needs and has been active in working with the AIDS and prison communities. She was the Director of a Senior Citizen's Summer Residence and Children's Day Camp for 17 years. She believes in being active in reform and has served on the board of the International Organization of the Helen Prize for Women, the board of the Association of Early Childhood Educators, the Board of Survivorship, and as the Executive Director of Eduporta International Education Agency.

Shamai has been active in the Psychosynthesis community, serving on the AAP Steering Committee for two terms and has acted as the secretary, treasurer, conference chair and registrar, and nominating committee chair. She has been compiling the AAP Members' directory since 2005.

Her other published works include:

Satanic Ritual Abuse, <http://hourglass.net/tritherapy/Satanic.html>

The Transpersonal/Reaching Beyond the Self,
<http://hourglass.net/tritherapy/transpersonal.html>

The Dreamtime: What is it

Really? <http://hourglass.net/tritherapy/dreamtime.html>

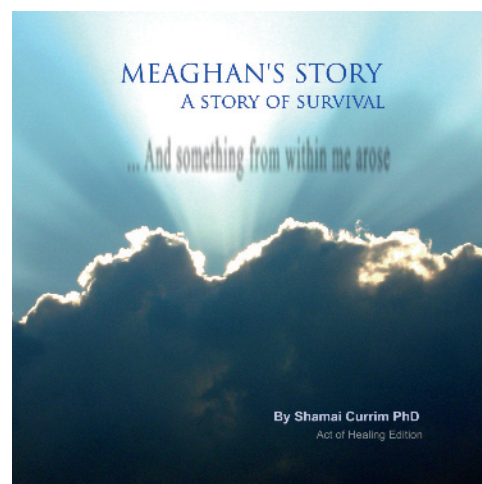
The Wheel of Life: Aligning Dreams with the SuperConscious
<http://hourglass.net/tritherapy/wheel.html>

The Five Forces: Working with Dissociative States

<http://hourglass.net/tritherapy/5forces.pdf>

Extreme Abuse, A Transpersonal Perspective in AAP's Conversations
in Psychosynthesis 2011 issue on Trauma and Recovery

<http://hourglass.net/tritherapy/world.html>



Today Shamai works as an advocate for change.

The criminality of ritual abuse becomes explicable in this book. Through poetic and artistic rendering, Shamai brings her past reality to the reader with an unexpected beauty. —Joanna Hart

Meagan's Story, A Story of Survival, Act of Healing Edition 2012
can be purchased by contacting the author at Shamai@hourglass.net

psychosynthesis education & training

Molly Young Brown On-line Courses in Psychosynthesis and Ecopsychology

<http://mollyyoungbrown.com>



Individual Distance Learning Courses

Three year-long distance training courses for people who live in areas with no nearby psychosynthesis center, and/or others who prefer to work at their own pace and schedule:

The courses consist of study assignments that include readings and exercises for self-exploration, and the student's written responses by e-mail. Instructor written feedback for each lesson is followed by an hour telephone conversation.

1. **Personal & Spiritual Psychosynthesis** covers the essential concepts, principles, and methods of psychosynthesis. The work focuses primarily on the student's own self-discovery and growth. 12 lessons. *(May be offered as a teleseminar course in the future.)*
 2. **Guiding Skills** explores principles and methods of psychosynthesis in counseling, psychotherapy, life coaching, and spiritual direction. (Prerequisite: completion of the first course, or comparable training at a psychosynthesis center.) 12 lessons
 3. **Psychosynthesis for the Earth** brings in systems thinking, ecopsychology, deep ecology, and "The Work That Reconnects." It is designed for educators, activists, and concerned citizens. (Prerequisite: completion of the first course, or comparable training at a psychosynthesis center.) 6 to 8 lessons.
- Certification/Credit** - A certificate of completion will be awarded for each course.

Teacher Training "Psychosynthesis for the People"

On-line teleseminar course

Many "ordinary" people today can benefit from learning disidentification and centering practices, how to work with subpersonalities, how to seek wisdom and guidance from the superconscious, and how to recognize and respond to the call of Self. This course will help students of psychosynthesis to acquire the necessary skills and understanding of psychosynthesis concepts, so they can teach effectively in their communities. The focus is on facilitating learning in groups for personal growth, rather than individual sessions.

The program includes 10 teleseminars (on-line) at two week intervals with reading, writing, and exercise assignments between seminars. Enrollment limited to 6-7 students. Pre-requisite: one year of psychosynthesis training or equivalent. **Next course starts in the fall of 2012.**

For more information, visit MollyYoungBrown.com

BUBBLES, SENSITIVITY, AND DISTORTIONS

Joann M. Anderson

In the latter half of my mental health/counseling practice, I became aware of unusual sensitivities in my clients, in both adults and children. My awareness was due, in large part, to the late Roberto Assagioli's writings¹ on giftedness and Kathleen Noble's research at the University of Washington on gifted women.² Following is a case study in which a client used my suggestions in solving a potentially serious problem with her daughter. Names have been changed for confidentiality.

Bubbles

"Sometimes," Anna said, "when I look in the mirror, I don't see myself, I see Susan Myer."

"Hmm. And who is Susan Myer?" asked her mother, who was brushing her six-year-old's hair in front of a mirror.

"She's a girl in my class at school and she is so pretty. I wish I were her so I could be that pretty."

Her mother stopped brushing Anna's hair, resting her hands on her daughter's shoulders. "Anna, you are very pretty in your own way. Your eyelashes are very long, your eyes are beautiful. You can appreciate Susan's prettiness and feel your own beauty at the same time."

"But how? Sometimes it is like I am Susan and not myself."

"Put a bubble around you and fill it with the prettiest colors you know. Fill it with the colors you like best."

Anna nodded. "Okay."

Over the next several years, Anna's divorced and remarried mother reminded her daughter many times to put a bubble around herself. For example, when Anna and her mother moved away from Anna's godmother, Anna cried for some time because they would not see each other again for several months. Anna's mother finally realized that Anna's godmother was likely grieving, too, and reminded her daughter to put the bubble around her so she didn't feel her godmother's sadness, too. The change in Anna's behavior was immediate and positive. No more tears. Instead, Anna said, "I didn't know."

Often, when Anna visited friends overnight, she would return home acting as if she were the friend with whom she had stayed until her mother reminded her to put the bubble around her. Again, the change in Anna's behavior was immediate and positive. When Anna started a new grade in school, or went into a new situation that was not too comfortable, her mother reminded her to put a bubble around herself and fill it with her favorite colors. Anna nodded, smiled, and went on to have a great time. Occasionally, Anna would cry for her father, who lived far away. Her mother again reminded her to put a bubble around herself and fill it with the color of her father's love. Within a short time, Anna would wipe her tears and come to her mother for a hug. When Anna started middle school, she sat next to a needy girl who "hung onto" Anna every place they went. Anna said, "I just put a bubble around me and it was all right." The next day, Anna again said, "I was really scared today about not being able to do some math, so I put a bubble around me and saw myself doing it perfectly. After that, I took the test and did well on it." Anna's mother and stepfather both hugged her and laughed joyfully with her. Her mother realized that all those reminders had worked.

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Sensitivity

As a therapist, I wanted to know what this is all about. It clearly worked to solve many problems, yet I needed to know why. I began reading books that were not in my counseling study bibliographies. *Guiding the Gifted Child* by James T. Webb, et al.,³ was one of the most helpful. Webb and his associates cited studies and described characteristics of gifted and talented children which are not normally recognized by parents, teachers, and administrators.

Anna is clearly a bright and talented child, although she is not a linear thinker who says “a,b,c,d, . . .” Instead, when she thinks, she may start with “j,” then go to “z,” back to “c,” then “m,” and maybe end with “a.” Learning the alphabet and math skills was a great challenge for her. Still, she read two grades beyond her chronological age and was very curious. Her high energy was also indicative of a gifted child’s character.

Still another characteristic of these children is their high sensitivity. Webb calls them “kids who have to have the tags cut off the insides of their new shirts because they can’t stand the irritation on their skin.” These children are also highly distractible, as was Anna, unless they are working on a particularly interesting project.

As I observed Anna and talked with her mother, I noticed that Anna was aware of every small detail that went on around her. Her mother reported that one day in the store when she was upset about not having her wallet, she anxiously explained the problem to the clerk. Anna later took her mother to task about distressing the clerk. “He didn’t know why you were yelling.” Since Anna is highly sensitive to tones, she misinterpreted her mother’s firm voice as yelling. After Anna’s mother found her wallet and calmed down, she listened to Anna’s complaint in detail, and explained to her that it had been a big deal to have lost her wallet, and that she had had reason to be upset. She was clear with Anna that she hadn’t been yelling at the clerk. She had only been letting the clerk know what was going on. Anna finally calmed down and said, “I didn’t know it was such a big deal.” From all that I read, not all gifted children are this sensitive, and not all sensitive children are gifted. But the gifted children’s literature is the only place I’ve seen the needs of the sensitive child addressed clearly.

Anna is sensitive in other ways, too. Her mother had to give away two beautiful angora sweaters because Anna’s skin itched whenever she wore them. Anna was allergic to different kinds of food as a young child, but gradually outgrew the allergies as she became older. Colors made a great difference to her. If she was given clothes that were of a different color than those she liked, she wouldn’t wear them even if they were nice. This changed somewhat as she grew older, but not completely.

Most of all, Anna is sensitive to the feelings of other people and will take on those feelings when she is with other people. When she first demonstrated this tendency, her mother began teaching Anna to put a bubble around herself. “You can know what your godmother is feeling and realize that your feelings are different. You don’t have to feel her feelings. You can simply know and be aware that her feelings are different and separate from your own.”

At times her mother was totally distressed, wondering whether Anna would ever learn to do this by herself. For example, when a neighbor’s dog lost her dog companion to old age, Anna’s mother reminded Anna over and over again that “you can know what the dog is feeling and know that your feelings are different. You don’t have to feel the same feelings as the dog. You can talk to her about her feelings and know that your feelings are your own. Let the dog have her own feelings and you have yours.”

Distortions

As these sensitive children express their perceptions based on their sensitivities, they will often distort what is actually happening. One of the things that parents and teachers need to do is honor the child’s perception, as Anna’s mother did when she listened to Anna’s distress with her for “yelling” at the store clerk. This is a good example of how to help a sensitive child clear the distortions.

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Parents and adults can help their children by listening carefully to the way they see the world and the events around them. Distortions and misunderstandings can be cleared easily when the child is heard in a matter-of-fact manner.

Strategies

After working with Anna and her mother, as well as reading extensively, I offer the following strategies in dealing with extremely sensitive children:

First, parents and teachers need to recognize the sensitivities as real. For example, the soft angora sweaters actually caused Anna's skin to itch. Her mother paid attention to this.

Second, teaching children to imagine a bubble around them is helpful for creating boundaries. When Anna was young, her mother had a lot of bubble-blowing toys around, even a large one for the yard. As a person-sized bubble floated away one day, Anna's mother asked her daughter to imagine a bubble like that around her all the time. Anna giggled at the image and nodded her head. Teaching children to fill the inside of the bubble with colors that are pleasing to them is a way for them to learn to nurture themselves wherever they are.

Third, parents and teachers need to recognize the distortions resulting from limited perceptions and high sensitivities. The adult can recognize the perception, and the distortion, and ask if the child wants a different picture of what happened. Letting children have a choice of whether or not they get more information builds children's confidence. Sometimes, the child will say "no." In that case, the adult can say, "If there is a time when you do want to hear another side, let me know." When Anna's mother has done this, Anna regularly returns to the situation when she is ready. The differences between the child's perceptions and the actual occurrences may be significant.

For example, a highly sensitive six-year-old boy repeatedly told his mother that his teacher was "always mad" at him. When the mother talked to the teacher, the teacher was surprised, then said, "I suppose I frown when I'm looking at him because I'm working hard to understand him. He's very different from the other students." When the student learned this, he relaxed, and the teacher didn't have to work so hard to understand him. They began to understand each other.

Fourth, parents, teachers, and children need to learn to ask questions of each other about their feelings rather than assume an untruth. Clear, calm communication is so important in these situations.

Fifth, I have found that mothers and fathers can also assume a great deal based on their own highly sensitive natures and the limited verbal information they get from their children, especially teenagers. The parents will then jump to conclusions and often act on those conclusions. At the same time, the conclusions may be totally false. Anna's mother has had to learn how to clear her own distortions, since she, too, is highly sensitive and gifted. She has had to learn how to ask her husband if he is angry when he is frowning, rather than assume that he is angry. Anna learned to ask and clarify her own perceptions so well that she began challenging her mother: "You are assuming things that aren't true about me!"

One example of this occurred when another mother reported an exchange between her and her bright, sensitive teenage son. The mother was preparing dinner after work one evening when her son asked if he could go to a party on a school night, which was against the family rules. Although she didn't want to problem-solve his request when she was tired, she did, and they came to an agreement about it. She had just returned to the stove to stir the meatballs when her son made another out-of-line request. She took a deep breath and blew it out between her lips. Her son said, "Oh forget it . . ." The mother was silent for a minute, then turned to him and asked, "What did you think I was going to say?"

"That I couldn't go."

"Do you want to know what I was really thinking?"

He shrugged.

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“I was thinking that you are pushing me really hard when I am super tired after working all day and am now working to get dinner ready for all of us. You asked for one thing, which you got with limitations, and now you are asking for another thing, and I don’t want to problem-solve something else when I’m this tired. Are you willing to put it on the back burner until after dinner?”

“Oh. Yeah, that’s ok.” He then helped her finish dinner.

Conclusion

Children, teenagers, and adults all have varying degrees of sensitivity. It is essential that therapists, parents, and teachers recognize this and gain skills in dealing with the resulting distortions. Teaching children to use an imagined bubble around them that is filled with their favorite color can change their affect immediately and positively. Their sensitivities can then be used as springboards to greater problem solving and unimaginable creativity no matter where the children are and no matter what else is happening around them. ■

FOOTNOTES

1. Assagioli, Roberto, Psychosynthesis, Viking Press, Inc., 1971.
2. Noble, Kathleen D., “The Dilemma of the Gifted Woman,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 1987, 11, 367-378.
3. Webb, James T., Ph.D., et al., *Guiding the Gifted Child*, Great Potentials Press, 1992.

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Joann M. Anderson, M.A., L.M.H.C., combined Psychosynthesis, Transactional Analysis and Child Development Theory in her private mental health practice for more than twenty years.

In 1973, Dr. Assagioli helped her develop the concept of “psychosynthetic living” which she has continued to use and teach throughout her challenging life as wife of a professional man, mother of three gifted children, and a full-time grandparent/parent to a gifted granddaughter.



(Editor’s Notes Continued from [page 2](#))

about good English and consistent style standards to request from our writers. It is a challenging task, so if you see inconsistencies in this issue, please bear with us while we iron out the wrinkles in our process. To keep our digital magazine from becoming too chaotic, in general we ask that our writers follow the American Psychological Association style which can be found at <http://www.apastyle.org/> and there is a quick tutorial at <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>. For articles, reviews and other pieces, please prepare your work in MS Word or Open Office Writer or similar software using Times New Roman size 12 font and do not use special styles or formats, because we must transfer your work into different software that may not recognize your formats or styles. For announcements and “goings on” notices feel free to use the fonts and colors that you prefer. If you have photos or other illustrations to go with your work, please send the article (.doc) and pictures (.jpeg) as separate attachments in an email, and you may also send me a pdf of the finished article so I can see how you want it to look. Thanks to all our contributors!

—Jan Kuniholm, editor

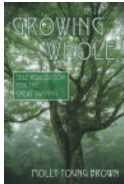
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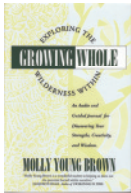
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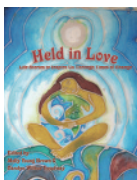
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MOON

Oh, how I love the moon! Isn't it amazing how a barren rock can become a thing of immense beauty when the Light shines on it. And the moon takes the light given it and gives it to us. Praise to the moon! Praise to the Light! Praise to the Maker of the rock and light!



Oh, how I love the moon!

Reflection by Bonney Kuniholm

Psychosynthesis and Coaching: The Time Has Come

Didi Firman, Ed.D, LMHC, BCC

“A recent development on the personal development genre is the emergence of life coaching. Life coaching can be broadly defined as a collaborative solution-focused, result-oriented and systemic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal attainment in the personal and/or professional life of normal, nonclinical clients.”

—Grant, A. M. (2003). “The impact of life coaching on goal attainment, metacognition and mental health.” *Social Behavior and Personality*, 31(3), 253-263.

The field of coaching, variously referred to as personal coaching, life coaching—or in business work, executive coaching—has emerged strongly since 1998. It is a field that is currently unlicensed, though regional and national certification is available, including through the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) and its credentialing arm, The Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE). It has found among its practitioners both counselors and psychotherapists transitioning from clinical work into coaching, and practitioners trained solely as coaches. Its application extends to a wide variety of client populations, client needs and varying services for personal, professional, and business use.

Psychosynthesis, as a holistic, transpersonal or spiritual psychological orientation, has pioneered key concepts and strategies that are at the core of coaching principles. Written in 1973, *The Act of Will* (Roberto Assagioli) is a defining text in psychosynthesis and clearly orients itself towards a coaching methodology. Psychosynthesis assumes a Self in each person functioning as a center of awareness and will. It is through accessing awareness and engaging will that growth and transformation are possible. Along with a comprehensive theory and methodology to support access to the will, theory and practice include the use of the full range of psychological functioning (imagination, thinking, feeling, sensation, impulse and intuition); work with subpersonalities; techniques of imagery, dialogue, journaling, goal setting, cognitive, emotional, and sensory awareness and a commitment to purpose, meaning and values as the path to well being. The *Call of Self*, a phrase coined in psychosynthesis, is the center point of work. It is the assumption that each individual has the capacity to tune in, deeply, to a sense of life purpose. Likewise, families, groups, businesses and cultures at large have the potential for responding to what is truly important, building slowly but surely toward a healthier world.

“The emerging profession of life coaching seems destined to play a significant role in the future, providing support for relatively healthy people to realize their full potentials. It is a discipline that assigns a central role to the will, drawing on both personal and spiritual levels of this core psychological function. In contrast to psychotherapy, coaching assumes that clients have sufficient emotional integration to function in self-responsibility, at least as an ideal, and that they can use their will with some degree of effectiveness. This would imply basic levels of good will and skillful will, in psychosynthesis terminology. In this context, Assagioli’s profound insights into the nature and functioning of the will, so far ahead of their time, will likely find a receptive audience.”

—Crampton, M., *Empowerment of the Will through life coaching*. CA: AAP (2000)

It is time for psychosynthesis to take a leading role in the field of coaching. I am glad to see that the upcoming 2013 AAP Conference in Burlington, VT will focus on this topic, and I am pleased to announce that The Synthesis Center in Amherst, MA is now an approved provider of Psychosynthesis Coach training—

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training that will lead to a Psychosynthesis Life Coach (PLC) certification and potentially to national certification as a Board Certified Coach (BCC)! We are in the midst of our inaugural program and will open the program to the public in the fall. I hope many of you can join us and help get psychosynthesis out into the world through coaching.

Below is a bit more information. Visit our website (<http://www.synthesiscenter.org/>) for the whole scoop.



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Announcing the first nationally certified (BCC) psychosynthesis coach training program, starting in the fall of 2012. Through teleconference, e-mail and shared coaching practice, participants will be trained in the field of psychosynthesis personal and business coaching.

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The program will start the week of October 22.



Didi Firman, EdD is director of the Synthesis Center in Amherst, MA; a professor of psychology; an author and a blogger on the *Psychology Today* website. www.synthesiscenter.org and <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-life-purpose>

Coming Home: Coping With a Sister's Terminal Illness Through Home Hospice Care

By Cynthia Pincus Russell, PhD

Sunstone Press: Santa Fe, 2012

A Book Review by Walter Polt

I get it: probably Cynthia Pincus Russell, PhD, the author of this book (whom I'm privileged to consider a friend, and who graced me with the request to review this book), had no idea that her book's subject is something clear out of my experience. But probably the universe thought: *Hmm, he has no up-close, bedside experience with someone dear to him dying. It might be good for him to get a feel for the kind of challenge chosen individuals face: being ever so busy plus accepting the full-time task of heavy-duty caring for and day-by-day loss of a dear, lifelong friend and sister.*

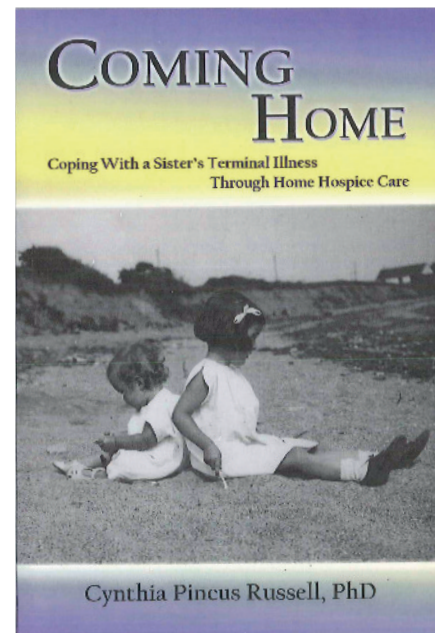
And so this review has been a little slow in coming. I've been carrying the little 125-page book around for more than a month. People see it, gasp at the precious cover photograph, and ask, "Is the author one of the two little girls?" (The girls are sitting in white dresses back-to-back on a Connecticut beach.) In other words, is she that tiny one-year-old, or the four-year-old?

"She's the tiny one."

I wonder how much of our citizenry carries regrets, confusion, and apprehension about loved ones' deaths—experienced, avoided, or yet to be faced.

Cynthia Russell has spent her life taking care of people, working at Yale University and as a colleague with Bernie Siegel, writing books and brilliant poetry, faithfully composing her veritable gift box of a newsletter *Lifeline*, playing the oboe, and making her professional psychosynthesis training program a warm and inclusive one.

And here, in this book, set back in the time when TWA 800 exploded near JFK, she pairs up with her sister Dee and intimately entwines with her like a (far-from-identical) twin—as companion and caretaker in Dee's last six weeks of life.



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This book shows that a person can carry heavy job responsibilities and still be a desperately needed ally, work out unsolvable puzzles daily, and share heart-rending moments of joy and pain. It's an open diary in which the author's heart and sparkling mind splash in brilliant colors onto every page the encounters of each day—alongside the many grays and vacant moments, and the hard medical facts, and the steely actualities of dying. Finally, it's witness to the single bluebird at the window that last day, when the author is alone again in her 18th-century, historic house—which through it all has been her home, a haven for Dee, and a seamlessly functioning counseling center!

This book is a gift, whether you have seen death and dying close up or not. The author is more petrified than eager for people to read the book, because in reflecting on what she and her sister went through growing up with a very distant neurosurgeon father and an overwhelmed cellist mother, she reveals distressing family secrets for the world to see at last. It's a story not only of coping with a sister's terminal illness, as the book cover declares, but with memories of times with her sister in the years before.

Writing in seemingly unpolished disregard, and using often gritty prose, she fashions every page of this compelling book into striking poetry. She is right there, bringing you starkly face-to-face with each living moment—bringing each back to life by stunning, surprising analogies and word illustrations, such as “bones outlined in flesh” and “her last dime of energy.”

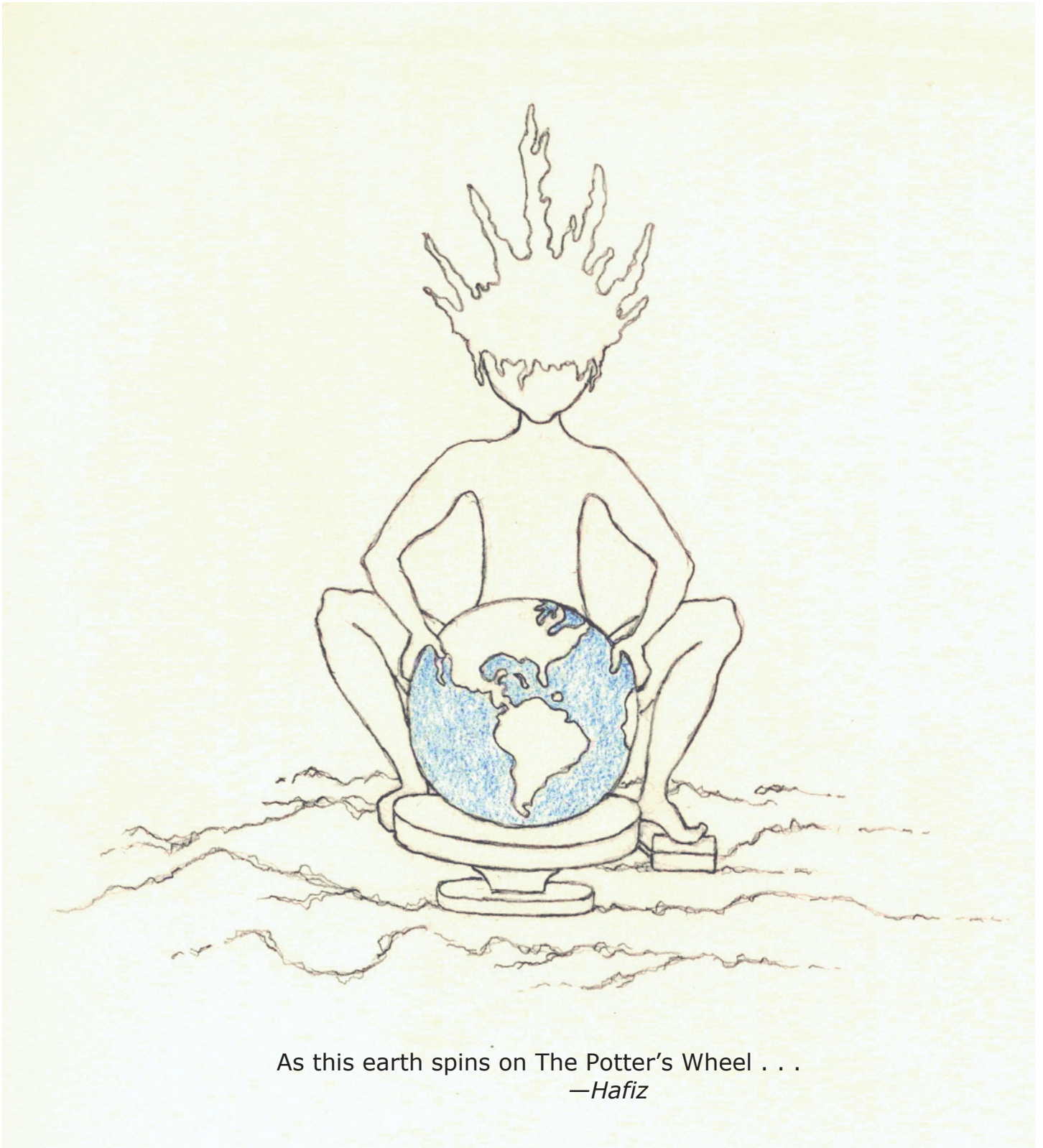
Keen, relentless observations on every page reveal the tug-of-war between her professional caretaking and this very personal, family caretaking, part at home and part in a hospice center. They also reveal the author's observant, unabashed, and unflinching faith in religion and spirit—“holding the divine as the hub of life's wheel every moment”—and in everything human. That includes the humorous, which she finds everywhere, from C. S. Lewis to a bumper sticker in New York City that read “Let's put the FUN back in dysfunctional.” She interweaves past, present, and future seamlessly in such rich, yet everyday, English that you follow her flights with ease.

I don't want to give away too much. This book is spellbinding, with dramatic surprises. (But don't take my word for it. Whether you're caretaker or patient, feeling confident, incompetent, or absent, *read it*.) The final entry is exquisite and worth the price. The book is also useful: it has careful, wide-ranging sections on “Thoughts, Quotes and References” and “Ways to Clarify and Center.”

The author suggests things you will need to do when it's your turn: for example, “Get yourself a little notebook and write, write, write.” Her notebook was her “thread to survival,” and she has published it here to pass on to us. You, in turn, *will* give this little treasure trove of a book to loved ones to read. They *will* read it and give you heartfelt thanks. ■



Cynthia Pincus Russell



As this earth spins on The Potter's Wheel . . .
—Hafiz

Drawing by Bonney Kuniholm

Fear and Anxiety: Causes and Cures in Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* and Richard Schaub's and Bonney Schaub's *The End of Fear*

By Kerstin W. Shands

Worry and fear have been part of human life since time immemorial—and perhaps for a good reason. Referring back to the theories of the early Darwinians, Ernest Becker states in *The Denial of Death* that anxiety may have had an evolutionary value. Those human beings in primeval times who were most fearful were most likely to avoid danger and thus to survive. But this has also led to man's development into “a hyperanxious animal who constantly invents reasons for anxiety even where there are none.” (Becker 17)

In a book on the anatomy of gut feelings, Kristoffer Ahlström shows how irrational we are as to what we worry about. We are more afraid of terrorism, epidemics, and violence than of the infections and illnesses that, statistically speaking, are far more likely to kill us. What really fills us with terror is any situation that is catastrophic, involuntary, uncontrollable, unfair, and potentially lethal. If all these aspects turn up together, we are terrified.

Following Paul Slovic, Ahlström points to some surprising facts about the groups within a population that tend to worry and those who do not. Generally, men worry less than women. However, while *most* men and *most* women worry about things to about the same extent, there is a small group of men – about 30 percent – who are not particularly worried about *anything*. They see low risk where others are alarmed. These are well-educated white men who tend to be conservative in political outlook.

If these men worry less because of biological characteristics related to their sex, *all* men should have been in the same group. Do they worry less because they belong to a powerful group in society that is part of decision-making processes and able to influence developments in society? It has indeed been shown that we are less worried about risks when we make our own choices (instead of having things forced upon us), and we are also less worried when we can enjoy the fruits of the decisions ourselves.

Countless people suffer from disturbing states of mind such as fear and anxiety. Many take different forms of medication, a practice that can lead to dependencies. Millions of people are dependent on tranquilizers and painkillers, others are in therapy, while the vast majority, perhaps, try to grin and bear it.

Since forms of fear, worry, and anxiety are so widespread, this is a huge and urgent question for the medical profession and for psychotherapists. Is it possible to understand the causes of fear, worry, and anxiety, and determine if they are related to the immediate and specific concerns of an individual or not? Can effective methods of treatment or alleviating philosophical perspectives be found? Can we identify the root causes of what Freud called free-floating anxiety, in order to understand and eradicate unwelcome anxieties?

How should we deal with fear, worry, and anxiety? Should we “feel the fear and do it anyway,” as Susan Jeffers proposes? Should we attempt to ignore negative emotions (after observing them briefly) and turn our attention to sources of joy, real or imagined, in order to attract more of the good stuff (as *The Secret* proposes)? Should we simply ‘choose’ happiness, as Kay Pollak suggests in a book on happiness? Or should we dig into the roots of our anxieties, embrace and accept negative mental and physical states in the hope that this will help us move beyond them?

In the following pages, I will explore and contrast two different approaches to the subject formulated by some prominent thinkers. In his classic work, *The Denial of Death* (1973), Ernest Becker departs from psychoanalytic theory, while Richard and Bonney Schaub build on the practice of psychosynthesis in their 2009 book, *The End of Fear: A Spiritual Path for Realists*. I will focus, firstly, on these authors' understandings

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of the root causes of fear and anxiety, and secondly, present their proposals for how to accept or transcend these disturbing and uncomfortable states of mind.

Let us first turn to Ernest Becker. In *The Denial of Death*, Becker argues that the world *is* terrifying, and that this *is* the real source of anxiety. Since we want to control our anxiety, we deny the terror of the knowledge of death. Instead, as a defense, we become obsessed with immortality. In a sense, our whole culture is a huge defense against primordial anxieties connected with our awareness of death. The primary way to become immortal is through heroic acts of different kinds. Neurotic or depressed people, in Becker's view, are those who have not managed to transcend their anxieties through heroic projects.

In Becker's view, "the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man." (xvii)

If we want to understand "man's urge to heroism" we must look at narcissism (2). Freud proposes that we are all marked by narcissism, and Adler points to our need for self-esteem. Becker writes: "It doesn't matter whether the cultural hero-system is frankly magical, religious, and primitive or secular, scientific, and civilized. It is still a mythical hero-system in which people serve in order to earn a feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakable meaning." (5) "The prospect of death," Becker quotes Dr. Johnson, "wonderfully concentrates the mind." (xvii)

It is not easy to admit to this desire for heroism, even if this is *the* central problem for humankind. We do not want to admit to our fear of death, and there is an advantage to this repression (as Becker quotes Zilboorg): "If this fear were constantly conscious, we should be unable to function normally. It must be properly repressed to keep us living with any modicum of comfort." (17)

Freudian concepts underpin Becker's analysis, where anality has a primary role to play. The concept of anality is especially important in this discussion since, according to Becker, "The anus and its incomprehensible, repulsive product represents not only physical determinism and boundness, but the fate as well of all that is physical: decay and death." (319) Becker points to Norman O. Brown's discussion of anality in Jonathan Swift. (33) Swift seems to have been horrified by precisely the 'paradox' that Becker builds his argumentation on, that we are sublime selves and defecating animals, all at the same time. Another reader of Swift, Erwin Straus, "similarly earlier showed how repulsed Swift was by the animality of the body, by its dirt and decay," Becker observes. (33) However, it is worth pointing out that while Straus discusses *obsessive* traits, Swift, Becker suggests, is disgusted specifically by physicality and anality.

Linked to what Becker (1) calls "the problem of human heroism," depression can be explained as a fear of death, or more specifically, as a failure to transcend this fear through heroic acts. Why this sense of failure? Because one of the core characteristics of depression is a lack of courage: following Adler, Becker maintains that "depression or melancholia is a problem of courage"—"it develops in people who are afraid of life, who have given up any semblance of independent development and have been totally immersed in the acts and the aid of others." (210) He continues: "The more you shrink back from the difficulties and the darings of life, the more you naturally come to feel inept, the lower is your self-evaluation." (210) Adler, writes Becker, "put us off somewhat by talking about the selfishness and the pamperedness of the depressed person, the 'spoiled child' who refuses to grow up and accept responsibility for his life." (211) Relying upon Boss, Becker finds that "the terrible guilt feelings of the depressed person are existential, that is, they represent the failure to live one's life" whereby "the depressed person uses guilt to hold on to objects and to keep his situation unchanged. Otherwise he would have to analyze it or be able to move out of it and transcend it". (213) Becker reminds us of Freud's view that psychoanalysis cures the neurotic, but only in order to introduce him to the common misery of life: "Neurosis is another word for describing the complicated technique for avoiding misery, but reality is the misery." (57) This may be the case for physical illnesses, too. Neil French (among many others) argues that "any physical symptom, other than injuries, may well prove to be psychosomatic or psychokinetic." (34) (At the same time, as David Servan-Schreiber shows in his book *Guérir le stress, l'anxiété et la dépression sans médicaments ni psychanalyse*, the reverse may be true: *mental* unbalances can be *physiological* in origin).

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If Becker had read contemporary have-it-all life philosophies (such as *The Secret*), he would, I believe, have been deeply skeptical. He is doubtful of Maslow's promotion of the self-actualizing individual with his peak experiences (and points out that Maslow himself was aware of the underside of his theory [60]). Because, as Becker writes:

... what sense does it make to talk about enjoying one's 'full humanness'—as Maslow urges along with so many others—if 'full humanness' means the primary *mis-adjustment* to the world? If you get rid of the four-layered neurotic shield (envisioned by Pearls), the armor that covers the characterological lie about life, how can you talk about 'enjoying' this Pyrrhic victory? The person gives up something restricting and illusory, it is true, but only to come face to face with something even more awful: genuine despair. (58-59)

"*Consciousness of death* is the primary repression, not sexuality," according to Becker, and "*this* is the repression on which culture is built". (96) Freud would "never clearly see or admit that the terror of death was the basic repression," even though "he moved away from a father-fear theory of culture to a nature-terror one". (97)

Before I read Becker, I had thought that the idea that our greatest and therefore most repressed fear is the fear of death—so dramatically launched in his book—had been his own, original idea, and that this was why he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for this work. Reading *The Denial of Death* I realized that Becker's achievement is mainly a compilation of already existing ideas, such as those of Otto Rank, Heidegger, and others. It is true that he presents the idea in a striking, eye-opening manner. And yet, at times, his treatise appears somewhat dated and limited, in part because his whole argument builds on timeworn dichotomies that he seems not to question.

Becker's primary dichotomy is the body and the symbol-making mind oriented toward immortality. In a denial of the reality of death, we turn toward hopes for immortality. We do this in many ways, through having large families and long family histories, through creative pursuits (hoping that our products or creations will outlive us), and through a variety of heroic acts. We do this as individual human beings and as nations and even as a species.

"Man," writes Becker, is literally split in two; he is aware of "his own splendid uniqueness" and his "towering majesty" in nature at the same time that he knows that he is going to "rot and disappear forever." We are living "a painful contradiction" that is a paradox, an "existential dualism." (26, 27) Man has a "symbolic self" and "a body that is worth about 98¢." (28)

But this is only a paradox if we look at things from the same dichotomous cultural paradigm as Becker does, that ranges from the go-getting mind to the desiring and defecating body. What seems absent is the soul. Despite his emphasis on our symbol-making drive, Becker's universe is thoroughly materialistic.

Even when he is discussing Kierkegaard, who does use terms such as the soul and the spirit, Becker immediately 'translates' these terms: "For 'spirit' read 'self' or symbolic identity," he tells us. (69) Indeed, Becker tends not to go into spirituality at all apart from what he ominously calls "organized religion." At the same time, his references to religion are diluted and all-inclusive. Religion for Becker includes communism and Maoism, and he points to Otto Rank, who sees "all human cultural creation" as having a "religious nature," (7) and to Norman O. Brown's similar reasoning in *Life Against Death*.

Becker concludes: "It can't be overstressed, one final time, that to see the world as it really is, is devastating and terrifying. It achieves the very result that the child has painfully built his character over the years in order to avoid: it *makes routine, automatic, secure, self-confident activity impossible*." (60)

So what are the remedies? Despite his predominantly materialistic outlook, Becker emphasizes the interconnection of religion and psychiatry in the work of Søren Kierkegaard, a writer he really admires. Even though Kierkegaard was writing in the 1840's, he was "really post-Freudian," according to Becker, who finds that

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Kierkegaard has ideas very similar to those Becker himself is presenting in *The Denial of Death*. The biblical story of Adam and Eve is central in Kierkegaard since this myth contains “the basic insight of psychology for all time: that man is a union of opposites, of self-consciousness and of physical body.” (68-69) The result of this “fall into self-consciousness” was anxiety, and “the final terror of self-consciousness is the knowledge of death . . . This is the meaning of the Garden of Eden myth and the rediscovery of modern psychology: that death is man’s peculiar and greatest anxiety.” (70)

Anxiety being the result of a correct perception of the truth about our condition, it is not all bad since it gives us “the ultimate education, the final maturity.” (87) If we have created protective layers of repression and denial in order to cope with an overwhelming and frightening world, we now have to *unlearn* repression and face up to our “natural impotence and death.” We can go through the school of anxiety and graduate with honors even though we can never be totally anxiety-free. Still, we can “use anxiety as an eternal spring for growth into new dimensions of thought and trust.” (92)

Let us now turn to another perspective on fear and anxiety: *The End of Fear: A Spiritual Path for Realists*, by Richard Schaub and Bonney Schaub, published in 2009. The founders of the New York Psychosynthesis Institute, the Schaubs have more than thirty years of experience as therapists from a psychosynthesis perspective. In the autumn of 2010, I participated in one of their workshops, and this is how I discovered their books, the highly interesting *Dante’s Path* and *The End of Fear*.

The point of departure in *The End of Fear* is similar to that of *The Denial of Death*: far from being irrational, the Schaubs claim, our anxieties stem from realistic assessments of what life and the world we are living in are like. Our fears are not unfounded, in other words, and they will not go away! Sooner or later, we must discover and embrace the truth that all of us, regardless of status, position, or assets, are equally vulnerable: “Everything and everyone you see, including yourself, is subject to change and loss at any moment.” (7)

Vulnerability shows up as a feeling, yes—a feeling of nervousness and insecurity that comes of being susceptible to wounding, exposed to risk—but it is more than a feeling. It is the state we all live in; it is our actual human situation. No matter how we try to deny it, we know deep down that life is unpredictable and that we risk change and loss at every moment. (xix)

Surprisingly, there is something seductive about worry: “The seductiveness of worry is our belief that, by worrying about something long enough, we are going to arrive at an answer.” (77) In their discussion, the Schaubs refer back to Aaron Beck, the founder of cognitive therapy, who regarded “the awareness of death as the root of all our anxieties.” (7)

Religion, money, and status make no difference: “Our vulnerability lies in the transitory nature of our lives, and we’re all in this together.” (xix) As the authors are quick to point out, this insight is not new. Buddhists have developed a view of life as impermanence, and philosophers have struggled with the question. What the authors of *The End of Fear* do is to show how we try to run away from this insight, and how we can deal with it instead. They argue that there are “three classic choices people make to cope with their vulnerability. Some embed themselves in materialism, others pin their hopes on religion, and still others step back from life to take refuge in disengaged skepticism.” (xx) If, on the other hand, you “practice *the awareness of vulnerability*,” . . . “a constant, instant practice that you can do anytime, anywhere,” . . . “The more you will feel connected to every other human being—and the more you will feel your deep, innate love toward all living beings, including yourself.” (xx)

If that is the case, the experience of spiritual oneness that is the great reward for spiritual seekers would seem to be the *result* of a fundamental acceptance of one’s vulnerability. In a chapter entitled “Practicing Vulnerability,” the Schaubs give examples of exercises that can help us get rid of fear and anxiety. One such exercise is to take a walk and “look at everyone and everything you see as temporary.” (63) You can think of every person you meet as “a soul briefly here.” Or, you “may come up with words of your own to focus your mind on each passing person’s vulnerability. However you choose to frame it, the thought alone begins to free your mind from the impossible job of denying reality as it really is.” (64) They conclude: “Realizing that all of them feel as you do—that there are no exceptions to the vulnerability we all share—will start to set you free from your isolating

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individual fears.” (68) Going out into nature, contemplating the seasonal changes and the cycle of birth and decay, can have the same effect.

Having proposed these exercises of looking outside oneself in the contemplation of vulnerability, the authors go on to encourage the reader to turn inside and “take a close and affectionate look at your fear.” (76) Our survival system reacts to dangers, big and small, sometimes very small, because it is “responding to the bare fact that your life is subject to change and loss at any moment.” (76) Following Becker, the Schaubs propose that while we are in denial of this fact at the level of personality, the survival instinct has not forgotten it. If we try to turn to our fears with affection, this is a way to “acknowledge and appreciate your survival instinct for working overtime to protect you.” (76) Naturally, we must check if there *is* anything really threatening, but since in most cases there isn’t, we can instead thank our fears, and “whenever any form of fear arises, turn toward it with affection, thank it silently in your mind, and watch what happens. This is a quiet, simple practice; it works quite subtly, and it can change the way life feels.” (79)

It is not only that this process of “normalizing vulnerability” helps us get out of our denials. Something else happens, according to the Schaubs. Our awareness of vulnerability leads to a sense of love without conditions, a love of life: “When this love without conditions rises, unhindered by fear, there is no more searching. When it fills your thoughts, your feelings, and your body, your questions are finished. Conflicts are reconciled, opposites collapse, separation ends. Whatever else you wanted is meaningless now. Questions, conflicts, separation, and wants only exist in a state of fear. Your unconditional love of life dissolves them.” (82)

This sense of unconditional love belongs to what Roberto Assagioli (the father of psychosynthesis) and Carl Jung have called “transpersonal” experiences, something they felt was important to study since these experiences “produced observable, beneficial changes in people’s mental outlook, emotional balance, physical calm, and spiritual knowledge.” (125) Skeptics dismiss such states as fantasies, and some claim that “the illuminating visions of St. Francis were actually caused by an epileptic condition.” (127)

However, new ways of photographing the brain “[provide] objective evidence of the factual existence of a dormant state of oneness deep in your nature” (128), reminding us of William James’s words in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: “Our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it ... there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.” (128)

Experiences of oneness and transcendence can come to us in different circumstances. In a threatening situation, in a thunderstorm, Richard Schaub had such an experience himself. He describes it like this: “In those seconds before annihilation, a wave of love began to rise in me. The love got stronger and stronger until my mind and body dissolved into it, and in the next instant the only thing left of me was bliss and the awareness of bliss. Language doesn’t go with you into such a state. All I can say is that the ‘I’ that I had lived with all my life was gone, replaced entirely by bliss, and at the same time there was an ‘I’ that was aware of the bliss.” (102)

Although “psychosynthesis presupposes psychoanalysis” in “a first and necessary stage” (as Roberto Assagioli puts it in *Psychosynthesis - Individual and Social*), and although the points of departure are similar in their assessment of the existential root causes of states anxiety, the outlook of Richard and Bonney Schaub in *The End of Fear: A Spiritual Path for Realists* is far more optimistic than that of Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death*. While the Schaubs see our vulnerability, they also see “the goodness inherent in our nature and in the world.” (132) In the analyses of the causes of and cures of fear and anxiety, then, we can distinguish some important differences between a psychoanalytic approach and the practice of psychosynthesis. From the comprehensive theoretical perspective of psychosynthesis, we become aware of the existence of the superconscious, a psychospiritual realm of the self or the soul associated with higher inspiration.

In *The End of Fear*, Richard and Bonney Schaub encourage us “to lift the veil of denial from your deepest source of fears and vulnerability,” beyond which lies “the discovery of the oneness:” (129) “The impact of oneness tells us something vitally important. Underneath our fear is a reservoir of love so vast that even a momentary taste of its depth can change a life.” (131) The hopeful conclusion is that “there is a way to be with life as life is—and when you find it, something deeper in you rises up after waiting so long for you to awaken it.” (132) ■

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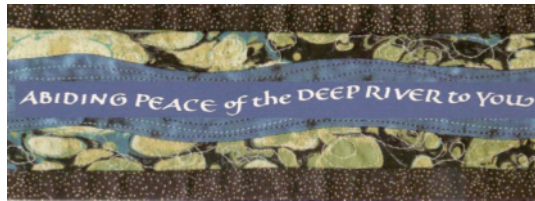


Jean Rhea's Talk on YouTube On June 16, 2012, I was asked by TEDx Sonoma County to talk on their topic, *A Sense Of Place*. The question for the topic was, "What gives us a sense of place?" Reflect on a place that lives large in our memory... sights, smells, sounds, tastes, feelings. How much does how we perceive a place have to do with who we are? How much does a sense of place affect us? How is our sense of place changing in an increasingly interconnected and digital age? The title of my talk was: *A Place Of Heart*. Here is the link to this talk: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=av3DybCMwLo>

A Place Of Heart is approximately thirteen minutes in length, and is about my journey from deep harm, through the wilderness through relationship and safe love. The description I use of love is perhaps a wonderful analogy of authentic unifying centers and how important they are to integrating primal wounding.

Jean A. Rhea is Jean is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in California, a Coach (Restorative Coaching), and the Clinical Director at St. Vincent de Paul Society, San Francisco, which is developing a unique holistic and integrative approach to homelessness, violence, substance abuse and trauma.

"If we don't change direction soon, we'll end up where we're going."
—Irwin Corey



Fall Deep River Workshops and Facilitator Training
with Abby Seixas, M.Ed., LMHC

*Abby Seixas, author of **Finding the Deep River Within** and longtime psychosynthesis practitioner, is offering a 7-week telecourse and two day-long workshops for women this fall:*

The Deep River Within:

***A 7-week distance course for women in the art of slowing down.
(via phone & internet)***

Sunday afternoons (Eastern time), October 7-November 25

For more details about the course, see Abby's website: <http://www.deepriverwithin.com>
or contact her: abby@deepriverwithin.com

Finding Balance and Calm in a 24/7 World

September 14, 2012, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Boston University School of Social Work, Boston MA.

6 Continuing Education Credits for Social Workers.

More info: [BU School of Social Work](http://www.bu.edu/ssw/) <http://www.bu.edu/ssw/>

The Deep River Within:

Taming the To-Do List and Finding Depth in Everyday Life.

October 27, 2012, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

[The Westford Therapy Center, Westford, MA](http://westfordtherapycenter.com/) <http://westfordtherapycenter.com/>

More info: abby@deepriverwithin.com

*Any of the above workshops fulfill the prerequisite for the
Deep River Facilitator Training:*

Gather the Women:

A One-Day Training in Leading Deep River Groups

with Abby Seixas, M.Ed., LMHC

October 28, 2012, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

(Either of the above workshops, or another Deep River group,
is a prerequisite to this training day.)

[The Westford Therapy Center, Westford, MA](#)

Click [here](#) for more details about the training.

And, looking ahead to January 2013:

The Deep River Within: Living a Soulful Life in a 24/7 World
at [Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health](#)

Meeting at the Wellspring

by Catherine Ann Lombard

Another scorching June afternoon in Italy. The bus descends the winding road down from Rocca di Papa onto the sleek autostrada as we head north to Florence. We are 30 pilgrims on our way to Casa Assagioli, the home in Florence where the founder of psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli, lived, worked, taught, and wrote. Tired after a three-day international conference, we still manage to fill the bus with chatter in anticipation of the next day's adventure. I long for rest and quiet, and slip into a seat near the front, next to Keith Hackwood from Wales. We are the first group invited to directly encounter Assagioli's archives, and we come from all over the world—Canada, Australia, Sweden, Germany, Brazil, Portugal, France, Haiti, Spain, Poland, Ireland, the USA and, of course, Italy.

Our hosts are *Alle Fonti della Psicosintesi*, translated as "At the Wellspring of Psychosynthesis." Since 2007, this international group has been sifting and sorting through the boxes of material that Assagioli accumulated during his lifetime. Initially gathered and examined after Assagioli's death in 1974, his notes, international correspondence, appointments, articles, books, pamphlets, hand-written reflections, and scholarly assessments were later stored in the "Esoteric Room" of his house. During its recent restoration, the roof of this room was removed and the need to protect and relocate the material became mandatory. At the time, Phyllis Clay, from New Mexico, was visiting the project's architect, Paula Marinelli. Phyllis insisted that the boxes not only be moved, but sorted, and so the archive project and *Alle Fonti della Psicosintesi* came into being. As an extension of the June 2012 conference *Psychosynthesis in the World*, the group decided to extend a welcome to anyone interested in spending a day visiting Assagioli's house, study, and garden. In addition, we would have the unique opportunity to experience the archives 'hands on.' An afternoon would be devoted to our reading, studying, and perusing the cataloged files including original handwritten material by Assagioli.



The journey



The bus speeds through Lazio into Umbria. We pass the hills of nearby Montepulciano and soon enter Tuscany. The evening light washes the hills of Arezzo into shades of mauve, the same hills where Assagioli had to hide during World War II, wandering in discomfort with his family. Fiorella Fiorini, our official interpreter, suggests that we come up to the bus microphone and introduce ourselves. One-by-one, while the bus sways between speeding cars and 18-wheel-trucks, each of us takes a turn. But tiredness is creeping over us, and the journey starts to feel endless. We shout with laughter at Fiorella whenever she mistakenly translates from English to English or Italian to Italian. The long tresses of black hair running down her back sway with the bus and her returned laughter. Suddenly a soft, fluffy man from Catania is nearly sitting on my lap! He croons a song of longing in Sicilian dialect and leads us in a refrain of *lalalas*. Then a French Canadian belts out

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Alouette, and Keith and I giggle with exhaustion and joke about forever circling ring roads around medieval cities to the tune of foreign ditties.

Eventually, we drive past Assagioli's rose-colored house at 16 via San Domenico and are finally released from the bus. Heading to our various hotels for the night, we prepare for our next day's "encounter of the heart." But Florence refuses to let us rest, as it is San Giovanni's feast day and the city is ablaze celebrating her patron saint with street fairs and fireworks. From my hotel room above the city, the Duomo appears like a wedding cake church, the waxing moon hangs haloed in the sky, and fireworks explode with precision and streams of fairy dust light. At the same time, Italians roaming the street roar as their Azzuri team beats England in the European soccer semi-final. Encased in a strange and beautiful mixture of human and divine, I finally settle down for the night.

An encounter in Assagioli's study

We gather the next morning in a mediation circle. Singular words fly between us, our shared feelings of Action, Joy, Eagerness, Surrender. Our first task is to stop at a small round table full of wooden blocks. These blocks are stamps especially made by Assagioli to imprint his evocative words. Bang! Bang! We select a block and carry another word into the day. *Vitalità* is now stamped onto my soul.

We divide ourselves into two groups for the house tour, and soon English, Italian, and French fly up and down the two-story villa. Hung on walls throughout the house, white boards forever carry Assagioli's handwritten words and diagrams. We climb up to his apartment where his portrait as a 20-year old greets us, beckoning all to reflect, know, love.

I am eager to enter his study, and upon doing so my eyes scan the shelves in search for a book that spoke to me five years earlier. When I first entered this room, the book *American Humor*, thick with a bright orange cover, seemed to jump off the shelf and call my name. Being an American living in Italy at the time, suddenly the man whose vision of the human psyche that had so profoundly touched my life seemed to tickle me as well. Smiling to myself, I imagined what great jokes we would have told each other.

Today I run my finger along *The Art of Expression* by Atkinson, *A la découverte du Yoga* by Adams Beck, *Unità Creativa* by Tagore, and *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* by Jung. But the book *American Humor* eludes me — it is not where my memory has held it all these years. There is little time, as we must make way for the second tour group, and I wonder if perhaps the book has been moved to the general library. For some reason, I feel the need to see and touch this book again. Turning away from the bookshelves, I notice a small leather-bound guest book on Assagioli's desk. I open to see—is it new or old?—and then, did I once sign it? I don't remember, as I flip through the pages, scanning dates for 2007, and then my name. I am there! Clearly signed, with the date, and my comment in Italian: *Bellissimo e grazie*. A stranger beside me, Linda Dyrefelt from Sweden, from the place of mother, softly and playfully, exclaims beside me, "Oh, look! You've found yourself!"



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Instantly I drop and I soar. I wonder at this meeting between me and myself and this point of recognition offered by the stranger, unsuspecting and spontaneous, moved herself by the higher reality we momentarily share—my finding myself in Assagioli's study. I sob deeply and Luce Ramorino, our guide, stands silently, watching. I am aware of Linda's warm hand gently placed on my back at my heart chakra. I disappear and yet stand still, held by God and everything in the room. Then I feel the need to come back, reassure those around me. "I'm okay," I say, grounded yet breathless.

It isn't even noon, and yet my work feels finished. Everything else received that day promises to be an extra blessing—bountiful gifts of light, the ease of being, a heart moved towards knowing.

Our group now eases outside, across a patio, through a disheveled cantina, and into the garden where Assagioli would meditate on his roses. A pungent smell of wild ground mint fills our senses, and pruned olive branches with olives the size of seeds lie at our feet. A tree bares green *susine* prunes ready to ripen. I quietly watch a white butterfly drink from lavender nectar. Strong light etches delicate shadows onto the terra cotta pavement. The trills and swishes of various languages float above me as the frenetic Florentine traffic rushes by. Cicadas vibrate their rhythmic song, a resonance of midday heat.

Dr. Renzo Giacomini is now sharing in Italian his personal memories of when he was a student of Assagioli's in 1972. "There are two things missing from his study," he says in a low, almost conspiratorial, voice. "A spittoon and a big, black telephone. Assagioli had respiratory problems and was often spitting into a spittoon which he kept near his desk." The Sicilian couple who is listening appears to struggle with this piece of information. "Oh," they finally surmise, "it was *la vecchiaia*, old age."

"And the telephone would ring and ring, but being deaf in his old age, he would never answer it, leaving it for the secretary downstairs," continued Dr. Giacomini. "Yet, he always seemed to be able to hear whatever question you had."

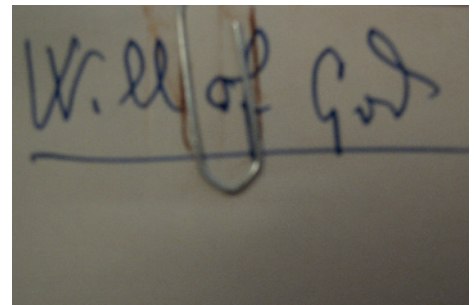
"He loved his books and when he and his wife went up to their summer home, he would often fill up his car with so many books that his wife barely had anyplace to sit."

Time for lunch. Eggplant baked in *sugo*, oozing with melted mozzarella. Thinly sliced zucchini layered with parmesan. Salads and fresh greens. Tozzetti and cups of diced sweet fruit. Real conversations on folding chairs placed in the shade.

Another circle, only this time we are instructed on how to approach the archives. Take care of the energy his handwritten material evokes. Move slowly. Allow for the paper and words to touch you. Breathe and know this is only a taste.

The archives – accumulators of energy

Thick blue boxes wait for us at various tables throughout the villa. Some of us move to rooms where Assagioli and his wife once slept, ate, received guests. Windows are open and dry hot breezes waft in from the street and neighboring courtyard. At first, we buzz with excitement along with a touch of anxiety, dividing ourselves amongst the boxes like kids at Christmas, in a candy shop, in the school library. Boxes labeled: "The Will—Italiano," "Transpersonal Self—English," "Writings of others," "Handwritten Notes of Assagioli—English" call to us. Without much



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thought, I sit in front of the first free box I find, one labeled “Superconscious Material—English.” I unsnap the box’s clip, unwind the protective blue cover, and discover folders and folders of material.

Reverently I open each folder. Staring back through time are onion-skinned papers lined with typed quotations, handwritten notes, various pamphlets and letters all concerning superconscious material. Suddenly I stop shifting through these pages, frozen by a simple note of Assagioli’s: “The Will of God.” It is paper-clipped to a small book on prayer written by an American minister. The book’s margins are full of penciled notes. Double vertical lines run along the edge of a paragraph he once noted, some words in the text are underlined for emphasis. The Will of God. I shudder and cry.

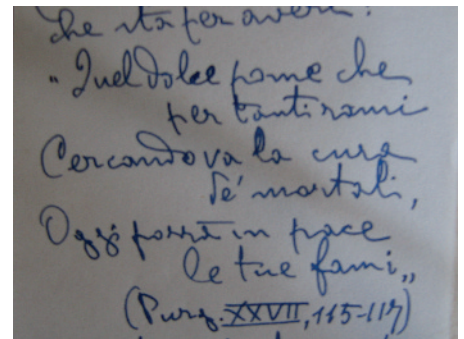
It is all so much, so I stop, climb the stairs to the apartment where his principal collaborator, secretary, and the first president of the Institute of Psychosynthesis after his death, Ida Palombi, once lived with her cats. I sip black coffee, ease myself into a chair on the terrace, breathe. A poem is forming inside me about finding myself in his study, and I give birth to it in the room’s empty silence.

Once more I return to sit at yet another table. The others around me are filled with determination, a kind of hurried mission. Some scribble notes, others run the pages through their hands. A Parisian woman gasps. I look up and our eyes meet across the table in acknowledgement of the profundity before us. She is weeping.

Determined (and strong willed!) to find *American Humor*, I return to Assagioli’s study. It is dimly lit with the shutters drawn. On the desk is a kitchen timer, a small United Nations flag, a model ship, a small photo of Assagioli meditating under a tree, and a postcard of Mount Fuji. I sit for a moment on the divan where he would receive guests and try to still my mind, but I am soon drawn to continue my search. The librarian has promised me that no books have been removed, so *American Humor* must be here somewhere! Finally, I find it tucked into a back corner, irretrievable as another bookshelf blocks its freedom. Relocated since I last saw it, the book reflects my own life. During the past five years, I had also relocated my home from Italy to the Netherlands to Germany. I am happy to find and touch this book again.

I leave the study to engage with a small yellow folder on the Will. There seem to be endless slips of small, sepia-stained pages, 8x12 cms in size. Some have been visibly torn to size, others are purposively folded together to form small, loosely-bound books. Assagioli’s hand varies from dancing loops, to bold strokes, to indiscernible scratches. His notes appear in Italian, English, French, or German, depending on what language he was reading at the time.

I discover quotes from Dante. The verses float before me, anchored between my fingertips. “*Luce intellettuale piena l’amore. Intellectual light full of love*” (Paradiso XXX:40). I remember Assagioli’s quoting this verse in his essay on the synthesis of polarities when he discusses Logos versus Eros.¹ Another quote from Purgatorio catches my attention:



*Quel dolce pome che per tanti rami
Cercando va la cura de'mortali
Oggi porrà in pace le tue fami.*
(Purg. XXVII:115-117)

That most sweet fruit which all mortals eagerly
Seek with so much care from many a bough
This day shall give your hunger peace.

Turning away from Dante, I am delighted to discover a small drawing of the egg diagram, a brief sketch concerning inner obstacles to the will. I wonder, what made Assagioli consciously select this size paper? A week later I find the answer in Massimo Rosselli’s article *Roberto Assagioli: A Bright Star*. Andrea Bocconi, one of Assagioli’s youngest students, once posed the same question. “They are accumulators of energy” was Assagioli’s smiling answer.² Amongst these ‘accumulators’ I find he has written on the back of an invitation to attend a meeting in Rome. It is 1930.

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I am so full, I hardly know what to do anymore. Half of the three hours allotted to this encounter has flown by. I move again to another room, sit at an empty table, allow my thoughts to soar out a high window open to the greenery across the street. Where did he find the time to write all this? We are thirty students all engaged with our own box and still more material lines the bookshelves. What a great scholar he was, carefully quoting others, meticulously studying all that he read. How much life flowed through him!

My musings are startled by Fiorella. "Have you found what you've been looking for?" she asks, and I have to laugh. "Yes, I have," I beam back, for what more could you hope to find than yourself in Assagioli's study? But she is now urging me to examine the catalog list to see if there is some specific topic I wish to explore. "Dreams" catches my eye, as I am only familiar with Assagioli's brief remarks that dreams more often reveal only a partial aspect of the human personality and that only part of the unconscious is able, or willing, to express itself through dreaming.³ Did he actually write something more about dreaming?

In fact, there are three small yellow folders on dreams. Fascinated, I leaf through the first pages where he describes a number of dreams. There is no date and nothing to indicate the dreamer. Are these dreams his own, recorded one pale dawn? In the last folder, I am surprised to discover exercises to perform while sleeping. All this, I think should be translated into English and published.

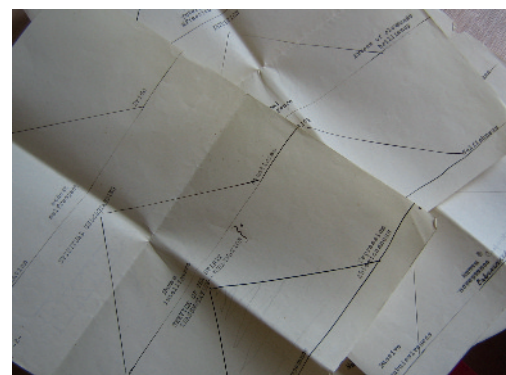
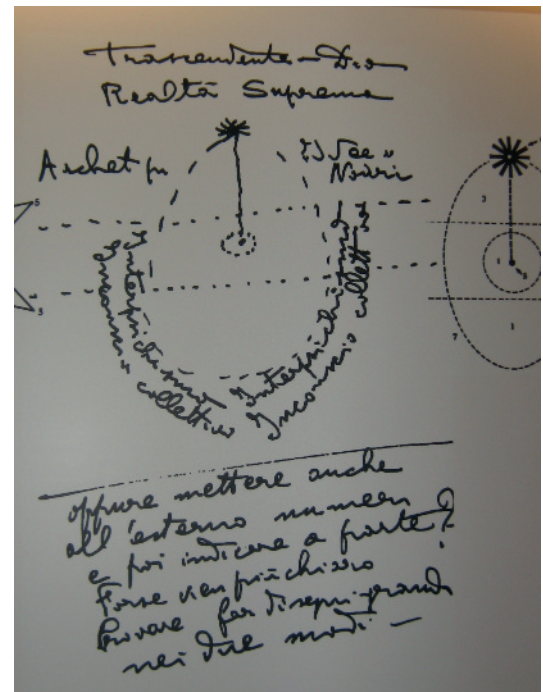
But this afternoon is only a taste and with only thirty minutes left, I realize that what I really want to see are his notes on polarities, something dear to my own professional and personal experience. At the recent conference, I had presented my master's thesis which included my own polarities of culture shock. During the past year, I had spent many hours intimately busy working with these triangles to express my ideas. I hurry to obtain these three folders and suddenly before me are Assagioli's own triangles, penciled with question marks, deletions, and additions. I too had spent much time drawing triangles, crossing out words, waiting for intuitions. How closely my own struggle to best define the polarities of culture shock and their higher reality seem to mimic his. What a gift it is to see his reflections and thought process on the higher synthesized realities of compassion, spiritual dignity, and revelation.

Sadly, the time is over and we must leave the boxes to return to the group circle. Why didn't I take more careful notes? What was the equilibrium point of the Dark and Light polarity again? Why didn't I copy the box number down where I found the sketch of the egg diagram? As I leave his apartment for the larger meeting room and the others, I find that I already miss Assagioli's presence, whole in my hands. I pause on one quote on my notepad, copied by Assagioli from *Statesman and Nation* by J. B. Priestly. "Knowledge and Love are one and the measure is suffering." Assagioli had underlined the word 'measure'.

Beyond the Wellspring

Another group meditation, imaginary sunlight pouring onto our image or word. We share our impressions and visions. I am walking alongside Assagioli and then we are walking with everyone else in the room. At the Wellspring of Psychosynthesis.

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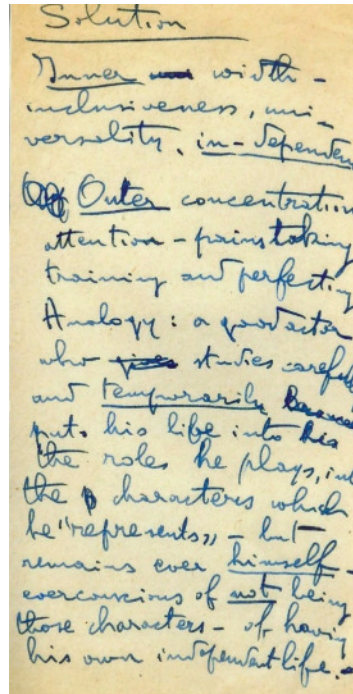


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We are tired, overwhelmed, grateful, inspired. With great effort we learn a circle dance and send the well-spring around the world. A final card is taken from underneath an illuminated candle that is shaped like the egg diagram: a gift from the archives, scanned and printed for us to take home. Mine is in English: Solution written in his hand, a small token of his accumulated energy. I am laughing inside. Of course, I would receive the ‘Solution’. Why not?

Solution
Inner width—
Inclusiveness, uni-
versality, in - dependence

Outer concentration
attention — painstaking
training and perfecting
Analogy: a good actor
who studies carefully
and temporarily
puts his life into
the roles he plays, into
the characters which
he “represents” — but
remains ever himself —
ever conscious of not being
those characters — of having
his own independent life.



Solution
Inner ~~was~~ with -
inclusiveness, uni-
versality, in - dependence
Outer concentration
attention - painstaking
training and perfecting
Analogy: a good actor
who ~~puts~~ studies carefully
and temporarily ~~becomes~~
put. his life into his
the roles he plays, into
the characters which
he "represents," — but —
remains ever himself —
ever conscious of not being
those characters — of having
his own independent life.



Catherine Ann Lombard is a Psychosynthesis Psychologist and Counselor, writer and poet. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at the University of Twente, The Netherlands, where she conducts research into student sojourners' experience of culture shock and their search for meaning. Catherine has published her recent findings in *From Culture Shock to Personal Transformation, Studying Abroad and the Search for Meaning* available from lulu.com. She received her MA in Psychosynthesis Psychology from Middlesex University, and her Diploma in Psychosynthesis Counseling from the Institute of Psychosynthesis, London. To learn more about her, see catherineannlombard.com.

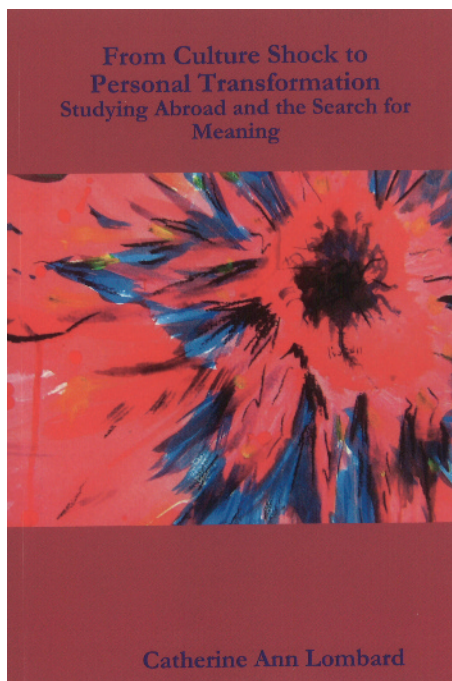
Notes:

1. Roberto Assagioli, *L'Equilibramento e la Sintesi degli Opposti* (Firenze: Istituto di Psicointesi, 2003), p. 12.
2. Massimo Rosselli, *Roberto Assagioli, a Bright Star*, International Journal of Psychotherapy, Volume 16, Number 2, 2012, p. 18.
3. Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis, A Collection of Basic Writings* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The Synthesis Center, Inc., 2000), pp. 83-84.

book announcement

From Culture Shock to Personal Transformation Studying Abroad and the Search for Meaning

by Catherine Ann Lombard



Culture shock is a well-known term used to define the initial experiences of immersion in an unfamiliar culture. This study demonstrates that anyone undergoing its effects might wish to view the experience as an opportunity to consciously search for life meaning and personal growth.

Through her psychosynthesis counseling work with international students, Catherine Ann Lombard illustrates how young people, when faced with the challenges of living abroad, can enter into a personal journey towards their authentic selves. Ultimately, by confronting themselves and growing in awareness, the students whose testimonies appear in this book release new creative energy and renew their personal and working relationships.

Catherine Ann Lombard also presents a new model for culture shock, based on her client work, that integrates a spiritual component into the established ABC framework. This new ABCS model represents a synthesis of both the universal and particular experience of culture shock.

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UT International PhD student

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tools for the journey

THE COUNCIL

By William P. Ryan, PhD

Inevitably at some point in the process of their psychotherapy, patients present some complex life dilemma, the resolution of which will result in a significant life change. During this time, the person experiences a great deal of inner tension and confusion because several subpersonalities have very different, often opposing, feelings and thoughts about what to do.

I tell my clients that these big dilemmas cannot be resolved at the level of consciousness at which they currently exist. A good resolution that answers the essential question *What is in my best interest in this situation at this time of my life?* cannot come from a rational approach. Making lists of pros and cons does not work. Trying to respond to the conflict from a pragmatic or moral perspective only increases the confusion and inner tension. From my 38 years of experience in sitting with clients struggling with these dilemmas, I think that they are best resolved from the realm of the heart and by engaging the Higher Self as a source of inner wisdom.

I offer my clients the metaphor of “The Council” as an alternative pathway toward a resolution of these big issues. Visualizing the crisis from the perspective of a higher level of consciousness offers a way to value—with compassion and non-judgment—the thoughts and feelings of each subpersonality, so that each can contribute toward a resolution that is in the best interest of the whole person. This often results in some answer that no one subpersonality could have come to on its own. The Council also provides a container for all the conflicting feelings so that the dynamic tension of the dilemma can be tolerated for an extended period of time.

Initiating a Council

When I do this work, first I ask my client to imagine that all the different parts of their personality have decided to have a meeting to explore their particular issue. I ask the person to imagine the kind of physical setting in which this gathering would occur and I share some examples of settings other people have used.

Some people select a favorite natural setting and imagine their subpersonalities as individual people coming together around a campfire in the woods, sitting on beach chairs at the ocean or hiking up to a remote mountaintop. Some people select a favorite indoor meeting place such as a den with couches and a fireplace, a conference room with high-back leather chairs, or a quiet room in a retreat setting that is unique to them. For example, one man, whose passion was making wood furniture, imagined a circular picnic table and a glass of wine. As I talk about this, I say to my client, “Trust whatever image shows up. The image of a gathering place will make the Council more concrete and will empower the experience. It will also help to take the conflict out of your head and begin to locate it in some larger aspect of your consciousness.”

To help make the Council image more concrete, I have my client talk about the conflict again. As he/she is describing these persistent inner thoughts and feelings I help them to see that they are emanating from distinct subpersonalities. I help them to find a label or name for that aspect of their inner dialogue. “So one member of your Council is the Father part of you. It’s important for him to be a good father who takes care of the needs of his children. Who else is at the Council?” The client talks further and I interrupt and say, “That’s the Playful Boy part of you that is tired of being so responsible and wants to have more fun in life. Who else is at the Council?”

This initial process continues for a time until there are five or six inner voices that have been acknowledged and named. Then I will say, “It’s also important to leave one or two empty seats. Those are for the mystery guests. We don’t know who they are yet, but they will show up. They are always an important part of the Council and are needed for a good resolution. Usually the other voices in your head speak so loudly that these parts of your personality do not get a chance to be heard. By leaving the empty seats, we are inviting them to

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be present and are honoring the importance of their contribution.” As the Council continues over a number of sessions, these spaces are usually filled. Sometimes they are subconscious or weaker voices in the inner landscape; at other times they are unconscious fantasy parts or dark or wounded parts of the personality. Sometimes there are undeveloped or underdeveloped aspects of the personality that need to be encouraged to speak in order for the issue to be resolved.

The final member of the Council is the Wise Elder. His or her presence at the Council represents a higher level of consciousness—the Higher Self—and serves a number of functions. It is the task of the Wise Elder to make certain that all the voices get heard and are respected, that certain voices are not allowed to dominate the conversation or attack the other members. The Wise Elder quiets down the judgmental voices with a tone of gentleness and compassion. He or she holds the large questions before the Council, *What is in my best interest in resolving this dilemma at this time of my life?* The Wise Elder repeatedly returns to that question and encourages the members of the Council to tolerate the tension of unknowing until a resolution emerges that is “in the best interest of all.” The Wise Elder is a compassionate inner presence and the metaphorical image of a circular gathering (symbolizing wholeness and synthesis) provides the container for all the new and powerful feelings as the Council convenes for a number of therapy sessions. In the initial stages of the Council, I often will hold the position of the Wise Elder until the client recognizes and trusts that part of him or herself.

Richard

Richard, a priest in his early forties, was faced with a profound dilemma. He had just been offered a prestigious position in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. He knew that if he accepted the offer and did well, he would eventually become a bishop. This was something that he had fantasized about since his early years of training in Rome. In the past few years, however, Richard had found himself increasingly attracted to several women parishioners. He was also envious of men who were fathers and wondered what it would be like to father a child of his own. The offer of this position put Richard at a crossroads moment. Indeed, for him it was a dark night of the soul.

Richard loved the concept of the Council and felt relieved that I would be able to guide him through this dilemma. He imagined his Council convening at a mountaintop retreat center that he had visited several times. One particular room had a large stone fireplace. Facing the fireplace is a horseshoe arrangement and Richard imagined seven or eight very comfortable armchairs, each with a different sub-personality sitting there.

The first to speak was *the Priest*. Richard described how much he enjoyed giving sermons, making complex aspects of Catholic theology accessible to parishioners. As a pastoral counselor, he liked the one-to-one engagement of helping people with their personal struggles. The next subpersonality he called *Rich, the Father*. He felt a growing envy of men in his parish who had children and it was becoming harder for him to suppress his yearning to have his own family. Because of the emotional absence of his own father as a young man he had grave doubts about his ability to be a good father.

As he revealed the next subpersonality, Richard was more than a little embarrassed. This was the part of him that fantasized about making love to different women and enjoyed thinking that many women adored and desired him. He named this subpersonality, *Don Juan*. Next came *Mr. Perfect*. This part of him embodied high moral standards and expectations of his accomplishments. Often he did not measure up to these standards and *Mr. Perfect* would be relentless in his recriminations. This subpersonality was judgmental of *Don Juan's* lust-filled fantasies and hyper-critical of *Rich, the Father* considering leaving the priesthood to have a family. The final participant in the first gathering of the Council was the *Celibate*. He spoke of the importance of maintaining the commitment to God that he had made in a sacred ceremony. The vow also made him feel safe. He was quite anxious about his ability to perform sexually, and so celibacy enabled him to avoid possible failure.

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In the second Council session *Father Dan* emerged as the representative of Richards's Wise Elder. In the early years of his priesthood he had known an older priest named Dan who was a father figure and mentor for Richard. He remembered Dan as a kind, compassionate man who shared his personal struggles as a priest and encouraged Richard to find ways to express his individuality within an oftentimes oppressive church hierarchy. Throughout the Council *Father Dan* in a compassionate voice held the question *What is in your best interest in resolving this dilemma?*

At the fourth session *Little Richard* showed up. Initially, he appeared as a five-year-old sitting in the large armchair in the background with his head bowed and his feet dangling in mid air. *Father Dan* invited him to speak. *Little Richard* talked about how scary this discussion was to him. He recalled how excited his mother was when as a five year old he told her that he wanted to become a priest. She took him onto her lap, caressed him and said, "You are my special little boy." *Little Richard* related how this scene was replayed over the years and brought him frequent praise from relatives; he was very worried about displeasing her and losing that special status. He worded it very simply, "If I leave the priesthood, will people still love me?" *Little Richard* was the mystery guest in the Council.

The Wise Elder

How the image of the Wise Elder presents itself is unique to each person. I encourage patients to find an image that fits with their world view and personal narrative. For people in recovery from some addiction, I encourage them to consider the Wise Elder as their own personal Higher Power. For people familiar with Jungian concepts, I talk about their Self; for those families with Psychosynthesis, I talk about their Higher Self. For some the image of the Wise Elder is a family member or mentor who was a source of compassionate understanding and wisdom. They carry the memory of that elder with them and that person's guidance is available for them to draw upon. For those few patients who do not connect to any psychospiritual tradition or someone from their history, I ask them if there is an author whose books they have read or some historical figure who represents a person of compassionate wisdom to them. Most people are able to imagine someone who becomes a reliable image of the Wise Elder for the Council gatherings. Some people, like Richard, are able to transform that image over time to represent more directly their own inner Elder.

The Council as a Container

Most people experience great difficulty in tolerating the amount of tension generated by the conflicting ideas and feelings that emerge in making big life decisions. It is almost impossible to contain for any length of time. This is why so many people make a premature decision—it ends the tension. It is also why so many people use some addictive substance or activity during these periods of inner struggle to numb their anxiety.

The Council provides a metaphorical container for this tension and conveys the notion that it is possible for all the parts of the personality to work together for the common good. It draws upon an ancient symbol of wholeness—the circle or mandala—to quiet the feelings of fragmentation and the fear of an emotional breakdown. By making the image of the Council very concrete—imagining a physical gathering place, giving vivid descriptions of the various Council participants, using language specific to such an undertaking of discernment—we assist our client in bringing the process into a larger space, or container, outside their own head, reducing the holding of the tension in the body. By reminding our client that "the Council members are gathered around the fire sitting on tree stumps" or "sitting in comfortable chairs in the wood-paneled room" the situation or dilemma is now "out there" in a container between therapist and patient, a more manageable, less overwhelming and frightening place for it to reside.

To help ease the inner tension between sessions, I suggest to my patients that they keep a journal exclusively for the Council. Each time before they begin to write I recommend that they re-imagine the place where the

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Council is gathering and envision each of the members sitting in their spots in the circle. Then I encourage them to write down whatever each member is saying on that day. The act of journaling is another way of taking the inner turmoil and placing it “out there.”

The Process

How long it takes for the process of the Council to unfold toward a good resolution varies with each person. Sometimes it takes only four or five sessions. More commonly it takes a few months. During this time it is important to explore the historical roots of each of the Council members. It is helpful to learn what purpose each has served over a person’s lifetime and how deeply they are entrenched. That is true even for parts of the personality that seem universal (almost all Councils have some version of *the Critic*) or genetic (such as introversion or a “slow to warm up” temperament). They, too, have a history in how they have evolved with that person. One of the key roles of the therapist is to encourage, with gentleness and compassion, each of the members to tell his or her story. In response, overly loud subpersonalities generally quiet down and more dormant ones develop a stronger voice. As a result, the purpose that each part serves becomes clearer and the members work together more cooperatively toward the common good. Throughout the process the Wise Elder holds the question *What is the best interest of the total personality in this dilemma at this time of my life?*

Mystery Guests

In each person’s Council there will be one or two parts of the personality that are not present in the initial presentation of the inner dialogue, but whose emergence will be essential to the unfolding resolution. By advising my patients to leave one or two empty seats at the gathering, I am acknowledging their existence and importance. The idea of “holding a seat” is also a symbolic invitation for them to emerge and participate. As a therapist, I find it fascinating to witness the wide range of mystery guests that show up.

A pivotal moment in Richard’s discernment process happened when *Little Richard* joined the Council. What was key for him was the awareness that this young boy part of his personality felt that Richard’s only way of getting love was by being a priest. So *Little Richard* embodied his subconscious terror that if he left the priesthood people would no longer love him. By acknowledging his fear and exploring further *Little Richard*’s historical roots, Richard became more aware of the many aspects of himself, separate from his role as a priest, that others found lovable.

Richard’s Resolution

About seven weeks into his Council, Richard began our session by saying that he had decided to accept the Church’s offer of the prestigious position. It quickly became clear that the dominant voices in this decision were those of the *Priest* and *Little Richard*. “Being a priest is who I am. I have prepared my whole life for this. It is a big step toward the fulfillment of my dream,” said the *Priest*. “Besides,” said an agitated *Little Richard*, “everyone will be mad at me if I don’t.”

This was a decisive moment for Richard and a challenging one for me. From experience I have learned that the greatest danger in the Council process is a premature decision. It is understandable that patients want a resolution because it is very hard to tolerate the tension and uncertainty. It is also very difficult as a therapist to contain, for a long time, this amount of confusion and doubt. I, too, wanted it to be over.

Over time I have developed a useful tool for these moments. I ask my patient “to poll the other members” to see what they have to say about this decision. After Richard polled the other Council members—revealing more than a little disagreement—I asked Richard what *Father Dan* had to say. He became quiet and reflected upon his memories of Father Dan. Then, as his right hand tapped his heart, he said softly, “Father Dan would

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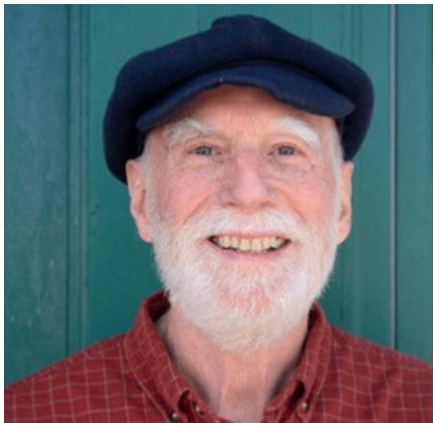
say that being a priest is not who I am. There is more to me than the role of being a priest. He and others love me for just being Richard.”

A month later, Richard walked into the office seeming as if a burden had been lifted. He talked about his walk along the ocean the day before. “As I walked, I found my self repeating the Bible passage, *What doth it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?* I knew then that I had to refuse the position. If I take it, it will be selling my soul for the power and prestige. I can’t do it.” He felt relieved and sad. The anguish of uncertainty was over. He also felt the sadness about the ending of his dream to be a bishop.

Richard’s Council work had been concluded. He would tell the bishop that he was under a lot of emotional stress and needed to take a leave of absence, giving him time to prepare for the next stage of his life. He left the priesthood within the next year. The process of implementing the decision and the transition into an entirely new life became the new focus of our work together.

While the Council no longer met in formal sessions, I encouraged Richard to deepen his relationship with his Higher Self, as represented by *Father Dan*. He would also “poll the Council” in preparation for our sessions and we would use it as an informal way to help him make some decisive steps during his transition. For example, *the Priest* subpersonality encouraged Richard to use his background of pastoral counseling to develop a psychotherapy practice as a way of supporting himself.

For many of my patients the Council becomes an ongoing working metaphor that we return to as we move through the smaller decisions that emerge during in-depth psychotherapy. My patients also report that they periodically utilize what they have learned in the Council by holding mini-Councils at home or at work. In



these moments when they are experiencing some intra-psychic conflict they feel more able to re-imagine those parts of their personality in dialogue, tolerating the tension among them until a resolution emerges. So even with smaller ordinary conflicts my patients feel that they now have a life tool that helps them to externalize and contain the dynamic tension and develop more respectful coexistence among their sub-personalities.■

William P. Ryan, PhD, has been a psychologist in private practice for more than thirty-eight years. This article is based upon a chapter in his latest book, Working From the Heart: A Therapist’s Guide to Heart-Centered Psychotherapy. More information about his work and book may be found at Dr. Ryan’s website: <http://www.williampryan.com>.

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There will be three keynote plenary sessions: (1) coaching and psychosynthesis, (2) systems transformation, and (3) how we can serve the world today most effectively as psychosynthesists. Your workshop presentations are the highlight of this upcoming conference. What you have learned in your practices, and what you sense is now emerging are of utmost importance to the advancement of psychosynthesis in North America.

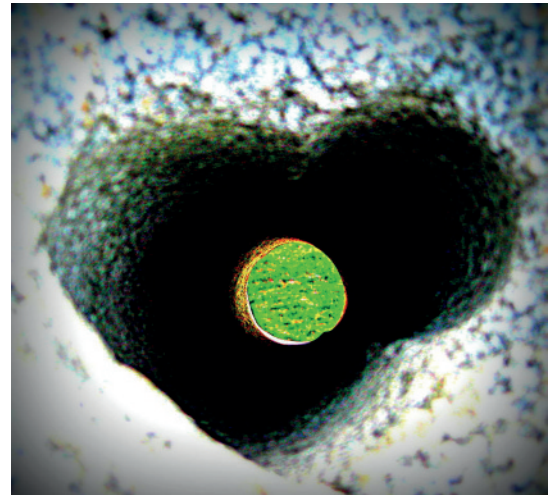
The proposal form is ready for you to complete at www.aap-psychosynthesis.org at the 2013 Conference page, and can be found on the home page as well. Two screenings will assure that your workshop has the information needed to satisfy requirements for CE's and will be a presentation of psychosynthesis principles. We are looking for 24 workshop presentations at the conference to share with 100-200 new people, in addition to psychosynthesis colleagues. Participants will be expecting introductory courses, practical techniques, demonstrations of how coaching and psychosynthesis are integrated into your practice, innovations, edge research—theoretical and prototypical, creative/artistic expressions, and unconditional love and forgiveness—to name a few.

Please take some time now to complete the proposal form and send it to conference@aap-psychosynthesis.org

If you have questions, either email, or call 386-916-3747 and one of us will call you back.

EARLY REGISTRATION

You may now pre-register for the AAP 2013 Conference, *Psychosynthesis At the Heart of Systems Transformation*. Online registration is at the AAP website, www.aap-psychosynthesis.org, on the Conference 2013 page. An early registration discount is available until December 31, 2012. Burlington, VT is easy to get to: it has an international airport, there are shuttles from Boston and from New York City, and busses are accessible throughout New England. It's an easy drive, as well, from most anywhere in eastern North America. Trains into New York City with transfers to Vermont are also an option. We already know that this conference is going to happen. There has been a huge amount of interest already generated for participation in one form or another. We look forward to seeing you there!



psychosynthesis in life

Psychosynthesis, Art, and Ecopsychology: A Personal Journey

by Alan Steinberg

My first experience of psychosynthesis was in the late seventies, after working with a therapist who did not include psychosynthesis in his world view. I then began to work with Judy Bach, having my first inklings of a perspective that was larger than my previous one in which I was “broken,” in need of “fixing.” This relatively short introduction helped me make a decision about a relationship that was not working. Only sixteen years later did I again become the Traveler, this time for a much longer, deeper exploration—in fact, one that continues to this day.

My decision to be trained as a guide myself came through an indirect path. All those years I led the life of a professional potter, making and selling the work of my hands to support myself and my family. Paulus Berensohn taught me that being a potter meant learning to be a person first. George Kokis introduced me to the relationship between making art and the archetypal wisdoms of the great myths, and I began to familiarize myself with the ideas of Carl Jung. In 2001, while on staff at the week-long *Men’s Wisdom Council* at Rowe Conference Center, I had an epiphany:

After a round of introductions, participants donned blindfolds, lined up single file, right hands on the shoulder of the man in front. We led them on a silent trudge through the darkening forest. Upon their return, still blindfolded, we shared the Greek tale of Theseus’ descent to meet The Minotaur—half-man, half-bull, hidden away in the deep caverns of the Labyrinth. The participants, still blindfolded, were led to a staff-created Labyrinth. Crawling on their bellies up and down stairways covered with wet slimy leaves and unseen obstacles, each man experiencing his labyrinth, as few humans have, throughout his body, through his sense of touch and smell. At the end they were asked, “Are you ready to meet the Minotaur?” One at a time they were helped to stand and guided to a plywood wall, their faces in front of a head-size hole cut into the plywood. They removed their blindfolds. Looking through the hole towards a mirror facing them, they saw their own faces, but with shaggy monster fur and horns painted on the back side of the plywood surrounding the cutout, making it perfectly clear the monster was within.

The next morning I led the group on an eyes-closed visualization back into the Labyrinth, recalling the feel of wet rock, a dank smell, the sound of dripping water. They opened their eyes to the sight of a half-ton of raw, wet clay in front of them. They were invited, in silence, to make their monsters. A half-hour of furious work ensued.

When the work stopped we witnessed a great variety of evocative monsters. Randy’s sculpture, a simple rectangular block eight-feet wide, eight-feet deep, by three-feet thick with rows of smaller blocks across the top—20 in all—puzzled me. I could not see how it related to our work.

We used a sharing technique designed to remove judgment from the process, and borrowed from dream workshops. Members of the group were invited to comment on each other’s forms, beginning with the phrase, “If this were my dream/sculpture I would see ‘this’ in it.” Anyone could share their impressions and finally the person whose creation it was could speak, reserving the right to “take whatever resonates from the others’ observations, and to just let the rest go.”

We went from sculpture to sculpture, the insights full of wisdom and humor. I noticed, however, that Randy held back, so he went last. The hesitant comments showed I was not the only one who was perplexed. Then Randy spoke.

He spoke of how, more than 25 years earlier, working as a private investigator for a hospital, looking for, as he put it, “wrong-doing,” he had discovered an angry nurse in a neo-natal clinic secretly killing babies. He

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ran to the hospital administration expecting them to call the police. Instead, a long debate ensued amongst board members as to how to handle this without damaging the hospital's reputation. While they debated, more babies died. Randy's sculpture was a graveyard!

The group drew in close around Randy, till his tears had all drained away; then we cradled him in our arms for I don't know how long. For 25 years Randy had kept this trauma a secret. His wife, friends, therapists he had seen, had never heard the story. It was the clay, together with the mythological ritual, that brought it to the surface where healing could begin.

This was a transformational experience for me, confronted with clay's tactile power to awaken us emotionally to experiences and connections inaccessible through the psychological function of thinking. I recalled Paulus' assertion: The word *therapy* comes from the Greek root *thera*, meaning *to ripen*. I began to think of myself as *therapist*, as in *midwife*. I began to offer workshops using clay as a tool for self-discovery. Participants would respond in clay to rituals, poems, stories, and exercises. I included versions of the great myths—creation myths, hero's journey myths, and elder myths. I incorporated stories from the Eastern pottery making tradition, in which the potter focuses not on the pot they are forming, but rather, on the space inside the pot. As a poet once said, "Who is being formed - the potter or the pot?" These stories seemed to illustrate basic structures of the psychosynthesis model, the "Who am I" exercise being a good example. "We have bodies – and we are more than our bodies." I enrolled in the training program at the Synthesis Center.

A friend who is a vision quest guide introduced me to the Lakota myth, *The Legend of Jumping Mouse*, a version of the hero's journey, in which all the characters were animals, representing symbolic aspects of the human psyche, from various subpersonalities to transpersonal figures.

Here was a bridge between human experience and the "more than human" world. My work began to take on ecological concerns. Subpersonalities might appear as wounded child and critical parent, they might appear as Mouse and Badger. Transpersonal guides might appear as Christ or Buddha; they could appear as Wolf and Eagle. We might climb a mountain to meet a Wise Being or the mountain itself might be our wisdom source, as might an old tree, or the stump of a dead tree—speaking ancestral wisdom. Now I could take that question – "Who am I?" along with some of its associations: "Where do I come from?" "Where am I right now?" "Where am I going?" to name just a few. I could take those questions, along with drawing pad and pencil, as well as a plastic bag of clay, and, of course, a journal. Now I could get up from the meditation pillow and head outdoors to see what wisdom Tree, Stone, Ocean, and Stars had to share with me.

This past year, after studying with Joanna Macy, her *Work that Reconnects* became a larger part of my workshops, particularly one held in the Virgin Islands, co-facilitated with my friend, writer Fred Taylor. This work is grounded in the belief that when we acknowledge and feel our pain for the world, we discover our deep connection with all beings. We loosen the boundaries of the ego-restricted self, letting in the healing energy of the eco-self. Joanna's spiral image for the *Work that Reconnects* fits well with the permeability of the lines in the psychosynthesis egg diagram, which had become for me the bones supporting the individual flesh of myself as artist/teacher/guide/deep ecologist.

In our first year offering the workshop, we saw hidden among the beautiful landscapes, intimations that, ecologically speaking, all was not well in Paradise and the many ways that we need to wake up. An example: Two poems I offered as prompts for clayworking refer to a woman, lost at sea in the Philippines, saved by a giant turtle who came up beneath her, holding her above water for three days and nights until a ship came by. At first sighting, sailors on the ship thought she was on an oil drum. One participant actually sculpted the image of a woman held afloat by an oil drum. Despite the fact that the poems were inspired by a true story, as reported in the Syracuse Post Dispatch, he judged the possibility o



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f consciousness in a turtle so absurd he had to dismiss it. Here was disconnection—from other, from the other that lives within us, from the collective superconscious.

So, this past year, we began acknowledging this dimension in our workshop design, incorporating some of Joanna's exercises. We began with gratitude for the blessings of our lives, followed by exercises that evoked expressions of concern over what humans are doing to the environment. This opened the door to exercises focused on new visions for a more sustainable society. Engaging our will, we clarified our unique contributions to an emerging future vision. In a climactic "Council of All Beings," we donned masks we had made, becoming, and then speaking as hummingbird, sun, ocean, turtle, barracuda and puffer-fish—speaking of the dangers we faced to our well-being, offering wisdom to the humans. We noticed that our clay sculptures and writings became infused with caring for the fate of the earth and all its beings.



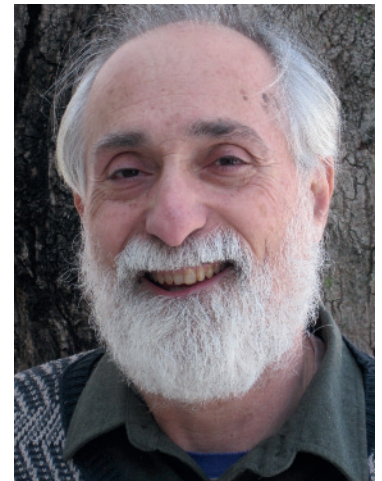
As our hearts opened, inner peace replaced inner angst, as a sense of purpose emerged, hope arose. We danced the "Elm Dance," a dance of hope Joanna had learned from people living in the shadow of Chernobyl. We danced it often. It finally became part of our closing ritual, with some of us waist deep in the waters of Lameshur Bay.

Together we gave voice to our call of Self. We spoke to each other, engaging our strong, skillful, and good wills, and also the transpersonal will, speaking of our choices for change in our lives that would bring ourselves into harmony with the rest of creation.

Then, saying our goodbyes, we all headed back to our homes on this much larger Island—Earth. ■

Alan Steinberg and Fred Taylor will lead a third annual *Making Art in Paradise* January 7-15, 2013. For info and photos, go to: www.brattleboroclayworks.com/maip

Alan Steinberg has been a ceramic artist and teacher for more than 40 years with work in galleries across the country. A founder of the *Brattleboro Clayworks*, he has studied with many well-known artists in the field, including Paul Soldner, George Kokis and Paulus Berensohn. He has also studied with Ram Dass, Pema Chodron, Stanley Krippner, Alex Grey, Sean McNiff, Peter London and Martin Prechtel. Trained at the Synthesis Center of Amherst MA, he now maintains a practice as a Psychosynthesis Guide. He has led workshops for *Rowe Conference Center*, *Omega at the Crossings* in Austin Texas, the *League of New Hampshire Craftsmen*, and the *Vermont Leadership Institute*.



psychosynthesis teleconference

Psychosynthesis Guides Us to “Awaken and Return to Self”

By Abigail De Soto

Four years ago I stood on an old Roman bridge in a market town in southwest France, watching the clear water rush beneath me. I had been using psychosynthesis in my own life and with clients to awaken to “*what is*,” not to feed a dream or myth that society conditions us to believe. As I stood on the massive stone 400-year-old bridge that had experienced much water flowing beneath it over the years, I understood that the fairy tale of life was over. It was time to awaken to a deeper understanding of life, ourselves, our power, role and responsibility as human beings. *Now* was the time to explore the age-old question, “*Who am I?*”

At the end of June 2012, I was privileged to attend the vastly popular international psychosynthesis conference in Rome, Italy. Countless applications and future possibilities for psychosynthesis were discussed, presented and explored in one venue by both long-term specialists and eager newcomers from around the world. It was an almost excessively rich experience for four days. One of my moving discoveries at this conference was a deeper introduction to the esoteric and spiritual dimension in Assagioli’s concept of Psychosynthesis. This aspect had been evident and resonant for me from my first discovery of psychosynthesis at the *Psychosynthesis and Education Trust* in London (PET) in 2007, and continues to be something I explore to this day in conjunction with the complimentary teachings of *A Course in Miracles*.¹

My feeling of being on a synchronistic track was great as I met participants in Rome who support, teach and disseminate the spiritual dimension of Psychosynthesis through Creative Meditation. There are today three centers in the world—in California, Southern England and Italy² whose sole focus is to contribute to the creation of a web and global field of consciousness to guide humanity in this critical awakening through the teachings of Psychosynthesis.

We live in a period of massive acceleration as well as a time of fear, a time of great potential—potential for evolving consciousness, *and* potential for irrevocable mass destruction. Charles Dickens once wrote, “*It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.*” Our time could be compared to that era, a time in desperate need of new paradigms to rebalance an impending tip toward ecological and planetary destruction.

We need to return to Self, reconnect with a deep inner calling, relinquish childish ego games of “grab and take,” “use and abuse,” and “hate and destroy.” The time to awaken is *now*—awaken to who we are in the becoming, and to who we were born to be. Courage and fortitude must be cultivated to enable us to open our eyes with honesty and discernment to destructive ways of being so we can step into more evolved “adult” roles. We are called to incarnate and live from a place of *peace*, to become peace-makers, healers and teachers, “messengers and ministers” of the Divine, and to become people ready to *heal the unresolved issues of consciousness itself*, passed on through generations. If you feel the call, now is the time to answer. Take action and join us for a three-month telecourse this September. No need to travel... from the safety and quiet of your home, join an intimate group of others from around the world who seek to explore what a deeper connection to Self can mean.

Notes:

1. *A Course in Miracles*, published by Foundation for A Course in Miracles. Self-study, spiritual mind training program developed over seven years through Columbia University’s Department of Psychology.
2. Creative Meditation International Centers: Meditation Mount-USA, Sundial House-UK, Community of Living Ethics- *Comunita di ica Vivente*, Italy

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"Return to S.E.L.F. – the Call to Awaken"

Tele-course starting **September 29th, 2012**; 12 sessions over three months,
Designed and taught by Abigail De Soto

*Drawing on psychosynthesis, practices of mindfulness, Buddhism, and the spiritual teachings of A Course in Miracles, embark on an inner journey and exploration no worldly trip can rival! Open your heart and mind to thoughts and possibilities that will heal lifelong wounds, release suffering, and prepare you to step into a role of **healer, teacher, lover, peacemaker, and change agent**.*

If you desire **freedom, peace and healing** in your life, I invite you to join an intimate group of like-minded leaders to explore the vital question of *who* you are, and *what* you have come to offer your community, family and the world.

Tele-course starts September 29, 2012 and includes:

- Online experiential teaching (needs only a phone + computer) + group work.
- 12 classes of 1hr + 20 minutes, over three months + small support groups to explore weekly themes.
- Complimentary recordings of each session for review or missed sessions.
- OPTIONAL: discounted individual coaching sessions for participants seeking to further explore an issue/question.

Per Person Price: \$396

***Special promotional offer: \$332 for AAP members—
register by September 19, 2012***

What could be the **value** of an experience of freedom, peace of mind and awakening to Self?

What would be your subsequent **experience** of life?

*Why not join us and find out! And, enroll for a longer Creative Meditation training
with one of the International Creative Meditation Centers*

Abigail De Soto was host and organizer of the global **March 2012 Synthesis Teleconference** offering five workshops, with guest speaker, Piero Ferrucci. She is author, yoga instructor, creator of ***YinDance-Your Inner Dance*** (a trademarked mind-body technique), transformational coach and psychosynthesis guide. Presently based in SW France, she works globally with people aspiring to lives of fulfilment, passion, and happiness. For more information contact: discovery.transformation@gmail.com or visit <http://www.inner-discovery.com>



New Members of AAP (Continued from [page 49](#))

Christina Olivieri, MFT, PhDc, San Francisco, CA, USA

Adrienne Jeffries, CSW, Stonyfell, SA, Australia

Catherine Ann Lombard, MA, Gronau, Germany

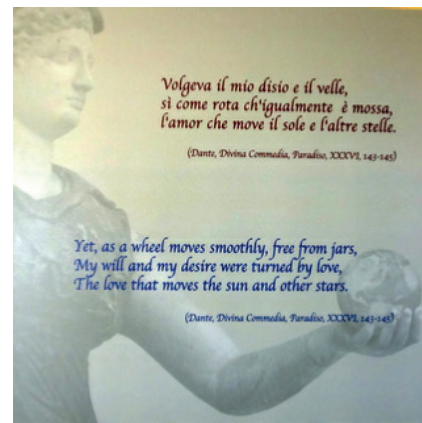
Joanne Graham-Wilson BA, JD, LLM, DEA, Auribeau sur Siagne, France

psychosynthesis in the world

Reflections on the International Psychosynthesis Conference in Rome

Molly Young Brown

“Psychosynthesis in the World” was the theme of the International Psychosynthesis Conference held near Rome, June 21-24, 2012. The *Istituto di Psicosintesi* and the *Società Italiana di Psicosintesi Terapeutica* (S.I.P.T) began work on this Conference over four years ago, and their hard work and planning culminated in an event that will long be remembered by all 580 people attending from all over the world. The well-designed program brought us all together as a community in plenary sessions twice a day, while numerous simultaneous presentations and workshops gave people ample opportunities to explore their particular interests in greater depth. Moreover, ten co-creative groups met twice in 1-3/4 hour sessions to inquire together how psychosynthesis can serve the world in various applications and areas of concern. These groups each gave brief reports on their work in the closing plenary session and further inspired us to carry the spirit of the conference into the future. Some of the groups, including my group on the environmental crisis, plan to carry on their work via the Internet. Another co-creative group plans to create an international psychosynthesis web site and proposes international conferences be held every four years.



Simultaneous translation between English and Italian (and on one occasion French) helped us all enjoy the plenary sessions with the use of headsets, which also enabled us to hear the speakers clearly. Volunteers translated for the workshops and co-creative groups, so we all were “on the same page,” at least most of the time. Working with a diversity of languages and accents expanded my sense of belonging to a truly world-wide community. We had participants from all over Italy and twenty-two other countries, including a group of six from Nairobi, Kenya who are working with single mothers.



Molly Young Brown's
keynote address urged ecological
courage and compassion

Most of us stayed at the conference site, a modestly-appointed spiritual retreat center. Those who registered too late to be accommodated at the center stayed at a nearby hotel and rode a free shuttle bus to and fro.

I loved the Conference! I reconnected with so many old friends and colleagues, from the USA, Canada, Europe, and New Zealand. I made new friends as well, of course. Beyond these individual connections, I experienced such a strong sense of community, a sharing of common values and concerns rooted in the heart. I was struck by the absence of dogma or conflict over “correctness”; people seemed open to different perspectives and experiences, listening deeply to one another with genuine interest. I was also gratified to see the enthusiasm and energy of younger people carrying psychosynthesis into the world in so many creative and effective ways. Psychosynthesis is indeed alive and well in today's global world.

Abigail De Soto

Well, what an international conference it was! You only needed to enter the foyer of *Mondo Migliore*, teeming with people, to hear Italian (naturally), English, French, Swedish, German and probably other languages. I

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even got called in at the last minute to do some simultaneous translation from French for a plenary session- it was like being at the United Nations!

The plenary and workshop topics and discussions were rich. I was particularly pleased to hear Diana Whitmore speak of her work in social psychosynthesis with the Teens and Toddlers charity in London, and explain her transformative use of psychosynthesis principles with at-risk young people, without ever using the 'p' word.

We had teachings by many, many greats.... there was too much to do it all. Some significant sharing happened in unscheduled, chance happenings in the hallways, much like at the U.N. Among plenary sessions, workshops, unexpected meetings at the book table or in the bar, we had more than enough sustenance for three days.

Piero Ferrucci spoke on 'Qualities of Will' and the vital qualities of self-reliance, resilience and control to keep us buoyant in today's accelerated and dangerously changing times. For those of us interested in Assagioli's esoteric side, there were representatives and information on both Meditation Mount in CA and Sundial House in the UK (the latter I am exploring even as I write this contribution for *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*). Yes, I would agree with Molly, psychosynthesis is well and truly alive around the world, offering a modern, adapted and needed paradigm to many of the challenges we face around the globe, be they ecological, educative and social, or spiritual.



Diana Whitmore

Walter Polt



The 500+ participants overflowed this auditorium

The Rome conference glows—as an emotional and visual memory, a tumble of vibrant images. From the first moment, it was a thrill to be surrounded by people talking excitedly in many different languages. From beginning to end, the conference leadership was gentle, good-humored, careful, and capable. As a participant, I felt myself carried forward by the exuberant overflow of participants, as I thought, "Each person here is a leader somewhere!"

A big pleasure for me was participating in one of the multinational "co-creative groups"—and feeling included as an integral part of it, thanks largely to Piero Ghirelli, who led it with alert integrity and warmth. (Our group ended up proposing creation of an international psychosynthesis Web site and having an international conference every *four* years instead of every 12—each one on a different continent.) Also a pleasure was an outdoor experience

that let us enjoy the balmy touch of summer in the hills of Rome. At one point during it, I was in one of many circles arrayed across the lawns under variously colored banners, slowly making wordless eye contact with other participants, one by one.

It was an honor and thrill to give my workshop, on how we can change conflict by connecting *through* differences, not just in spite of them. Claudia dal Forno, a superb Italian translator, gave great support.

What's better than hugging dear "old" friends from many countries? Could it be walking under summer stars with my wife Cynthia and new friends from more countries? What's better than hearing Kenyans tell about teaching African psychosynthesis dances to Italians in Africa? Could it be hearing Italians tell about



Ritual of bonding in circles on the lawns

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teaching Italian dances to Africans in return (such as the Tarantella) also in Africa? I kept feeling myself expand into ideas new to me, such as "I *am* my body, and I am more than my body (etc.)." And I will always feel gratitude to people of many nationalities who so graciously set aside their first languages momentarily to speak to me in mine!

Carol Blanchard

My experience of the Rome conference was so similar to those of Molly, Walter, and Will. The sheer numbers of people, many speaking different languages, was an inspiration to find ways to connect. The Kenyans from the first African psychosynthesis center, who danced every night under the stars, provided that opportunity, as well as the opportunity to connect with their pain that some of their group were denied visas to come to Rome by their government.

Having personal deep meetings with many old friends and creating new ones from around the world was an exhilarating delight. The presentations were fine and many were tremendously thoughtful and stimulating. The opening ceremony in the beautiful natural surroundings brought us into direct contact with one another, eye to eye, hand to hand, heart to heart, soul to soul.

I would like to share some of the principles of the organizing committee, through the words of one of its proponents, that were given to the international group working in the Assagioli archives in Florence last October: 1) the conference should be a meeting and a listening space, connecting through concrete ways of working together, sharing ideas, projects and information; 2) it should be going beyond Assagioli's work and vision as developed so far, while deepening and broadening it, and opening to new ideas for the future. This would include research of new approaches, and presenting projects specifically related to the fields of science and technology, the environment and ecology; 3) it will honor world diversity, complexity, and unity, and the need for a true globalization, while honoring the differences among ourselves; and 4) it will ask the questions, "How does psychosynthesis respond and develop its capacity to act, in the face of world social crises, suffering and rapid change --- without becoming an ideology? How to bring to community, group, and world its methods and process of becoming more deeply human?"

These focused ideas and meditations, and the creativity of all the organizers, attendees and presenters at *Psychosynthesis in the World*, brought a powerful and living spiritual presence to the conference from beginning to end.

Some highlights for me:

Diana Whitmore (Psychosynthesis and Education Trust) presented on her pioneering *Teens and Toddlers* program—"visionary common sense: applied spirituality—when we serve people we heal everything."

Gianni Dattilo's "heal the split between inner world and outer world, to awaken the soul of the world."

Piero Ferrucci's feeling into some new qualities of the will.

Massimo Rosselli's presentation with art and poetry and shamanic drum, *Relational Self and Vulnerable Self: A Global Healing Perspective* ("From the past, into the *presence*, for the future").

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Nairobi psychosynthesists sharing traditional dance



Massimo Rosselli's keynote conveyed meaning with art, poetry and a shamanic drum

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Judi White: “participation as the basis of psychosynthesis,” “bring the world into the consulting room,” “express qualities and spirit of psychosynthesis, more than methods.”

Margret Rueffler, Psycho-Political Peace Education, on healing the collective psyche, and the living energetic field of a group or nation.

Ewa Bialek from the Polish Institute, on psychoenergetics, the quantum field, evolving consciousness and direct communication between the Higher Self and the body

.....one can go on and on.

I came away with a deeply lived experience of being connected—heart, mind, and will.

Two other important events have occurred; the participation of psychosynthesis-inspired WYSE (World Youth Service Education), and of the world-wide Group for Creative Meditation, with main centers in California, England, and Italy—another project of Roberto Assagioli, in which he presented many of his ideas on right relations, and group and spiritual life connected to world service. It was wonderful to see this historic bridge-building!

I believe this conference is a watershed for all of us, and I am glad that we will be able to see some of the presentations on the internet.



Cypresses on conference grounds



Musical interludes introduced general sessions

You can watch talks by Daniele de Paolis, Gianni Yoav Dattilo, Molly Young Brown, Diana Whitmore, Piero Ferrucci, Massimo Rosselli, Andree Samuel, and Fiorella Pasini at the International Psychosynthesis Conference in Rome, June 2012, by following this link:

www.psicosintesi.it/istituto/psicosintesi-mondo/video



Events were seen by video in the chapel