



AAP News

The Newsletter of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis

May

2008

Join us June 27 to 29 in Vermont!



The 2008 AAP Conference
**Healing and Transformation
in the 21st Century:
Creating Personal
and Global Change**



at Vermont College of Union Institute & Univer-

Ready for an exciting get-together with others from the worldwide psychosynthesis community? Then join us in Brattleboro Vermont in June for a keynote address by **Abby Seixas**, author of ***Deep River Within***, and workshops with Tom and Anne Yeomans, Didi Firman, Molly Young Brown, Walter Polt and Cynthia Lashley, Brad Roth, Judith Broadus, Deborah Onken, Phyllis Clay, Peter Stonefield, Lenore Lefer, Bob Anderson, Ilene val Essen, Raul Quinones Rosado, Cynthia Russell, Mary Kelso, Betty Bosdell, Nick Young and other faculty from Vermont College, Neal Klein and Jan Wall from Lesley University, Eva-Louise Hamer and Marcel Rheault from Canada, Svante Bjorklund from Sweden, and a special presentation by Sasha Badkhen and Mark Pevzner from the Harmony Institute in Russia—and many others—AND—before the Conference, the Trainer Development Program June 26 and 27.

Phone Registrar Shamai Currim at (203) 820-9416

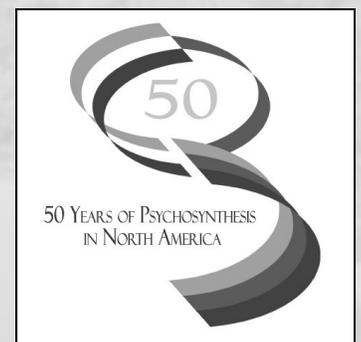
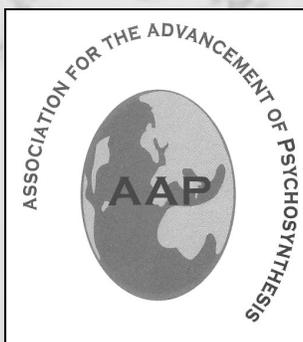
On Line Program Details and Registration:

www.aap-psychosynthesis.org/conference

Co-Sponsored by The Synthesis Center, Amherst, MA

Hosted by Union Institute & University

Register Early (before May 27) for the best rates!



AAP News

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Yes, Send Ideas, Art, Photos, and Letters

Send ideas helpful in your life and work, your poems, book reviews, art work, articles—especially about your use of psychosynthesis.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the editors or of AAP. We may edit submissions for grammar, syntax, and size.

Help Your Editors Edit

We're volunteers, so if possible please make your submissions "camera-ready," **Goings On** notes 75 words or less, and **articles** 500 words or less.

Submission Deadlines

Mar. 15, June 15, Sept. 15, Dec. 15

Send to

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The Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis

Founded in 1995, AAP is a nonprofit association with tax exemption in the United States. It is dedicated to advancing and advocating on behalf of synthesis and conducting psychosynthesis educational programs. Your donations are tax-deductible.

Goings On

Soul Collage in Santa Fe

SoulCollage®, presented at the last AAP Conference by author Seena Frost, LMFT, and her Collaborator, Mariabruna Sirabella, LMFT, generated enthusiasm in the attendees. Mariabruna is offering the first **Facilitator Training with clinical focus** May 11 to 15, in Santa Fe, NM. Psychosynthesis is one of the great currents that inspired the creation of this method, where the concepts of subpersonalities, synthesis, and ideal model—just to mention a few—find natural expression. SoulCollage® promotes self-awareness and self-development by activating the imagination and channeling it to serve psychological and spiritual growth and emotional balancing. Visit www.sirarte.com or call 831-768-1442 soulcollagesantafe@gmail.com.

The Synthesis Center Summer Intensive

The Synthesis Center, in Amherst, MA, will hold an intensive Level 1 summer program. It includes all the material covered in the nine-weekend program of Level I in three intensive four-day sessions. The fee for the Summer Intensive is \$2,800. The dates for the 2008 Summer Intensive are as follows:

July 18-21
August 15-18
September 12-15

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this training with Didi Firman, director of training, you can reach her at didi@synthesiscenter.org Free informational meetings will

be held at the Center

Friday, May 16, 6:30 to 8 p.m.
Friday, June 20, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

The Center is also happy to be continuing to offer training with Tom and Anne Yeomans. Tom offers advanced training seminars and Anne offers women's circle facilitator training.

For more information please visit our web site

www.synthesiscenter.org

Editor Note:

CHANGES COMING AT AAP NEWS

Mary Eileen Kiniry leaves the staff of *AAP News* with this issue. We want to thank her for her elegant contributions. Best wishes!

This issue is my last as editor of the *AAP News*. It has been great to work in this way with the psychosynthesis community, and I want to thank everyone who has helped to make my tenure as editor a fruitful one—especially the *AAP News* staff: Karen Pesavento, Mary Eileen Kiniry, Marilyn Wedberg, Joann Anderson, with special appreciation to Walter Polt, whose support, editing, and layout tweaks helped my editorship.

Joann Anderson will become editor for the next issue, and I wish her and the rest of the group all good things. I am sure you will continue to see a great newsletter arrive in your mailbox. You can make it better by joining the newsletter staff to edit articles, or by sending in your thoughts, experiences, and observations. The next issue will have the theme

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Co-chair Report

In just a few short weeks we hope to see many of you at the conference in Vermont. Do check the Web site (www.aap-psychoanalysis.org/conference) for detailed information about workshops and registration. If you are joining or renewing your membership, you will be included in the next update of the Web site membership list.

In addition to the outstanding program planned by the conference committee, we will be holding a membership meeting on Saturday afternoon. You will receive a report of this past year's AAP accomplishments. We think you will be pleased about the goals AAP has achieved.

The Steering Committee will also be asking for some direct input from you. At last year's conference, the following question was raised: "What does it mean to 'advance Psychosynthesis'?" Would you please think about and prepare to share with the group what "advancing Psychosynthesis" means to you. If you prefer, you can send written thoughts or reflections to cochairs@aap-psychoanalysis.org. We will summarize these responses both on the web site and in a future newsletter article. As we enter a new 50 years of psychosynthesis in North America we believe it is timely to have some wider discussion by the membership on this subject.

You will be reading about two changes in other parts of the newsletter. However, we take the opportunity here to thank Jan Kuniholm for his capable, dedicated years of service as editor of the AAP Newsletter. His interest in psychosynthesis theory, the art of publishing, and contact with so many psychosynthesis practitioners has led to a creative newsletter with each new issue. This has all come at a time when he has also been heavily involved in demands of work and home. Jan, we do wish you the best as you move into new adventures. You will be missed in this venue and we are grateful for your willingness to chair the 2008 conference.

Our new editor will be Joann Anderson, who brings many gifts and talents to this undertaking. Welcome, Joann. We are grateful for your willingness to serve AAP in this way.

There will be more to share at the conference. In the meantime, let us all take courage in these times. Psychosynthesis provides a path to expanding consciousness, the only way to create a world in which we want to live.

In Light and Love,

—Carla Peterson and Hedwig Weiler
Co-Chairs

History of Psychosynthesis in North America: Valmy Conference in 1958 was a Turning Point

By Sharon Kelsay Mandt

We remember significant events in our lives and may refer to them as milestones or turning points of our personal journey. Certainly May 23 to 25, 1958, was a milestone for the journey of psychosynthesis, since it was the first psychosynthesis conference in North America.

Roberto Assagioli, MD, spoke to a small group of twelve professionals invited to a large old house known as 'Valmy' in Greenville, Delaware, for the purpose of developing the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation (PRF) which had been incorporated only six months before in November 1957.

The participating delegates in this

groundbreaking endeavor were Roberto Assagioli, MD, (psychiatrist, founder), Florence, Italy; Charles B. Dawson, (psychologist and art therapist), Boston, MA; Mrs. Alexia DuPont deBie (director and founding member), Wilmington, DE; Robert Gerard, PhD (psychologist), Los Angeles, CA; Frank Hilton (PRF Administrator), NY; Hilda Hilton (Librarian, McCall's Magazine) NY; E. Russell Jones (PRF Treasurer), Wilmington, DE; Elizabeth Knight (PRF Secretary), Springlake, NJ; Ruth Lofgren, PhD, (biologist) NY; Richard Mades (PRF Fund Raiser), Boston, MA; Helen Cabot Miles, MA (art

educator), Newtonville, MA; Richard Price, MD (psychiatrist), Wilmington, DE; and Triant Triantafyllou, PhD (psychologist), Athens, Greece.

These diverse delegates' discussions were taped, and a subsequent transcription documented the thoughts, hopes, and awareness of each participant. Especially significant for us today are the comments of the founder, Roberto Assagioli.

On the opening morning, Dr. Assagioli gave an introduction to the basis of psychosynthesis and his hope for research: "All constructive projects within this inclusive framework, carried out in a

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Letters

More Thoughts on the Will in Disidentification and Affirmation

I appreciate John Firman and Ann Gila's crediting me (*AAP News* February 2008) with identifying the use of will in the disidentification exercise. However, I did not write that Assagioli's exercise leaves out will; rather I wrote that *their* position, which claimed that disidentification must not include any affirmations, left out the will. I appreciate their view that the distinction between affirmations and disidentification is vital. However I did not intend in my writing to suggest that "one *must* move to Assagioli's affirmations," as they write. So I repeat what I wrote earlier—that I think their distinction is misplaced.

John and Ann quote Roberto Assagioli from two different places in his book *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings* (Amherst, MA 2000, The Synthesis Center). The passage they like (page 101) has to do with the achievement of "self-identity," whereas the second (page 103) has to do with the procedure for "disidentification." John and Ann are very supportive of the introspective approach that R.A. presents for the first, but they don't like the affirmations that he adopts for the second. It seems to me that the two passages are describing slightly different (but important) points in the same process: When we are the captive of our identifications (as Assagioli says, for example, "mistakenly identify[ing] ourselves with our body and attributing to the "I" our physical sensations"), it seems to me that we *must* take some kind of *action, with a will* (such as making an affirmation) to move ourselves away from our captivity, our false and limited mis-identification, in which we feel as though our thoughts, or our sensations, or our terror, *are* our selves. The affirmations John and Ann refer to are essentially "negative affirmations," if you will, consistent with the need to remove the attachment to a false identification: "*not this . . . not that.*" Yes, there are sensations present (observation), and *no*, they are not the "I" (negative affirmation). This is essential in the process at the point when we are not yet at true self-identification. This is no credo, it is the way we remove ourselves from the clutches of whatever false projections we have allowed to dominate our awareness.

I see no conflict with this procedure, as *later* in the same process we are able to extend the mindful inner observation, as they have so eloquently put it.

"Affirmations" in the process of disidentification can, I am sure, become obstacles if they become positive statements of content, for as Ann and John indicate, then they will build just another identification, and perhaps a dualistic one at that.

So long as the statements used are akin to those Assagioli suggested, taking the form of *releasing* the grip of identifications by means of negative affirmations such as "I am *not* my body," etc., then I cannot see what John and Ann really have to object to in Assagioli's formulation. I think the good doctor knew what he was proposing. After we are free, then we are able to *be* without being identified in some inappropriate way, but getting there takes more work, and I think we cannot *be* free until we *get* free. In his book, I think Assagioli was describing both points in the process.

John and Ann write that "disidentification practice is about using will to engage the insight or experience (not the belief) that one is distinct but not separate from form." I see disidentification as *disengaging* from the forms which captivate and dominate our awareness and experience, so that the engagement—with our *being*—that they so eloquently describe can then occur.

I too, am grateful to have this dialogue here in the *AAP News*, and I hope to be part of a continuing discussion about this and other issues in psychosynthesis. Thanks, Ann and John!

Jan Kuniholm

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of "**Education.**" Please send articles and submissions to Joann at Newsletter@aap-psychosynthesis.org.

I will probably be around to help and contribute in some way—I hope to do more writing now, as well as to be more involved with the live (as opposed to the written) side of psychosynthesis at the June conference in Vermont and at the Synthesis Center in Amherst, MA.

Thanks to all, blessings, and best wishes!

—Jan Kuniholm

Reviews

Coming Closer to Death

Review by Jan Kuniholm

Will Parfitt has written a lovely little book called *The Something and Nothing of Death: A Book to Read Before You Die*

(Ps Avalon, Glastonbury, England, UK, 2008). It is little enough (145 pages) that it cannot dive into the depths of its topic, and it is lovely in that it does not try. Instead, it invites readers to explore their own depths and provides some guidance in doing so.

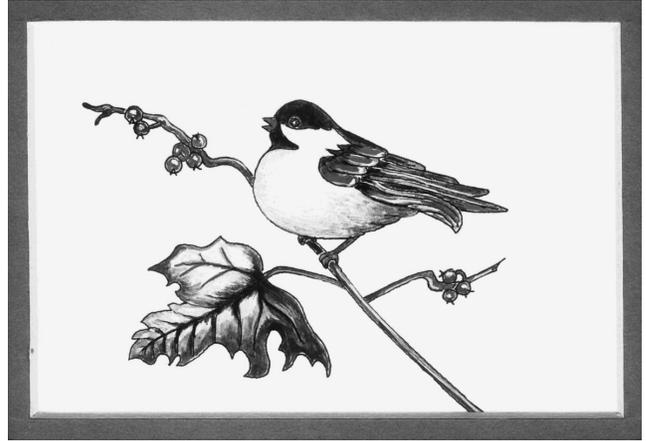
The title comes from peoples' beliefs about what happens to us after we die: either something, or nothing. While Parfitt briefly summarizes the various beliefs that people around the world have about death, dying, an afterlife, life, dreams, and the meaning—or meaninglessness—of it all, he does not focus on belief or unbelief, reason or unreason. He is able to speak to us no matter what we believe or do not believe, for he says, "Living your life now, surrendering to what is, confers meaning on life *and* death through transcending all concerns about their difference." He invites us to *face* death; as he says, "to face death confers inner strength for it brings us more authentically into the fullness of our lives; in other words, it brings us closer to freedom."

His book provides a way for us to get to know *our own* death, through thought and reflective exercises, and in the process he invites us to know an aspect of our lives that most of us ignore or avoid.

The Something or Nothing of Death can be read in a day or two. The exercises in it give something that will stay with us; for example, Will's adaptation of an exercise widely used in psychosynthesis begins with the answers to the question, "Who Am I?" and asks us to *let go* of these answers, one by one, until we have divested ourselves of each of the attributes of what we call "I."

This is a book to read while we live, and it uses the topic of death to bring life. It gives a lot, gently, almost surreptitiously. The reflective thought on realities is lightened with grace and humor, including the "last words" of Groucho Marx ("Die, my dear? Why that's the last thing I'll do!"), and ends with those of Frank Sinatra: "The best is yet to come."

You can find this book at www.psavalon.com.



Art by Bonney Kuniholm



The Steering Committee of the AAP warmly welcomes new members Gwin Stewart and Cynthia Bost, who were elected by the recent ballot, and we gratefully welcome back Sharon Mandt who was elected to a second term.

We also sadly accept Roberta Nelson's resignation from the Steering Committee due to personal circumstances. During her year on the Steering Committee she was instru-

Welcomes and Farewells

mental in starting the Research Committee, which will continue. We are grateful for her contribution and wish her well in all she is undertaking. A hearty thank you to Jan Kuniholm and Karen Pesavento, who will leave the AAP Steering Committee after completing three-year terms this June. Jan has served as editor of the AAP News for the last two years and is also this year's conference committee chairperson. Karen has also

served on the newsletter and has been Membership chairperson for the last two years. AAP is very grateful to both Jan and Karen for all their hard work, their dedication to their tasks, and their attention to details as well as to the big picture. We wish them well and look forward to their future contributions to psychosynthesis.

—Edwin Miller, Chair
AAP Nominating Committee

Reviews

Nature and the Human Soul

By Bill Plotkin

Review by Molly Brown

Bill Plotkin's new book, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World* (New World Library, 2008), offers an ideal model for "soul-centric" human development within the close embrace of wild nature, with children, adolescents, adults, and elders living in harmony with their inner gifts, one another, society, and the natural world. As I read the book, I was inspired by the richness and beauty that he believes is possible for human beings (as do I). Plotkin's concept of soul lies at the heart of his model:

By *soul*, I mean a thing's ultimate place in the world. I use the word *thing* to embrace the fact that *everything* has a particular place in the world and therefore has a soul—all creatures, objects, events, and relationships...

By *place*, I mean not a geographical location but the role, function, station, or status a thing has in relation to other things. A thing's place tells you how it fits in the world...

When we say "ultimate place"...we are calling attention to the very core or heart of a thing's identity, its decisive meaning or significance, its *raison d'être*...

The set of relationships a thing has with all other things is a *unique* set: each thing occupies a unique place, a particular node in the web of life. Therefore, the soul of each thing is unique.

The human soul is a person's ultimate place in the more-than-human world...

If your soul is your ultimate place in the world and you need to live from that place to be fully yourself, then the world cannot be fully itself until you become fully *yourself*.

It seems clear to me that Plotkin's concept of soul is not the same as the psychosynthesis concept of "I"—which is without qualities: pure awareness and will. Plotkin's "soul" suggests a person's specific gifts, purpose, and calling—which in psychosynthesis we place in the superconscious. We often speak, however, of a person's having a center or core, beyond the idea of the superconscious. We also place a great deal of importance on purpose—on a person's contacting and being guided by his or her life purpose. These are the very things that Plotkin addresses in his book.

In psychosynthesis, we often think of Self (or Higher Self) as encompassing both Spirit and soul, both universality and individuality, both transcendence and immanence. Plotkin's soul seems to refer to the individual immanent aspect: how each of us "fits" into the world and is uniquely called to contribute to the web of life. As students of a holistic psychosynthesis, we would do well to expand our understanding of the immanent dimension of Self—the soul. The activation of this dimension is sorely needed today to address the critical problems of our world.

Assagioli sometimes used the terms Self and soul interchangeably, as many of us do. Jean Hardy entitled her 1987 book on the evolutionary context of psychosynthesis, *A Psychology with a Soul*. Although he has studied and respects psychosynthesis, Plotkin holds a different perspective. He believes that soul, Self, and Spirit should refer to distinct dimensions of our inner life.

By *Self* I mean our personal wholeness, a totality that holds all the original capacities, potentials, and resources of our humanness... Soul is our center, or core. Spirit is the immanent and transcendent unity that contains all.

Here Plotkin's definition of Spirit is reminiscent of the psychosynthesis concepts of Transpersonal Self and Universal Self.

Plotkin traces the development of the human being through eight stages, rooted in the cycles and qualities of the natural world, from early childhood through late elderhood. He dedicates a full chapter to each stage, exploring its challenges, tasks, and rewards in depth.

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Reviews

Nature and the Human Soul By Bill Plotkin

Review by Mary Eileen Kiniry

The evolution of our species does not force species to mature psychospiritually, and individual maturation, in general, does not cause our species to evolve. But, in our time, if we do not mature as individuals (and consequently as societies), the entire arc of human evolution might soon come to an end. We are in danger of extinction—along with the extinction we have already wrought upon thousands of other species. The continuation of our human arc depends on which circle—egocentric or soulcentric—we embrace.

The above is the essence of Bill Plotkin's latest book. The pages of the book are filled with elaborate and wonderful ideas, wheels, circles and a diagram called the Eight Stages of Ego-Soulcentric Human Development. There are pages upon pages of wonderfully dense thinking and multiple "Resources to share with parents, teachers, teenagers and visionaries." Here is a man, like so many psychosynthesists, immersed in the desire to be of consequence, to make a difference, to have their ideas and work known by the world. Instead we find ourselves in an ever shrinking group, often becoming more and more serious and despairing. Grand thoughts and diagrams and nearly 500 pages only seems to push the majority of people further and further away.

Where is the embrace we so long for?

For me the real story was embedded in the plethora of words. What I responded to the most in my present word-weary phase is the story of The Alcove of Death. Bill relates how he has been on his own soulcraft journey for a very long time. Most recently he has been doing "despair and empowerment" workshops with Joanna Macy and circle work that had humans "stepping aside from their human identities and speaking on behalf of other life-forms."

As he came to this place in the red rock of southern Utah, it seems that "other life-forms" stepped aside and spoke on behalf of this particular human. A beautiful story of fear, years of avoidance of that which most wanted to embrace him and ego that caused him to believe he was the teacher and the others were the students—until we see the student ("Michael laughed and put his arm around me and said that there was no way of getting out of this.") is the true teacher.

So Bill went up the mountain into this cave, alone and met Death—and in the presence of Death began reciting all he had done—"my soul work, my commitment to it"...and Death became impatient and somewhat amused and introduced Bill to his wife, Joy. "Your soulwork will not progress further until you surrender to her." And the alcove went from being a foreboding place to a honeymoon cottage—"a marital abode for Death and Joy, a playground for their eternal romance." So Bill Plotkin has begun his apprenticeship to Joy. "We are irrevocably altered by walking ceremonially toward what we most fear." Let's Dance for Joy!

Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World by Bill Plotkin, 2008: New World Library, 14 Pamaron Way, Novato, CA. 94949 www.natureandthehumansoul.com

Review by Molly Brown *continued from Page 6*

Our society supports ego development, but not soul development—what Plotkin would call "soul work" or "soul craft." Without any sense of connection with the soul, a person may spend years wondering what he or she "should" be doing, working at inappropriate jobs, and seeking fulfillment through material possessions, addictions, and "entertainment." Plotkin has led numerous wilderness trips—often called vision quests—to help people connect with their souls within the supportive embrace of wild nature. I for one have had my most intense experiences of "soul" by fasting in the wilderness with the support of knowledgeable guides, including, on one trip, Bill himself.

I can't begin to summarize the vast amount of knowledge and insights contained in these 450+ pages. I can only urge you to read this book, find yourself and your life throughout its pages, and learn more about how to bring your soul gifts into the world. We need the full potential of every human being to survive and thrive through the challenges of the 21st century.

History, continued from page 3

spirit of synthesis, are welcome...” The remainder of the first and second day was devoted to expanding the understanding of psychosynthesis techniques and their application. The last day was devoted to planning the PRF development.

Quoting Assagioli from the closing morning of the Valmy Conference: “It [PRF] is an act of service primarily for humanitarian purposes, to contribute to diminishing the great amount of suffering due to psychological ignorance, to wrong methods of education; it is a work of prevention of future suffering, of nervous psychological diseases; a work of actual, active fostering of the best in humanity, from children to adults. . . . So you see that it [PRF] is an act of service, an act of love primarily, and all the

mental, intellectual, scientific work needed for this should be a function of this center of humanitarian purpose.”

Within the closing moments of the conference, Assagioli said: “Well, I think we can say that from Valmy this weekend, a new history in psychology may have been firmly started. . . . Yes, a new era, a new start in psychology!”

Mrs. De Bie: “Always a progressive new dawning. That was in the minds of the people who first named it [this home] ‘Valmy!’”

Valmy became the PRF headquarters and remained so until 1963, thanks to the generosity and involvement of Mrs. Alexia duPont deBie. The headquarters were moved to New York after her death in 1963. PRF continued the

outreach all over the world until 1976, two years following the death of Assagioli, when it officially closed.

Note: All through the transcription of the three-day Valmy Conference, the reader is exposed to the compassion, global awareness, genius, inspiration and inclusive nature of Assagioli. This 100-page document will soon be made accessible online or by hard copy.

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If you are not a member of AAP, this is a complimentary copy! Please consider joining and supporting AAP's work.



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Explore This Issue:

- **The 2008 AAP conference happens in Brattleboro, VT, in June**
- **Reviews of two new books**
- **Disidentification and affirmation discussed further**
- **Notes on the history of Psychosynthesis**
- **Goings on at Psychosynthesis centers, Web sites . . .**

. . . and much more . . .