

Psychosynthesis Research Foundation
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In the next hour or so, I am going to try to acquaint you with some of the ideas of psychosynthesis, to answer some of the questions: What is psychosynthesis? What is meant by the concept of the self in psychosynthesis? What is the Will? What are some of the central techniques of psychosynthetic-style therapy?

First, I would like to say a word about the place of psychosynthesis within the framework of humanistic psychology. When we arrived here the night before last, our president wisely and appropriately arranged for us to get acquainted as rapidly and as effectively as possible by having us take part in a mass encounter group. He did this not as a gimmick, but rather as an expression of the central tenet of humanistic psychology and of psychosynthesis as well. That central point is that when dealing with human experience, we should start with human experience, not with ideas about it. So in keeping with that spirit, I am going to ask you to take part in a few brief exercises that are used rather frequently in psychosynthetically oriented therapy. In this way, you'll get the experience first, and hopefully, my subsequent talk will be more interesting and provocative as a result.

First let's start with the body, the somatic aspect of psychosynthesis. The full name for psychosynthesis is bio-psychosynthesis. This seemed a little too long, so Dr. Assagioli, the founder, chose to drop the prefix "bio". I am going to borrow a procedure of Betty Keane's for the purpose of starting this series of experiences that are typical of psychosynthetic therapy. You are all familiar to some extent with body awareness procedures. I am going to ask you all to sit back and relax, make yourselves as comfortable as you can in your chairs, and take a moment to get in touch with what you feel right now. Close your eyes if you want to; it makes it easier to tune in to what is happening inside you. Do you have a sense of where you are touching the chair? Has anyone a feeling of how long he or she is? From where he is touching the chair to the top of his head? Don't think about it, just feel it. Then someone might have a sense of how wide he feels. Is there any awareness of breathing? Where would you say you felt movement within you? Right at this moment. Why don't you follow the breathing for a while; don't lead it, just follow it, and get interested in it.

Now I wonder if we might raise one arm, very, very slowly, very easily, up into the air; and feel how much of your side is touched or reached by this action of raising an arm. Keep your arm up for a while. Do you sense the air on your hand? How warm are you now on the side where your arm is up; along that side of your body? Do you have any feeling of that? And now, very easily, not putting it in any particular place, let the arm come down and settle where it wants to....Let's try it once more with the same arm but sensing the hand coming up through space without trying to push it up, but rather, feeling how

sensitively the hand can begin to reach the air....Get the sense of how you are there, what space is available to you. And when you are ready, let it come down again and come to rest....Take a moment to sense how the two sides feel, and find out if you have any sense of what is happening there. And then, try the same thing with your other arm....What did you feel during the experiment; how do you feel now? Would anybody like to comment?

A: "More Balance."

A: "I am more aware of both of my arms."

Ques: Do you feel more wide? Do you feel more open? Ans: Yes.

Well, this is a very simple experiment. One can see that you really need do very little to begin to get quiet. I suspect that most of you now feel calmer, quieter, more relaxed, warmer perhaps. Some people find that their eyes water a bit and they feel comfortable in a general sense as the result of such a simple procedure.

Now this time, I'd like you to close your eyes again....and let both hands come up in space. Let them come up very easily, until your arms are raisedAnd now I'd like you to begin to rock back and forth very gently in the chair or wherever you are seated. Rock back and forth very gently. Now think of what you feel as you are sitting there. What are you sitting on? What part of you touches the chair when the arms are in the air? Again, sense what you feel of breathing; how much space is available to you for breathing now? When you feel that you have come to a little more balance (you will just have to feel that through; it will be different for each of you) try to find out if you can come to a sitting position that feels a little bit easier for you than the one you were in before; and then let your hands come slowly down to rest....

Now these body awareness procedures serve as an excellent preparation for a procedure that is central to psychosynthesis. I am going to read this exercise to you slowly, and I'd like you to imagine that you are saying the words to yourself as you sit as quietly and as comfortably as you can. But before I go into the exercise, I would like to give you a brief introduction to some of the ideas that are involved in it. Our tendency toward insecurity and alienation is partly a result of our tendency to live exclusively outside of ourselves. This exercise and the one that follows it will afford you a means of entering into yourself and might well be considered a kind of daily health measure. The first step is to dis-identify from all that we are not, in essence. It is possible to distinguish the self, or "I", from the changing contents of consciousness, and I am going to try to help you to do that now. This is the exercise that I am going to ask you to follow:

"I have a body, but my essence is not my body. My body may experience different conditions of health or sickness, pleasure or displeasure, rest or fatigue, but that has nothing to do with my true nature. My body is my precious instrument of experience and action in the outer world, but it is only an instrument. I treat it well, I seek to keep it in good health, I enjoy its pleasures, but it is not my real "I". I have a body but I am not identified with my body.

"I have emotions but my essence is not my emotions. These emotions are countless, contradictory, changing and yet I know that I always remain I, myself, in times of hope or despair, in joy or in pain, in states of irritation or calm. These emotions may try to submerge me at times, a wave of anger may be felt within me, but I am not this anger. I can observe and understand my emotions and then gradually learn to direct and integrate them harmoniously. I have emotions but I am not identified with my emotions.

"I have desires but my essence is not my desires. My desires are aroused by drives, physical and emotional, and by outer influences. They too may be changeable and contradictory with alternations of attraction and repulsion. I have desires but I am not identified with my desires.

"I have an intellect but my essence is not my intellect. My mental instrument is only partially disciplined and it often refuses to obey me, its contents are constantly changing as it embraces new thoughts, knowledge, and experience. It is a valuable tool but it is not my "self". I have an intellect but I am not identified with my intellect.

"I engage in various activities and play various roles in life. These activities may at various times express but they do not define my essential being. I may play at different times the role of husband or wife, parent or child, employer or employee, but I am something more than these roles. My true nature is not identified with any outward role or activity.

What then am I? What is this center which is able to stand back and observe my sensations, my emotions, my desires, my thoughts and my actions, and to realize that they do not define its essential nature. It is the essence of my self, a center of pure self-awareness and a center of will. It is the permanent factor in the ever-varying flow of myself in spite of the fact that my body, my sensations, my feelings, my desires, my thoughts and my actions are continuously changing, from moment to moment and even more so, from year to year. It is that which is awake and aware even when my conscious ego is asleep and dreaming. It is that which observes my dreams. It is that which gives me the sense of being, of continuity, of inner security. It is the source of self-identity on the personal level.

"I recognize and affirm my self as a center of pure self-consciousness. I realize that this center not only has a static self-awareness, but also a dynamic power. It is capable of observing and directing all the psychological processes and the physical body. It is a center of will which can enable me to become the master of my own destiny.

"I am a center of awareness and of responsible power."

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Instead of stopping for comments I'd like to proceed because there are a number of things that I'd like to get across to you and as we do so, I think that the ideas will become clearer.

We have all been impressed with the vigor with which we tend to repress our unpleasant experiences and our feelings of incompetence and unworthiness.

But it is equally true that we tend to neglect and to forget our happy experiences, the times when we were extraordinarily delighted, the occasions when we were made to feel competent, loved, cared for. At this point, I should like each of you to reach back in memory to the most wonderful single experience that you can recall at this time. Take a moment, think back to the most delightful, wonderful, pleasant experience that you can recall. I'd like you to visualize it in your imagination. Try to hear the sounds that are associated with it. Smell the odors and feel the textures that delighted you at that time, if there were any. Savor it just as fully as you can, and as you do so would you just raise your hand and let me know if you have such an experience now...Fine. Thank you. This is a delight that is yours to enjoy at will. So let's do it for a long delicious moment, right now.

Now, some of you may be suffering from some kind of physical discomfort while you are here; perhaps a headache or some stomach distress, or you may have been feeling anxious about something in your personal affairs before we started this program. For those of you who started the day with such feelings, I'd like to ask you to go back in imagination now to those problems, those pains, those anxieties. Visualize them for a moment, and bring them back. And as you do so, ask yourself, do you still feel any sense or as much of a sense of physical discomfort or mental anguish as you did before? If so, I ask you now to focus on these thoughts from the vantage point of your self, the self that we described a moment ago; and think this way: "I, myself, have a pain, but I am not that pain. I, myself, have a sense of anxiety, but I am not that anxiety; it is not my essence."

Now let's switch back to the memory of the happy experience that you had, the one that we were thinking about a moment ago, and the wonderful feelings that it invokes in you. And now ask yourself: What's happened to the pain, to the anxiety?...You may recognize this procedure as quite analogous to what behavior therapists call desensitization.

I'd like to proceed with a somewhat different exercise, it is called "The Exercise of the Rose." Again, visualization and imagination are central to these procedures. The power of imagery - whether it is visual, olfactory, or auditory - the power of this imagery to change your motive, to help you direct and control your thoughts, to enhance your sense of self and to develop the feeling of voluntary control, will be demonstrated again with this procedure.

Let's imagine a rosebud, closed. Let's visualize the stem with its green leaves, its thorns, surmounted by a bud. The bud appears green because its sepals are closed, but at the very top, a rose-colored point can be seen. Let's visualize this rosebud as vividly as we possibly can, holding the image in the center of our consciousness. Now, there gradually begins a slow development, the sepals of the rose begin to separate from the bud little by little. They turn their points outward, thereby exposing the rose-colored petals. They are still closed. The green sepals continue to open until we can see the whole of the firm fresh rosebud. Now the petals begin to follow suit, separating from each other slowly, expanding gradually into a rose in full bloom. Now look at the fully blossomed rose and enjoy its beauty. Brush the soft petals lightly across your lips, feeling their velvety softness. Take a deep breath so as to inhale and smell the perfume of the rose and enjoy its sweet and delicate aroma. Now expand your vision of the rose to include the whole rose bush, rooted in the ground, warmed

by the sun, watered by the rain, nourished by the soil and the light of the sun. Imagine the vital substances that are absorbed by the roots, that go up through the rose bush, that combine with the energy from the sun to create the living rosebud and that bring it to a beautiful full odorous blossom.

Finally, let us identify ourselves with the rose itself. Or more precisely, let us introject it into our selves. Symbolically, we are now the flower, the rose. The same life that animates the universe and that has created the miracle of this rose is producing in us a comparable but even greater miracle, the awakening and developing of our spiritual being and that which radiates from it....

Thank you for your attention. That is the end of the demonstration that I wanted to do with the whole group. Now that you have had the experiences of some of these exercises, perhaps it will be useful to go on to a description to some of the more formal aspects of psychosynthesis.

One of the marks of a mature science is that it is no longer identified with the insights and achievements of one or a few great figures. In psychotherapy, we are presently entering that phase. The efforts of countless theoreticians and clinicians have provided us with a collection of ideas and tools which, though by no means complete and perfect, are now growing toward a synthesis. Those who committed themselves to what appeared to be diametrically opposed points of view can now see the results of their efforts leading to bridges and convergences with each other. As we approach this psychological knowledge and techniques, we can truly look forward to the development of a broad synthesis of outlook which propounds a doctrine of man as an organism that integrates biological, psychological and spiritual capacities.

Psychosynthesis is a point of view that was proposed by Roberto Assagioli, an Italian psychiatrist, about 1910. The essentials of the psychosynthetic point of view are approximately these: Man incorporates a biological, a psychological, and a spiritual aspect. All three are integral parts of man. Each aspect has its own needs, drives, and modes of manifestation. One aspect cannot be explained in terms of another; one aspect cannot be reduced to one or a combination of the others. Each aspect is qualitatively different from the others, but each has powerful effects on the others.

The first necessity is for a man to recognize his self, his core of "I"-consciousness, for which the preceding exercise was developed. This self is distinct from the mechanisms and the modes of his being. His main purpose is to actualize his potentialities, that is, to develop his functions on each of the three levels, biological, psychological and spiritual. For this purpose, he must strengthen his sense of self which is the center of his sense of individuality. This self is the agent of both awareness and of control, of consciousness and of will. Increased awareness of the self results in a detachment from illusory aspects of existence. It results in increased awareness of reality, an increased effectiveness in one's daily living, in one's endeavors, and an enhanced sense of relatedness.

Ten years ago, Dr. Assagioli held a seminar in Delaware. At one point he was discussing some of the functions of the mind. In doing so he arrived at a good illustration of the essence of psychosynthesis. He said, when

we reason, we have to control the imagination. When we give free play to the imagination, we have to control reason and analysis. Always the self, through the will, reaches, utilizes, plays with, controls, activates or puts into cold storage one definite function according to its purpose, the self's purpose. That is psychosynthesis: the view that there is a willing self that can control all the dynamisms, the spontaneous dynamisms of the psychological functions and energies. "That's it in a nutshell" he said. But to do that, you first have to realize that you are a self, and that you have a will. Take careful note of this: you are a self and you have a will. Or, you are a self which has a will which is capable of willing. And from that vantage point, you proceed to the wise utilization and coordination of the various functions.

Dr. Assagioli distinguished between will and motives or incentives. The latter are relatively superficial. They seek affection, approval, security, and so forth. They dominate the behavior of children and simpler, less-evolved animals. But the will is something higher, more central; and it is to be distinguished from motives and drives. The will seems to be a real function of the self and only in proportion that there is a measure of awareness of the self can there be will. There is never will alone, per se, but there has to be a willing self. Desire is not an expression of the self, only will can and must be an expression of the self. The self is an experience, not a conception. After we have the experience, we can formulate it into a conception, more or less. Because life is primarily experience, we must experience the self before we attempt to conceptualize it.

Psychosynthesis considers the so-called higher drives, such as the search for meaning, for beauty, the urge to altruism and to spiritual experience, as needs in their own right, not merely as distortions or sublimations of lower drives. Psychosynthesis postulates a higher unconscious which balances and supplements the lower unconscious, the one that you and I are most familiar with. This higher unconscious is the source of our so-called higher drives, the source of creative inspiration, the source of our peak experiences. Psychosynthesis postulates that behind the myriad social roles through which we relate to each other, there is a core of permanent selfhood which is the source of strength, of security. Stripping away the defenses exposes the self, enlarges consciousness, and enhances one's sense of mastery. This procedure tends to evoke the self, that aspect of the psyche which manifests the integrative functions of the organism. It can do so when it is liberated from harmful illusions, wasteful attachments and defensive ploys. One benefit of this liberation of the self is the opening up of the psyche to creative inspiration.

Psychosynthesis uses special techniques to evoke the sense of self and to strengthen the higher drives. You have experienced some of these today. Another was to be demonstrated here by Martha Crampton, but unfortunately, she was unable to be here. It's her special "baby" and it is called the "Visual Who Am I?" technique. It was developed originally by Bugental and others. Martha took Bugental's procedure and added the idea of visualization. I believe she thereby greatly enhanced the value of the technique. What I am going to demonstrate is a variation of her method.

"Dorothy", I am going to ask you if you would step out for a moment. Dorothy is going to be our demonstration subject. She doesn't know the technique; I want to describe it to you in some small detail without her hearing so as not to affect the way she responds to it.

I would like to suggest that with such a large group we may have difficulty hearing Dorothy's responses. So it might be good if the people in the center would move out so that I can sit in the center of the floor with Dorothy. Then you can arrange yourselves around us.

The "Visual Who Am I?" technique involves having a relaxed subject imagine in any sense modality a series of answers to this question: "Who am I?" Usually the subject will tend to visualize the answers, but the answers may also come in terms of sounds, tastes, odors, feelings, or tactile sensations - or in combinations of the various sense modalities.

We ask the subject to think of his personality as composed of a series of concentric rings, or layers, somewhat like those of an onion. The earlier replies to the question "Who am I?" will tend normally to be rather superficial and meaningless. As we ask the subject to search more deeply for new answers to this question, the character of his answers changes. Conflicts and defenses are now represented by the answers which are often of a symbolic character. The subject may not even recognize the meaning of these symbolic images but he will nevertheless experience the affect that is appropriate to the conflicts that these symbols represent. The symbols may be interpreted in the course of the procedure or not. This depends on what seems appropriate in a given case. Deep and painful conflicts are often aroused rather quickly by this procedure. Consequently, the actual use of it may well spread over many sessions, with time out to stop and explore analytically the anxieties that arise at each point. But if it is at all possible, we try to proceed quickly through the layers of conflict because experience has shown that when the subject gets to the core, there are beneficent and calming images which arise after the painful ones. These images offer the subject a deep and pervasive sense of security, and help him to establish the base within himself from which he can analyze and modify his neurotic reactions. So when the subject arrives at these happier, warm and often luminous images, he has reached his self. From this perspective, he can see his conflicts with enhanced clarity and objectivity and he can begin to exercise intentional voluntary control over his responses to the conflicts.

I think that I have given you a fair indication of what I will be trying to do with Dorothy today. She and I haven't tried this before; I have only met her a couple of times. I will play it by ear and I may stop before we complete it; I don't know; it depends on how it goes. Will somebody call her in please? This will be essentially the end of the discussion and demonstration. After that, we'll have an opportunity for further questions....

(At this point F.H. is giving suggestions for relaxation to Dorothy while she and F.H. sit face to face. Ed.)

F.H.: I would like you to imagine that you and I are sitting in a movie house, side by side, looking at a big blank screen. Can you see that? Can you imagine that? Then I turn to you and I say, "Dorothy, look at that screen. Don't try to do anything. Just ask yourself this question, 'Who am I?' And wait for an answer to appear on the screen."

D.: I see an eye, an eyeball.

F.H.: Look at it carefully and tell me more about it.

D.: It's dark and shining. I see a reflection in the pupil of the eyelashes, and it's getting larger; it's dark, partly shaded by the eyelid.

F.H.: Do you see anything else? Just let the picture develop.... Is it a man's eye? A woman's eye? Is there an expression to it? Is there anything else that you can say about it?

D.: It seems to be a reflection of my own eye, but it's darker.

F.H.: Is there anything else about it that you can say at this point?

D.: It's merely one eye and not two eyes.

F.H.: Okay, let's put it aside and let's try again. Each time you try you go to a deeper and more significant answer to the question "Who am I?".... Ask yourself, "Beyond the eye, who am I?"

D.: A large purplish shape of light that keeps changing shape.

F.H.: And as you watch that purplish shape of light, what shape, if any, does it take? Can you describe it?

D.: It's shaped mostly like this (gestures) and it seems to move into me - and it's diffuse around the edges, etc.

F.H.: (To the audience:) Did you all hear? She said, "I feel much, much, much more relaxed than when I first started." All right, Dorothy, and as you look back now...?

D.: It's organic, it's like a doughnut, it seems to be changing shape... protoplasmic.... I don't think it's going to take on character if I tell it to; it just doesn't seem to do a thing.

F.H.: Fine, would you like to go on? D.: Yes.

F.H.: Would you be willing to put it aside, wipe it off for now, open your eyes, throw it away, then close your eyes again. Okay. And now we are back in the theatre looking at the screen, ask yourself again "Deeper yet, beyond the eye and the beautiful protoplasmic glob "Who am I?"

D.: Let me say....

F.H.: (repeating D's comment to the audience) She says that before she saw the first eye, the eyeball, the word "YOU" came as a reply to the question. That was the first response. And notice how that fits in with what I said before about the character of the earlier responses (i.e. their superficiality). (to D.) Is there anything else that you want to tell us now about that?

D.: Well, I felt that word was superimposed by Dorothy on me.

F.H.: Okay, but there is something clear that you can see, Dorothy: a change in the character of imagery. First the word "you", then the eyeball, then the purple glob. Now let's go back again to the blank screen and ask yourself "Who am I?", and wait. Perhaps it will not be visual, maybe it will be something else.

D.: This time I see a shaft of light in front of me and maybe it has something to do with you.

F.H.: Could you describe the light?

D: It's sort of a purple light, it was diffuse and all over the place, but this seems more ordered and it expands this way (gestures).

F.H.: How do you feel?

D: Different. I feel different, bigger.

F.H.: You feel bigger?

D: Yes, for the first time since I've come into the room, I feel bigger; entering the room beyond this space my body is actually occupying. I feel myself expanding into the room.

F.H.: Anything else?

D: I just feel bigger. I feel my breathing is deeper....

F.H.: (to the audience:) Did you hear what she said? She said that when I first asked her to take part in this demonstration she had felt she wanted to go away, but that now she feels comfortable enough to just be herself. (To Dorothy:) Okay, close your eyes, and let's go back again. Certainly you and I can see, and I think that everybody else can see that there was a progression from the most superficial kind of response to a more open, more expansive one. Let's try a few more, if you feel up to it. Are you all right? All right, then let's go back to the seats in the cinema and imagine you and I are sitting side by side and we are staring at that screen again. I ask you to go deeper yet in your quest for an answer to the question "Who am I?"

D: I get a Cinerama effect; the screen extends all the way around the room. It's becoming a planetarium.

F.H.: And as you look at the planetarium?

D: My heart seems to be beating so as to fill the whole....I am really beginning to lose words.

F.H.: Can you just describe what you see? Don't try to interpret it, just tell us what you see and what you feel, or smell or taste.

D.: I am feeling lighter and lighter....You know, I am stuck somewhere, because it seems to want to dissolve; it seems to want to have an....an opening within it and I....

F.H.: All right then; wipe it off, then let's go somewhere else. Can you do that, go back to the screen.

D.: The screen feels very square. (laughs)

F.H.: Go back to the rectangular screen and ask yourself again, "Beyond this

planetarium, this universe, deeper yet, "Who am I?"

D.: Now the screen seems to be moving toward where we are sitting and we seem to be moving towards it.

F.H.: What do you see?

D.: I see the square of the screen moving toward us - passing around us. (F.H.: And how does it feel?) It looks as if I am going to go through the screen. (She sobs and trembles - stifling a cry.) The screen is behind me! (gasping) It just hurled me back! (Silence for a long moment.)

F.H.: What do you see?

D: Like a red warmth, and darkness on the sides, going back....

F.H.: How do you feel now?

D: I feel very high! (laughs, then sobs, cries, and sighs) It's great!

F.H.: Who are you?

D: (sobbing)....

F.H.: (jokingly to the audience, to relieve tension) "I knew who I was when I came in, but I forgot!"? I think that what she is telling us is that this procedure has brought her back to a fuller recognition of something that the outside world tends to block out. (To D.:) Tell me if I'm wrong, will you, but what I think you are saying is this: You have had plenty of awareness of a deep sense of self long before this procedure, but that the world that we live in is so full of extraneous sensations and nonsensical stimulation that it blocks out that sense of self. Now, by going through this procedure, you were able to put aside this world, and you went back into that excruciatingly intense sense of self-consciousness. Is that right?

D: That's right.

F.H.: All right. Look around you and come back to "reality." You have to do that you know...and face the rest of us. (Audience laughter) Thank you very much.

D.: Thank you. (She is visibly shaken and a bit unsteady.)

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(A period of questions, answers and discussion followed. This was not recorded.)

Although psychosynthesis does not explicitly insist on this point, it is our experience that a successful growth experience leads to an increasingly open and accepting attitude toward life and a more generous and caring attitude towards others. The defenses of the ego wither away and the inner self becomes manifest as a core of strength. As one's consciousness expands and one's will becomes more effective, one finds oneself even more completely in this world as it is. One continues to strive to grow and to help others, but one is no longer attached to the necessity of achieving one's own idea of success. The ego and its attachments have been put in the shade, and the self grows ever more luminous and effective.

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