

# PSYCHOSYNTHESIS QUARTERLY

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The Digital Magazine of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis

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*Volume 6 Number 4*

*December 2017*

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**Sleepers, Awake!** *by Jan Kuniholm*

**Driving the Carriage** *by Dorothy Firman*

**Opening the Gateway to the Storyless Land**  
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**And More . . .**

# Psychosynthesis Quarterly

**Editor:** Jan Kuniholm

**Assistant Editors:** Audrey McMorrow, Walter Polt and Douglas Russell

**Design and Production:**

Jan Kuniholm, Walter Polt

**Psychosynthesis Quarterly** is published by AAP four times a year in March, June, September and December. **Submission deadlines** are February 7, May 7, August 7, and November 7.

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## Notes from the Editor

Even though we do not solicit material with any kind of “theme” in mind for the *Quarterly*, there are inner connections between many of the articles our writers share with you in this issue, which run the gamut from death to life, from habits to spirit.

Ann Gila’s memoir, “Take Your Grandmother Home” is about recovering connections with family, and we have also a review of a *Handbook of Individual Family Constellations* that shows the vital importance of family relationships. Death makes an appearance in Catherine Ann Lombard’s interview with Massimo Rosselli, and also in Shamai Currim’s reminiscence of a *Journey of Love*. A dream is remembered in the *Stone of Villa Serena*, and the object of that dream is mentioned by Dr. Rosselli in his closing words.

The new book *Always About Anxiety* alerts us to general anxiety disorder from a first-person perspective. Life struggles on in an *Old Fighter’s Work*. Richard Lamb shares ways of finding peace.

Alan Haras shows how psychosynthesis is yoga, helping us find our “true guru,” and Richard Lamb invites us to “invite the witness” in the practice of presence. Didi Firman shows us that we cycle through psychological functions, as one triggers the next, and therein we find a gift: awareness of the sequencing can break the chain. In *Sleepers, Awake!* I note how habits also function in cycles.

Cristina Pelizzatti and Bill Burr share an application in subpersonality work for “Your Own Star,” the interactive map of the psychological functions that made its debut in last issue. Cristina goes on to give a more detailed account of the work of psychosynthesis life coaching. Shamai Currim contemplates the connections between psychology and spirituality, and finds them inextricably intertwined.

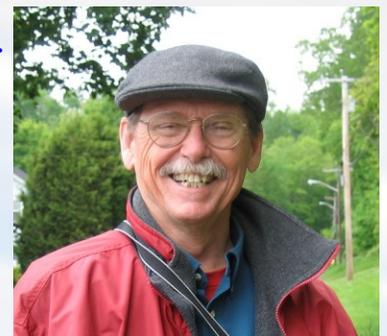
Workshops and courses are coming up: A certificate training series with Didi Firman, in person in Amherst, MA, and also online as a teleconference, in December and January; The Synthesis Center will offer a distance-learning program for Level 1 Psychosynthesis Life Coach Training beginning in February; and a Mothers & Daughters Workshop series will be given by Karen Herold and Lauren Herold-Morgan in Bellevue, WA in January, February and March.

It is a pleasure for us to present the *Quarterly* to you. We are grateful to all who send us material to share, and look forward to the coming year with you. If something in this issue inspires you, or moves you—or even makes you unhappy—please take a moment to share your response with us. Your praise inspires us, and your constructive criticism will help us to make the *Quarterly* even better.

Send your comments to [newsletter@aap-psychosynthesis.org](mailto:newsletter@aap-psychosynthesis.org).

In the meantime, enjoy!  
Happy Holidays  
and A Joyous New Year  
from all of us to all of you.

Jan Kuniholm



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## “Take Your Grandmother Home”

**Ann Gila**

*The following is a slightly abbreviated chapter from my recent memoir Stay Present and Love Him. I share it as an example of John Firman’s and my understanding of Self-realization. For Firman and Gila, Self-realization does not mean we become Self, but rather that we follow the invitations that Self extends to us—what both Assagioli and Jung referred to as “call”—even invitations that are sometimes beyond our immediate understanding. We don’t see Self-realization as experiencing a particular state of consciousness, but rather a deepening of our relationship with Self as we become increasingly able to listen and respond to its guidance. We found that Self’s invitations can come to us through various channels, following our conviction that Self is transcendent-immanent, and that these invitations are extended to us in every minute of our lives. Therefore, we view Self-realization as a moment-to-moment relationship between “I” and Self. [For an elaboration of Firman and Gila’s understanding of Self-realization, see Firman’s monograph, “Self and Self-Realization,” a free download on [www.psychosynthesispaloalto.com](http://www.psychosynthesispaloalto.com) .]*

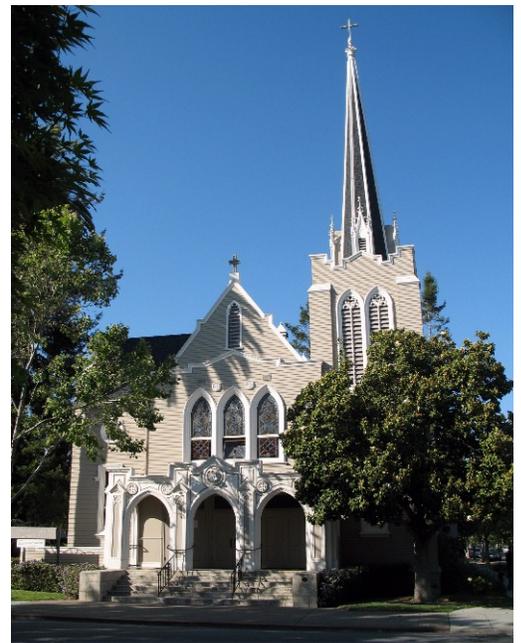
One day in mid-August 1996, I was at the noon weekday Mass in St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church near downtown Palo Alto. I often went to this service because it was only thirty minutes long and could easily fit into my day, and its brief homily almost always had a message I needed to hear. On this particular day with the temperature in the low nineties, the coolness inside the church added to the peaceful quiet of the simple service, attended by only a small group of us. I easily fell into a reverie, and at the same time was aware of the ritual proceeding before me. In fact, the familiar liturgy may have contributed to what was to occur.

In my head I began to hear the following command, repeated over and over: “Take your grandmother home. Take your grandmother home. Take your grandmother . . .” I didn’t know where the message was coming from or what it meant. I had tears in my eyes and didn’t know why. I even tried to push it out of my mind, but it was insistent, as if it had a life force that wouldn’t be denied. After a while I surrendered to it, hoping that if I didn’t fight it I would learn its meaning.

Mass ended, and the command was less intense but stayed with me as I walked home. I was eager to tell John about what had just happened. We talked. What does this mean? Is there something I’m supposed to do? Is this significant, or is it just some nonsensical intrusion?

I certainly didn’t know where it came from, although at times in the past I had had the experience of being guided by something that felt beyond myself. This had been true as far back as I could remember. So what about now? Was this the guidance I was familiar with? And if it was, what did it mean? It certainly was extraordinary.

You see, my grandmother Caterina was dead; she had died when I was ten years old and was buried in a small town on the central coast of California. Home for her, however, was a tiny village in the hills of northern Italy. When she was twenty-four she had left her mother and two sisters behind, boarded a ship in the port of Genoa, and come to the United States to join her husband who had immigrated three years earlier. She brought with her their four-year-old son, Giuseppe, my uncle Joe. She never saw or spoke to her mother or her sisters again, and I



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believed I carried her deep sadness within me. I remember sitting on the back steps of her house in the late afternoon, the train whistle blowing in the distance, and feeling an overpowering longing for somewhere else.

As a young child I had been very close to my grandmother and had lived with her and my grandfather many months of each year while my parents both worked. I felt loved and cared for by her, more so than by my own mother, her daughter. So, did the command have something to do with this strong bond I had had with her?

I asked John, “Do you think I’m supposed to dig up her body and take it back to Italy?” I really didn’t think so, but I was willing to consider all possibilities. He suggested I pray or meditate on the message and see what emerged. So I did. Within days I knew what I had to do. I needed to go to Italy. I didn’t know what I was looking for, or what I would do there. I just felt I had to make the return trip she had never been able to make, and I had a sense of urgency about it. Maybe it was because my mother was growing old, and I needed to do it for her, too.

I began to make preparations for the journey, which John and I would take in just a few weeks. Because of the short time before our departure, the airline tickets were expensive. At one point, John, because of our familiarity with imagery and guided visualization, teasingly said to me, “Are you sure you can’t just take this trip in your imagination, Annie?” As he pointed out, “It would be a lot cheaper!” I laughed. “Nope, I have to do it, Johnny! Are you with me?” Of course, he was.

As we packed our bags, I wanted to take something of my grandmother’s with me, something I could leave if I found the right place for it. I felt it would be a symbol of the return to her country she had never made and I now would make for her. I settled on the sugar spoon from her set of silverware. It had scalloped edges and was the most ornate piece in the set. I wanted to carry back something of hers that was beautiful.

John and I left San Francisco on a Friday morning in early September and flew directly to Milan. We had eight days for whatever I had to do. I had been to Italy several times before but had never visited the region of Liguria where my grandparents were from. John and I would now explore the Ligurian hills and villages, looking for something of which I had no knowledge. I felt as though I held only a worn treasure map with barely readable lines, its treasure yet a mystery to me. My “map” consisted of copies of my grandparents’ Italian passports, some sketchy details about places and people my mother gave me, and some old, worn, family photos of my grandmother’s sisters and their children that had been sent to her from Italy over fifty years earlier.

John and I arrived in Milan on a Saturday morning and easily found our rental car. At the time, the airport in Milan was not large, and we only had to step across the street to pick up our car. I was excited and apprehensive. I said to John, “What if we have spent all this money and time for nothing?” John reassured me that whatever happened was okay. Throughout this journey he gave me his unconditional support to follow whatever I sensed I needed to do, without having to guarantee any specific outcome. Such freedom he gave me! Thank you, John.

We left the airport and drove south on the *autostrada* (Italian freeway) in the direction of the Ligurian coast, passing through a multitude of tunnels. I marveled at how the Italians had blasted through the mountains to construct this highway. As we entered and exited tunnels and shifted from the brightness of day to the dimness of light within them, our drive was not long—two hours to the coast, and then we turned west towards the province of Savona, the one in which my grandparents had been born. As we drove along the Mediterranean Sea, I squirmed in my seat with excitement and looked at John with an “Oh, my goodness, we really are here” grin, and in quieter moments, gazed at the vast blue sea before us.

John reached over and took my hand. “How you doing, Annie?”

“I’m okay. Just terribly excited but also scared. I don’t know why. It’s weird to feel scared when I think about what my grandmother did. She left everything she knew and went to a



On the *autostrada*

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place where she knew nothing. You know, John, sometimes I try to imagine being her. Getting on a ship bigger than anything I've ever seen, herded into steerage below, two weeks crammed into a space with no privacy and terrible sanitary conditions, rarely, if ever, being allowed up above for some fresh air. No, I can't imagine it. And then, at Ellis Island being subjected to a humiliating physical examination, standing in lines not understanding a word being spoken to me, having my name misspelled in the registration rolls by an agent who looks at me disparagingly. No, John, I can't imagine it. I feel so sad when I think of what she went through."

John squeezed my hand. "I know, Annie. I think this is why we're here. To let her know we know. To redeem her fear and pain. But I think we're also here because you need to know where you came from, to meet the family she left behind. I don't know if we'll find them, but we'll give it our best shot."

"I love you, Johnny."

"Yep, I'm a swell guy!"

"You are! Sometimes I think you mean that as a joke, but you know what, it's not a joke. You are a swell guy!" He squeezed my hand again.

We hadn't made hotel reservations, not being sure in which town we should stay. Growing up I had heard the names of the towns of Spotorno and Finale Ligure, but I had no idea if one or both held a key to my quest. Passing by Spotorno, we exited the *autostrada* at Finale Ligure, and dropped down the steep hill into the part of town bordering the sea. John stopped the car at a hotel along the palm tree-lined promenade, and I went in to struggle with the Italian language as I checked the availability of rooms. The room I was shown was dark and stuffy, not at all inviting.

We then circled back along the coast in the direction of Savona, and after passing through the seaside villages of Varigotti and Noli, we stopped at the first hotel on the beach in Spotorno, Hotel Tireno. I walked into the clean and quiet lobby, was greeted by the lovely and elegant owner and her granddaughter, both of whom spoke some English, and instantly I knew this was our place. We were taken to our room on the first floor, threw open the windows on that sunny day, and looked out at such a touching sight for me—the Mediterranean Sea.

John and I then unpacked a few things, and despite being exhausted after traveling for twenty hours, we got in

our car and headed for the hills, hoping to find a place called Vezzi Portio. We had no idea if it was a village or a region, but it was the first of two places written on my grandparents' passports, so this was the lead John and I chose to follow. We found road signs that directed us away from the sea, under the *autostrada*, and up into the wooded hills overlooking the Mediterranean. We had driven about three kilometers when we passed through the small village of Noli per Tosse, and as we rounded a curve we saw a sign on the right side of the road announcing we were entering Vezzi Portio. I experienced a flood of feelings—joy, excitement, sadness, amazement, and gratitude—and could not believe I was here. In that moment I felt like I had found a treasure chest, and knew I was soon going to begin to connect the dots of my family's history. John stopped the car, I jumped out and stood near the sign, and he took the first



Vezzi Portio, Italy

photograph of many in what was to become a remarkable journey.

We continued on into the wooded hills, and after a few more curves in the road we saw the sign "Magnone." I turned to John with tears in my eyes, and I knew I was coming home. Magnone was the second name on my grandparents' passports, and I had a hunch this was the name of the village in which they had lived before immigrating to the United States. I later learned I was right.

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Magnone consisted of one tiny store, a municipal building, an elementary school, and a scattering of houses on forested hillsides. What now? I had no idea what I was looking for—the only thing I knew to do was to follow any inspiration I had. And this led to leaving Magnone and continuing on the road further into the mountains, looking for a cemetery where I hoped to find headstones engraved with names I might recognize.

A few kilometers later we rounded another curve in the road to find a large church and a small parking area at the back. We pulled in to find the church doors tightly closed. It was late in the day and we were exhausted, so I suggested we drive back to our hotel, rest, have some dinner, and begin again early the next morning. John was open to anything I wanted. He was there, standing by my side, supporting my quest in any way he could.

Immediately after we turned around, however, I spotted a small cemetery on the left side of the road and shouted to him, “There’s a cemetery! Let’s stop and go in.” I was sure we were about to discover something significant. Apparently, neither of us had seen it on the way to the church, and this was the only time during the entire trip we ever missed one! We walked among the gravestones looking closely at all the names, and as became our habit, John took one row and I took the next. Well, I left disappointed—no one there seemed related to me.

The next day John and I set out again, following the same route into the hills, but this time when we reached a fork in the road we turned in the opposite direction and immediately saw a sign that said “cimitero, chiesa” (cemetery, church) with an arrow pointing to a one-lane road through the woods. As we followed the sign, we had no idea if we would find the graves of the family my grandmother had left behind, but because this cemetery was near Magnone, we were hopeful. My treasure map of notes and photographs lay in my lap, ready to be compared to the information on gravestones, and fortunately, in Italy the photos of most who have died are encased in glass and embedded in their tombstones.

At the beginning of the lane on the left was an old two-story Italian farmhouse, vines growing up one side of it, a grape arbor and flowering rose bushes on the far side. The bottom floor was a garage almost the entire width of the house, and its doors were wide open. In the dim interior we could see an old tractor and plow, tools hanging from overhead beams, several small wagons that might have once been hitched to a horse, and stacks of wood. We had no idea then how familiar this house would become to us.



Tree-lined lane



Forested hillsides

We passed by and cautiously followed the narrow winding road, honking our horn on the blind curves. Chestnut trees lined the lane, laden with nuts that would fall to the ground in the coming months, and beyond them woods surrounded us on both sides. Up ahead we saw a clearing, and when we reached it, there before us, on our left, was a huge church that seemed so out of place at the end of this sparsely populated lane. Across from it, built on a hillside, was a cemetery surrounded by a stone wall.

Would I find anyone I knew? Of course, I would never have actually met anyone who was buried there, but I hoped to recognize names, and maybe photos. We parked our car near the church and walked over to some marble steps that led up to a rusty wrought-iron gate. At the top of the steps we unhooked the piece of wire that held the gate closed, walked in, and before us was a cemetery built on three levels. On the first level were those who had died many years ago, and the gravestones of some of them were embedded in the cemetery wall. I walked straight ahead, reading the names on graves on the

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ground that had sunk so far into the earth that it seemed as though very small people were buried in them. When I got to the third one, I was stunned—“Vittorina Rebella,” my grandmother’s oldest sister! “Johnny, this is my grandmother’s sister! This is Vittorina.” How can I describe the feelings that overcame me? I had come home for my grandmother but, in that moment, I knew I had also come home for me. My hands instinctively went to my heart, John held me, and I cried. Next to my great-aunt Vittorina was her brother-in-law and one of her nephews.

Vittorina’s headstone was one of the few that didn’t have a photo attached to it, but I had brought a photograph of her with me, so I showed it to John. In the photograph she is old with a wrinkled, weathered face, wearing a simple print dress, probably one of her finest, standing in the park next to the sea in Spotorno, the town in which John and I were staying. It may have been one of the few times she came down from the hills, and I imagined she had dressed up for the occasion.

John and I walked around this lower level of the cemetery and continued to read the names on gravestones, including those embedded in the cemetery wall. Another grave on the ground caught my attention, that of Angela Parodi, because her maiden name, Parodi, was that of my grandfather. I knew nothing about my grandfather’s family; he never talked about it, and he dismissed or deflected questions when we asked. This was in contrast to my grandmother who had written to her sisters for years after she immigrated. My grandfather’s last name, Parodi, is common in Italy—like Smith or Russell in the United States—so I didn’t assume Angela Parodi would be related to me. I learned years later, however, that Angela was in fact my great-aunt, my grandfather’s sister. I saw on her gravestone that she had died a few months before the end of World War II. I was later told by her sons and her grandchildren—whom I eventually met, and that’s another story—that her family were members of the *partigiani* (partisans), those Italians who formed the resistance to the Nazis and the Fascists. My great-aunt Angela was shot in the heart on the porch of her house by Italian soldiers who were aligned with the Germans and who scoured the woods one night in search of young Italian men who had joined the resistance. She was protecting her sons who had fled out the back door. When I met two of them, my mother’s first cousins, they were stunned by how strongly I resembled her. Giovanni, the oldest, couldn’t take his eyes off me.

We were not alone in the cemetery. Cats hovered on ledges and around the corners of gravestones, fearful of us and yet remaining close enough, we thought, in case we had food. Days later we met Adriano, a true St. Francis there in the woods of Liguria, who fed them every day from sacks of kibble he had stashed in the trunk of his car. When we introduced ourselves, he was so taken with us as Americans, thanking our country and telling us about America’s role in the liberation of Italy at the end of World War II.

We walked up four steps to what I named the mezzanine level of this hillside cemetery. Here there were a few graves on the ground, but we were mostly surrounded by family mausoleums. I looked to the right and noticed at the top of one of the smaller ones the name “Abate.” I was curious about this, because when I was a child and living sometimes with my grandparents, a couple named Maria and Joe (Giuseppe) Abate came to visit them from San Francisco. At the time I didn’t know they were related to us; I thought they were Italians who came from the same region of Italy and therefore were friends in this new country. When I was a young adult, however, I learned they were part of our family—but that, too, is another story.

After they arrived in California, Joe and Maria both found jobs in the Ghiradelli chocolate factory in San Francisco. As a kid I looked forward to their visits because they always brought me chocolates. My favorites were the tubes of Flicks, which were about five inches long and wrapped with brightly colored shiny paper—red, green, blue, and gold. Inside were flat chocolate drops with a little swirl on the top.

The Abate mausoleum was simple compared to those nearby that were much more ornate. As I walked over to it, I didn’t expect these Abates to be those I knew as a child—after all, they had lived in San Francisco. But then I remembered the story my mother had told me a few years earlier. Soon after Joe and Maria retired, they had planned to move back to Italy, but Joe died shortly before they were to leave California. Maria returned to Italy alone with Joe’s coffin and went on to live the last years of her life in Finale Ligure.

The left side of the Abate mausoleum was a vault in which the coffins had been placed, and to the right was a

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small open space with a waist-high, padlocked wrought-iron gate across it. As I approached the gate, I could see an altar against the back wall and on it two vases of dried flowers. I leaned over the gate to look at the names on the side of the vault, and read “Abate Giuseppe” and “Gravano Maria ved. Abate.” Here were Joe and Maria! I hadn’t been looking for them, and had no idea they would be here. I cried.

John quizzically came up behind me, not knowing who they were. He had heard all the family names, but he hadn’t heard theirs. I told him the story and how touched I was to find, here in the woods of northern Italy, these people I had known as a young child in California. I always remembered their kindness and how elegantly they dressed. John asked me about Maria’s name, and I explained that in Italy, women keep their maiden names. Gravano was her maiden name, and “ved.” indicated she was the widow (*vedova*) of Giuseppe Abate.

We left the Abates’ mausoleum and walked up several steps to the top level of the cemetery, at the back of which was a wall stretching from left to right with tombs built into it, separated in the middle by a tiny chapel. On each side of the chapel, the rows were five across and five high, and nearby was a ladder that could be moved along the wall and used to climb up to place flowers on the tombs of loved ones at the top.

For a moment I turned around and gazed out over the cemetery, the church, and beyond to the Mediterranean Sea. The stillness was sacred. John stood close behind and wrapped his arms around me. There was nothing to say. It was a holy moment.

I methodically read every name on the tombs. I had checked two rows when I saw the name “Maria Giuseppina Rebella ved. Tintori” in the middle of the third row. “John, here’s my grandmother’s youngest sister who she wrote to over the years!” I looked closely at my great-aunt Maria’s photograph and saw a younger version of my *nonna* (grandmother). I cried again. I had heard that this sister was the hardest for my grandmother to say goodbye to.

As John and I continued to read the names on all the tombs, every few minutes he heard shouts of, “Johnny, that’s my cousin! Look, here’s his picture!” as I pulled out one photograph after another. After we finished looking at all of them and John had taken photos to bring home to my mother, we walked back down to the first level. I paused for a moment. To this day, I have no idea why the headstone embedded in the wall to the left of the gate caught my attention. I thought we had looked at all of them. But now I couldn’t read it from where I stood because it had weathered so much over the years, so I walked up close and bent down to peer at the name engraved on it. I was stunned. It read: “Rosa Canepa in Rebella.” This was the mother my grandmother had left behind! I couldn’t believe it. I had found my great-grandmother. I sat down on the earth in front of her gravestone. I felt like I wanted to get as close to her as I could. Maybe I was doing it for my grandmother. John stood quietly nearby and then suggested we come back the next day with paper and pencil to make a rubbing, which we did. And, before we left, we buried my grandmother’s spoon in the earth that covered her mother’s grave.

As John later wrote to a friend, “Great moment. I could feel the women rejoicing, a coming home. So all the sisters and great-grandmother were held, mirrored by granddaughter Ann. Happy ladies. Sadness too. Many feelings overlapping. Rich.”



Great-grandmother’s grave

The story did not end there. When John and I returned to our hotel after our first day in the Magnone cemetery, I borrowed the hotel’s telephone book to look for the last names of my grandmother’s sisters’ husbands, hoping to find their children. I found two listings, one for each of her sisters. I was ecstatic, yet scared, knowing if I found anyone it would be difficult with my limited Italian to explain who I was. I assumed no one would speak English, and I was right. During this entire search, which continued beyond this visit and spanned ten years, I never met a relative who spoke a word of English.

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The next day, before we returned to the cemetery to make the rubbing, John and I drove around the roads of Magnone looking for the first address I had found in the phone book. We stopped and asked a workman, who directed us to a tiny lane near Magnone's municipal building. We passed two houses, and at the end we found the one we were looking for. The name in the phone book matched the name on a photo I carried in my hand, a photo of a young boy sitting at a school desk. John waited in the car as I approached the front door. A small dog in a nearby pen barked and alerted a woman who came around the side of the house and looked at me suspiciously. I imagined they rarely had a visitor they didn't know.



Claudio and Ann  
at the ruins

"Io sono Anna Gila da California," (I'm Ann Gila from California), I hesitantly explained. "Credo che Claudio Tintori è mio cugino." (I believe Claudio Tintori is my cousin.) I extended my hand with the photo. She looked incredulous. "È mio marito!" (It's my husband!) "Dove hai trovato questa foto?" (Where did you find this photo?) The conversation continued with stops and starts as I reached far into the past for any Italian I could remember. I understood her far better than I was able to speak. She said Claudio was out and would be home soon. She invited John and me into her kitchen to wait.

When Claudio returned, it took some time to explain how we were related. He was astonished to learn my mother was his first cousin and that his mother, Maria, was my great-aunt. Claudio and I were close in age because he was the youngest child of my grandmother's youngest sister. Once he understood who I was and that my grandmother was his aunt, he asked if we wanted to see the ruins of my great-grandmother's house, the house in which my grandmother had lived before immigrating and where my uncle Joe had been born. "Sì!" (Yes!) I responded, grateful for this gift.

Claudio led John and me further into the woods beyond his house on a precarious trail overlooking the autostrada far below. I watched him traverse it like a mountain goat, while I carefully placed each foot after the other and tried not to slip down the mountainside. John caught me a few times when I began to lose my footing, but we eventually arrived and spent an hour at the ruins. Vines and other plants had invaded the house and were growing through every crevice available to them. Claudio showed us the room where he thought my uncle had been born and the kitchen where a brick oven and a few shelves still remained. John snapped one photo after another. Claudio was warm and welcoming to us, and he and John made a sweet connection together, despite not speaking a word of each other's language.

After we returned to Claudio's house, I asked him about the second name I had found in the phone book. He told us it was Ettore Ganduglia, the grandson of my grandmother's oldest sister, Vittorina. He lived in the two-story Italian farmhouse we had noticed at the beginning of the lane on the way to the cemetery! The following day we went to visit Ettore and his wife, Rosa. When we stopped at the house, Rosa was outside, pruning a flowering bush near the front door. I approached her with my photo of Ettore, taken of him in a suit when he was a young man in his twenties. Without knowing who we were, she exclaimed with a big smile, "È mio marito! Quant'era bello!" (That's my husband! How handsome he was!) We laughed along with her, and when I explained who we were, she was amazed and delighted. Ettore was down the road and returned a few minutes later. We joined them in their kitchen, where Ettore offered us a glass of wine. Of course John no longer drank alcohol, and I hardly drank myself, but I accepted a small glass. The custom felt so familiar to me; in an instant I was back in my grandparents' home. The same thing happened a few days later when we had lunch with them and they served us *coniglio* (rabbit). I remembered the chickens and rabbits in pens behind my grandparents' back shed, and how painful it had been for me to watch



At the ruins

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them being killed for our dinner table. But here, despite this, and despite the fact that John and I were vegetarians, we graciously accepted the rabbit they served.

In the days we had remaining, John and I wandered deeper into the Ligurian hills and even found the village where my grandfather had been born. Our stay in Spotorno that year was brief, only eight days, but they are days I will never forget. At the beginning of the journey I didn't know what I would find, but with John's support, and perhaps divine intervention, I followed a message that I could easily have dismissed as nonsense. I chose to take it seriously instead, and as a result I gained a great deal—I found my family, and I finally experienced the roots that I had so deeply missed. ▣



Grandmother



*Ann Gila and her late husband John Firman taught psychosynthesis together for over twenty years. Ann is a licensed psychotherapist in California and an adjunct faculty member at Sofia University (formerly the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology). John and Ann co-authored three books: The Primal Wound: A Transpersonal View of Trauma, Addiction, and Growth (1996); Psychosynthesis: A Psychology of the Spirit (2002); and A Psychotherapy of Love: Psychosynthesis in Practice (2010).*



Italian Countryside



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# **Psychosynthesis Life Coaching: a Transpersonal Process**

***Cristina Pelizzatti***

## **The Essence of Psychosynthesis Life Coaching**

We believe that, as humans, we all have immeasurable resources: potentialities, energy, wisdom, and ability. Clients can facilitate changes and realize their potential by utilizing these resources. They are waiting to be discovered and used to co-create the life clients want, faster and more easily. We focus on the present and future, on the client's strengths, on life purpose and goals. We work with clients to create new possibilities to fulfill their lives. We coach them towards achieving a quality of awareness that everything within us has a right to exist, has a meaning, and has a value to bring into our wholeness as a gift to life itself. That includes our history, subpersonalities, errors, crises, joys, suffering, positive and negative aspects, high and deep realities.

Through times and circumstances, we get to life's "Larger Goal" through an irreversible process: growth through transformations and integrations, or synthesis. We are professional helpers speeding up this process by honoring our past and living fully in the present with open minds, open hearts, and open wills, toward the emerging possibilities of the future.

Based on the belief that all individuals are whole and capable, coaching assumes that clients are experts, with the capacity to determine what is best for their lives. By sensing and aligning with the "emerging self," the coach works along with the client to maximize personal and professional potential, to create an extraordinary life and close the gap between where they are in the present moment and where they want to be.

We help our clients to name and become more and more aware of the "field of infinite possibilities." Throughout their life, they have already felt these to be present as a nameless sensation. Then they access this transpersonal dimension, naming it, grounding it, and, through affirmation, anchoring these energies into daily life as empowerment toward their goals. We turn towards our clients with curiosity to find out more about their mindset, their vision, desires, talents, core needs, agendas, and goals.

With patience and determination we ask the client to consider the truth, not just the first thing coming to mind, and then to listen and live their life's Purpose, to grow in perspective, attitude, and mindset and raise their own standards—first to design the life they want and then bring out their own brilliance and resources to achieve excellence and create purposeful, extraordinary lives.

The necessary first phase of the psychosynthesis process is the creation of clarity and space for the "I" as director of the whole personality (personal psychosynthesis). This is followed by a second phase involving movement toward the realization, grounding, and utilization of the higher potentials within everyday life (transpersonal psychosynthesis). Psychosynthesis Life Coaching moves clients into action, accelerating their progress by providing greater focus and awareness of all the possibilities that exist when they function as the "I" to create fulfilling lives and set healthy boundaries instead of creating limiting comfort zones.

In the coaching conversation we work in particular with the "I" by expanding the limiting identifications of a comfort zone and exploring its limiting beliefs. We push the edges with empathy to let the core needs barred by the needs of the subpersonalities emerge. Through awareness and will we help the client find motivation for change along with a flexible movement.

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The “I,” which has consciousness and will and no contents, includes the attributes of observation, awareness, power, and therefore responsibility of choice. The Self is the deeper reality responsible for one’s being. The sense of personal self or “I” exists as a relational emanation of the Self, forever linked to it: the bond between “I” and Self is neither lost nor broken, but each person has a different level of awareness about this relationship, and some may be completely blind to it. The core point of coaching as a transpersonal process is to make the connection: to bring the “I-Self” relationship into awareness and subsequently into action toward the goal.

### **The Transpersonal Path**

“Transpersonal process” essentially implies working through and beyond the personality, toward universality—a process of transformation—until we are able to “see” as “I” through the eyes of the Self, oneself and the world, and back to the personality.

“Transpersonal” is a force we bring with us into the human dimension, veiled by our manifestation in the physical world, always present and asking for realization/actualization. It develops through the fulfillment of the basic needs until we reach the point when we begin to search for the profound Meaning we are born with: the Purpose or soul’s right to exist fully and contribute with our unique gifts as human beings towards the Positive Valence of the Universe.

The Transpersonal path includes the sequence of getting beyond the personality through a process of energy transmutation toward the depths and heights of excellence and back into the personality, thereby becoming fully human, in action as a meaningful co-creator of our life. Along this path we develop an awareness of the shadows of what we know about ourselves and don’t like (and what is therefore hidden), developing this awareness into the potential to enlighten what is true about us but that we know absolutely nothing about.

### **Psychosynthesis Coaching as a Transpersonal Process**

Psychosynthesis Coaching as a transpersonal process recognizes a hierarchy consisting of developmental (though not simply linear) stages of consciousness: Prepersonal, Personal, and Transpersonal; and states of consciousness. All of this is within a structure involving context, content, and a process (F. Vaughan) involving specific methodologies, strategies and ways of knowing. As coaches we are the experts in the process; the client is the expert in content. The transpersonal context is the worldview that the coach holds, creating the environment for unfolding the client’s Self, based on the coach’s psychosynthesis (and transpersonal) orientation.

In coaching as a transpersonal process we guide clients to loosen the rational mental dimension, opening up a space to the intuitive mind, grounding and anchoring the awareness of transpersonal contents into the “I” and using them as motivators for chosen goals. They do this by maintaining the awareness of the unbroken “I-Self” relationship throughout the journey of life experience.

With empathy and strong determination, the coach accompanies the client in this continuous engagement with “I-Self” to find the appropriate response and solution to move forward and commit to realistic goals within a specific time frame. We, as an “external unifying center,” guide people towards the challenge of reaching their innermost nature by allowing the connection to the “I-Self” relationship. Being able to do this means we already know the territory not only theoretically but also because we’ve been there, having had personal experiences of our transpersonal nature. Having been there and done that, we are able as guides to accompany people (travelers) in this journey along a safe path, in a way that they can bring transpersonal resources into daily life as drivers of change.

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We predispose ourselves as guides with empathy, presence, beginner's mind, unconditional positive regard bereft of judgmental attitude, and an awareness of the self-actualizing tendency: all transpersonal qualities that the coach brings into the session as a mirror with which clients may see themselves and recognize the presence of these qualities as already within them. We allow ourselves to become an external unifying center, holding the “I-Self” space as a transpersonal setting in which the process overlaps, moved by the energy of the Self. The I-Thou becomes a Self-to-Self relationship, and the transpersonal process occurs, emphasizing the client’s awareness of the “here and now” as a “willer,” without contents. We facilitate the connection between the “I and the Source of our Being,” thereby energizing and empowering the “I.” The unifying center is the channel for the Self, allowing us to experience our own connection to the Source.

During this process we are coaching clients in a collaborative and cooperative effort, in line with their own agenda, toward their own goals, looking for what is really missing: the core needs overlapped by the client’s personal history and subpersonalities with their needs. As guides, we assist clients in the process of human development to include the deeper resources already existing dormant in each person. So clients ground, anchor, and become aware of their potentialities and manifest the inherent capacities beyond the “normal” understanding of who they are, to become “more” of who they are.

The awakening of these reserves empowers the person with self-care skills, generating new perspectives on professional or personal life direction and future choices. These perspectives are potentially world-changing: we gain access to the resources of wisdom, innate creativity, and the spirituality we all have within us, and which we need when we are to confront the many challenges we face as human beings.

The personality rooted in the ego-self is the reflection of the Self. The Self is developing through the “I” to the point where the ego is no longer sufficient to support this growth and to serve as a foundation for this experience. At this point the ego is transcended and in this step the characteristics of the ego are not abandoned but rather emerge in a more integrated and comprehensive way into the “I.”

As a result, the “I” is metabolized in a creative synthesis in the Self, in the manner Patanjali suggested in the “Yoga Sutra” more than 5,000 years ago:

“The Light of the Self shining into the I”

The discovery, as Assagioli suggested, of being a “Self in expression” fixes the attention directly on the importance of the path of self-discovery, allowing us to gain an awareness of being the “I” as a content-less, willful and aware expression of the Higher Self at the level of the personality. The experience of reaching the awareness of our infinite nature as a Self, and then bringing the subtle transpersonal energies back into the personal “I,” conditioned by the limits of the form we wear, requires training, and the humility and courage to recognize and therefore deal with our vulnerability.

As an external unifying center, we, as coaches, allow the creation of the sacred space in which clients can permit themselves to let go of the many masks they’re carrying throughout everyday life. In the process they start to realize and show their vulnerability, the core of themselves, the vulnerable Self. This Self is not vulnerable in substance, but in the form that covers the Self, the personality. This realization enables clients to reach the freedom of *being who they really are* and find the courage to be that Self in action through the will, with the ability to respond to the situations they face in everyday life through the acceptance of their human limitations.

Working on vulnerability awakens and leads the client to the power of resilience as an inherent capacity of a human being to learn from crisis, personal history, and primal wounds. In the process the client becomes stronger and

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more flexible, thanks to inner resources, personal skills, and strategies in line with purpose, meaning, and value as drivers toward chosen goals. The client passes from a state of powerlessness to being empowered.

### **Knowing How and Knowing Why**

Life is about change, sometimes unexpected and unwanted; in these situations, acting as a proactive participant in the flowing stream of life with the ability of “knowing how” makes a difference, but “knowing why” makes the crucial difference. The “why” emerges through the discovery of being “willer and vulnerable”: two inevitable facets of the human condition, in search of the ultimate meaning (*Will to Meaning*, V. Frankl). The ability of the coach to be fully present (by love and will) allows the client to be vulnerable during the coaching conversation. In this sacred space, the client experiences the quality of this presence: the I-Thou relationship, where the client feels not only seen, but profoundly understood, contained, supported, and guided toward the solution chosen.

Psychosynthesis Coaching in particular offers this training, starting with the fundamentals: personal psychosynthesis followed by transpersonal psychosynthesis: “the transpersonal process,” one step at a time, until we reach the summit of the personality—the realization of being a “Self in expression” throughout the journey of life, and the awareness of the “gift” of being a very rare life form, a human being.

We guide people to reach and use “the personal power” originating in the realization of being a Self in expression through the human form, with all its limitations and unlimited potentials—“infinity which experiences finiteness,” and grows, with the responsibility to act in line with our purpose, meaning and values through willful choices.

These are three fundamental steps along this path:

Identification of contents and players within the personality;

Disidentification, leading into the space between the “I” and the contents, becoming the observer, observing the contents of experience as they arise in consciousness, with the power of choosing where to direct attention, what subpersonality to wear at will, which energy field around a subpersonality to explore and learn to use at will, to be empowered instead of imprisoned by the limitations and filters of the subpersonality.

Self-identification: the process of gaining the awareness of being the “I-Self.” The “I” is not a place to go or a goal to attain: it is the experience of being the observer having the experience of the contents.

The realization by the unity, the “I,” of the existence of a multiplicity of subpersonalities (the “diversity”), through the phases of knowing, possessing, and transforming, enables the awareness of “unity into diversity” of the “I-Self” as a nondual reality. From here we act as a coordinating center (director), from the energetic space of content-less awareness and will, co-creating the future in line with purpose, meaning, and value. This diversity enriches the unity of the Self as a unifying center, like an orchestra. The director “I” and the musicians play one at a time or all together as necessary, each one with its unique note, but in harmony. Without any of them the orchestra is not complete, is weak, or out of tune. When we tune into the “I,” the flow is harmonious and powerful: we are empowered by the energy out of our inner source, the Self.

Listening for meaning, value, and purpose means to listen for the larger life, to see the bigger picture beyond improvement. We listen for the broader context within which clients see themselves, how clients orient themselves to meaning, value, and purpose, thereby providing the potential for connection to something larger than the ego encapsulated in the skin.

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By accessing the “I” as a willer, we step away from constantly attempting to willfully manipulate our lives or duck the realities of life as it is. We become aware of the freedom within ourselves to will to give meaning to life, becoming proactive instead of reactive, growing with emphasis on awareness to be a willer with the power to choose outcomes that promote development while attaining higher qualities to reach the goal. We truly believe as guides that clients contain within them all their answers, talents and strengths; and we assist them with trust and confidence in the process of self-discovery, grounding and anchoring this awareness into the “I,” through powerful questions, to increase and bring it into actionable steps to reach the chosen goal. We assist and guide people into the process of Self-actualization/realization, a transformational way to become more of who we are by expanding and stepping out of the usual mindset. This process occurs in dynamic tension, not by rejecting any part of us—who we are and what we did—but by understanding who we *really* are thanks to “everything we did.” This leads to a compassionate forgiveness about our past and creates the capability to become more than we already are because, using a quote from Maslow, “What a man can be, he must be.” We listen with intuition, with open hearts, open will, and open minds to the emerging future possibilities (*Theory U*, Otto Sharmer), and we can share our intuition because the I-Thou or Self-Self relationship is in partnership, and clients can learn to listen to themselves, through the transpersonal process in which we guide them. As an external unifying center allowing the client to reach their own unifying center, through our congruency we become bridges, thereby enabling clients to build steady bridges toward their future, reaching the inherent and latent abilities waiting to be brought into manifestation.

During coaching sessions we guide clients along the path of self-discovery, to become more and more self-confident while experiencing the deepest and highest regions of the unconscious, gaining knowledge of the many parts which inhabit us and the dynamics of their interactions. This leads to an increase in awareness and confidence in stepping out of the safety of the “comfort zone,” recognizing the “I” in its freedom as the comfort zone to inhabit and from where to invite the many parts as welcome guests, empowering the “I,” and not weakened by being under control of the subpersonalities.

Motivation is an essential component of the coaching process. It is the driver to reach the goal, and as coaches we train the person to stay in touch with the meaning behind the motivation with powerful questions designed to stimulate and manifest the purpose within, the motivator of life itself.

Reaching a goal as a motivated player aware of the inner game is the winning formula. The components we bring to the game are the gift we have to manifest, passions we have as a meaningful way to be in the game, and value we place on our participation as drivers toward the purpose as a calling.

## **Conclusion**

The Transpersonal Psychosynthesis Life Coaching Process consists of guiding the client along a journey starting from Maslow's meta-needs as a creative reinterpretation of all life based on the awareness of “being an I” in search of meaning. Experience through trial and error is transformed from defeat into an asset consisting of ownership of the steps necessary to learn a lesson and acquire the skills of “learning by doing”; not as a label but as an honorary citation for the attempt made as imperfect beings towards perfection in the process of becoming more and more who we are, as a willer with power of choice.

Last but not least, we accompany the person to trust and recognize their intuitions as valid, going through a cognitive process valuing the inclusion of the intuitive function in the personality. This process involves a meaningful use of the rational mind to translate the intuitive whole into parts, and subsequently to integrate them into the vehicle of expression of the personality, the psychological functions, toward the purpose, meaning, and value needed to support the manifestation of the Self as “the foundation” towards each goal. ■

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Cristina Pelizzatti dedicated her youth to competitive sports that brought her in contact with wild nature and work with beautiful Siberian huskies and wolves for 20 years, in Europe and North America. Then she resumed her passion for the study of the psyche, through study in the transpersonal field, attaining an MA in Indovedic Psychology, as a foundation for subsequent studies in psychosynthesis counseling, transpersonal counseling, ecocounseling (ecopsychology applied in counseling) and psychoenergetics in counseling. Trainer, practitioner, and researcher, she brings into synthesis the reconnection with our inner nature, the Self, through nature, working in person, in groups, in schools, online. She is a certified Psychosynthesis Life Coach (PLC) with The Synthesis Center (TSC), staff member of TSC, leading the TSC program in Italy and providing people the unique opportunity to become Certified PLC from TSC in Italian.



December in Florence, Italy

# The Synthesis Center

## Level 1 Psychosynthesis Life Coach Training: Nationally Certified, Distance Learning Program, 2018

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We are gearing up for our next round of psychosynthesis training in the Distance Learning Program. If you have an interest in becoming a life coach and love psychosynthesis, consider this option! If you want to deepen or begin your study of psychosynthesis, join us and be among an amazing group of people who will come together to begin our journey into the transformational approach and practice of Psychosynthesis Life Coaching! *And please spread the word!* Our groups have been powerful, international and deeply dedicated to the teachings of psychosynthesis as a way to support transformation, individually and beyond.

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### Logistics

**You need only a phone and international calls are most always free. The times and dates will be determined by group interest and availability, but will start in February of 2018 and meet (generally) on a weekly basis, in 3 hour phone or video sessions.**

### Course Fees

The level 1 program is \$3000, as is the level 2 program. Discounted rates for full payment or commitment to both groups are available. Scholarships and payments plans are available as well.

### Initial Contact

If you are interested in this program, contact me (Dorothy Firman) at [Didi@synthesiscenter.org](mailto:Didi@synthesiscenter.org) and I will send you information and we will set up a time to talk!

*May we be the people who lead the way towards integration and harmony, love and will,  
and the power to support the world in living in peace!*

# Opening the Gateway to the Storyless Land: Presence in Reauthoring our Stories

*Richard Lamb*

I came across the following poem and think it fits well with my coaching philosophy, anchored into “I” through my physical body:

Mountains and oceans have whole worlds of innumerable wondrous features. We should understand that it is not only our distant surroundings that are like this, but even what is right here, even a single drop of water. — Dogen Zenji

Dogen was a Buddhist priest, writer, poet, and philosopher in early 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan, and although that's a fair age away, his words are still able to cut deep today if we listen with a “beginner’s mind,” like the sharpest of swords. If we allow them to cut away the *mara* of our habitual thought-forms, by piercing our perspective, such words are able to dismember the delusions of our day-to-day experience. It is through evoking that contentless, conscious awareness that Master Zenji poetically describes things.

Here is my take on his statement. It's a metaphor for our worldview, individually and collectively. The *meaning* we assign an experience—*any* experience—is an “internal” act: an act of will, from those distant surroundings to drops of water.

Yet whose story is enacting that (personal) will? Is it “ours?” Are we acting from that clear inner space of authentic personality, fueled by our *inner sun*, that transcendent-immanent connection to Self? Or are we enacting stories we did not author by ourselves? Is the author a facet of survival personality, from this life?

Much as we might adopt another's meaning to an experience, as a belief (knowingly or unknowingly), we are *more than any* position our thoughts take us, or *any* experience for that matter. So how might we synthesize this *dis-identification* from a limited, “either/or” frame of awareness towards a more expansive, “and whatever . . .” frame that allows our inner sun—our authentic self, beneath, above and beyond the conditioning of form—to shine into the present moment? In *presence*, that’s how. We remain still and unjudging, detached and observant, yet respectful, of whatever content enters the circle.

It is in presence, through our daily tending of conscious awareness and will, that we come to hold in a detached, illuminated yet compassionate field our old stories (e.g. unconscious limiting beliefs and associated attitudes, the core of which were formed early in life—i.e., the “pre-personal”) and their related sub-personalities. These “complexes” of unconscious parts narrow what we can experience of reality, in the moment, by constricting what we can be consciously aware of through our psychological functions. Those well-used tracks of experience beckon us to remain within them, like the proverbial frog at the bottom of the well. We may be wholly present in that healing field of awareness with our own traumas, and those of others. Those traumas are hardly ever forgotten, or fully resolved, simply held resiliently, calmly, patiently.

So it is through presence—that contentless conscious awareness and will—where our intuition comes fully and reliably to the fore. It is the process and state through which we access intuition more reliably. In my own case it is through *feeling* my emotions, which forms a central part of my personal “shadow work.” We are present in the now . . . now, now, now . . . to participate with Self in the evolutionary unfolding of another human being, and by shared reflection, ourselves.

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As guides, evoking presence with our fellow travelers, a teacher of mine would return to the following: “presence constitutes 90% of the work.” In the flow of presence, of transcendent-immanent consciousness, we are able to access a spectrum of *knowing-without-knowing*, a radical trust in *the now* that can unfold and heal the deepest of hurts, unfold and energize that most far-out of goals.

Whether we’re evoking presence as part of our own “work within the work,” holding the space for a fellow traveler (noting that guides are all travelers too!), or simply being in the moment when faced with the pains—and joys—of life, taking the time for *consciously* being in the flow of life . . . of consciousness . . . is central to any psychosynthesisist’s path.

Depending on which facet of our experience we choose out of habit, be that our thoughts, emotions, sensations, impulses/desires or imagination, our worldview can become limited, distorted by those unconscious habits of experiencing reality, i.e. the world “out there.”

The “essence” of presence at its heart lies in the concept and devotion to *dis-identification*, a practice Assagioli noted as consistent across the mystery traditions he researched. Much as presence may seem an actionable goal, it is one that is as fluid and changeable in the moment, as water! We move from *identification*, noting the content entering our field of conscious awareness, e.g. “I am angry!” to an inner space where we have a choice to *dis-identify* from that content. From disidentification we may choose to *Self-identify with the flow of life*: to evoke presence; i.e. we are able to hold the yin-yang axis of qualities without narrowly identifying with any content in our awareness. It is, in short, “freedom from the known,” from our habitual thought-forms: our stories, co-authored through ancestry, family and society at-large.

So when we find ourselves consumed by whatever experience, be that the train of thoughts, emotions, an impulse to act without forethought, we may ask, “. . . and who is aware of this experience?” I suggest we return to that simplest of daily devotions, the experience I call “Inviting the Witness.” It’s that simple, often overlooked discipline that, if combined with the rest of our psychosynthesis tools (and others such as yoga and the *pancha kosha*,<sup>1</sup> which fit snugly with Roberto’s original *bio-psychosynthesis*), returns us to presence more and more: that experience of pure conscious awareness and will, beyond any content. It’s hardly an easy gig, as it’s a lifetime’s work . . . and more than!

I’ve recently come to call this devotion to presence, *Opening the Gate to the Storyless Land*. I hope that we can all, in these troubling and uncertain times of transition, pass through those gates to craft a new story for humanity and the biosphere we are interdependent with. As co-creators of this world, Transpersonal Self, however we each experience that, calls to us from a transformed, more ideal future.

*The present moment is the only door into existence. The past and future are not doors, they are walls.* — Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, a.k.a. Osho.



<sup>1</sup> **Pancha Kosha** is the concept in yogic philosophy that there are five layers, or sheaths, around the human soul. The term comes from the Sanskrit **pancha**, meaning “five,” and **kosha** meaning “sheath.” **Pancha Kosha** includes Annamaya **kosha**—the food sheath and Pranamaya **kosha**—the mind sheath.



Richard Lamb practices out of the Nottingham in the East Midlands of England, UK. His story took a challenging turn in February 2001, when he fell off Tower Ridge, a winter mountaineering route on Ben Nevis. He came to understand this as his own ‘initiator event’, and in hindsight, that led him to answer the Call of Self as a Psychosynthesis Coach and Hypnotherapist working with trauma survivors, including amputees. He walked out of hospital in Manchester 3.5 months later, minus the right leg beneath the knee, with a fixed-up left ankle that had healed miraculously (after fracturing and dislocating), a nasty head trauma and having lost about 75% of his fingers to 3rd degree frostbite. That said, these physical limitations didn’t stop him from re-climbing Tower Ridge in 2004 . . . and haven’t stopped him from learning how to use chopsticks either!

# **Old Fighter's Work**

*Jan Kuniholm*

**This unruly self  
that I have worked a lifetime  
to soften, to harmonize, to teach to love,  
gets smaller as I succeed.  
Its fear of being interfered with  
lives in my dreams, where it fights off  
change with tenacious violence.  
Each day I feel more at peace,  
trying not to try, as the inner fear  
is gentled away  
beneath my dreamer's notice.  
This self has been gifted with  
caresses of inner light  
several times over the years  
when love showed me that  
there is never any interference.  
But this unruly self gives up its distrust  
so slowly, even when proof  
embraces me more closely and warmly  
than my mother ever did.**

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# THE PATH OF SELF-REALIZATION: Yoga, Psychosynthesis, and the Goodness of Fit

Alan C. Haras, MA, BCC

*“In the right view both of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga.”*  
—Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*

In October of 2016, my wife and I were in Florence making plans to visit the home of Roberto Assagioli. While sitting in our hotel room one evening, I begin searching through the online archive of Assagioli’s writings. Combing through this treasure trove, I stumbled upon a handwritten note that read, “Psicosintesi = Yoga.” As soon as I read this, a deep, true voice within me exclaimed, “I knew it!” I felt as though something within me simultaneously settled and flowered. That night I had a dream where a voice told me that I would discover in Florence a “symbol,” a mandala, in which all the pieces of my life would fit. I woke up incredibly happy, and immediately understood that the “symbol” was Psychosynthesis—a center around which the various dimensions of my work as a yoga teacher and guide would find their proper place.

My training in Psychosynthesis Coaching has been like a Rosetta Stone that has helped me understand the inner meaning of the yogic teachings, and a key that has helped me unlock the purpose of my work as a yoga teacher. Over the last 12 years, I have contemplated what it means to live out this unique vocation in the modern world. I have taken much inspiration from the yoga tradition, but also recognize, as a white man raised and living in suburban Michigan, the severe limitations of attempting to adopt and replicate the rich and ancient Indian perspective on the formation of teachers and students. With great reverence for the ancient tradition, I have questioned what the role of the modern (and in my case, Western) yoga teacher is in the world. What does it mean to teach yoga, and what does it mean to be a yoga teacher? What skills are needed? What are the pitfalls to be avoided? Psychosynthesis Coaching has given me the context, form and training not only to approach these questions, but it has also empowered me to live out my vocation as a yoga teacher with greater integrity, sincerity and effectiveness.

From my own experience and observations, I see yoga teachers playing various roles within their community. I think a yoga teacher is someone who, first and foremost, *practices* yoga. By “practicing yoga,” I don’t mean simply doing the physical postures, but that the teacher is consciously engaged in his/her own process of integration, synthesis and wholeness. As a “teacher,” I see the yoga teacher as an *educator*—someone who designs classes with the aim of “drawing out” the hidden potential of their students (Assagioli, 1968). As a leader, the teacher models and supports students in expressing the values of Yoga in their daily lives. As a guide, he/she has the privilege of companioning students as they discern and unfold their unique *dharma*, or Call of Self. However, as someone who has taken five different yoga teacher trainings, I have become aware that the current system aimed at forming yoga teachers does not offer adequate training for developing these various roles—which are essential if the yoga teacher is going to create opportunities for individuals to experience *yoga*.

The word “yoga” is often translated as union, wholeness, integration, or synthesis. Much like Psychosynthesis, yoga can refer to both the method practiced and the goal to be experienced. Derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning “to yoke,” the two things that yoga seeks to yoke together are the personal self and the Higher Self. In the yoking of two animals together, the yoke is always custom-fit—crafted with the individual animal in mind, as to not create discomfort or irritation. When yoked together properly, the two animals are able to grow together, and work together toward the accomplishment some task or goal. As the animals grow, the yoke must also be reshaped and refashioned.

The practice of Yoga is exactly the same. Yoga is a method by which we “coordinate and integrate all our inner

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resources, so that they are working in a unified way and in line with our aims” (Firman & Vargiu, 1977). Texts like the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* were meant to be a kind of framework for teachers to fill out and elaborate upon for the sake of their students (Desikachar, 2003). The transmission of yogic knowledge was always “custom-fit” to the individual student—affirming Assagioli’s approach to working with clients: “For one person, one thing: for another, quite the opposite” (Assagioli, as cited in Yeomans, 2010, p. 2). There has never been a one-size-fits-all yoga, in the same way that there is not one “right” way to do Psychosynthesis. These vast traditions allow for, and celebrate, the diversity of the individual, while at the same time being in service of individual, social, and global harmony.

According to a 2014 research study conducted by the Yoga Alliance and Yoga Journal, 36 million Americans now consider themselves yogis (Macy, 2016). Another study notes that 62% of yoga students and 85% of yoga teachers originally were drawn to yoga for exercise and stress relief, but later noted that spirituality was the primary reason they maintained their practice (Park, Riley, Bedesin, & Stewart, 2014). Modern yoga teachers are not only leading groups of individuals through a contemplative practice, but they are also acting as guides to individuals seeking wholeness, authenticity and purpose.

As Yoga continues to grow and evolve, the skills and training of a modern yoga teacher must also evolve to accurately reflect those roles. I have found that training in Psychosynthesis provides incredibly useful maps for guiding individuals and classes, as well as invaluable opportunities to consciously engage in the process of integration. As a contemplative psychology and educational framework, Psychosynthesis has helped me better understand the various practices and techniques that support the natural process of growth and transformation, as well as the pitfalls, distortions and obstacles to be aware of. When I teach, I now see my yoga classes as 75-minute group Psychosynthesis sessions—where the yoga class itself becomes a holding environment that invites students to travel upon the path of Self-Realization.

Because my classes emphasize the spiritual dimension of yoga, it is not uncommon for students to visit me in my office either before or after class to talk about their journeys. As a fellow pilgrim on the path, I did the exact same thing with my yoga teachers. This kind of interaction can be traced back all the way back to the Upanishads—the ancient books which form the very roots of Yoga. These texts contain discussions and stories regarding the great questions of life—Who am I? What is the nature of Ultimate Reality? What is the nature of the world, and what is my role in it? The word *upanishad* means “to sit down near” or “sitting near devotedly” (Prabhavananda & Manchester, 1957, p. ix). One meaning is that the student sits down near a guru in order to receive the transmission of sacred knowledge, while another meaning is to “sit down near” the inner guru—to hear “the still, small voice” of the Higher Self whisper its wisdom to the personal self.

One of the distinct features of the Upanishads, which I think predisposed me to Psychosynthesis Coaching, is its unique pedagogy. The sages, rather than giving prescribed answers, often employ a series of questions to elicit or evoke the innate wisdom of the student. These artful conversations inevitably culminate in Self-Realization—a moment of Self-recognition that transforms the disciple’s life. These days, forest hermitages are in short supply and genuine gurus also seem hard to find. But, today we have an abundance of yoga teachers and dedicated yoga practitioners. And what is not in short supply, and what can never be diminished no matter how much it is overlooked, is the presence and guidance of the Higher Self.

In training Yoga teachers as Psychosynthesis Coaches, this archetypal teacher-student relationship can be reimagined in a way that honors the ancient Upanishadic tradition while adapting it to the modern world. Psychosynthesis Coaching offers both yoga teachers and yoga students a clear understanding of roles, appropriate boundaries and expectations, and frees both from the baggage of misguided ideas surrounding gurus and disciples. By shifting from a “guru model” to a “coaching model,” the relationship shifts from a hierarchical “social dynamic

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of disempowerment” (Whitwell, 2015), to a strengths-based, peer-to-peer relationship where the coach is in service of the student’s Higher Self. By honoring the personality as well as the Self, Psychosynthesis Coaching circumvents the distorted view that says the purpose of yoga is to “get rid of the ego.” The coaching dynamic, rather than tearing down the self, builds up and empowers the “I,” while simultaneously placing it within the larger, empathic context of Self. It fuses the best of transpersonal psychology with the best of spirituality. And by supporting the view of “both/and,” Psychosynthesis is a medicine to an industry that can easily polarize the quest for enlightenment with the responsibilities of house/car/job/family.

The first practical aim of a yogi is to understand one's own personality, which includes the body, mind, emotions and intellect. The second practical aim is to awaken one's inner powers. The third practical aim of a yogi is to serve society. After attaining some ability through yoga, one should contribute to the development and maintenance of society. —Swami Niranjanananda Sarasvati

In his book *Psychosynthesis*, Assagioli makes a “cordial appeal to all therapists, psychologists and educators to actively engage in the needed work of research, experimentation and application” (Assagioli, 1965, p. 9). I feel that yoga teachers are in a unique position to contribute to this experimentation—applying the principles and techniques of Psychosynthesis in their classes and in their relationships with students. With yoga centers now covering the globe, the introduction of Psychosynthesis into these communities can support the good work already being done, as well as further encourage “the creation of a new civilization characterized by harmonious integration and cooperation, pervaded by the spirit of synthesis” (Assagioli, 1965, p. 9). As I continue to go through the *Archivio Assagioli*, I get the impression that Assagioli somehow anticipated this growth of “modern yoga.” As someone who supported many of his students in starting institutes and training programs, I think he would be overjoyed at the idea of yoga teacher training programs including a psychosynthetic curriculum. Furthermore, I think he would be ecstatic to see yoga teachers trained as Psychosynthesis Coaches in order to serve their students in hearing and responding to their own unique Call of Self.

While Psychosynthesis Coaching helps those called to be yoga teachers unfold their unique *dharma*, it also trains them to effectively guide others in unfolding their own. It supports both teachers and students in deepening their self-knowledge, accessing and integrating the potential hidden in the higher unconscious, and serving society by supporting individuals as they grow in wholeness. Rather than creating followers, Psychosynthesis Coaching allows yoga teachers to more consciously support their students’ autonomy and unique unfoldment. In this way, the modern yoga teacher expresses some of the great beauty of the Upanishadic tradition—creating not only a safe environment for community members to grow spiritually, but also acting as a skilled guide who understands the terrain of the path of Self-realization. Like the Upanishadic sages of old, today’s yoga teachers equipped with Psychosynthesis training, can serve the people who come to them by helping them unlock their own dharma, and discover the Self who has been their true guru all long.■

*This is an edited excerpt from a chapter in the forthcoming book *The Call of Self: Psychosynthesis Life Coaching from The Synthesis Center*.*

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Alan C. Haras, MA, BCC is a board certified coach and trainer, 800-hour Dharma Yoga teacher, as well as a spiritual director and retreat guide trained in Ignatian Spirituality. He is the owner of Hamsa Yoga Center in Lake Orion, Michigan, the founder and director of the Cardoner Institute for Contemplative Leadership, and a member of the core faculty for Synthesis San Francisco's Coach Training Program. He lives in Rochester, Michigan, with his wife Rita G. Patel. | [alanharas.com](http://alanharas.com)



Lake Wakatipu in New Zealand in December

## **“Many of us feel nostalgia...”**

### **Reflections on the Soul, Healing, and Assagioli’s last hours on earth**

#### ***A Conversation with Massimo Rosselli***

#### ***Recalled by Catherine Ann Lombard***

Last year, on a balmy mid-September afternoon in Florence, 35 psychosynthesis enthusiasts gathered to sit in a circle on the terrace of *Casa Assagioli* and welcome Massimo Rosselli, MD, psychologist, clinical psychologist, and psychosynthesis psychotherapist. The group was particularly interested in hearing more about his time with Roberto Assagioli, with whom he trained, collaborated and practiced. Rosselli met Assagioli in 1966 when he was a medical student. While we all eagerly welcomed him, Rosselli, in turn, invited us all into his heart as he flashed a radiant smile. As part of the International Conference in September 2017 at Casa Assagioli, *Gruppo alle Fonti* and the Istituto di Psicointegrazione had invited us to freely and spontaneously ask Rosselli any questions we liked in the hour we would spend together.



The author (front, left) with but participants of the international meeting in September 2017 at Casa Assagioli.

A former professor at the University of Florence and international psychosynthesis speaker, Rosselli is the author and editor of numerous publications, including articles for *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*. Past president of the Italian Society of Psychosynthesis Psychotherapists, he is president of the European Federation of Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy. Naturally, what interested us most was his time with and insights into Roberto Assagioli, the visionary founder of psychosynthesis.

The group of English and Italian speakers had traveled from ten countries and boasted a vast array of expertise—from psychosynthesis psychotherapists to nurses, educators, writers, and shamanic healers. Rosselli spoke fluently in both English and Italian, with *Gruppo alle Fonti* providing translations back and forth so all could understand. By chance, I found myself sitting next to him, his long arms and hands occasionally flying above me (*à la* Italian style) whenever he wished to emphasize a point. Meanwhile, I did my best to take notes of some of the questions and answers that we shared during our hour together. (My apologies for any unintentional errors, oversights, and/or omissions.)

At one point, I asked him for further details about Assagioli dying naked. “I don’t mean to belabor this point,” I said, “but I feel that it’s important.” Looking directly into my eyes, Rosselli peered inside me to a profound depth. “You’re right,” he said and preceded to relate his experience of Assagioli’s death.

But we begin at the beginning, with the first question of the hour...

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*Q: Did Assagioli ever talk about the impact his father’s death might have had on him? And his subsequent adoption?*

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A: You touch on a core point of how he would speak about himself. I always called him “Dr. Assagioli,” and he would often indirectly touch upon certain points about his life. Concerning this question, the way he spoke to me about losing one’s father in general and the father-son connection was his way of speaking about his very early loss. Of course, when Assagioli was growing up, his adopted father held the presence for him of the male figure. But, I will say that his feeling for the maternal side was stronger. He was rewarded and sustained by the feminine maternal side.

But he never really directly spoke about this. This was more in connection to my own personal story. I didn’t actually lose my own father so early in my life, but I did feel the loss of a connection. And so, this was his didactic way, to transmit his teachings and experience through one’s own personal story. This was his direct way to address the soul—the spirit—you would feel the vibration of the personality—the soul, the spirit, the Self. The level of interaction between us was so deep that we were also connected at the personal and soul level. He was a master. *A maestro.*

*Q: What exactly was his connection to Alice Bailey and the Tibetan? And how did he translate the seven rays into his personality types?*

A: I was expecting this very question! [All around laughter] This opening of the “Wall of Silence” is quite widespread nowadays. One aspect of it is dealing with the truth of certain things. Silence was requested by Roberto Assagioli in order not to confuse his being a psychologist with his being a leader of a movement. He very much wanted to create a science of psychology.

One source of his teaching was esoteric, and esoteric teaching is a religion of religions. Discernment was one of his qualities. A quality of the Self. When considering his “Wall of Silence,” one must consider that boundaries are not the same as limits. Boundaries do not separate. They simply distinguish between what starts here and what stops there.

Actually Roberto Assagioli never properly wrote a book about human types. These writings were collected after his death. Yes, the essence of the rays are in the text of the types especially when he talks about how every type (that is, “ray”) has a “key note.” He translated this idea in such a way that it might be used in the psychological world. But these personality types really need to be developed and completed more fully with the information and understanding of the rays.

*Q: What was he like as a person?*

A: He was joyful, rich with humor. He always had a wonderful smile, with eyes that came from far away, from infinity. He was warm, radiant and always serene. What I remember about him with particular emotion was the way he knew how to welcome us young people, how to encourage us, to stimulate us. He was hard of hearing. I had to write things down for him to understand. But sometimes he understood everything without my writing down anything! His voice was like his hearing. Later in his life, his voice became a bit high-pitched, feminine. But this goes to the core. Something else comes from the Self. There is a sound inside the sound. The breath inside the breath. When the soul passes through the physical vehicle. To me he was the most embodied person I ever met. He was fragile—but not energetically! The force of his spirit was embodied.

*Q: Did he ever practice yoga or do any physical exercises?*

A: He did breathing exercises and gentle movements, but all for short periods of time.

*Q: Did he ever give any indication of how he reconciled being one of the first to promote psychodynamic healing with his not being able to help his own son?*

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A: After the death of his son Ilario, I know he felt deep pain. When someone told him that they were sorry to hear about Ilario's death, he said "Oh, now my son has really seen the bright light." He never denied this deep pain, but he was able to reconcile himself to it with the understanding of, "Yes, I am powerless. There is nothing we can do. We are powerless when facing deadly illness. But I can redeem this deep pain into the larger perspective of life." After all, healing is not necessary for everything. This failure to heal allows us to stay with the vulnerability of being fully human. Assagioli created psychosynthesis to bring this understanding outside of the realm of esoteric thought.

*Q: Can you explain the difference between what Assagioli meant by "soul," "spirit," and "Self"?*

A: The soul is the human face of the spirit on Earth. The Self has two faces—one face is turned towards infinity and the all-pervading spirit. But the same ontological being has the other face that looks to the embodiment of the presence of the person and at that level of the soul. Self is an ontological being which holds the borderline between individuality of spirit and infinity.

*Q: What is your last memory of Assagioli?*

A: I was with him and the other students when he died. At one point, he didn't speak anymore. But his eyes were very present. He was following the process, including what we were doing. At the end he had a little stroke. His left part was paralyzed. He picked up his left arm and let it drop. I remember his eyes looking at us and then he turned his head away. He died completely naked. Right at the end, he tried to take off his clothes and he nearly did it all by himself. At the end, I saw in his eyes a heartfelt infinity. I don't want to forget the heart. He was cremated and interred next to his mother at the Trespiano Cemetery in Florence. Near the end of his life, Assagioli said, "Psychosynthesis is still a child."

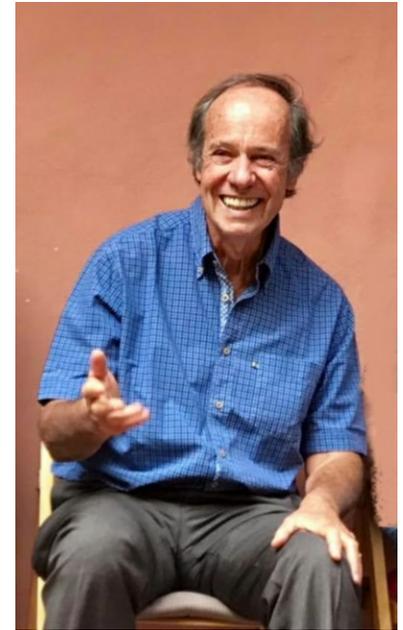
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Rosselli ended by reading in Italian and then English a short passage written by Assagioli. The poetic words swirled around us like a prayer as we sat together in deep gratitude for our time together in "the house rising up in Central Italy where people of diverse beliefs may meet in good will." The passage Rosselli read is as follows:

### **Molti di noi...**

Molti di noi sentono la nostalgia del raccoglimento,  
di potere anche per un breve periodo,  
in una piccola stanza da cui l'occhio  
spazi liberamente sulla natura,  
cercare di ritrovare in sé stessi  
l'armonia e la propria verità,  
onde ritornare alla vita attiva  
con restaurata e riposata energia.

Many of us feel the nostalgia for gathering  
our thoughts into concentrated energy,  
of being able, even for a moment,  
in a small room where the eye  
can glide freely over nature,  
to try again to find within ourselves  
harmony and our personal truth,  
then to return to an active life  
with restored and reposed energy.



Massimo Rosselli

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La casa sorgerà nell'Italia Centrale,  
su un'altura che domini i dintorni,  
è pensata quale chiostro moderno,  
ove uomini di varia confessione  
possano benevolmente incontrarsi  
e ognuno per sé, senza lotta né disputa,  
cercare nella tranquilla contemplazione  
di riconquistare il proprio equilibrio,  
la fede nelle proprie forze e nella vita.

**Roberto Assagioli**



The house will rise up in Central Italy,  
on a height that reigns over its surroundings,  
conceived as a modern cloister,  
where people of diverse beliefs  
may meet in good will,  
and each one for themselves,  
without struggle or dispute,  
may seek in quiet contemplation  
to regain balance and faith  
in their own strength and in life.



This picture is what the view from this house might have been like.  
See *The Stone of Villa Serena* by Isabelle Küng on page 52 of this issue —  
about a memento of Roberto Assagioli's dream of such a house, which did in fact exist for a time.

# Driving the Carriage: The Gift of Psychological Functions

**Dorothy Firman, EdD**

*Sally is walking down the street to a job interview, for a job that meets every one of her “ideal models” for work. Except one. Sally is afraid of heights and the office is on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor. Sally has done therapy and other forms of work to deal with this fear. She fully understands the subpersonality that carries anxiety and particularly places it on heights. She has dug deeply into her family of origin trauma to find many aspects of the why to this fear. Three blocks away she has the thought that she has tried to banish: “What if the elevator falls?” Dismissing that cognitively, she follows with an image of looking out the window during her interview and throwing up. And then she feels nauseous. She immediately feels terrified. She has a strong impulse to turn around and go home. Thinking; imagination; sensation; emotion; impulse/desire, on a fast track to losing this job. Intuition kicks in, for a second, with a reassurance and a tiny pull on the Higher Self that has moved her this far. But is it enough?*

This process of cycling through the psychological functions, quickly and without the control of the internal unifying center (I), and the capacity to disidentify, is basically a day-to-day operation for most of us. Sometimes it is big things, sometimes little, but those functions do their thing and We (the I/Higher Self) may or may not be paying attention. On a good day, the same thing happens but to positive ends.

*Sally wakes up after her successful interview and stretches. From her near-sleep she knows meditation is calling her. Her impulse pulls her out of bed and to the cushion, where she senses her very grounded body on the cushion. A little later, she thinks about getting ready for her new job and imagines herself at her desk with a smile on her face. Happily, she stops, breathes and chooses to go to the kitchen for breakfast. Intuition, impulse, sensation, thinking, imagination, feeling, CHOICE.*

Assagioli's *psychological laws pertaining to will training*<sup>1</sup> tell us the whole story: any psychological function will reinforce others along its same pathways. It is our job, personally and as helping professionals, to use that fact towards the highest callings of Self. Easy to say, harder to do. Breaking it down, we return to “I” whose functions are awareness and will. We notice and we choose. When any function starts to take us down a slippery slope, we know that the whole team of horses will follow, unless we take the reins and steer our wagon towards the desired goal.

How? Get Purpose clear first, so we see where we are going (stage 1). And make sure it is well chosen, in line with the Higher Self. Every “should” we have wants to slip in under the guise of Purpose. With purpose in sight, it's essential to know how our own personal psychological functions work (stage 2). Cris Pelizzatti and Bill Burr offered a much more in-depth view of this subject, along with their incredible interactive STAR map<sup>2</sup> in September's issue of the *Quarterly*.<sup>3</sup> Go back and check it out. And use the map for yourself and with a client to help in this stage. Also use Assagioli's “practices” in the psychological laws (note 1)! By assessing our own, subpersonality-infused, easily triggered functions, and noting those that are best allies to Call of Self, we become aware and have access to will (stage 3). We would do well, also, to attend to sequencing. How does the “kick in” of one function move us to another function? Is there any pattern that we can see? (See the exercise below for this one!) Creating strategies for situations that are likely to get us hooked, and even situations in which we are already sliding down the slippery slope, sets us in an orientation towards using those psychological functions to our advantage, not being dragged by them, unconsciously, towards outcomes that are not purposeful (stage 4).

*Sally's intuition is a strong ally, but needs more activation and Sally needs to understand how it speaks to her. Sally's thinking is clear, but a scared subpersonality can grab it. Her body responds to cues given by other functions, etc. Sally knew all this in our first scenario, so when she realized (disidentified) that she was starting to slip (first*

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cue from intuition), she remembered (thinking) her strategy. Breathe, Pause, Reset. Sensation is responsive and also impactful, for Sally. It will follow another function's lead, but will also help to soothe other functions. Using affirmations, well-rehearsed, she used her thinking and imagination function to state important goals, learned knowledge (elevators rarely fall), and to imagine best-outcome scenarios. Feelings (easily hooked) start to follow suit and impulse is carried forward by the aligned will. Intuition is Sally's "still, small voice," but it becomes easier to hear with every passing experience.

Stage 1: Define Purpose, clear and unfettered by subpersonalities.

Stage 2: Engage in ongoing self-work on understanding our psychological functions and especially noting which ones do what in the system that is our being.

Stage 3: Get clear on what psychological functions are best allies (and that may change from situation to situation).

Stage 4: Choose strategies based on this knowledge so that you can stop the slide before it happens or climb back up and RESET, if you start to slip.

And then do that again, whenever and as often as you need to.

These functions are the gift of our rich inheritance as human beings. They also carry our trauma and are suffused in cultural and circumstantial experience. *We*, however, do not. *We* are a center of contentless awareness and will. We drive the carriage.

### ***Good morning/Bad morning: An Exercise in Psychological Function Sequencing***

Visit the memory of a really good morning. Just the first 10 minutes, from waking to whatever comes next.

Remember this "example" of a good morning as clearly as you can and notice how the psychological functions worked: what they did and in what sequence. (Imagination will fill in for what you don't remember!)

Write it down very simply, using psychological function language.

I stretched in my bed, held in sensation.

I thought about my day and remembered that my granddaughter was coming over.

I had an immediate image of us playing.

I felt happy.

I wanted to get out of bed to be ready for her.

I was reminded (by my intuition) that I take a moment before getting up to tune into purpose and quality, and so I did.

We had a great day.

(sensation, thinking, imagination, emotion, impulse/desire, intuition)

Now do the same thing for a "bad" morning.

I woke up thinking about my to-do list.

My back hurt.

I began to feel anxious.

I heard my call to orient towards purpose (and ignored it)

I saw my computer in my mind's eye.

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I wanted both to jump up and get to work (subpersonality #1 in control) and I wanted to hide under the blankets (subpersonality #2)

Subpersonality # 1 won and I was at the computer within 10 minutes.

It was not a great day.

(thinking, sensation, feeling, intuition {unheeded}, imagination, impulse/desire)

The great thing about noticing sequencing is that we are also noticing where we can *break the chain* of sequencing. What functions help ground us? Connect us to Call? Soothe our subpersonalities? Where can we intervene in a sequence to change the momentum?

Have fun with this gift that is yours, and like your stable full of horses, feed them well, help them heal, love them and guide them. They, in turn, will carry you wherever you are going. 🐾

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.synthesiscenter.org/articles/PsycLaws.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.psicosintesi-life-coach.com/downloads>

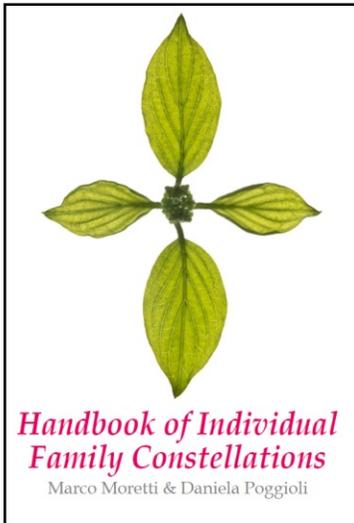
<sup>3</sup> See <https://aap-psychoanalysis.org/resources/Documents/Psychoanalysis%20Quarterly%20September%20202017.pdf>



# Handbook of Individual Family Constellations

By Marco Moretti & Daniela Poggioli

## A Review by Jan Kuniholm



This new book presents a truly practical spiritual psychology in its adaptation of Bert Hellinger's Family Constellations approach to working with individuals. Hellinger's work is overtly transpersonal. The family system in this approach is a multi-generational entity with an integrity (that can be maintained or violated) that spans generations, that has basic spiritual interconnections, and that can be accessed by working directly with the collective unconscious through "knowing fields." The access in this work reminds me of the sensing that is used in Thomas Yeomans' Corona Process, being a kind of collective intuition.

Moretti and Poggioli give an overview of Bert Hellinger's remarkable methods, share some key insights and principles that are used in Hellinger's Family Constellation process, and then show that this work, which usually is done in groups, is amenable to work with individuals in therapy.

The Family Constellation process shares some concepts that may seem incongruent to commonly used practice in psychosynthesis and many modalities of psychotherapy, yet they also show that this methodology is eminently useful as one of many alternative practices in a therapist's toolbox. Moretti is himself trained in psychosynthesis and feels comfortable in using this approach with certain clients. He trained in the Hellinger methods in group work, and then began to explore whether the methods and ideas would work in individual client-therapist environments. This book is the result of his successful development of this area.

The Constellation process regards the therapeutic relationship as human and professional—but *not personal*. The process apparently encourages *systemic empathy* rather than personal empathy. This may seem to be a challenging concept for many of us, but the purpose is that personal empathy, by its individual focus, may displace a person in the family constellation, whereas full inclusiveness is high on the list of priorities in this process. In this kind of work the therapist temporarily takes "last place" in the family constellation. Transference and countertransference are to be avoided perhaps more in this approach than in others, which regards this kind of interaction (of either kind) as an obstruction to a successful therapeutic relationship. Constellation work aims at developing techniques to "restructure reality." It engages dialogue between multiple realities in search of consensus, rather than working to heal specific issues for the individual.

Hellinger found that the relationships in a family constellation are governed by three main "orders of love" and that there are also systemic laws that govern all who would help or try to render service to clients in a constellation. I cannot discuss these in detail here, but I would suggest that these laws may be as surprising and challenging as Assagioli's psychological laws were to many of us on our first reading of *The Act of Will*.

Assagioli was clear in his teaching that it is important for us to be aware of the different levels of human activity as well as physical phenomena, and he warned against a confusion of levels as a source of error both in theory and in practice. It seems very clear to me that constellation work takes place on a different "level" than individual work, and has laws and orders that may seem even contraindicated if they were used in individual work. Nevertheless, Hellinger has applied these laws and orders successfully for decades, and Moretti and Poggioli have,

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it appears, successfully brought these into a form that individuals may use to access a level of psychological and spiritual activity that was previously limited to work in groups.

In constellation work, the therapy does not continue until some kind of resolution is achieved, but rather it ends at the *first sign* of essential movement within the constellation, so that the realities may be restructured without the guidance, interference or biases of the therapist. Moretti and Poggioli indicate that at times extended numbers of sessions are needed; however they often space them out more than “regular” therapy practice, sometimes allowing a month or more between sessions. Then again, occasionally the work is completed in a single session.

Moretti and Poggioli’s book is divided into two main sections, one devoted to theory, including a fairly lucid presentation of some of the main concepts of Hellinger’s work; and a second section devoted to their own practices, in which each author presents expositions of their individual approach to the work along with illuminating case histories. The authors identify which of them is responsible for the writing in sections of the book. The book suffers a little from a translation from the Italian that is not always as “elegant” in English as one might prefer, but the clarity of what is intended is not sacrificed.

This is a significant work. Some of Hellinger’s many works are available in English, but most are not. And the authors take Hellinger’s work into a new domain that may be of great interest to therapists who wish to utilize a multi-generational, psycho-spiritual approach to the therapy of individuals in their relations to their families. The “family” in this work, by the way, is not limited to the nuclear family of origin, and the dynamics of the family entity or constellation are not defined, but rather to be discovered in the work.

There is much in this book that I have not touched upon. The work is fascinating, and represents a new resource for many practitioners. Like psychosynthesis, the family constellation process is learned by in-person training, and needs the development of particular skills of empathy, intuition, and self-restraint as well as self-knowledge. The beauty of this book is in its unique applications to work with individuals. The authors discuss both the limitations and the advantages (for therapists and for clients) of this individual work, which allows one to discern the contexts in which it might be useful. Moretti and Poggioli have each developed practical methods for application which can be learned and applied by others. ■ The book is available from [Amazon](#).



## **Mothers & Daughters: A Legacy Lives On** **Karen & Lauren Herold**

*From the Eternal  
Out of the Past,  
In the present,  
For the Future.  
—Roberto Assagioli*

**E**ach one of us has a mother. For good or bad we are all impacted by the relationship with the woman who carried us in her womb and delivered us into this life. For the lucky ones, this is the woman who nurtured us, taught us, fed us, and kept us safe. Most importantly, this is the woman who taught us about love. All children, regardless of gender, have a close and impactful relationship with their Mother. For women, though, this experience includes another dynamic. As well as being the primary source of love, care, safety, and nurturance for a child, Mother represents the image of what it means to be a woman for a young girl. Mother is the image of “female,” and everything about her defines “woman-hood” for her daughter.

As we move towards understanding, accepting and ownership of our own life we have more capacity to learn about, understand and accept our Mother’s life. Our Mothers grew to adulthood with radically different social, cultural, and family influences. By scaling the barriers of Mother and Daughter roles we are empowered to appreciate the circumstances that shaped our Mothers into the women they have become.

The gifts of the process can be profound. Investing in examining this important relationship in a woman’s life opens the door to profound understanding of the key influences that shaped her image of woman and of mother. Through understanding, she is able to choose the attributes and skills that serve and support her and to begin to build a new image of how she wants to live as a Woman. Finally, she is able to begin the process of entering into an adult relationship with her Mother and/or Daughter through understanding and accepting the circumstances that influenced her development and growth to womanhood.

Karen Herold and her daughter Lauren Herold-Morgan each have private practices that are women-centered. Karen, a transpersonal psychologist, psychosynthesis life coach, and yoga teacher, focuses on empowering women at their mid-life transition as they envision, create and manifest a new phase in their lives. Lauren, an herbalist, dream worker, and women’s circle facilitator, focuses on helping support women during the transitional times of pregnancy, fertility, young womanhood and new motherhood. Karen is a graduate of the Synthesis Center Training and Lauren is currently enrolled.

Karen and Lauren are always finding ways to co-create and support each other, and are frequent attendees at each other’s classes and workshops. In that light, both were invited as speakers to a conference on “Dreaming and Healing” in March 2017. Imagine their delight when Dr. Didi Firman approached them, asking them to consider continuing a body of work developed by Didi and her mother Julie Firman. Didi and Julie’s work consisted of shepherding Mothers and Daughters as they explored their relationship and moved towards healing not only their relationship, but through that healing bringing greater health and understanding to their families, and ultimately to our society. Their workshops were highly attended and appraised by women and they spent many years offering them.

Karen and Lauren have developed a workshop series that they will be presenting for the first time beginning in January 2018. The series will last for six evening classes and a weekend in-town retreat. Their curriculum is grounded in and inspired by the book written by Didi and Julie Firman, *Daughters and Mothers: Making it Work*, (HCI Publishers, 2003) and was further shaped by their respective professional backgrounds, experiences, and flair. In addition to core material, the course will include creativity exercises, writing, imaginal journeying, talking stick ceremony, drumming, singing, dancing, witnessing, laughing, crying, truth-telling, and more.

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Their course begins with an examination of what it means to be a woman in 2018. Exploring what the influences are in our society that limit or enhance each woman's ability to connect with and authentically live in alignment with her true Self. There is an exploration of what it means to "grow up girl" in our society and in our individual family situation through an examination of the influence of a Mother from birth through baby, toddler, teen, and young adult years. Other influencing mediums are also explored, such as school, church, media, and cultural norms. It is through this lens that the ideal model of Woman is explored by questioning the "shoulds," "oughts," "messages," and "permissions" that we grew up with and which may limit us in some way. The next step is an introduction into the process of dis-identifying from the stories and scripts we have adopted and internalized through taking ownership and responsibility for our lives. Through this process of claiming our adulthood we are invited to examine the ways that we have blamed our mother, our situation, and anything else that represents the sub-personality hooks, blaming, and victimhood that are often part of the pattern of being in our world today.

The goal of this class, in Karen and Lauren's words, is to bring healing to women, through healing the relationship of Mothers and Daughters. Through healing this key relationship they hope to bring healing to the families, their communities and the world. ■

## *Mothers & Daughters – Healing the Feminine Together*

### *A Workshop Series for All Women*

**When / Where:**

**Tuesdays 6:30-9 pm: Jan 30, Feb 6,13,20,27, Mar 6**

**Weekend In-town Retreat: 10 am-6 pm: Mar 17-18**

**Location: Bellevue, WA**

**To register: email [Lauren@laurenherold.com](mailto:Lauren@laurenherold.com)**

**Cost: Sliding Scale \$200 – \$450, as you're able**



*After an extensive career as an accounting and business executive, the struggles of life change and empty nest syndrome prompted Karen Herold, MTP, to leave her business career and return to school, where she earned a master's degree in transpersonal psychology, which focuses on the psychology of wellness as opposed to dysfunction. Through that educational and transformative process she realized a calling to work with women who are moving through their own transitional time of midlife. She has developed a unique process using creativity, psychosynthesis, and transpersonal psychology to help women in transition to envision and manifest the next stage of their lives. She is a spiritual seeker, a psychosynthesis coach, on the faculty of Sofia University, a certified yoga teacher, a successful business executive, and the mother of three adult daughters and two young grandchildren. She is a wise woman who affirms each client as the designer and creator of her life.*

[www.wisetransition.com](http://www.wisetransition.com)



*Lauren Herold-Morgan is a graduate from Bastyr University, herbalist, birth doula, dream worker, and wise woman and has spent her whole career supporting women through the initiations of life. Her specialty is supporting women through becoming a woman, fertility, pregnancy, new motherhood, and menopause. She has worked as an herbalist, having worked at and managed multiple herbal stores and places of healing; as a massage therapist who specialized in pregnancy and postnatal massage; as a birth doula supporting women in labor; and most recently as a facilitator of women's circles. She is currently studying with the Psychosynthesis Center to become a certified life coach, and plans to bring this knowledge into her work of supporting young girls as they transition to womanhood.*

[www.laurenherold.com](http://www.laurenherold.com)

# Psychology and Spirituality

*Shamai Currim*

What is Psychology really about? Isn't it just the scientific study of the human mind and its functions, especially those affecting behavior in a given context; the mental characteristics or attitude of a person or group; the mental and emotional factors governing a situation or activity?

Or is there more to what we term "psychology"? Of course, if we downsize the research and look only for an understanding of Transpersonal Psychology, then we begin to see the addition of the higher and lower states, an understanding of the human mind through altered states of consciousness and transcendent experiences.

In his article "Symbols of Transpersonal Experiences," Roberto Assagioli reminds us that

In speaking of the transpersonal we are faced with a serious difficulty and that is the inadequacy of human language.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to talk about the fourteen groups of symbols that can be used as psycho-spiritual exercises to bring about an increasing synthesis between the personal and transpersonal levels and the manifestation of the Whole Man.

In her article "Psychology and Spirituality: One Path or Two?"<sup>2</sup> Mariana Caplan, PhD, states that

Most of mainstream psychology does not concern itself with issues of consciousness and spirit and rejects what is not scientifically quantifiable . . . Spiritual understanding comes from a direct perception of a greater intelligence, force or power. Some people call it non-duality; others call it Christ, Allah, spirit or God. Spiritual technologies help us access an experience of consciousness itself, and sustained spiritual practice supports us in learning to anchor ourselves in a more abiding sense of that greater reality. Meanwhile, psychological work helps unravel the complex strands that constitute our personal psyche—patterns and wounds that, if not tended to, can impede our growth and block our perception of spiritual realities . . . It is very important to understand that our psychological blocks can actually impede our capacity to open to spiritual understanding and experience. Trauma and a sense of betrayal in childhood . . . can result in a failure to trust the divine and life itself and in great difficulty in surrendering to the unknown.

So, *can* we, in reality, separate spirit and psychological process? In his article, "The Superconscious and the Self,"<sup>3</sup> Roberto Assagioli reminds us that the Transpersonal Self is basically ontological—*onthos* meaning *being*—which is not process, which is something "standing in itself"; and the Self is seen as the focal point around which the many superconscious processes occur. The Self is the cause of those processes, and the source of the energy that makes them possible. The Self is a stable center of life on its own level, which *has* functions but is not a function. It is the pure experience of the Self—of contact and eventually of identification with the Self—which is very different from expanded states of awareness. The awareness of the "I," or personal center of awareness and will, is the first step toward the experience of the Self. Achieving this condition of identification with the "I" and of inner mastery and harmony is a major aim of personal psychosynthesis.<sup>4</sup>

In his article "The Psychology of Spirituality: Religion traditionally provides a structure for spiritual experiences," Stephen A. Diamond PhD writes that

spirituality can best be characterized by psychological growth, creativity, consciousness and emotional maturation . . . Spirituality entails the capacity to see life as it is—wholly, including the tragic existential realities of evil, suffering, death and the *daimonic*—and to love life nonetheless . . .

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By bravely facing our inner demons . . . we transmute them into helpful spiritual allies. During this alchemical process, we come to find that the same devil so righteously run from and long-rejected turns out to be the redemptive source of renewed vitality, creativity and authentic spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

In coming back to process and stasis, to movement and stillness, and the paradox when we try to separate the wheat from the chaff, or the valuable from the worthless, we find that all parts of the psychological and spiritual processes are intertwined.

My personal training in psychology and transpersonal psychology, or the psychology of the soul, happened in different locations, different trainings, through different teachers; and yet, in the end it was important that they interlock and remain whole. As I grew, and as my understanding and life wisdom intensified, so did my understanding of the growth we must all achieve in order to move forward and become the guardians of the wisdom path. When we live our truth, others are bound to take notice and emulate the joy that comes forward in knowing ourselves. Roberto Assagioli, who was always known for his joyful spirit, reminds us of the importance of taking an inclusive outlook, moving from duality to wholeness, from the mundane to the spiritual, and including the all. When we do that we become clear thinkers, with the ability to see the whole picture and the understanding of health on multidimensional levels.

Roberto Assagioli said it best in his interview with Sam Keen, when asked what the major differences are between psychosynthesis and psychoanalysis, to which Assagioli replied:

We pay far more attention to the higher unconscious and to the development of the transpersonal self. In one of his letters Freud said, “I am interested only in the basement of the human being.” Psychosynthesis is interested in the whole building. We try to build an elevator which will allow a person access to every level of his personality. After all, a building with only a basement is very limited. We want to open up the terrace where you can sun-bathe or look at the stars. Our concern is the synthesis of all areas of the personality. That means psychosynthesis is holistic, global and inclusive. It is not against psychoanalysis or even behavior modification but it insists that the needs for meaning, for higher values, for a spiritual life, are as real as biological or social needs.

And he goes on to say:

In the practice of therapy we both agree in rejecting “pathologism;” that is, concentration upon morbid manifestations and symptoms of a supposed psychological “disease.” We regard man as a fundamentally healthy organism in which there may be a temporary malfunctioning. Nature is always trying to re-establish harmony, and within the psyche the principle of synthesis is dominant. Irreconcilable opposites do not exist. The task of therapy is to aid the individual in transforming the personality, and integrating apparent contradictions.<sup>6</sup>

One cannot separate the water from the drop, the organism from the universe. What we can do is begin to understand the complex nature of life and our ability to reach both self-knowledge and transcendence.■

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> [https://aap-psychosynthesis.org/resources/Documents/symbols\\_of\\_transpersonal.pdf](https://aap-psychosynthesis.org/resources/Documents/symbols_of_transpersonal.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> (Adapted from *Eyes Wide Open: Cultivating Discernment on the Spiritual Path* (Sounds True, 2010) [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/mariana-caplan-phd/spirituality-and-psychology\\_b\\_941242.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/mariana-caplan-phd/spirituality-and-psychology_b_941242.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.turningpoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Superconscious-and-the-Self-Roberto-Assagioli.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Assagioli, R. (1971) “Identification Exercise” in *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*. New York: Viking. Pp. 116-125.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evil-deeds/200812/the-psychology-spirituality> Dec 24, 2008

<sup>6</sup> “The Golden Mean of Roberto Assagioli,” An interview conducted with Dr. Assagioli by Sam Keen that was published in the December 1974 issue of *Psychology Today* <http://synthesiscenter.org/articles/0303.pdf>

# Using “Your Own Star” in Subpersonality Work

## Christina Pelizzatti and Bill Burr

*This Applications Note is a follow up to the article introducing Your Own Star (YOS) that appeared in the [September, 2017, issue of Psychosynthesis Quarterly](#), and outlines a practical application of YOS in subpersonality work during a recent coaching session.*

### Introduction

The Star Diagram of the psychological functions used in psychosynthesis takes into account the multiplicity, plasticity and dynamism of the human psyche, mapping these functions in a coherent manner and enabling an intuitive, graphic vision of their existence and interplay.

For example, in the center of the mandala of the psychological functions of The Synthesis Center designed by Clare Goodwin (below), we find the “I,” immersed in the intrinsic functions of the “I” itself: the Will, inherent faculty of the I/Self, surrounded by Transpersonal qualities, and Awareness—another inherent faculty of the I/Self.



For those in the process of psychological growth, awareness of prevalent or nondominant psychological functions is indispensable: the continuous work of harmonization of the functions contributes to a growing awareness of the Self and the capability to access the transpersonal energies and qualities in an ecological context—from Ego to Eco (for oneself and others).

Becoming conscious of processes that we are often unaware of through disidentification and impartial observation enables us to direct them in a responsible manner through Love & Will, empowering the “I,” promoting and regulating the psychological functions under the guidance of the Self.

Through Awareness the “I” can utilize the Will to direct the various psychological functions at every moment of life in this process of harmonization. As a consequence, the Will serves as coordinator, without impacting directly on reality.

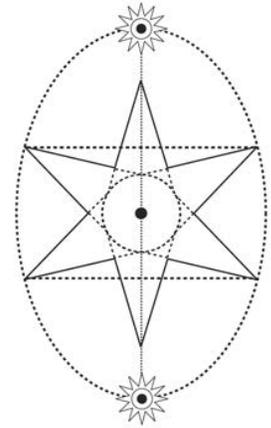
Here at the TransAlpine Center in Italy, we've been working with a diagram that facilitates an understanding of how the psychological functions interrelate with the fields of consciousness mapped in the Egg Diagram, effectively blending the functions into the fields illustrated in the ovoid. The reasoning behind this centers on the “I,” and the presence of consciousness at the center of both the Egg and the Star as a center of pure Awareness and Will. The upper rays of the Star represent functions typically associated with content of the higher unconscious- imagination, intuition, thought, while the emotive/sensory/impulse functions are more closely aligned with the reactive content

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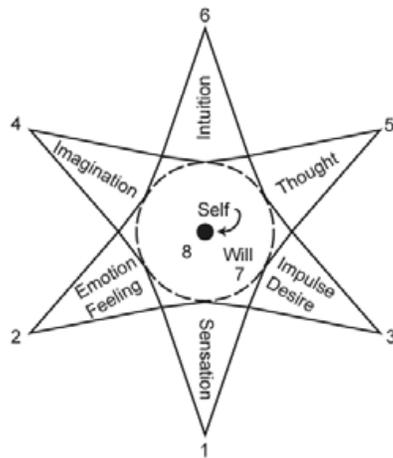
of the lower unconscious. The idea is to gain additional perspective on how the psychological processes of a particular function influence the others and the psyche in general.

The continuing harmonization of one's Own Star facilitates the use of the psychological functions towards a given objective, and, more generally, the participation in a responsible manner in the process of Self-actualization or synthesis. In this context the 10 psychological laws defined by Maestro Assagioli ("Act of Will", Chap. 5) clarify in detail how the psychological functions are intimately interconnected. The understanding and conscious use of these laws is fundamental to the comprehension of psychic processes.



## Background and Purpose

The Star Diagram is usually approached from a “holistic” viewpoint in which the traveler centers him/herself through meditation and/or contemplation of questions relating to the degree in which a certain function is used/is comfortable, etc. Then the results of this exploration are plotted on a diagram of the Star of the Psychological Functions (PF), either in notated form or a star is drawn with rays of varying length according to the degree of association with the particular function.



While this process is useful in obtaining insights, it is also time-consuming, lending itself therefore most appropriately to a centered, holistic approach.

We have found that the “Your Own Star” (YOS) structure presents elements of simplicity and immediacy that enable more targeted application with subpersonalities, thereby facilitating the work. While a manual method can also be used, the result is one PF profile. YOS invites consideration of the relationship of the traveler (whether centered or identified with a subpersonality) to the PFs in a two-dimensional

matrix, the result being generation of up to five profiles: three typical of everyday interactions (personal /relational /professional), one a spiritual/transpersonal profile, and one of the Traveler's own choosing. [YOS is available as a free download: click [here](#).]

If used with a specific subpersonality, this generation of multiple profiles has been seen to offer perspectives to both the guide and the traveler for further work.

The purpose of this note is to provide guides with a practical example of how the “real time” aspects of Your Own Star can be used to heighten the traveler's awareness of the presence and impact of a dominant subpersonality on their lives and worldview through exploration of the psychological functions.

The following case study involved a client (“Beth”) with whom initial work had already been done, identifying a dominant subpersonality: the “Victim.” This subpersonality was dominant to the point where it/she was present continuously, manifesting it/herself through behavior, body posture, ways of speaking and relating to oneself and to others, and as a continual state of strong anxiety. In this type of situation finding a polarity becomes critical, both to awaken the client to the situation and to permit the establishment of an alternative point of observation. This note will illustrate how YOS was used as an enabling tool in this process.

Date: 12-Jul-17  
Name: CP

Star Diagram Analysis

Error Values	How Much do you...?		How Much do you...?	
	COMFORTABLE	USE	TRUST	LISTEN
Personal/Creative				
INTUITION	0	0	0	0
EMOTION	0	0	0	0
IMAGINATION	0	0	0	0
IMPULSE/DESIRE	0	0	0	0
THOUGHT	0	0	0	0
WILL	0	0	0	0
Relational				
INTUITION	0	0	0	0
EMOTION	0	0	0	0
IMAGINATION	0	0	0	0
IMPULSE/DESIRE	0	0	0	0
THOUGHT	0	0	0	0
WILL	0	0	0	0
Professional				
INTUITION	0	0	0	0
EMOTION	0	0	0	0
IMAGINATION	0	0	0	0
IMPULSE/DESIRE	0	0	0	0
THOUGHT	0	0	0	0
WILL	0	0	0	0
Spiritual				
INTUITION	0	0	0	0
EMOTION	0	0	0	0
IMAGINATION	0	0	0	0
IMPULSE/DESIRE	0	0	0	0
THOUGHT	0	0	0	0
WILL	0	0	0	0
Nature				
INTUITION	0	0	0	0
EMOTION	0	0	0	0
IMAGINATION	0	0	0	0
IMPULSE/DESIRE	0	0	0	0
THOUGHT	0	0	0	0
WILL	0	0	0	0

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## Session Work

Beth was invited to center herself using appropriate methods (in this case, abdominal breathing), and deliberately and knowingly identify herself with the chosen subpersonality. In this particular session she was asked to think about a moment or experience lived as the “Victim,” focusing on the internal dialogue between the “Victim” and her “I.”

As the “Victim,” Beth was invited to explore the PFs, one at a time, identifying and feeling her relationship with each PF within a specific relational framework chosen from the YOS matrix. For example, in a personal reference (dialogue between the subpersonality and the “I”), as the “Victim,” how much is a given PF used, how comfortable was she with it, how much did she trust it as a function of her personality, how much did she use it, etc. These questions were answered on a scale where “1” meant “not at all” and “10” was “totally,” “all the time,” and so forth.

The profile shown in Fig. 1 that emerged from the personal exploration revealed that the “Victim,” subpersonality had complete control over the psychological functions, with the exception of Intuition. This was indicative, as emerged later in the session, of how intuition, which is a psychological function from where the Self “sends” energies/images/symbols, was not under the control of the “Victim.”

Once the Personal Profile was done and reviewed, the same methodology of centering and internal dialogue was used to explore the relational matrix. The profile that emerged enabled Beth to see in real time (i.e., viewing the profiles literally side-by-side) how once more the “Victim” subpersonality dominated her relational outlook, and, once more, how Intuition was not involved. As can be seen in Fig. 2 the two profiles are substantially similar.

The *Your Own Star* matrix was then used to characterize a situation where the “Victim” could be out of her “comfort zone”—a situation somewhat outside the routine of daily life. In Beth’s case, it was pleasure/release through listening to music, in particular live concerts. Once again, Beth was invited to center, to knowingly and completely identify herself with the “Victim,” to immerse herself in memory and experience of a past concert, and to engage in an internal dialogue between the “I” and the as to how she felt about and related to her thoughts, her imagination, her impulses/desires, her emotions, her sensations, her intuition.

What emerged is shown in Fig. 3. The chosen situation represented an area in which identification with that aspect of her psyche resulted in an apparently total shutdown of the “Victim” subpersonality. The “Victim” no longer was operative in that context as shown by the complete absence of affinity with the PFs: Beth responded to every question regarding each PF saying: “the Victim isn’t here!”



Figure 1: “Personal” Profile



Figure 2: “Relational” Profile

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Having identified a psychic state that certainly hosts a subpersonality offering potential for work with opposites, a fourth exercise was done, this time from the spiritual or transpersonal vantage point. The procedure remained the same: centering, presence in the “Victim” subpersonality, then the inner dialogue in a transpersonal context.

The data from this exercise created the profile shown in Fig. 4: a profile markedly different from those generated by the previous exercises. The interpretation here is that once the “Victim” subpersonality enters into the transpersonal, her hold on the psychological functions is loosened and there is space for the “I” to manifest. Note that the thought function is now at minimal levels, indicating that the rational mind is a key player in the “psychological game” and at the moment in which the subpersonality no longer has control over the field of rational thought the other functions activate. We can see how Intuition has also been reactivated, being a psychological function through which the Self emanates energy directly.

From this we could see that, with Beth, the spiritual/transpersonal is the “pole star” on which to work with subpersonalities.

### Comment

The “Victim” subpersonality, recognized by Beth as being dominating, creates a comfort zone for itself which Beth has identified as a “danger zone”—because it creates anxiety, discomfort, unhappiness, a sense of inferiority, and blocks action to the point where one of the key elements which emerged during the session was the determinant role of the Guide in this process. At the beginning of the exercise and often, though with diminishing frequency as the session proceeded, “Beth” (in quotes, because it was actually the “Victim” who occupied the self) would stop, protest that she couldn’t do it, couldn’t manage it—in effect the subpersonality was fighting for survival, to maintain the status quo. At these junctures the intervention of the guide was decisive—supportive, firm, unyielding: “tough love”—the manifestation of Presence as love & strong will.

In the moment Beth found herself in a context that she likes (music, concerts), the “Victim” “let go,” the Star almost appears to be a mandala as the degree of relationship to the PFs diminishes and Beth continually underlined that in that moment the “Victim” wasn’t there. The guide told her that actually the “Victim” is always there, but had lost its grip and as a consequence her personal self was able to become colored by positive emotions, sensations, and the rest of the freed psychological functions, bringing her awareness to the polar opposite.

In this way we can “see” the poles in the plots associated with the centered identification with the subpersonality on the one hand and through identification with what Beth loved to do on the other. However, it remains that both poles are always there.

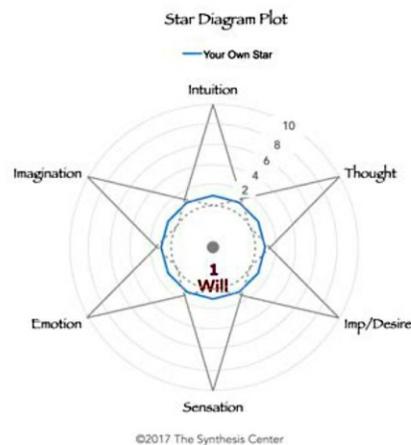


Figure 3: “Subpersonality’s Own Star” Profile

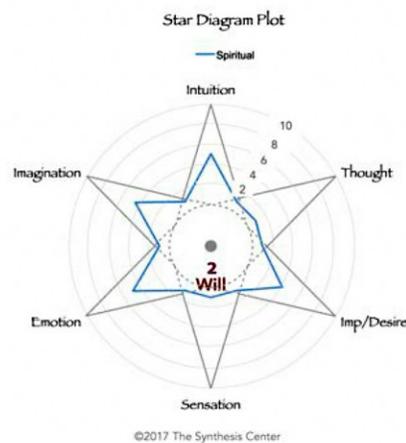


Figure 4: “Transpersonal” Profile

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## Conclusion

The work of Synthesis of Opposites, disidentifying from either and both (the “both/and” of the situation), is done in the Spiritual/Transpersonal area. Beth’s profiles opened a way forward for further work. The inhibited psychological functions need to be empowered, and as the quantification of will in Figure 4 suggests, in the Transpersonal the “I” has regained access to its own psychological function: the Will.

The results of this session and the profiles generated by the YOS exercises point the way for following work which will focus on “Explore, Expand, Empower” the “I” relative to Beth’s “Victim” subpersonality. The synthetic valuation system and immediate graphical representation of YOS enabled the entire course of analysis to be done in about one hour and twenty minutes. This suggests that this tool can be an effective addition to subpersonality work, particularly in cases where there is a need to understand the degree of dominance and identify a polar candidate.☐

## For Further Information and Comment

Cristina Pelizzatti, The Synthesis Center Staff, PLC

email: [cris@criscoaching.com](mailto:cris@criscoaching.com)

Bill Burr, Administrator, PLC-Italia, PLC

email: [wwb@psychosynthesislifecoach.com](mailto:wwb@psychosynthesislifecoach.com)



# **Sleepers, Awake!**

## **The Act of Will in a Field of Habits**

*Jan Kuniholm*

### **Introduction**

Roberto Assagioli listed six categories of contents of what he called “the lower unconscious.”<sup>1</sup> Some of what he listed is not normally available to consciousness as we know it, such as “the intelligent co-ordination of bodily processes.” Much of what remains in this lower unconscious are contents that are available to consciousness, but usually only with concentration and specific conscious actions for identification and retrieval. I think there is a category that Assagioli has left out, that deserves our greatest attention. The lower unconscious is filled with stored energy patterns established by recurrent previous behaviors that go through regular cycles of thought, emotion, or behavior with no conscious direction, intervention, or awareness. In fact, the retrieval or identification of the nature of these patterns may be difficult or seemingly impossible. We usually call such patterns “habits.” Some of them are truly “lower” unconscious—unavailable to normal waking consciousness—while some may be in the realm of what Assagioli called the “middle unconscious”—available to consciousness if an effort is made to become aware of them.

Habit: a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance; or an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary; or actions that are triggered automatically in response to contextual cues that have been associated with their performance.<sup>2</sup>

For most people, much of life is governed by an intricately interwoven network of habits—most of which run our lives perfectly well without our conscious awareness or intervention. Habits are usually interwoven into “fields.”

Field: A region of time or space in which a given effect (such as magnetism) exists; or, a complex of forces that serve as causative agents in human behavior.<sup>3</sup>

After we have learned to drive a car, for example, we have only to decide when and where to go, while the “nitty-gritty” details of driving the car are controlled by the several habits we learned and instilled in our early driving lessons. This method serves us quite well. In fact, we would be poor drivers if our every move had to be consciously decided—especially in an emergency. Conscious decision is a slower, more cumbersome process than the automatic responses that are carried out habitually. And often our habits carry within them the energies of prior learning and deliberation, so that their quick responses may be the best ones. But—maybe not!

The set of habits we use to drive a car are a good example of an “ordinary” habit field: in driving a car we engage a particular level of awareness, aimed at the roadway and its immediate environs—we may engage a particular peripheral vision to scan the sidewalks for moving kids or animals; we are alert to sounds of the road and of our vehicle; we multitask the operations of our vehicle; we adjust our posture to the car seat; and so on, all without paying much or any attention to any of it. Yet the influence of the field will make itself felt as soon as a child runs into the road after a ball, and in traffic the influence of the field may make it difficult to focus on what the person on our right is saying. When we get out of the car the habit field “disengages” and our ability to focus on other things is accordingly increased.

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## Habits and Will

In an ideal world, all the habits we acquire would serve us well, so there would be no need to question them. However, as I approach my 70s my life has changed a great deal, especially in the past ten years, and it has become more apparent to me that not all my habits continue to serve me well! I have made certain decisions regarding my life to come in the next few years and have discovered (surprise!) that many of my habits of mind, emotion, attitude, or behavior do *not* help in fulfilling those decisions. In fact, some of them present formidable obstacles to my living out my choices. It is as if I have recently awakened to discover that parts of me—at every level of mind, emotion and body—are preprogrammed to drive “the car of my life” to wherever the habits lead, to where I have been accustomed to going for years, decades. If I had not made any decisions to change my life, there would be no awareness of a problem. But now, it feels as if I have put my hands on “my inner steering wheel” to turn left, so to speak, but discover that it seems to turn where it will—right, or not at all—regardless of *my* will. At first I thought I was dealing with, perhaps, a strong subpersonality. But it turned out that even though I was running into something with its own agenda, like a subpersonality, it seemed more stupid—and much more stubborn.

This situation is what Assagioli addresses in psychosynthesis—particularly in his book, *The Act of Will*. Assagioli differentiates between what he calls the “plastic unconscious” and the “structured or conditioned unconscious” and indicates that classical psychoanalysis focuses on the latter, attempting to eliminate repressions, complexes, and conflicts. He leads us to focus on the “plastic” unconscious, which resembles an inexhaustible store of unexposed photographic film.<sup>4</sup>

Assagioli’s seventh psychological law contains his discussion of habits: “Repetition of actions intensifies the urge to further iteration and renders their execution easier and better, until they come to be performed unconsciously.” He notes that habits “tend to limit us and make us follow only beaten tracks” but also asserts, with William James, that “we are responsible for forming our habits and even when acting according to habits we are acting freely.”<sup>5</sup> But that is not the way many of us experience our habits: if we have conscious access to our habits we may think we are “free” to change them, yet it is amazing how resistant they are to change!

Additionally, some habits—of the type Assagioli and others are likely to call “complexes”—have not been formed by “responsible choice,” but rather by reactions to repeated behavior on the part of others. For example, if a child is treated every day as if he were “stupid” by parents, siblings, peers and teachers, it is no surprise that some mental, emotional and behavioral habits of this child will be a constellation—or field—that revolves around the perception, “I am stupid.” How “free” is such a child to change this? Assagioli was quoted as saying that “psychosynthesis presupposes psychoanalysis,” and many people may feel that something akin to psychoanalysis is the best way to approach such traumatic conditioning. I suggest that all the *analysis* in the world will not change the habits that govern basic attitudes, because these are deeply conditioned responses. Assagioli and others have pointed out how resistant such habitual attitudes are to the intervention of conscious will. Such a child may be “rewarded” with a sense of rightness and easy execution for behavior that conforms with the “I am stupid” perception and punished, overtly or indirectly, by a sense of wrongness and difficult execution for behavior that challenges that perception.

Assagioli’s eighth psychological law indicates his awareness of unconscious processes. “All the various functions, and their manifold combinations in complexes and subpersonalities, adopt means of achieving their aims without our awareness, and independently of, and even against, our conscious will.” This is also known, he says, as Baudoin’s Law of Subconscious Finalism.<sup>6</sup> I find it amazing that he writes that *functions* have “aims”—but this is consistent with our knowledge of habits. Habits are patterns that tend toward an end result of some kind, whether that result is satisfaction, or familiarity, or some other feeling, or stability, a reward, or an ephemeral substitute for a genuine result. The latter is the hallmark of neurotic habits and addictions. Assagioli indicates that there is

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a real mystery in the relationship and interaction between psychological and physical facts, but I submit that approaching some of these phenomena as “habits” can give us some insights that can lead to solutions. These solutions are within the practice of psychosynthesis.

## **Mastery Over Habits**

Assagioli stresses over and over in his writings the need to gain self-mastery over our functions, precisely because for most of us, most of the time, all of our functions are driven by habits—energy cycles<sup>7</sup> that are strong, self-reinforcing, repetitive, and that have immense inertial resistance to change. And it turns out that, usually, the longer the habitual pattern has been operating, the more entrenched and more difficult to change it is. For many of us, this juggernaut of habit is the greatest challenge of old age.

When we live much of our lives relying upon the *convenience* of habits—just as wealthy people may rely on the convenience of having the details of their lives arranged and run by servants—we notice that exercising our wills in the areas normally controlled by habits will seem to be a difficult endeavor. Unlike the wealthy, who feel free to “sack” or “fire” their servants, we cannot simply “terminate” inconvenient habits by an act of will. When we become truly aware of our habits, we discover our history: forces which have shaped us, decisions we have made, actions we have performed, relationships we have made. These facets of our lives have each brought to bear a host of energies that operate at every level and involve every one of our functions. They are embedded in the processes of our lives and are interwoven in the fabric of our personal identities—not to be shaken off like raindrops, and not to be removed neatly like a wart off the skin. The most common result of the attempt to alter long-standing habits is *failure*.

It is only because of our overwhelming reliance on “our servants”—these habitual patterns of thought, emotion, sensation, perception, desire—of *all* of our functions, in fact—that we ever fall into the illusion of *having* a will: because we seldom use it, and even then we use it in such limited ways! One only gets the sense of *being* a will when one awakens, when one begins to bring conscious awareness into the *entire* field of habits. When this awakening begins, our first response may be horror and dismay, when we discover that virtually every aspect of our lives is governed by quasi-automatic responses over which our attempts at conscious control are relatively impotent. We are like a self-driving car that not only steers itself, but also seems to decide for itself where to go! So when I wrote above that the habits I ran into in myself were more stupid and more stubborn than a subpersonality, I was running into the aspect of habits that seems, not just animal, but actually *mechanical*—unresponsive to intelligence or will. They are not totally unresponsive, I discovered, but my approach to them has had to be different from my approach to subpersonality dynamics.

Years ago when I first trained in psychosynthesis I noticed how resistant “parts of me” seemed to be to the application of my new insights, to the successful adoption of the changes that psychosynthesis exercises pointed toward. I was so excited by many psychosynthesis exercises, and yet did not understand why the euphoric progress of my training sessions didn’t last too long once I was back on the street or at home or work. Psychosynthesis training was all about change. There seemed to be something else lurking in or around the work with subpersonalities and other aspects that I had learned—something that I had not yet identified, that was making change more difficult than I had had any idea it would be. There had been no “announcement” that I might encounter resistance—from within. Now I have a fuller appreciation of “my adversary”: the field of habits.

## **Habits and Awareness**

Incidentally, I am aware that my phrase “the field of habits” may evoke at least two images—both of them true. One image is a field of red poppies, whose opium lulls us into a gentle sleep of automatic responses—a state that

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some believe to be the normal reality of human functioning. The pinnacle of such thinking was portrayed in the utopia of behaviorism so seductively presented in B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*—a book that interested or repelled a lot of us in the 1960s. The other image is the concept of “field” as used by physicists, that is perhaps most familiar to us in the example of a magnetic or gravitational field whose “lines of force” extend invisibly beyond a particular location. Habits do behave like magnetic fields in a way, in that they exert force beyond the location of their “origin.” They function often invisibly and yet inexorably, and they seem to obey certain physical laws—which was why behaviorists attempted to claim a place in the “hard” sciences for psychology, by putting experimentation, quantification and statistics at the heart of their studies. We would be remiss in not learning something from the behaviorists, no less than if we were to accept all their claims. Conditioned responses were known and studied by the Sufis a thousand years ago, but the modern behavioral sciences increased our understanding of the automatic responses that are embodied in physical energies and habits.

It seems to me that the emphasis of psychosynthesis on conscious awareness needs to be completed by an application of that awareness in more specific ways to addressing the field of habits, so that the higher functions that psychosynthesis presents can have the power to really transform our lives. An analogy might serve us here. Freud was aware of the need for “psychosynthesis,” but he believed that it would occur automatically after analysis had provided the needed understanding. Assagioli showed that this was not the case: certain actions were needed in order for psychosynthesis to occur, which is why his work is full of techniques and exercises. Similarly, modern psychosynthesis seems (to me, at least) to assume that once we do the exercises and use the techniques, our personal synthesis will proceed without a glitch. Assagioli himself was fully aware that the path to synthesis was fraught with continual challenges, and that the hoped-for goal takes a tremendous amount of dedication, courage, and work. My own experience suggests that many of the challenges are presented by our habits, a lifetime of experience that has reinforced our inner disunity. Our first exposure to psychosynthesis can be a heady experience, but the work of replacing habitual patterns with acts of conscious will is the work of a lifetime.

When I found myself in the hospital with cancer 40 years ago, part of my healing came from the realization that a specific field of habits had gotten me into the problem I was facing. I discovered that nearly 20 years of habitual negative thinking, self-destructive behavior, obsessive emotional cycles and other aspects of a “complex” had contributed toward the physical self-attack that eventually manifested as cancer. The realization that this had occurred was liberating. But my understanding was not sufficient to change all the behaviors, many of which were quite unconscious. Forty years later I am still discovering habitual patterns that lie buried in my psyche and in my body, waiting to be dug up, shaken loose, and shifted. Recent research indicates that it takes a minimum of 30 days of continual practice, daily focus, and conscious *will* to begin to change a deep-seated habit. I am finding that energy psychology has provided some of the best techniques for applying psychosynthetic principles to habits, and I believe that energy psychology practices have a legitimate place in psychosynthesis practice.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, some medical practitioners are now including advice as to how to develop healthy lifestyle habits in their approaches to patients.<sup>9</sup> While such change may not contain any psychological subtlety, the very fact that habits are becoming recognized as being important to health in any way is encouraging.

Young people's bodily habits tend to be strongly life-affirming automatically, if the young person is not taught otherwise and the habits are not interfered with. After the age of 40, more and more conscious will is needed each year to keep the body's habitual energies in peak condition. I recall a professional firefighter's remarks about physical fitness, which was essential in his work: before 40 his body stayed fit without any conscious effort. After 40 he had to begin specific exercises to stay fit, and each year more exercise was needed. I am now nearly 30 years past that marker, and I can confirm his words. The body is just one of the “fields” in which there are alternatives in life—acts of will, or habitual reactions. The fireman's observation holds true on every level: but the point is not just exercise, but *conscious* exercise. And that is where the benefit is found. For someone who continues to awaken—for whom *will* becomes a state of being rather than an act—old age is a time of fulfillment,

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for increasing age demands more consciousness: more choice, not less—and the opportunities become greater. But for someone for whom the act of will remains an isolated flower in a field of habits, old age is full of effort that increases and becomes perhaps more difficult as time goes on.

One of the major emphases of psychosynthesis is to bring the power of conscious will into the position of being the organizer and regulator of unconscious processes—including our habits. The aim of garnering control over our beings is as old as humanity, and for most of history the disciplines of self-control were propagated by religious teachers. Those who are upset over some of the esoteric roots of psychosynthesis are trying to extract it from history. The techniques and practices of psychosynthesis were acquired as a result of Assagioli's study of spiritual traditions which had developed effective means for devotees to learn self-control. There has been abundant clinical and anecdotal evidence for such techniques for a long time, and lately some of these techniques, such as observing without judgment, are being validated by experimental means.<sup>10</sup> Assagioli adopted them because *they work*. It is interesting that behaviorism approached aspects of human behavior that had been documented for millennia in religious writings and practices (i.e. the habitual, stimulus-response conditioning that governs so much behavior), while maintaining its extreme anti-religious, anti-human, anti-cognitive biases, which attempted to reduce human life to a lowest common denominator of mindless stimulus and response mechanisms. Psychosynthesis is able to deal with habitual responses in a way that mobilizes all of the resources available to us—awareness, will, and all the functions.

What makes habits so powerful? Dorothy Firman once said that the greater number of psychological functions we employ in the process of change, the more successful the process of change is likely to be.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the greater number of functions a habit involves, the more resistant to change that habit will be. An example is what is commonly called “negative thinking.” This mental habit is a common element in a vast array of human difficulties. Its sources may be various, but it often engages thought, emotions and feeling, intuition, sensation, impulses and desires, and imagination. When one attempts to dislodge habitual “negative self-talk” one is often engaging with a person's entire history—a field that includes one's education, family, employment, personal relationships, hopes, plans, ways of approaching situations, and so on. It governs attitudes, crosses over the apparent boundaries between subpersonalities; it moves surreptitiously between the porous compartments of lower and middle unconscious; its tentacles have an effect on experience through all the psychological functions. It may well be a filter that controls our ability to be open (or not open) to the higher unconscious and to Self. It is huge—yet not huge like an “elephant in the room,” but rather like a lubricant that will subtly, sometimes invisibly, determine whether something runs, how it runs, or whether it stops. And there are many such habits that play largely hidden roles in our lives. It is only when a habit is unwanted and becomes massively intrusive, such as in the case of drug addiction, that such patterns take on the proportions of “an elephant.”

Assagioli put his work on the act of will into a separate volume because the field is gargantuan. Each section of *The Act of Will* could probably be expanded fourfold to consider details of what he visits in his chapters. The “antidote” to the field habit is the application of will on a daily, systematic basis. Our application of will is limited to our awareness of where there is a need, and this paper is emphasizing habits because they so often sneak below peoples' mental radar, and their power is vastly underestimated.

### **Spiritual Traditions' Approach to Habits**

Historically, this was not always so. Religious and spiritual traditions were keenly aware of the ways in which human behavior gets lost in a swamp of automatic, sleep-like habits. At the core of every religious and esoteric tradition (including Christianity, Islam, Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Gurdjieff work, theosophy, perennial philosophy, and more) is the clarion call, “Sleepers, Awake!” This is fundamentally an expression of the need to apply conscious will to the vast field of habitual unconscious behavior that fills and dominates most human lives.

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It matters little whether the “awakening” that is sought fits into a psychological belief system or a religious belief system, although the details of the approach will vary with the system. Nearly all esoteric and religious systems, at their core, place value on the exercise of conscious will. Many religious practices addressed the here-and-now problems of psychology long before “psychology” was known as a separate discipline. If Assagioli discovered that some of these practices are still effective psychology and incorporated them into his psychosynthesis, it would be blind of us not to use them, and foolish of us to condemn them because of their “religious” or “esoteric” origin. He reorganized the disparate elements of what he learned into a coherent approach to human life. Although he contrasted his approach to that of Freud to include a “height psychology” as opposed to being limited to a “depth psychology,” and others have added the awareness in psychosynthesis of the “spiritual psychology,” I think we are in a position to add the “bio-energetic elements” of which Roberto Assagioli was aware when he called his creation “bio-psycho-synthesis.” The field of habits occupies shifting ground within what we can call the bio-energetic level of human functioning. Attention to it can be a seamless part of our approach to the whole functioning of the human being, and the techniques we apply to it can be mixed with the other techniques available to us.

### **A Psychosynthesis Strategy for Habits**

Psychosynthesis is a full-orbed approach to the human person and behavior that includes work at many levels. I think its theory and practice can be expanded to explicitly include concepts and techniques that address the huge role of habits in our lives. I suggest that the depth-psychology aspect of psychosynthesis is partly a matter of:

- 1) bringing conscious awareness to habitual cycles and patterns; understanding their power, their roots and causes, and transforming destructive energies into life-affirming ones;
- 2) developing strategies to introduce conscious will to direct (or redirect) both the process and direction (means and ends) of these habits;
- 3) developing and executing the techniques used to replace negative, self-defeating habits with positive or life-affirming habits that are and remain available to consciousness;
- 4) in some cases, replacing habitual behaviors with consciously directed behaviors;
- 5) using many techniques that are already common in psychosynthesis, such as affirmations, evocative words, and guided imagery; but also including direct energy work with techniques such as meridian tapping, repetitive practice, and stimulus-response (conditioning) work;
- 6) understanding and utilizing the flows of energies that inhabit will, awareness, and all of the functions;
- 7) developing or constructing a synthesis of all the energies, *including* ones governed by habits, into a unified personal self.

Difficulties with habits may be left behind by the time we begin to address ourselves to spiritual psychosynthesis, the full alignment of the personal self with the Higher Self. But until we get past that “door,” habits will remain a significant challenge. And because they often lie beneath our notice, habits can be a primary stumbling block in what is known as “premature transcendence.” Many a great person, including personal growth and spiritual teachers, has been brought low by habits that sabotaged the healing or spiritual process. This can be equally true for the rest of us. Habits generally operate in cycles and in “fields” or “clusters,” so that it may be challenging to identify them—especially the emotional and intellectual habits, which are less visible yet more powerful than physical habits for many of us. Habits are not the same as subpersonalities, though they may be confused with them at times, and may lie at the heart of some personality structures. A habit may be unique to a single subpersonality, or it may cross over and be shared by many of our inner aspects. It is worth our while to include them in our inner work, our self-reflections, and in our work with clients. Work with them may sometimes feel uninspiring, because often the work is slow, plodding, and seemingly mechanical. Sometimes repeatedly applying energy and focus to the same pattern, day after day, is not intellectually stimulating! But it does produce results,

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and these results, often exciting, I believe, are foundational to successful psychosynthesis. However, I believe that the key to success is the central element in psychosynthesis: the application of *conscious* will to this seemingly mechanical response. For of course, the truth is that our habits are *not* mechanical. And this is why the “mechanical” approach of behaviorism is so limited, and ultimately futile. Our intention is not to manage our sleep, but to awake from it.

### **An Example of Making a Healthy Habit**

This whole last section is an example (with my comments inserted) from “Making Health Habitual: the Psychology of ‘Habit-formation’ and General Practice” by Benjamin Gardner, Phillppa Lally, and Jane Wardle, in the British Journal of General Practice, which is posted at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3505409/> Notice that the authors suggest *ten (10) weeks of daily practice* to get the habit in place! (And this is just a start.)

### **A Tool for Patients: Make a New Healthy Habit**

1. Decide on a goal that you would like to achieve for your health.
2. Choose a simple action that will get you towards your goal which you can do on a daily basis. (I add: choose something that is so “do-able” that you cannot fail to succeed in doing it; keep the step incremental to the goal.—JK)
3. Plan when and where you will do your chosen action. Be consistent: choose a time and place that you encounter every day of the week.
4. Every time you encounter that time and place, do the action. (I add: if it is helpful, record or mark the action in some way, or give yourself some kind of reward for doing it, even if it is only some words of self-congratulation. Maybe add an affirmation that doing this step takes you one step closer to the overall goal.—JK)
5. It will get easier with time, and within 10 weeks you should find you are doing it automatically without even having to think about it. (I add: some people find it more helpful to share your intent with others and allow someone who can be *consistently encouraging* to be your partner. But for others, telling others about what you are doing can be a form of self-sabotage, as your habit takes the opportunity to undermine your conscious choice by rebelling against the opinion of someone else. You will need to be aware of which approach is more helpful to you, sharing or silence.—JK)
6. Congratulations, you’ve made a healthy habit! (I add: you may lose your discipline and “fall off the wagon” on the way to success, and that is nothing to worry about. Success is not measured by how many times you fall down, but by how many times you get up.—JK)

Example: My goal (e.g. ‘to eat more fruit and vegetables’)

My plan (e.g. ‘after I have lunch at home I will have a piece of fruit’)

(When and where) \_\_\_\_\_ I will \_\_\_\_\_

Some people find it helpful to keep a record while they are forming a new habit. This daily tick-sheet can be used until your new habit becomes automatic. You can rate how automatic it feels at the end of each week, to watch it getting easier. ■

<sup>1</sup> Assagioli, R. *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings*; The Synthesis Center, Amherst, MA 2000; page 15. The contents include a) the elementary psychological activities which direct the life of the body; the intelligent co-ordination of bodily functions; b) the fundamental drives and primitive urges; c) many complexes, charged with intense emotion; d) dreams and imaginations of an inferior kind; e) lower, uncontrolled parapsychological processes; and f) various pathological manifestations such as phobias, obsessions, compulsive urges and paranoid delusions.

<sup>2</sup> From <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/habit> and <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/habit?s=t> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3505409/>

<sup>3</sup> From <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/field>

<sup>4</sup> Assagioli, *The Act of Will*; Chapter 5

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

(Continued on [page 52](#))

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(Continued from [page 51](#)) <sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See my article on Energy Psychology and Psychosynthesis in the September 2017 issue of *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See for example <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3505409/>.



Jan Kuniholm is editor of *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*. Much of his research has been in the form of personal experience.

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# The Stone of Villa Serena

Isabelle Küng

## THAT ROUGH STONE ON ASSAGIOLI'S DESK—WHAT WAS IT DOING THERE?



Assagioli in his office

As you can see in this picture of Roberto Assagioli, taken in 1967, his desk, in front of him, does not appear. But you can see the old fashioned phone, the books in the shelves, and his lined wooden chair. The chair was replaced by a more comfortable one a year or so later. I remember that on the desk there was a rectangular, elegant desk-clock in glass with golden pillars, also a blue flag of the United Nations, a globe of the sky and . . . an ordinary stone the size of a large hand.



Assagioli's Desk Today

In the Docufilm *Roberto Assagioli Lo Scienzato dello Spirito*,<sup>1</sup> there is also a model sailboat which he received in the later years, and a large 20-cm-high amethyst geode which I recall



Image from docufilm "Roberto Assagioli Lo Scienzato dello Spirito" (Fez Film Italy)

seeing in Assagioli's studio at *Villa Illario* in Capolona in July 1974 when I paid him my last visit . . . but no trace of that rough stone I had seen there.

Whoever removed that stone probably did not know what it meant to Assagioli and why it was there, on his desk, albeit not immediately visible to the visitor. Maybe Assagioli put it away himself considering that it was time to "let go" of this symbol of a significant enterprise of his? Who knows! But then, in the sixties, it was there. I used to visit him often, but only after a few years did I finally notice it. Of course it challenged the "ever on the move" curiosity of the 23-year-old young adult I was!

In such a harmonious setting, that rough stone was really "out of place." Gee, why was it there? So once, since I used to ask him all sorts of impertinent questions, I casually said to him, pointing at the rough stone: "*Dottore! Che cos'è questa pietra?*" (Doctor! What is it, this stone?) He heard me well, no trace of hearing difficulty! He

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was surprised! He marked a moment of pause while looking at the rough stone, which in the light of Assagioli's silence seemed to become denser and heavier . . . more significant indeed.



Image from docufilm "Roberto Assagioli  
Lo Scienziato dello Spirito" (Fez Film Italy)

And then came his answer, in a serene, detached and almost joking tone of voice: "Isabelle, this stone, you see," and he took the stone in his two hands, "is all that is left of *Villa Serena*."

"*Villa Serena*?" I asked, "What is *Villa Serena*?"

"A therapeutic community in Chianti," he replied, "and this rough stone is from the rubble that was left after World War II."

And he put the stone back on the desk, behind the other things, making a vague movement with his arm, as if chasing away some cloud or whatever; and we resumed our daily task. For eleven years I stayed at Via San Domenico one month every year, to report about my teaching his method to young adults in our boarding school in Switzerland,<sup>2</sup> to learn how to do better, and to help him in sorting out his notes. In my case the latter was really, I guess, just a pretext to give me the opportunity to learn one of his working methods. Later on, Piero Ferrucci did this sorting methodically, and these notes are now in the *Archivio Assagioli* on line for consultation.

However, the same day, Assagioli asked his secretary, dear and faithful Ida Palombi, to give me the flyer about Villa Serena from the prewar years. It described the experimental therapeutic community he had created on his own private property. It had been written at an earlier time and in such a different style from

what you would expect in an advertisement, that when I read it I realized that this had been for him the accomplishment of one of his dreams as a doctor. Assagioli was a neurologist; thus to create a place where people with nervous troubles would find relief and means to heal themselves was "logical." But his dream also included a social aspect: it was a place where sharing of responsibilities was a "therapeutic" means to enhance self-esteem and foster a feeling of free-consent cooperation. People were given the opportunity to be a part of a group endeavor while remaining free—both important factors in the healing process—and this would enhance mutual respect, the basis for right relations. It was a Villa where all involved would do their share, and pay what they could afford. It was an ideal community, with no opportunity for "power plays" to flourish. It was a group where the dignity of the human *being* was taken into true consideration, without regard to beliefs and mindsets, and where a person would not be pressed into any credo, whether political or any other. It was a place where the profound meaning of the word *hospital* (and its cognate *hospitality*) was to be lived; a place where RESPECT was the master word, and WILL to HEAL (to become whole) was the common denominator. This I got from the flyer.

This is what this rough stone on Assagioli's desk symbolized to him, while to the onlooker it was just a vulgar, ordinary, out-of-place rock. Today, I still wonder whether the person who removed it—if it was not Assagioli himself—had the slightest idea of what it had meant to him. And I rejoice because had I not been curious and a little impertinent (as regards asking unusual questions), I would never have heard this story from Assagioli himself, nor been able to share it with you.

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### Epilogue I (personal)

Little did I know or even suspect then (1967), that Assagioli's answer would turn out to be a life lesson (and warning) for me! For indeed, many years later I too would have but little left from an experiment into which I had invested my best energy for years. I realize, by the way, that this actually happens to a great many of us, worldwide, be it due to economics, war, natural catastrophe, personal destiny!

This relatively ordinary story, besides pointing at a hope-laden project and a dramatic episode in Assagioli's life, also showed me that everything in our life events has a value—often a deep significance—which is perhaps discovered only years later. That was a loss he had to endure. There were many others, but that is another story for biographers to tell. I must admit that having heard about it with my own ears, from Assagioli himself, and above all to hear him speak about it in such a serene manner, without bitterness, deeply impressed me: it was an example I felt like measuring up to when life confronted me with similar, but certainly less dramatic, losses.

### Epilogue II (not personal)

After I closed my private school in 1981, the Swiss Red Cross tested a prototype home for refugees in the school building we had just left. Here I tried to implement this *idea* of co-shared responsibilities to enhance health-friendly factors.

Ulrich Schühle and his Swiss Red Cross team very much liked the idea of having the refugees take care of the various responsibilities involved in keeping such a home functioning: mainly cooking for everybody and cleaning the house, organizing house rules, and so on. This was to be done with the staff's help. They would additionally teach the local language to the "guests," and guide them to find jobs. The SRC also liked the idea because they too believed that enabling the refugees to take appropriate responsibilities would acknowledge their human dignity and enhance their self-esteem. That would address self-assertive behavior caused by occasionally or habitually frustrated demands for respect and recognition. In theory, the strategy would constitute an antidote to inter-individual conflicts. Is there any need for violence when you enjoy self-esteem? But the theory still had to pass through a complex sieve: the mixture of mindsets, personal life traumas and the lot, of both refugees and the personalities of the team paid to take care of them. Additionally, there were the psychological pressures both refugees and, for very different reasons, the working team had to bear.

So I helped the team test that beautiful theory. Just for the first month. Then they had to adapt it completely to the various factors at stake. Reality may be harder than stone. Yet this is what it takes to turn knowledge into wisdom, to understand how to make the best of our opportunities and rejoice that everything teaches us what Assagioli called "a sportive attitude." To find out even more you can read his article "Life as a Game and Stage Performance" (*La vita come gioco e rappresentazione*<sup>3</sup>).

Ideas inspire us. Stones remain; they remind us of the adventure of implementing the ideas, and encourage us start again! As Zen philosophy tells us, the *beauty* of an action is important. ■

<sup>1</sup> (Fez Film Italy – presented these days at the 74<sup>th</sup> Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica – La Biennale di Venezia 2017) and also available in DVD

<sup>2</sup> see the December 2016 issue of *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*

<sup>3</sup> Available as a [download](#) from The Synthesis Center



Isabelle Clotilde Küng was trained from 1963 to 1974 by Roberto Assagioli. After 1981 Isabelle worked in international corporations and now writes about her experiences as a pioneer in teaching Psychosynthesis, both as a subject matter and simply as an "Attitude that matters."

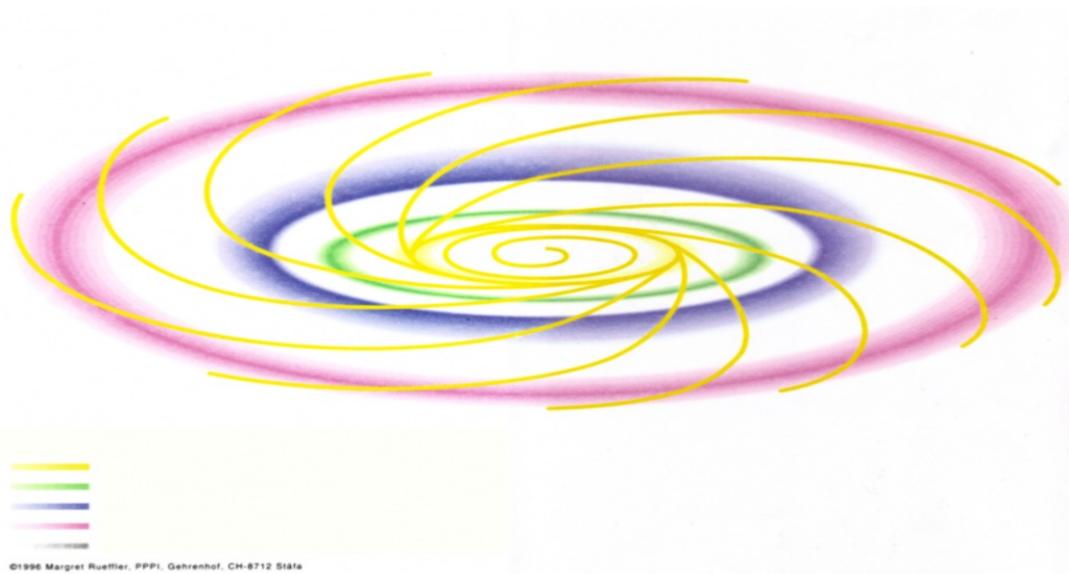
# You Too Are a Self

*Margret Rueffler*

I believe that the most profound change in human consciousness is the awakening to the Self, the essence of each human being. Without this essence and the spiritual might of the soul, human multidimensionality cannot exist. The Self is immanent and transcends the individual, and is therefore more than the individual body/mind/emotion. To become aware of this spiritual source, to embrace it as our birthright, is one of the very first steps on the path of returning home. Conscious alignment with this source, acknowledging this source in others and nature, leads to a deep honoring of oneself and others. How can the Self be understood and taught?

The model of human consciousness shown here with its spiritual source, the Self, has grown out of years of experience working with clients and training participants. It is the presentation of a basic model of the human psyche with its inherent differentiated levels of consciousness and their relationships to each other.

## Diagram: Model of Human Consciousness



- 1 Center: Self, Spiritual Source, Vortex
- 2 Yellow: Life Energy, Love/Will
- 3 Green: Personality, Psychodynamic Structures
- 4 Blue: Immediate Personal Unconscious
- 5 Red: Unconscious
- 6 White: Collective Unconscious

Human consciousness can be seen as an electromagnetic energy field with the Self as its spiritual center, a powerful vortex (1). The life energy or Love/Will (2), flowing from the source, the Self, magnetizes the field. The personality (3) consists of psychodynamic structures which express through thoughts, emotions and physical body. This expression can occur consciously or unconsciously (4, 5). The electromagnetic field of consciousness of the individual is interconnected with the collective psyche and through its thoughts and emotions energizes the collective psyche. The collective, in turn, influences the individual. Love/Will is the life energy (2) generated and

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expanding from the center, the vortex, carrying and holding the individual field and interweaving it with the collective.

In the center of the model is the Self, our spiritual source. I often call the Self the “Deeper, Higher, Innermost Self.” It is multidimensional, acts like an energetic vortex, creating life energy, Love/Will (2), expanding centrifugally through the various psychodynamic structures of the personality in daily behavior and action. This inner spiritual center expresses through action in our daily life.



The Self expresses through the personality in daily life and through the unconscious. The Self, our spiritual center, allows its life energy, Love/Will, to flow through the body, the emotions and the intellect. Without the Self there would be no physical body, no emotions, no intellect, and, of course, no spiritual dimension.

Simultaneously with this expressive, centrifugal power of the Self, there is a centripetal move which constellates and attracts the personality structure around this spiritual vortex and holds it in its place. Without the Self there would be no personality, consciousness and unconscious.

The Self is expressive, and simultaneously receptive. Both are active qualities, centripetal and centrifugal. As noted, the Self is multidimensional, immanent, and, simultaneously transcendent. It is immanent, transcendent, omnipresent, and is more than the personal consciousness and the unconscious. It is always present whether or not we are aware of it. Once we become aware of the Self a deep change and transformation of values and behavior occur.

The Self needs the personality and its structures to express creatively in this world and to manifest its life energy in form. Once aware of the Self, we can access its many dimensions and thereby come closer to Self-realization.

Becoming conscious and aware of our spiritual center, its gravitational pull guides the focus inward to explore the inner heights and depths. Yearning and longing projected outward, can now turn inward and directed toward the Self, finding its true home.



The personality is imbedded in the immediate unconscious (4) which contains all the events experienced from early childhood on and future events yet to be experienced.

The immediate unconscious again is held in the unconscious (5) which contains among other things our psychological inheritance from our forebears and our ancestors, structures from the past, and developmental possibilities and growth potentials for the future. Human consciousness, with its various dimensions is a focal point within the collective psyche (6). The collective unconscious houses our roots, cultural, religious, and national heritage, patterns of the past, and possibilities of growth and development in a collective future.

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### The functions of the Self:

A centrifugal and centripetal vortex

The observer is the eye of the Self

The focus of the observer amplifies and illuminates

The focus can change intensity, reach, and expand

The “Eye” of the Self takes in information

It can direct its focus inward and outward and thus influences the content of the psyche and collective

The Self is unlimited multidimensional potential birthed by infinite intelligence.■



*Dr. Margret Rueffler, a transpersonal psychologist, is the founder of Lagu Damai Foundation and Jiwa Damai organic gardens and retreat center in Bali. For more than thirty years she has developed and researched the Psychology of the “HeartSelf-Intelligence” and the “Psychology of Nations.” She trains people internationally and has published books which are translated into several languages.*

[www.jiwadamai.net](http://www.jiwadamai.net) email [info@jiwadamai.net](mailto:info@jiwadamai.net)

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## Always About Anxiety

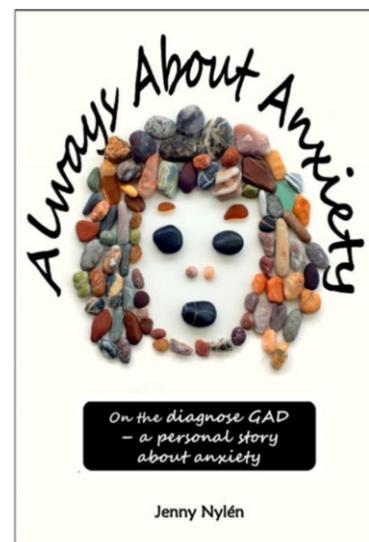
### By Jenny Nylén

A Review by Lars Gimstedt

Early this year I got an email about a book on GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder). It caught my eye, as it was about a diagnosis I had not heard of before, and as it was written by a layperson for laypeople. Jenny Nylén, the author, has suffered from GAD her entire life, and it ultimately led to burn-out and depression at the age of 55. This forced her to seek psychological (CBT—cognitive behavioral therapy) and psychiatric treatment, and thanks to this she recovered completely. From a life spending most of her energy on unrealistic and unnecessary worrying, she now enjoys a harmonious and happy life.

I found the book informative and easy to read. Jenny describes a number of typical situations where a GAD person tends to “flip out.” It is written with humor and a sound self-distance.

Although there is no connection to psychosynthesis per se, I have nevertheless submitted this review because I think this book can promote awareness of the existence of the GAD diagnosis, which is relatively unknown, despite having been defined in 1980. I believe this awareness can help those suffering from GAD without knowing it, and help



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them understand and forgive themselves for a behavior they probably have regarded as outright stupid. I think this book can help them realize that GAD is partly a biochemical dysfunction of the brain and that appropriate and effective treatment exists. A drug may be needed as a first relief, but psychotherapy is the main tool for long-term and stable, positive change.

In hindsight, thinking back on my 25 years of experience working as a psychosynthesis therapist, I think there may have been a substantial number of my clients who would have benefited from reading *Always About Anxiety*.

(Read about the book on [http://psykosyntesforum.se/Always\\_About\\_Anxiety.html](http://psykosyntesforum.se/Always_About_Anxiety.html) .)



Lars Gimstedt is co-translator and publisher of this book. He graduated from The Psychosynthesis Academy in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1992, and has worked as a psychosynthesis therapist, supervisor, coach, and mentor since then. His company, [www.PsykosyntesForum.se](http://www.PsykosyntesForum.se), also offers many different tools for self-growth and personal development in a comprehensive webshop, where this book may be purchased at <http://www.psykosyntesforum.se/bookshop.html>.

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## A JOURNEY OF LOVE

### *Shamai Currim*

I always wondered what losing love would feel like. Actually, I started off wondering what love felt like, for we need to feel before we can lose.

#### An Arranged Marriage

It's 1995, and my three children have almost all reached the age of majority, and my marriage of almost 30 years is falling apart. I'm walking on a downtown street and I hear a message, 'your soul mate is coming and this is the sound of his soul', and I hear a beautiful, high vibrating note that I take to mean that this is how I will know when I have met him. Later, I travel to Chicago with a group of other like-minded people and, as we are sitting and eating our supper, a local friend who is a homeopathic physician walks over with an Indian man and suggests he sit next to me (the only seat available) since we probably have much in common, both of us working in the health/healing professions. Ahmed sits down to my left and we do some light chattering, and then he suggests we take a walk outside. There is a full moon outside, I hear his soul sound, and we both feel love drawing us together. We connect with few words. He recognizes and voices the sadness he sees in my eyes, something no one else has ever noticed or spoken of, and he tells me he has a homeopathic remedy (he's a homeopathic physician and MD) that will help with that. He gives me his calling card and he tells me he will send me the homeopathic remedy in the mail. It never arrives.

I put his calling card in my wallet, and it sits there for five years. During those five years we both go through horrible divorces, and later I work in Bangladesh as a teacher trainer. I do believe that the Universe sent me to Bangladesh to learn how to live as a Muslim in the Indian tradition. In August of 2000 a friend and I take a summer journey through areas of Quebec I had never seen and, just before leaving I look at the calling card in my wallet and recognize that the card won't bring him into my life, and I throw it away, letting go completely and relying on karma and whatever is meant to be. Upon arrival at our destination, and even before we check into the B&B, we stop in at the studio of a palm/card reader, just for fun. As we open the door, the woman looks up from a reading she is currently doing and, looking directly at me she says, 'you are supposed to be with a dark skinned man and you have already met him. Will you just get on with your life!' and she goes back to her reading. Having let go of the card, and the memory, I don't connect to what she has just told me.

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In September 2000 I again find myself meeting with the same group of people with whom I had traveled to Chicago in 1995, only this time we are in New York City. Upon arrival, I get a package that tells me that Dr. Ahmed Currim will be the attending doctor, and I'm eager to see him again. It's been five years, and I wonder if he will remember me. As a friend and I chatter at the church door, Ahmed walks right by me and goes to speak to an Indian, a mutual friend. After he walks away, I get up to speak to her and she tells me that Ahmed is divorced and looking for an Indian wife. With my index finger pointed at her, I say, 'Don't introduce him to anyone else, he is mine!' and we both laugh. That evening, before the speaker enters the conference hall, my friend brings Ahmed over to introduce us and I offer him the empty chair that I kept to my left, for him. He declines, saying he prefers the chair he already has, which is closer to the stage. The next day we meet up again, after the talk, and as we chat outside on the street we get so caught up that we don't notice that all the other people have left. Ahmed offers to take me to an Indian lunch and then to drive me to the evening talk in New Jersey. I follow him like a lamb, with mind-doubts about being alone in a big city with a man I don't know, and heart-acknowledgment of this man who is to be my husband. At the end of the evening Ahmed and I both talk about our experience.



Ahmed and Shamai in 2005

Within six months we are married and when Ahmed and I look at the fact that he was born Muslim, and I was born Jewish, we both laughed. It's as if the Universe put us together to help heal the world!

## Facing Death

Ahmed and I had 16 loving years together, until his death in March, 2017. On his deathbed, when he was no longer able to do most anything, he reached over and put his arm around me, and touched his other hand to his heart, to let me know he loved me. He closed his eyes and went to sleep, peacefully.

I don't see death as an ending, but rather a beginning into a new phase of life, for both of us. Even though we aren't together in the physical, I still live with the memories and experiences that have brought me to my present life. There are times of laughter, and times of pain. It took me quite a while before I could again look at the photos of our past, and smile. Even though I had been a full-time caretaker for 12 years through his final illness, and had thought I had worked through the 'long goodbye' with loving compassion, one never knows how the inner knowing and children and subpersonalities will react. I find that waves of emotion roll through my body now, asking only to be observed. There is no need to understand or contemplate, but rather to move through this life transition with self-compassion.

## Roberto Assagioli

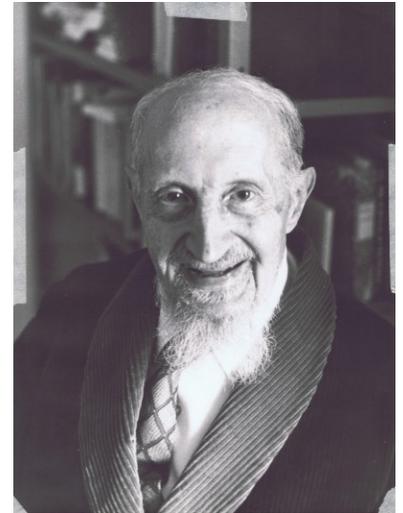
Roberto Assagioli had a happy forty year marriage and lived a long and prosperous life until he died at age 86 on August 23, 1974.

In an interview with Sam Keen, in response to his question, "Since the decline of religion in the West and the loss of the rites of passage—birth and death rituals—it has fallen to psychology to help people cope with transition crises and boundary situations. How do you deal with death? At 85 how does it appear to you?"

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Assagioli replies, “Death looks to me primarily like a vacation. There are many hypotheses about death and the idea of reincarnation seems the most sensible to me. I have no direct knowledge about reincarnation but my belief puts me in good company with hundreds of millions of Eastern people, with the Buddha and many others in the West. Death is a normal part of a biological cycle. It is my body that dies and not all of me.”<sup>1</sup>



On the AAP website <https://aap-psychoanalysis.org/Roberto-Assagioli> the following was taken from an article entitled *In Memoriam: Roberto Assagioli {1888-1974}* (second Synthesis Journal-Author unknown):

“there was—and equally precious for those who knew him personally—an inner wholeness about this man that was itself a continuous, living triumph over death. He had the achievement of joy, of a dynamic serenity and wisdom. And he was complete in that he himself did not fear death: so vital, he never worried his passing, despite his own physical frailty during the last twenty-five years. It was as if he sensed that nothing important would be taken away, as if, in the joy he achieved, there was some personal knowledge of immortality.”

Roberto Assagioli is truly a living mentor for all of us, even long after his passing. His words still ring true, maybe even more now than then. From his writings we can learn to live our lives in joy and from his experiences we can use the tools of psychosynthesis to reach our own understanding of life and death, and all that lies in between. We are never far from the Master, and the Master is never far from us, for we all can live in the harmony of Transpersonal Understanding.

Grieving sadness  
So heavy  
Weighs me down  
And yet, I have to allow  
The feelings, emotions, caring  
And love that make this possible  
For, if I hadn't loved  
I wouldn't be able to feel the loss



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Keen, Sam: *The Golden Mean of Roberto Assagioli*, Psychology Today, December 1974



Shamai Currim, PhD, lives in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with her children, grandchildren, dogs, and grandkitties. She is a graduate of Psychosynthesis Pathways of Montreal and has served for many years, in many varied positions, on the Steering Committee of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis. She is a retired psychotherapist, educator, and educational consultant and is currently living in joy, and love.

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