

CHAPTER 52

Psychosynthesis

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Psychosynthesis refers to the theory and practice of a perspective on human development first articulated by Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli.

The approach is based on unifying one's personality expression with a deeper source of purpose in and direction to life, the transpersonal Self, which is seen as the integrating principle of the personality and as a source of wisdom, inspiration, unconditional love, and the will to meaning and service. The term "psychosynthesis" is also applied to the process of personality integration occurring within this framework, either through the individual's own efforts or with the assistance of a psychosynthesis practitioner.

HISTORY

The foundations of Psychosynthesis were laid in the second decade of the twentieth century by Roberto Assagioli, whose work was far ahead of its time. Assagioli was one of those rare persons who can truly be called a sage. His wisdom, his radiant love, his down-to-earth simplicity were appreciated by all who knew him. Psychosynthesis, for him, was not merely an abstract doctrine but a practical philosophy that he applied in his daily living. Assagioli died in 1974 at the age of 86.

When Psychosynthesis spread to North America in the 1960s, it attracted many people who had a background in the new ther-

apies and growth disciplines such as Gestalt, the abreaction therapies, Transactional Analysis, and so forth. Some aspects of these therapies enriched Psychosynthesis as it is currently practiced in North America. Many people within the human potential movement found in Psychosynthesis a framework comprehensive enough to include what they had found of value in other approaches and that provided an orientation for deciding which methods, among the vast spectrum of available ones, were best suited to particular people in particular situations.

Assagioli's thought had its roots in many Western and Eastern traditions. He knew Freud, was active in the early psychoanalytic circles, and was one of the first Italians to introduce psychoanalysis in his country. The Freudian conception of the unconscious was included within his framework, but he felt it was incomplete. He expanded his own conception of the unconscious to include what has since been called by Maslow "the farther reaches of human nature" (1972), and he distinguished between the primitive or lower unconscious—the repository of our basic biological drives and our unresolved complexes—and what he called the superconscious—a realm that he postulated as being above or beyond our normal level of conscious awareness.

Assagioli agreed with the view that an important goal of therapy is to "make the unconscious conscious," to extend the frontiers of our consciousness into areas that were formerly unconscious. He differed from the psychoanalytic position in that he believed we must have a "height" psychology as well as a "depth" psychology—that we must go "up" as well as "down" in the psyche. Therefore he developed techniques for evocation of the superconscious that helped people to contact directly latent positive and constructive energies within themselves. Contact with the superconscious often gave people the strength and inspiration to deal with disturbing aspects of themselves. At least for those persons who wished to undertake a

spiritual Psychosynthesis, he also considered it necessary to look "upward" toward the transpersonal Self as a source of direction and meaning in their lives.

Emphasizing the need to assume conscious responsibility for the contents of the unconscious, he did not agree with the assumption of most depth psychologists that making the unconscious conscious was sufficient to effect change. He believed that awareness was only part of the picture and that awareness had to be balanced with will for the personality to become effectively integrated. Unless his clients established a connection with the source of will within themselves, he found that their insights would tend to get lost and be wasted. There was a need to rouse the person's motivation to take responsibility and to help the person "ground" the insights achieved through active techniques applied in the course of day-to-day living.

Assagioli's insights into the nature and training of the will are perhaps his greatest contribution to modern psychology. His understanding of the will is both profound and radically different from most previous conceptions. Viewing the will as an expression of the I or the Self, depending on its level, he saw the intimate connection between the will and the source of identity. He realized that the will was an unpopular topic in psychology, attributing this in part to the Victorian misconception of the will as a harsh taskmaster that forces us to do things we do not really want to do. Therefore he endeavored to show that the true will is serene and unstrained, that it enables us to choose what is in harmony with our own deepest needs.

CURRENT STATUS

The various centers and institutes of Psychosynthesis that have emerged in the Western world have all taken their point of departure in Assagioli's teaching. No orthodoxy has been established, however, and each center has interpreted theory and practice in its own

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way as well as adding to it. It was Assagioli's wish that the institutes remain autonomous and, to use his metaphor, relate to each other as the stars in a constellation rather than as satellites revolving around a central sun. He saw Psychosynthesis as needing to change and evolve with the times, as well as to adapt to the needs of different cultural settings. Founded in this spirit, the movement has avoided more than most therapeutic systems the tendency toward ossification. Psychosynthesis is practiced by an increasing number of human service professionals in North America, Europe, and South America. Areas of application include psychotherapy, counseling, medicine, education, religion, management and organizational development, and creative problem solving in a variety of fields.

Practitioners have generally been trained in one or more of the training centers that have been established in these countries. Training programs in Psychosynthesis vary somewhat from one institute to another, according to the particular emphasis of the center and the needs of the student. In the United States there are several training centers in *California* and *Massachusetts*, with other centers in *Seattle*, *Washington*; *Lexington, Kentucky*; *Burlington, Connecticut*; and in *Windsor, New Hampshire*. The centers in *Boston, Massachusetts*, and *Walpole* have a particular emphasis on educational applications of Psychosynthesis, while the others focus more on psychotherapy and personal growth counseling. In addition, individual practitioners are working in most areas of the country and sometimes offer training as well as counseling and consulting services. In Canada the major center is in Montreal.

The basic reference sources on Psychosynthesis are the two books by Assagioli: *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (1965) and *The Act of Will* (1975). A new book, *The Realization of the Self: A Psychosynthesis Book*, written by James Vargio (1980) is in press at the time of this writing.

Although Assagioli was a psychiatrist, his model of the human being was not based exclusively on the data of the psychiatric couch. He believed it was necessary to study the functioning of healthy individuals, including the most self-realized members of the human race, to gain a complete understanding of the full range and potentials of human nature. He deplored the tendency of diagnostic psychiatry to equate people with their illness. Instead, Assagioli viewed the person as a whole and considered pathological manifestations to be simply one aspect of the total person. As his perspective was one of growth, he tended to view symptoms not so much as something undesirable to be "gotten rid of" but rather as an indication of an energy blockage that needed to be explored. His emphasis was on releasing the constructive forces, on development of the person's positive resources, which he found would often cause symptoms to fall away.

Assagioli summarized his view of the human psychological constitution in Figure 1, which has come to be called the "egg diagram."

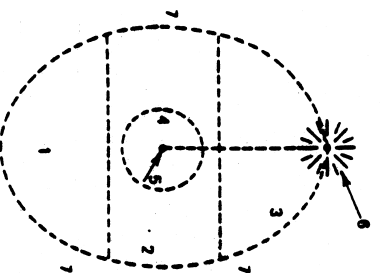


Figure 1 The egg diagram. 1. Lower unconscious; 2. middle unconscious; 3. higher unconscious or super-conscious; 4. field of consciousness; 5. "I" (center of consciousness or Personal Self); 6. Self (Transpersonal Self or Higher Self); 7. collective unconscious.

The area within the central circle is the field of consciousness, at the center of which is the "I," or personal self. The "I" is the point of pure awareness and will, which is the subject of our field of consciousness and the integrating center of our personality.

In the egg diagram the "I," or personal self is connected by a dotted line to a point above it—the higher or transpersonal Self. This transpersonal Self, like the personal self, is a center of consciousness and of will; however its domain is more inclusive. The transpersonal Self extends its awareness to include the whole realm of the personal unconscious as well as the more limited field of consciousness. It is the center around which integration takes place at the stage of the transpersonal or spiritual psychosynthesis.

The area of the egg diagram that falls within the oval represents the personal unconscious, or that part of the unconscious that relates specifically to the individual, to his or her life experience, and to the unfolding of his or her inner qualities. The personal unconscious is divided into three levels: the lower unconscious, the middle unconscious, and the superconscious. The middle unconscious contains those elements that are similar to our normal waking state of consciousness.

A variety of "maps" are used in Psychosynthesis to help us understand and describe what is going on in a person. In discussing these, it is important to bear in mind that a map is only useful if it happens to fit the situation. The skillful psychosynthesist will be careful not to impose a preconceived conceptual system on the person he or she is working with, and will attempt to sense the unique reality of a particular individual rather than distorting the person to fit a rigid mold.

The Subpersonality Map

We are all familiar with the many inner voices that clamor for our attention, often bearing messages that contradict one another. There may be a voice, for example, saying,

"I am really worn out; I think I will take a week off at Christmas and go to Florida." Another voice will reply, "But it costs too much, I can't afford to go." And yet another will be saying, "I really ought to buckle down during the holiday and finish fixing the kitchen so my wife will stop nagging me." This may be answered by a voice that says, "I don't care what she wants; I'm tired of her always telling me what to do anyway!" This kind of inner dialogue, which occupies so much of our energy, is going on within most of us a good deal of the time.

Psychosynthesis uses the term "subpersonalities" to refer to these "small I's" that speak for the part rather than for the whole. The subpersonalities are generally named. We might say that the person has a "pleaser" subpersonality that wants to ingratiate his wife, a "rebel" subpersonality that resents this, possibly a "survivor" subpersonality that causes him to work too hard and become exhausted, and perhaps a "martyr" subpersonality that will not allow him to indulge in the expense of a vacation. Of course, we would have to know the person well to identify the subpersonalities accurately.

We can describe subpersonalities as being structured constellations or agglomerates of attitudes, drives, habit patterns, and belief systems, organized in adaptation to forces in the internal and external environment (Vergin, 1975). They are similar to the "complexes" of psychoanalysis or the "games" of Transactional Analysis in that they contain crystallized energy that is "split off" from the whole of the personality.

When the child is unable to satisfy his basic needs and drives in a healthy, direct way, because of his own inadequacies or those of "significant others," he develops indirect and covert means to satisfy these needs. These means are the best available to protect his psyche from injury at the time, given his lack of experience, the immaturity of his organism, his internal dynamics, and the limitations of his environment.

An example to illustrate the process of subpersonality formation is the child who

becomes the "good boy." Such a child is usually praised for obedient behavior and threatened with loss of love for expressing his own will. To obtain love, he learns to conform to the wishes of his parents. He develops a desire to please, to do what others want him to do, even when this means ignoring his own needs, because it is the only way he knows of gaining acceptance. The same child may later develop a "rebel" or "bad boy" subpersonality, as subpersonalities often develop in pairs of opposites, with the tendencies of one balancing out the tendencies of the opposite pole. The child who is experiencing an inner compulsion to submit to authority will suffer from this restriction and may try to counterbalance this by a provocative and rebellious attitude, or by acting out a tough, daredevil role. One "good boy" I worked with—a man in his thirties—still played an abjectly servile role toward his mother but attempted to create a more "manly" image for himself by "tough" behaviors such as car racing and heavy drinking. Each subpersonality has some valuable qualities that are important to preserve in the process of personality transmutation.

The "Personally Vehicles" Map

The term "personally vehicles" refers to the body, the emotions, and the mind. These three components, which make up the personality, are like "vehicles" for the Self because they are its media of manifestation on the material plane. It is important that each vehicle be adequately developed and coordinated with the others so that the personality expression is balanced and harmonious. Some people are so identified with one of the personality components that they are cut off from other aspects. Such a split is most common between the mind and the emotions. A person who has been rewarded in life primarily for mental performance may be very mistrustful of his or her emotions, thinking that they are dangerous and would completely take over if given a chance. A

mentally identified person will need help in accepting and in educating the emotional side of the personality. People who are strongly identified with their emotions, on the other hand, may reject the mind and fear that mental activity would eliminate the vitality of their emotional life. Such people are likely to be flooded with uncontrolled emotionality and will need help in accepting the mental side of their personality.

The "I"-Self Map

Psychosynthesis posits that the process of synthesis requires an integrating center around which the synthesis can take place. Two such centers are postulated within the human psyche: the "I" and the Self. The "I" is considered to be a projection within the field of consciousness of the Self and functions as its deputy at the personality level. Both centers have the dual functions of will and consciousness. They are capable of awareness within their particular domain and of action upon it.

The psychosynthetic process can be considered as involving two stages that are successive but not rigidly separated: the personal Psychosynthesis and the transpersonal Psychosynthesis. In the personal Psychosynthesis, the "I" serves as the integrating center around which the process takes place. During this stage, the subpersonalities and personality vehicles are harmonized and integrated so that the person becomes able to function effectively in the realms of work and personal relationships and develops a relatively well-integrated personality.

During the transpersonal Psychosynthesis, the focus of personality integration gradually shifts from the "I" to the transpersonal Self. The "I" continues to collaborate in the process, but the transpersonal Self increasingly assumes a primary role, becoming the new center around which integration takes place. The "I" is like the mayor of a city who at first believes that he has full power and autonomy in his area of jurisdiction. He happily proceeds in the governing of the "citizens"

(the various elements of the personality that require integration) until one day he discovers that many of the laws of his city are determined by the policy of the federal government.

During the transpersonal Psychosynthesis, the "I" has the task of aligning the personality with the more inclusive purpose of the transpersonal Self, with which it has now entered into conscious relationship. The personality sometimes rebels and struggles to maintain its autonomy. It must learn that in cooperating with the greater whole, in harmonizing and blending its energies with those of the transpersonal Self, it will achieve greater fulfillment than in seeking to maintain the illusion of independence. For it is through our connection with the transpersonal Self that we experience real purpose and meaning in life, that we transcend the boundaries of our small ego and discover our deeper relatedness to the universe.

The psychosynthesis guide aims at helping the client experience the reality of the "I" as early as possible, since the "I" plays such a central role in the therapeutic process. It is particularly important to cultivate and reinforce this experience when dealing with issues of will, of inner direction, and of identity to help people gain a sense of their own worth and identity, of their human dignity, and of their capacity to take responsibility for the direction of their own lives. Without this awareness of the "I," we are like a ship adrift upon a stormy sea without a rudder to guide its course.

Once the client's identity with the "I" is firmly established, the personality is gradually harmonized and integrated through the will of this organizing center. In the course of the process, the consciousness of the "I" is expanded, the area in which its will is active is correspondingly increased, and the "I" moves "up" or closer to the transpersonal Self, eventually to reunite with its parent entity. The expansion of the "I's," field of awareness is analogous to what occurs when a mountain climber approaches the top

of a mountain. With each step upward, broader vistas appear and one can see the surrounding areas more clearly and comprehensively. To pursue the analogy, we could say that the closer a person's "I" is to the Self, the more full and enlightened will be that person's perspective on the total context of his or her life, with more understanding and acceptance of the past, and more strength and inspiration in approaching the future.

An interesting point is that as the individual's field of consciousness expands more into the "heights," he or she is thereby enabled to descend further into the "depths," when there is a need to do so. As the energies of the superconscious are increasingly contacted, the ability is gained to approach the confusion, the pain, and the distortions of the past with clearer vision and with greater compassion and understanding.

This point is illustrated in the stages one goes through in working out the relationships with the parent figures. As will be discussed later in the section dealing with emotional release, a client will often go through a period of expressing strong primal emotions, such as rage and pain. The field of consciousness at this stage of the work is relatively restricted, as the person is identified with his or her own strong feelings and is unable to see the parents' point of view. Later, when the person is more in touch with transpersonal energies, it becomes possible to disidentify with the "hurt child" attitude, to empathize with the situation of the parents, and to forgive them. At a still higher level of consciousness people can integrate more fully the experiences of their childhood, moving beyond simple forgiveness of and reconciliation with the parents to an understanding of deeper meaning and purpose in the fact that they were born to those particular parents. They become reconciled with their life as a whole. They are then able not merely to accept but actively to embrace their own destiny. They can see how even the most difficult and painful experiences have con-

tributed to the development of cherished qualities and have prepared individuals for the part they are called upon to play in life.

METHODOLOGY

The Personality Assessment

Assessment of the client's personality, needs, and existential situation is the first step in Psychosynthesis after the initial contact has been established. It is an ongoing process that has value not only in terms of guiding the initial direction of the work but also for evaluating the progress and needs at various stages of the Psychosynthesis.

Unlike diagnosis, which is often something "done to" the client by an authority, the psychosynthesis assessment respects the client's perceptions of his or her own needs and goals. It also has a therapeutic value in that the ongoing aspect of the assessment process helps to keep the client's will aligned with the work that needs to be done.

Unfolding of the Process

The real guide of the psychosynthesis process is the client's higher Self that, at any particular time, is directing the person's attention in certain directions. With this in mind, the external guide, whose role is to support the client's inner process, is attentive to what seems to "want to happen" in the session.

The actual sequence in which the issues emerge may come as a surprise. It is important that the guide refrain from imposing preconceived structures on the situation, remaining open to allow the client's process to *unfold from within*. For one client the most urgent need may be to get more in touch with powerful emotions; for another client the need will be to step back from emotional reactions so that he or she can perceive them more clearly and better understand what they are expressing. One client will need to explore intra-psychically a conflicted relation-

ship, while another will need to work this out at the interpersonal level. Sensitivity to timing and to the level at which particular issues can best be resolved at a particular time is crucial.

Identification and Disidentification

The concept of disidentification is a central one in Psychosynthesis, and it is probably one of the most important contributions made by this theory to psychological thought.

Disidentification can be understood best in relationship to its polar opposite: identification. We are identified with something when we are unable to separate ourselves from that thing, when our sense of identity is bound up in it. Some men are so identified with their cars that, should the car be scratched, they experience it as though they had been personally defaced, as though they were diminished by the fact that their car was scratched. A woman who is identified with the appearance of her body may feel that her worth as a human being is lessened if she develops wrinkles on her face or gets gray hairs. It is as though these people believed "I am my car" or "I am my body."

In the work of integrating our subpersonalities, disidentification plays an important role. We must be able to "stand back from" our subpersonalities in order to see them more clearly and to find the vantage point from which we can do something to transmute them. A man who was identified with a manipulative "salesman" subpersonality always aroused defensive reactions in people until he was able to disidentify from the need to sell himself. When he saw what he had been doing, he found it very comical and felt motivated to change his way of relating to others. When he realized that he could now choose not to play this role, he experienced a great sense of relief and inner freedom.

In addition to the various forms of unconscious and blind identification with some partial aspect of the personality, there is a process of voluntary or conscious identifi-

cation. At certain points in the psychosynthetic process, the guide may encourage a client to voluntarily identify him- or herself with some particular element of experience to achieve a specific purpose.

A basic principle is that we must "own" our experience: We must be aware of what is there and recognize it as part of ourselves, before we attempt to disidentify from it. Paradoxically, we are often able to be more in contact with our feelings when we are not identified with them. The ability to step back from our feelings into an observer position makes the feelings less threatening, allowing us to explore them more fully.

Activation of the Will

The will is one of the central themes in Psychosynthesis, and it plays a pivotal role in the psychosynthetic process.

The psychosynthetic guide must patiently seek out and support the will of the "I." The guide presents the client with many choices during the session to determine what issues he or she is ready and willing to explore, and to develop in the client the sense of being able to choose one's own direction.

The process of eliciting and reinforcing the client's experience of intentionality creates vitally important side effects or "incidental learning." The fact that someone is interested in the client's choices and respects them gives the person a sense of being valued as a human being and helps to build feelings of self-worth and dignity.

A client's motivation to work at the beginning of a session often comes from a subpersonality rather than from the "I." This may take many forms. A striver subpersonality may be trying to elicit the guide's support to eliminate a "lazy" subpersonality, or a "superman" subpersonality may be seeking to eliminate the person's "weakness." A dependent client may passively wait for the guide to do something to make things better, or a controlling client will try to push the session in a preset direction.

rather than being open to his or her own process or to the guide. The most obvious motive of many clients at the beginning of their work is to get rid of some pain or symptom rather than to explore the meaning of the pain. When the motivation of the client in coming to the session is not in line with what really needs to happen (i.e., the purpose of the Self for that session), the guide must find a way to help the person sort out the various strands of conflicting motivation and find the way back to center. When the fog lifts in the process of coming to center, the person can see more clearly what is happening and is in a better position to make wise choices.

Another important aspect in working with the will is the role of "grounding," or putting into practice the insights that have been achieved. Psychosynthesis utilizes a variety of methods to facilitate the grounding process. Within the session itself, guides often use role playing to help the client practice new attitudes or behaviors. If the work is done in a group setting, group members can provide an opportunity for trying out new ways. Writing is also a useful means of anchoring insights that come in a session. Most important of all is the application in the client's daily life, which the guide will attempt to keep informed of, giving extra grounding help to those persons who have trouble applying their insights in action.

Abreaction or Emotional Release

With many persons, since they bind so much of the person's energy, there is a need early in the therapeutic process to release strong emotions that have never been fully expressed. These emotions are usually related to painful relationships with the parent figures or to other traumatic situations in the person's life. At the stage when strong emotions of pain and anger are being expressed, the work may appear similar to Primal Therapy or other abreaction therapies. The philosophy of emotional release is different in Psychosynthesis, however, as the expression of hatred, pain, and anger is considered just

a first step and not the ultimate goal. It may be a necessary step if a person's feelings in these areas are blocked, but one must move beyond the negative feelings so that the energy bound in hatred and resentment can be released for creative purposes. Real healing only occurs when forgiveness and reconciliation take place.

Multiple Techniques

Many techniques are employed in Psychosynthesis, as no one technique fits all purposes or all persons. Some clients may work very well with certain techniques and not at all well with others. This depends both upon the psychological type and the level of development. A therapist who wishes to be fully responsive to the needs of a particular client must therefore be able to use a variety of approaches. It is important to bear in mind as well that new methods and techniques are constantly being developed in Psychosynthesis. Techniques are made to fit the person rather than the person being made to fit the techniques. Often the most effective approach is one that the guide develops on the spur of the moment to meet the needs of a particular situation.

A Holistic Approach

Psychosynthesis can be considered a holistic approach concerned with balanced development of the various aspects of human experience: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual (related to essence, purpose, values, will). In choosing techniques the therapist will bear in mind the development of these dimensions, stimulating those that are underdeveloped, using those that are well developed as entry points, and attempting to orchestrate them all in an integrated way.

The Processes of Integration and Synthesis

The process of Psychosynthesis, as the name implies, is one in which the conflicting and disharmonious elements of the personality

undergo a process of harmonization, integration, and synthesis. In the course of this they are brought into alignment with the person's higher Self, so that the personality becomes an instrument or channel through which the Self can manifest in the physical world.

Many polarities within the personality require integration. The exact nature of these varies from one individual to the next. Most can be related to the polarities the Chinese call *yin* and *yang*.

The entry points for therapeutic intervention can be at physical, emotional, or mental levels. In addition, the "I" or the Self can serve this purpose. This can be summarized in Figure 2.

Most current therapies tend to focus on the link between two of the three dimensions on the points of the triangle. Approaches like psychoanalysis, TA, and Rogerian Therapy emphasize the mental-emotional link; methods such as Gestalt, Bioenergetics, and Primal Therapy utilize primarily the link between the body and the emotions; and approaches like the martial arts, the Alexander technique, and the Feldenkrais method are based on the link between the mind and the body. Psychosynthesis recognizes all these links and uses whichever seem most appropriate to the situation. In most cases, there is an attempt to complete the circuit and to have the person work through the material at all levels, regardless of the entry point. Psychosynthesis differs from several other current therapies in that it values the

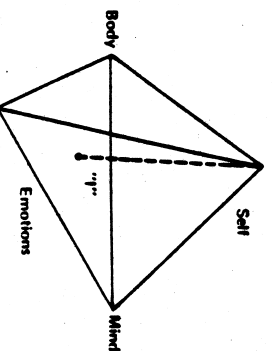


Figure 2. Entry points for therapeutic intervention.

role of mental understanding. Though a client may work through an issue primarily in a physical or emotional mode, it is important to understand the patterns and dynamics involved to be able to generalize from this experience and to ground it in daily living.

The Technique of Guided Imagery

The technique of guided imagery consists in having the client utilize visual and auditory imagination to get in contact with an inner world of fantasy. It is assumed that the images encountered in this way are symbolic expressions of dynamic patterns within the client's personality.

The client is instructed to relax and allow the imagery to unfold on its own, just as though watching a film on the mind-screen.

The guide may suggest that the client attempt to do certain things, such as establish communication between different elements in the imagery, identify with a particular person in order to experience his or her emotions more deeply, or explore particular aspects of the imagery in more detail. This method allows one to work directly on the symbolic contents of the psyche, exploring the qualities and interrelationships of the various elements, and attempting to bring a greater degree of harmony and integration among them. The guided imagery technique is able to reveal unconscious material in the same way as night dreams do, while it offers the advantage of permitting the person's consciousness and will to interact with this material. Thus it creates a bridge between the conscious and unconscious levels of the mind.

The role of the guide in a guided imagery session is to help the traveler maintain contact with the flow of his or her inner process, keep a productive focus, deepen the emotional connections, clarify issues when necessary, and "ground" the experience or relate it to the client's everyday life.

Evocation of Inner Wisdom

Various techniques may be used to help clients get in touch with their inner wisdom.

Usually these methods involve dialogue (imagined visually or acted out) with a figure that is designated as a source of wisdom. The figure may be imagined in human form, such as an elder or spiritual teacher, or it may be a sacred animal, an element in nature, or an abstract symbol. The guide will usually suggest that clients allow their own symbol to appear spontaneously. When outer dramatization is used, it has the advantage of "specializing" the different positions so that the clear place of the client's wisdom figure may be more easily kept separate from the subpersonalities with their distorting lenses. This technique is based on disidentification and often yields amazing results. The wisdom figure is invited to comment on various aspects of the client's life or to respond to particular questions or fears the person may have. It is reassuring and uplifting for clients to discover that they have within themselves sources of wisdom that they can readily tap. The major counterindication to this technique is when clients with a harsh super-ego take on the role of a judge rather than that of a compassionate sage.

Kinesesthetic Imagery

A helpful technique is focusing on the kinesthetic sense of what is happening in the psyche, along with the feelings that are associated with the body-sense. Gendlin (1978), in his book, *Forming*, speaks of contacting a "felt sense." The felt sense, which includes both a feeling and a bodily sensation, is first experienced and then translated into words or imagery. This technique is more effective than guided imagery with clients who tend to intellectualize, and it is a valuable foundation for most inner process work.

The Spirit Behind the Methods

The essence of Psychosynthesis lies beyond a particular set of techniques. New methods are evolving with the times, and they differ from one practitioner to the other. Far more important than technical knowledge is the practitioner's own level of consciousness and

his or her ability to be with a client from a place of clarity, wisdom, and unconditional love.

APPLICATIONS

Psychosynthesis appears to be an effective approach for relating to a wide variety of human conditions. Its flexibility and lack of attachment to particular techniques or terminology allow it to respond to the needs of widely different clients and situations.

Persons trained in Psychosynthesis have applied this perspective to working with most kinds of clients in the mental health field—from "normal neurotics" to persons who are severely disturbed and who demonstrate antisocial behavior. The approach must, of necessity, be adapted to the individuals concerned. The most widespread field of application for Psychosynthesis to date has been in counseling persons who are relatively healthy. Such persons utilize the approach to facilitate their personal and spiritual growth and to enhance their creativity.

Psychosynthesis offers a perspective of particular value to individuals or groups who are seeking to orient their lives around a deeper sense of purpose and meaning, and who experience a need to include a spiritual dimension in their lives. It is also particularly effective in working with persons in "existential crisis," whose distress signals the need for reorientation to new, more inclusive values and/or new forms of life expression. Persons in transition, either in their careers or personal lives, benefit from the contact Psychosynthesis provides with deeper sources of identity and life direction. There is a special need at such times of outer flux for the experience of inner stability and contact with one's own creative process. Persons faced with the need to make life choices may be helped by the psychosynthesis approach to open up a place of inner clarity from which to discern the path of greatest life meaning and growth.

Psychosynthesis has also been applied in

the field of education, particularly in teacher training and in the development of curricula often in such neglected areas as self-understanding, imagination, creativity, intuition, and volition. Educational applications of this kind offer a significant opportunity for preventive mental health work. Other fields of application include religion, management and organizational development, interpersonal relations, and the facilitation of creative process in a variety of fields.

CASE EXAMPLE

Jeanne, a young woman in her late twenties, was referred to me by another therapist who had become discouraged by her refusal to speak in therapy sessions over a period of several months. Heavy-set and overweight at the time, with an expressionless face, Jeanne was a secretary and was functioning well on her job while supporting herself in a bachelor of arts program in psychology, which she had almost finished. She had been married for a short time to an abusive man and was now living alone. She had been raised in an orphanage by nuns since the age of three, when her father had abandoned her mother. Jeanne's mother, later institutionalized as psychotic, was unable to take care of her and saw the girl only a few times while she was in the orphanage. Jeanne never saw or heard from her father again after he left home. She consulted a therapist because of depressive symptoms.

In our first session, Jeanne adopted the same stance as with her previous therapist. She sat in silence throughout, immobile as a statue, staring into space. At first I made some unsuccessful attempts at communication, both verbal and nonverbal, and finally realized that I needed to let go of the place within myself that wanted to "make something happen" in order that our communication could take place at another level. I needed to trust that, in allowing the deeper center within both of us to direct the process, what was needed would happen in its own

way. And so I too sat in silence and simply chose to open myself to experience Jeanne's presence and to allow her to experience mine. As I did so, I became aware of her higher Self as a very bright light and felt that it was trying to break through in her life at this time. I was also aware of painful memories from the past that needed to come forward into consciousness to be healed. As I sat with Jeanne, I experienced her inner beauty and felt a deep love for her. At the end of our session, I told her that I sensed the presence of a very beautiful person inside her who wanted to emerge and that I believed I would be able to assist in the process. I also told her that I was powerless to do it alone and needed her cooperation for this to happen. I informed her that I did not have the skills to help her unless we could talk and that I felt it would be a waste of our time as well as of her money to continue meeting unless she were willing to speak to me. As she still did not respond verbally, I suggested that she go home and think about it, and that she call me for another appointment if she was willing to meet me halfway. My intuitive sense was that an inner contact had been established and that Jeanne's will was beginning to mobilize for the work, which was shortly confirmed.

At our next appointment, Jeanne's behavior was very much different. She was still stiff and fearful, but willing to communicate. In the interval between sessions, she had done some imagery work by herself, which had gotten her in touch with some previously repressed memories of her early childhood. The fact that she did this on her own suggested that she felt a need to demonstrate her power and autonomy in this way. Though she had consented to speak to me, she maintained her sense of personal control by unlocking the memory bank alone. Jeanne reported the work she had done on her own with a sense of pride and agreed to let me guide her imagery process where she had left off. She immediately went back to the image of herself as a small child huddled in the corner of a room while her father, who had

been drinking, was beating up her mother so viciously that he almost killed her. Jeanne recalled that this was the event that had precipitated her being sent off to spend the rest of her childhood in the orphanage.

She got in touch with the feelings of fear and anger and pain that she had had at that time. She expressed anger to both parents for abandoning her and not caring about her feelings. Having done this, she got in touch with the feelings of love she had for her father and expressed resentment toward her mother for being jealous of this love and trying to keep her away from her father. She felt her father's warmth, but sensed that he was placing impossible demands upon her to fill a vacuum in his own life. She felt the burden of having to meet the strong emotional needs of her father and expressed resentment at having been used in this way. The father figure in her imagery said that he was sorry—that he didn't realize what he was doing to her and that the reason he left home was not that he didn't love her. She started to feel more warmly toward him, but still had some residual anger, the reason for which did not emerge until our next session.

Jeanne came to our next session feeling quite agitated, with a sense that she still had to uncover something more. She was aware of anger toward her father but felt that something was stuck in her throat when she tried to express it. I asked her to let an image come that would help her get in touch with what it was that was blocking her. She then saw an erect penis and recalled having been sexually abused by her father. This released the energy and she was able to complete the expression of anger toward him.

The following session was the turning point for her in terms of the transmutation of her anger. In this session, we took as a starting point a dream she had reported in which she was in a room that had a door covered over with wallpaper. I had her imagine that she was going through this door. She followed a tunnel leading down to a room in which several old men were seated. One of these men, who appeared to be very wise,

came over to her and told her that she had a firm foundation now and no longer needed to be angry. She was at first unwilling to accept this, as she still felt resentment at having been pushed around by so many people in her life. He explained to her that it was natural for her to have had these feelings when she was small and powerless, but that she was strong now and it was no longer appropriate. He told her that to continue holding on to her anger would only be a waste of energy. He then showed her some sort of plan or model that demonstrated to her that she really did have a strong foundation. As she opened herself to this realization, she felt that she could love without fear. She felt that she could trust other people now that she was able to trust herself. After that she was able to forgive her father and no longer saw him as a threat. Jeanne's process illustrates the usual progression in working with the parental "images" from expression of negative feelings through to reconciliation and forgiveness. The Self, or integrating center of the personality (symbolized by the wise old man figure in the imagery), seems to know when the stage of expressing anger is completed and can guide the person to the next stage.

After this stage in our work had been completed, Jeanne was a changed person. She was much more warm and open, and her depression lifted. She began to ask herself what she really wanted to do with her own life and developed a much stronger sense of her own worth. We were only able to have a few sessions together after this because unexpected commitments on my own part necessitated transferring Jeanne to another therapist. The work that we did during this period was focused on her own life direction and the exploration of possible alternative futures. She felt that she needed more time to find out what she really wanted to do and took some positive steps to explore various areas of interest. She also changed her job to work for an agency where the values were more in line with her own. After a period of work with another therapist, she decided that

she wanted to lose weight and within three months had lost 40 pounds. Shortly thereafter she met a very nice man with whom she fell in love, and at the time of this writing is happily married and waiting for her first child.

Jeanne's case is of particular interest because of the rapid and dramatic changes that occurred. This seems to be a result of several factors: her ripeness for this work, the good contact she was able to establish with her transpersonal Self, and the strength of will she had developed through coping with the challenges of her difficult life alone. Just as she used her powerful will in a distorted way at first to remain mute, she was able to move forward with surprising alacrity when she chose to align her will in a positive direction.

SUMMARY

The psychosynthesis approach is founded on the basic premise that human life has purpose and meaning and that we participate in an orderly universe structured to facilitate the evolution of consciousness. A corollary is that each person's life has purpose and meaning within this broader context and that it is possible for the individual to discover this.

Psychosynthesis postulates that the sense of meaningful relationship to a greater whole is mediated through a transpersonal or spiritual center of identity, called the Self. It asserts that in learning to cooperate consciously with this deeper source of our being, we experience the fulfillment of human life. The Self is seen as having attributes of consciousness and creative, loving will, which seek expression through service in the world. Thus the Self finds consummation as we develop our gifts and discover our particular mode of contributing to the needs of the planet—our "calling," or unfolding vocation.

In line with this perspective, much of the work in Psychosynthesis is directed toward experiencing and expressing the life source from which one's most profound sense of

identity is derived. Much of a client's therapeutic experience involves learning to discern when one is "coming from" the "source" experience and when one is coming from a false sense of identity with a distorted self-image, or "subpersonality." To facilitate the client's experience of this deeper center, it is important for the guide to stay inwardly connected to the client's essence and to avoid being taken in by the games or facades. A kind of "bifocal" vision is maintained in which the guide is simultaneously aware of the client's creative potentials and of the personality distortions that block their expression. In seeing through the client's outer shell of defenses to the place of inner strength and wisdom, the guide "holds up a mirror" that reflects to the client his or her hidden resources and helps to evoke them. This understanding of the subtler dimensions of the helping relationship is an important feature of Psychosynthesis.

In addition, the many techniques developed to facilitate the source experience represent a significant contribution to the field of therapy. In the early phases of work, the therapist's focus is on helping the client to differentiate the "I" (which is considered to be a "spark" of the Self operating at the personality level) from the various pushes and pulls within the personality and from the environment that the person tends to confuse with the "I." Techniques that are useful at this stage include: inner dialogue to gain understanding of and distance from the subpersonality patterns; healing of memories that have distorted the self-image; learning to attune to one's organismic sense of what is right; and direct evocation of the source experience through suggestions involving the creative imagination and/or the will. Later, when the foundations of personal autonomy have been laid, the person begins to come into conscious relationship with the Self and issues of a different order emerge. The process of alignment with the Self generally stimulates various crises of spiritual awakening, which the therapist must be equipped to handle. The person's illusions at this stage

tend to revolve around fears of power or of the lack of power. The client is commonly afraid of such things as visibility, being alone or different, being criticized, making a wrong choice, or losing control, and may project the image of a harsh, judgmental, or controlling parent onto the Self. Work at this level may require the withdrawal of such projections when they exist. The major focus, however, is on helping the client have access to a place of inner knowing where wisdom, healing, and life direction are available. Psychosynthesis is one of relatively few therapies that offer some understanding and practical tools for intervention at this stage of development.

In the long run, it is perhaps for its innovative and profound understanding of the human will that Psychosynthesis will be best remembered in the annals of history. First, it has helped to clarify the nature of the will and to free it from various misconceptions that have given the topic a bad name in modern psychology. It asserts that true will is an expression of the "I," or the Self, and as such is a unifying and enjoyable experience. The imposters of will such as harsh discipline, self-flagellation, "should's," perfectionistic striving, and the bulldozer approach are considered by Psychosynthesis to be subpersonalities—an expression of inner division rather than of creative will.

Second, Psychosynthesis proposes a particularly useful developmental model for understanding the stages of will maturation. It suggests that the first stage in will development is learning to differentiate oneself from "mass consciousness" as a separate individual with an internal locus of valuation and responsibility for one's own life. When this stage of "individual consciousness" has been reached, the person is ready to relate to the collective or more universal dimension without getting lost in it. He or she can then learn to cooperate with others in a common purpose and to cooperate with the transpersonal Self without losing the sense of individual identity. Thus the full flowering of spiritual maturity requires the integration (not

the surrender) of one's hard-won individuality within a more inclusive and transcendent pattern. The term "co-creation" is an appropriate one to describe a person's experience at this stage. At first there is a sense of creating one's destiny in partnership with a deeper life source that provides the pattern and direction. Later, as the center of identity shifts from the "I" toward the Self, the person is increasingly in touch with the creative will of the Self and experiences the personality as his or her vehicle of expression.

One feature in the psychosynthesis approach to the will that deserves special attention is its balanced appreciation of the role of both conscious and unconscious levels of motivation. Psychosynthesis acknowledges, on the one hand, the importance of taking conscious responsibility for one's life and of attempting to actualize one's highest values. It recognizes, on the other hand, that unconscious dynamics exist that a person must come to terms with. These are seen to include both unresolved material from the past and emerging patterns from the superconscious that point to the person's next step. While the value of "positive thinking" and of conscious efforts to reprogram "old tapes" is recognized, Psychosynthesis does not make a simplistic assumption that this approach alone is sufficient. Thus it avoids the imbalances common to many systems that tend at one extreme to emphasize a passive, receptive attitude toward the unconscious or, at the other extreme, to focus on conscious control while they neglect the role of the unconscious.

In summary, the uniqueness and special contribution of Psychosynthesis might be said to lie in its radically integrative view of the human being. Its unifying perspective offers a theoretical framework and a practical methodology for reconciling many tradi-

tional pairs of opposites: conscious/unconscious; individual/collective; inner/outer; awareness/action; spirit/matter. As such it provides a point of view that can assimilate new findings from diverse sources as we move toward a more inclusive understanding of human nature and destiny.

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