

Lecture for the World Day of Psychosynthesis

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REFLECTIONS ON THE MESSAGE AND ON THE NATURE OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS IN THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC

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The goal of The World day of Psychosynthesis is to encourage a greater connection and a true mutual recognition among all centers, groups and individuals in the world that will resonate with the message and nature of Psycho-synthesis. During this meeting, we will reflect and meditate together on the guidelines that can inspire us to foster this process of synthesis. We will also reflect on the vision and spirit of psychosynthesis as proposed by Roberto Assagioli: a vision that today reveals its incredible and surprising topicality and from which we can draw precious indications to orient ourselves in these challenging pandemic times.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

I will begin by talking a little about how **World Psychosynthesis Day** was born. Probably many of you already know that the date of September 20th was chosen during the *International Psychosynthesis Conference*, which took place in Taormina 4 years ago (2016), "to symbolize the unity of purpose of all the centers, groups and individuals of the world that resonate with the message of Psychosynthesis."

As we can read in the document drawn up for that occasion by Luce Ramorino and Mike Malagrecia, the proposal was born with the intention of **promoting**:

- **a greater awareness of belonging** to the vast energy movement initiated by Roberto Assagioli;
- **a greater connection, a mutual recognition and a synthesis** between the different units and groups of Psychosynthesis scattered around the world, beyond the specific belongings and the focus on one of its different fields of application (psychotherapy, education, self-training, interpersonal and social relationships);
- finally, this Day aims to promote **reflection, meditation** on how each of us can contribute to this work of connection, recognition and synthesis.

Today I will therefore share with you, during this lecture, my reflections on some of the guidelines (I have identified seven) that can perhaps orient us in this work.

THE HEART OF THE PSYCHOSYNTHETIC MESSAGE

Let's start with the words of Roberto Assagioli himself, who wrote:

"It is urgent to establish Spiritual "Airways" between nations, institutions, movements and across the continents. Let us give to this work comparatively at least as much energy, determination, desire, time, efforts as those which are given to establish airplane communications throughout the world." R. Assagioli, 20th September 1937

I personally find this quote very significant. It was chosen as the seed thought for today and introduces us immediately to the heart of the psychosynthetic message: a real vocation **to establish relationships, to connect different parts/entities** in a harmonious way in order to create new realities.

To this, I also want to add the importance of committing ourselves **to recognize the profound interconnections that already characterize our world**, both the external and the internal one. One is the inevitable mirror of the other. The interrelation is already a reality that we often fail to grasp. We must therefore also train and modify our view.

Finally, it is important that we learn **to act in harmony with this reality**. We must learn to give attention and energy to those forces capable of generating connections, exchanges and dialogue, both internally and externally.

At the same time, we must **develop awareness of the drives** to protect the personal good, **to isolation and closure** that are inevitably part of our "human endowment". And commit ourselves **to contain and transform them**.

This seems to me, the fundamental proposition of Psychosynthesis. It was a very urgent proposition in 1937, when Assagioli wrote this passage. As we well know, it was the period of expansion of totalitarianism in Europe. But it is no less urgent today, in the current world situation.

WE ARE LIVING IN AN ERA OF TRANSITION

In February, I was invited to London to hold a Keynote plenary speech at the *Second International Psychosynthesis Coaching Symposium*. On that occasion, I began by saying that **we are living in an era of transition**, characterized by the profound changes that the unstoppable process of globalization brings with it. We may be witnessing the labor of giving birth to a consciousness with a planetary extension.

I pointed out that we are facing not only several "hot" and absolutely not new issues – like socio-economic and gender inequalities, wars, terrorism, mass migration, exploitation of

childhood, intense climate changes, epidemics etc. - but above all we are facing the new global scope of these issues.

It is this global impact, I believe, that is the substantial difference from the past. **It is no longer just about the good and health of individuals, or “particular” groups of individuals, but about the good and health of the entire human group, and of all the living beings who inhabit this planet.**

This state of affairs has a profound effect. It reshapes our old needs and constellates new ones. Psychology (and with it the other scientific and humanistic disciplines) has the ethical task of confronting and questioning itself deeply on this state of affairs, in order to offer visions and articulated answers. And it is here that the message of Psychosynthesis reveals today, even more than in the past, its extreme topicality, its being a precious gift. I will come back to that point later.

THE PANDEMIC: GLOBALIZATION, RESPONSIBILITY AND MULTIPLICITY OF RESPONSES

Today we unfortunately know very well that in those days of February something was happening which we are still trying to understand the real extent of. I am obviously talking about **the Covid-19 pandemic**. Like everyone, I wondered about this epochal event and, among the many things highlighted by the health emergency, three in particular struck me more than others:

1. The first. The now undoubted reality of the processes I mentioned earlier: **globalization** and the strong and progressive increase in the **interconnection** that characterizes it. Already 2000 years ago, Lucio Anneo Seneca said: *“The earth is one country. We are waves from the same sea, leaves from the same tree, flowers from the same garden.”* But this pandemic has somehow forced us to have a direct experience of this reality. Unfortunately, it has done so in a traumatic way, with all its unwelcome implications. The pandemic (from the Greek, *pan*, which means "all" and *démios*, which means "people") concerns, in fact, "all the people", all the inhabitants of planet Earth.

2. The second aspect that struck me was the **power** and **responsibility** that each of us, like it or not, was called upon to assume in this scenario. Precisely by virtue of interconnection, we are experiencing the ability that each individual has to concretely influence the global situation through their choices and actions. What we do (for example, respecting certain hygiene rules or not) has specific effects on the spread of the contagion.

3. Finally, the **multiplicity of responses** that have been observed, especially during the lockdown period, have made me reflect. Some people have understandably felt lost, alone and deeply uncomfortable, while others have relished the restrictive measures as a welcome break. Some have enthusiastically stressed the benefits of the emergency, even affirming the dawn of a new world. Others have shown themselves disillusioned and disenchanted, still others have announced a dangerous collapse of our democratic society, and so on ...

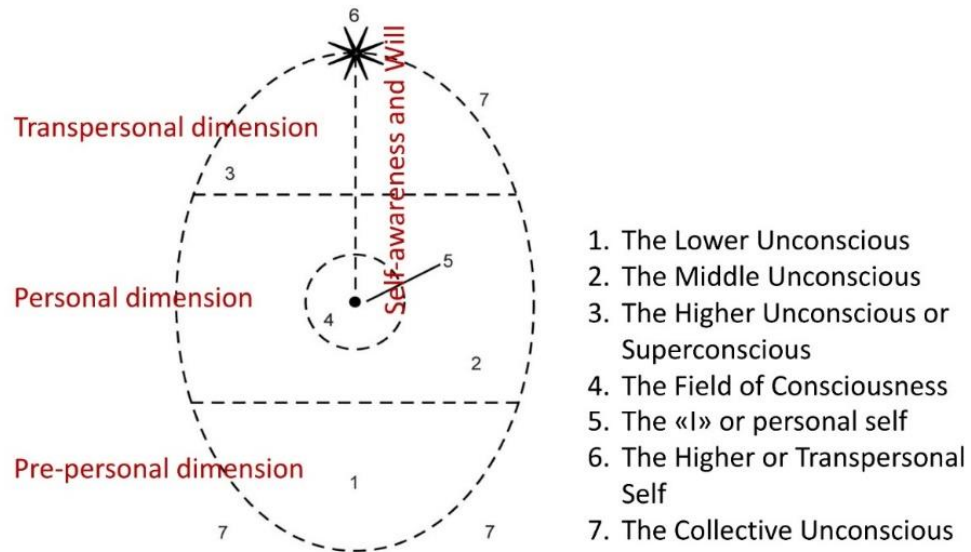
In this regard, it came naturally to me to associate this multiplicity of reactions with those witnessed by **Roberto Assagioli** himself in his evocative work, *“Freedom in Jail.”* You know that

Assagioli was Jewish, and that during the Nazi-Fascism period, he suffered persecutions of various kinds. In 1940, he was even arrested on charges of being a pacifist and an internationalist and then imprisoned. Of that experience, he wrote:

"Freedom: I realized that I was free to take one or another attitude towards this situation, to give one or another value to it, to utilize it or not in one or another way [dimension of self-awareness and will," A/N.].

I could rebel internally and curse; or I could submit passively vegetating; or I could indulge in an unhealthy pleasure of self-pity and assume the martyr's role [pre-personal level, A/N.]; or I could take the situation in a sporting way and with a sense of humor, considering it as novel and an interesting experience (what Germans call an 'Erlebnis'). I could make of it a rest cure; or a period of intense thinking either about personal matters, reviewing my past life and pondering on it [personal level, A/N.], or about scientific and philosophical problems; or I could take advantage of the condition in order to submit myself to a definite training of psychological faculties, to make psychological experiments upon myself; or finally as a spiritual retreat [transpersonal level, A/N.].

I had the clear sure perception that this was entirely my own affair and that I was free to choose any or several of these attitudes and activities; that this choice would have definite and unavoidable effects, which I could foresee and for which I was fully responsible. There was no doubt in my mind about this essential freedom and power and the inherent privileges and responsibility: a responsibility toward myself, toward my fellow mankind, and towards life itself or God [dimension of self-awareness and will, A/N.]"



Reflecting on these wonderful words of Assagioli, I asked myself: **Who are those who, in critical life situations, are able to access the freedom to choose and to activate,** from

among the various possible responses, **the most mature, creative and adaptive ones?** What characteristics do these people have?

THE POWER OF A BROAD, CLEAR AND INSPIRING VISION AND THE URGENT CHALLENGE THAT AWAITS US

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote: "*When there is no vision people perish.*" I found, precisely in this idea of "a vision," one of the possible answers to my questions. In extreme situations, individuals who are able to access the freedom to choose the most courageous and mature answers, seem to have an important characteristic in common: they are all supported and guided by a broad, clear and inspiring vision.

As I mentioned, I thought about what Assagioli wrote in the passage of "*Freedom in Jail*" just mentioned. And I also thought about what Viktor Frankl, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi, Hetty Illesum and others witnessed during their personal lockdowns. From all these testimonies, we know that **those who have a bold vision of the human being and of life**, have a better chance of surviving and/or experiencing positively even very intense crises. Having a vision that gives meaning to our experience is therefore of the utmost importance, especially in difficult times.

Visions are powerful because their language is symbolic. Images and symbols are, in fact, accumulators of certain energy charges. They are transformers, or channels, of psychic energies and favor their integration.

Visions are able to set in motion intense creative and transformative processes in the unconscious. We are well aware that trying to influence the unconscious with rational procedures is ineffective and unsuitable. To do this, we must instead use its own language: the symbolic one. And nothing conveys it more effectively than a vision.

Visions are powerful because they know how to guide us "beyond": "beyond" the automatic and predetermined responses of the pre-personal level, "beyond" the already known of the personal level and towards new possibilities, new lands to explore.

That's why visions are like the stars for sailors: they orient us, guide us and accompany us along our journey. They help us find and rediscover the route and give us the strength to maintain it despite moments of discouragement and loneliness, obstacles and failures. Visions can motivate us and move us emotionally. They awaken our desires, evoke the emotions and feelings corresponding to them, inspire our dreams and infuse us with the energy to commit ourselves to translating them into reality.

This is why it is so important that we ask ourselves: Will we be able to distil from the painful experience we are going through (the pandemic), the precious gift that it is able to offer us?

Will we be able to derive a positive, bold and courageous vision from it? A vision that we will continue to cultivate in a free and conscious way even when the grip of the shadow has loosened (if it will)?

And above all, will we be able to choose, among the various possible responses to this planetary crisis, the most courageous and creative ones?

This is the urgent challenge that awaits us and we must take it up with courage because on the answer that each of us will give to these questions depends, not only the outcome of the current pandemic, but above all the quality of life on the entire planet, as well as our own survival and that of many other animal and plant species.

THE GIFT OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS: A BOLD VISION FULL OF MEANING

And it is here that **Psychosynthesis** reveals its extreme topicality today. In fact, the precious gift that it offers us, what most characterizes it, is **its systemic and complex vision of life and of the human being** which are considered in all their aspects and, above all, in the relationships between these different aspects. It is an integral vision **inspired by the general principle of organization, integration and synthesis** (which is expressed at various levels: theoretical and practical; individual, inter-individual, social and planetary). It is a vision that we greatly need and meditating on it together can be useful, both to orient ourselves in these difficult times and to reflect on the work we are invited to do on the occasion of this World Day of Psychosynthesis.

SEVEN POINTS TO MEDITATE ON

Let us now look at **some of the points** that I have identified **and which**, it seems to me, **can help us** in promoting a greater sense of belonging, connection and mutual recognition and in favoring the synthesis between the different groups and units of Psychosynthesis around the world.

1. Psychosynthesis as a living Idea

First of all, let's try to look at Psychosynthesis as a living idea, a vital subject, an open system in the making, an organism that develops and grows and which, in order to continue to do so, must feed on the constant relationship with the environment that surrounds it.

Roberto Assagioli in fact stated that: **Psychosynthesis "can be indicated (and not "defined" because all definitions are limited and limiting)..."**

Why this distinction between defining and indicating Psychosynthesis? I believe it is precisely because we can define objects (which are inert, "dead"), living subjects on the other hand, (which are indeed alive and vital) can only be indicated, intuited, never fully grasped once and for all.

This first point, Psychosynthesis as a living idea, is fundamental, not only to better understand the nature of Psychosynthesis in and of itself, but also the vision of the human being that it offers us. In this vision, a very central aspect is precisely the distinction, the

disidentification of the subject, (the Self that we are, the consciousness that contains and experiences objects), from the objects (the parts, the subpersonalities, the various psychic contents.)

An evocative image: The Weaver

While I was preparing this meeting, I was looking for **an image that could represent** the message and nature of **Psychosynthesis in an evocative way**. And thinking of it as just a living idea, a vital subject, I was presented with the figure of a weaver who is working on her loom, as Assagioli said, "*with a lot of energy, determination, desire, time, and effort to establish spiritual airways*". That is, to create, from the colorful chaos of the partial elements, of the "objects" at her disposal, exchanges, dialogue, relationship, balance, integration, harmony, new syntheses and beauty.

This tireless work of weaving has the ultimate **purpose** of leading us to an ever fuller **realization of our true identity**, of the subject that we are, of our authentic Self that goes hand in hand with **the deepening of the experience of the substantial interrelation of all that is:**

- within us: between all our different parts and aspects; between the body, the psyche (or the mind) and the spiritual dimension; between the various levels of the unconscious (lower, middle, higher and collective) and consciousness (I-Self); between the different psychological functions (sensation, impulse-desire, emotion-feeling, thought, imagination, intuition) and between these and the will, and so on.

- and outside of us: in ever wider circles, with our family, friends, colleagues; with the different groups to which we belong (professional, political, cultural, social, spiritual...), and gradually with the whole of humanity, and all other living beings, nature, and the planet that is our home.

In my opinion, promoting this experience has never been so urgent and significant as in this particular historical period. The shift of attention from the "parts" to the "relations between the parts", in fact, clarifies our vision of the **Common Good** and develops our capacity to act accordingly.

How does this weaving work actually happen? And what are the attitudes that we can cultivate to actively collaborate in this work of connection and to encourage the further development of Psychosynthesis?

2. Interdisciplinary openness

As I have already said in London, the first is undoubtedly interdisciplinary openness. Psychosynthesis can in fact be indicated "*above all as a "movement", a "tendency", a "goal"; that translates into "an attitude and a slow conquest towards (organization) integration and synthesis in every field"*". (R. Assagioli)

First of all, in the vast field of human knowledge. As psychosynthesists we are called to feed a constant dialogue between different disciplines, points of view and study, between different approaches. The aim is to **overcome the fragmentation of knowledge**. That is, we must actively encourage *"the integration of psychology with the other sciences, and with philosophy, with religion (spirituality), with art."* (R. Assagioli) By doing so, we gradually build an ever more complete overview of that wonderful phenomenon that is the human being, and of life more generally.

3. Integrative vision and intercultural and international exchanges

The tension towards (organization), integration and synthesis must then also be expressed in the more specific field of psychology itself. As psychosynthesists, we must "establish relationships of appropriate collaboration (between the different) points of view or partial systems. (...) we must strive to recognize that every school, movement or technique has its merits and its limitations; and it is therefore advisable to know, to appreciate and make use of the greatest number of them."

The vocation of Psychosynthesis is therefore to promote - in addition to the interdisciplinary dialogue between psychology and other fields of human knowledge – an integrative approach and international and intercultural exchanges within the same psychology. Assagioli spoke of promoting a synthesis between American psychology (which has always stood out for the search for active, effective and creative techniques and tools), European (so attentive to the dynamics of the deep unconscious and the relational ones) and Eastern (which for millennia has investigated the transpersonal dimensions and the realization of our most authentic Self).

Today we can certainly add to this list the two other continents, the different indigenous and shamanic psychologies, the ethno-psychiatric approach. Perhaps Assagioli's intent was to create **a psychology with a planetary reach**. This is also very relevant today.

4. The original and central core of Psychosynthesis

So, the vision of the kind of relationship that Psychosynthesis should have with the environment, from which it draws the nourishment it needs to continue to develop, is truly very broad and inclusive. However, we must keep in mind that alongside this vocation to dialogue and alongside the integration of many external contributions, there is a central and original core that forms its essence. This is important in order not to present a distorted view of it and not to fall into the trap of heterogeneous eclecticism.

As you know, this central and original core consists of a specific vision of the human being, represented mainly in **the two diagrams** of the Egg and the star of psychological functions, and by **the seven fundamental experiences** that constitute the "sine qua non" of the psychosynthetic path: the experience of disidentification, the experience of the "I", the experience of the will, the Ideal Model, synthesis, the superconscious and the experience of the Self.

5. Existential experience and theoretical reflection

Do you see how much the heart of Psychosynthesis consists of an experiential dimension? And, in fact, the relationship between existential experience and the theories relating to the different fields of knowledge mentioned above (science, philosophy, spirituality, art, psychology itself and so on) is another important point. **Intellectual knowledge**, theoretical reflection (although necessary and very important!) must always **be in the service of a direct existential experience**, they must alleviate the suffering of individuals and promote real processes of harmonization and growth. Otherwise they are sterile intellectualism, a dead letter. Not for nothing did Assagioli consider Psychosynthesis a "*life praxis*" and said of his own way of proceeding: "*I have tried to be intelligent without being intellectual.*"

Psychosynthesis is most interested in what is potentially able to unite all human beings, at least as many of them as possible. Then we can perhaps identify as one of his **most specific objects of study, the universal, archetypal dimension of human experience**, what Bergson called "the immediate data of consciousness". I am referring, for example, to facing our limits with impotence and to experience power, will and courage to go beyond the known; to our need for security and to the urge to heroic, ethical and humanitarian action; to the suffering of loss and to the search for freedom and happiness; to aesthetic experiences, artistic creation, great scientific intuitions; to the urge to protect oneself and to the urge to grow and transcend oneself; to the experience of birth and death; to insight, ecstasy, play; to solitude and to love, solidarity, brotherhood. It would be difficult but so interesting to complete this list.

6. The question of language: emancipation from literal thinking and the criteria of universality

The importance attributed to existential experience with respect to theorization leads us to the next point: the question of language. What kind of language is really able to describe and promote the living and life-giving experiences that are the most specific object of study of Psychosynthesis? What kind of language is able to mirror its deeply inclusive nature? And thus, foster mutual understanding and recognition within it and its further development and diffusion in the world?

Assagioli himself had wondered about this thorny issue and was well aware of the misunderstandings and difficulties (which he called "serious") posed by the use of words, especially when you want to describe on a theoretical level a complex and elusive reality like that of the human psyche. He was a passionate scholar of etymology and semantics and had therefore fully grasped **the symbolic value of language**, its power to veil and confuse reality or reveal it.

As psychosynthesists, we too are called to reflect on this issue and to take great care in choosing the words we use. Are there any **criteria** which we can referred to?

- first of all, it seems important to me that we develop the ability to **distinguish the maps** (i.e. the different belief systems and theoretical formulations relating to the different fields of human knowledge, science, philosophy, spirituality, etc.), **from the territory** (the reality of the experience that they want to indicate);
- then I believe that it is even more important that we commit ourselves, when we are working on the maps, to choose those words that best respect **the criterion of universality**, that is, those that can be received by the largest possible number of individuals, regardless of their different groups of belonging (ethnic, cultural, philosophical, spiritual, etc.).

These criteria are particularly relevant for a psychological approach which, like ours, integrates the transpersonal, spiritual dimension of the human being. They help us to avoid the temptation of literal thought, which always brings with it misunderstandings and sectarianisms. They help us to practice disidentification, to *"be polyglots psychologically and spiritually, to learn to be skilled translators"*. (R. Assagioli)

Assagioli himself proposed the empirical, concrete and pragmatic **language of science** as the official language of Psychosynthesis. And I do not have the impression that in the present historical moment we have a **more functional** reference system available **for the goal of creating a common ground of understanding** that allows for dialogue beyond the particularities and personal beliefs of individuals or groups. The scientific metaphor still seems to be the most suitable one **to support the universal vocation of Psychosynthesis** and to favor its further development. Whilst still remaining a symbol!

7. Trifocal vision

I am almost done, but let me go for a moment back to the importance that a bold and meaningful vision such as that proposed by Psychosynthesis can have, both to guide us in these difficult times, and to reflect on the work that we are invited to do on this World Day.

I said that visions are powerful, and they are, provided that, as Zygmunt Bauman said, they lead us to experience, on an individual level, the abyss that exists between what we continue to do and what we should do, and on a collective level, between what matters to those who decide and what is truly important.

We psychosynthesists should know this well. What makes a vision truly such is its transformative power. An **authentic vision is rooted in the here and now**, in the real. It leads, it induces action: it activates our will, it moves our being in a specific direction. Otherwise it is just a daydream, an illusion that perhaps satisfies some of our desires, even noble ones, but which does not produce integrity.

This is why our vision must be trifocal. That is, it is necessary *"to see and keep in mind the distant goal, the purpose; then have a vision of the intermediate stages that go from the point of departure to the point of arrival; finally, the immediate perception of the next step to take."* (R. Assagioli)

The global transformation we need will not happen without the commitment of each one of us. It requires real and radical awareness.

Petra Guggisberg Nocelli, 20th September 2020

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On the website of the *Institute of Psychosynthesis (Florence)* you will find material about the World Psychosynthesis Day.

Link: <http://www.psicosintesi.it/english/world-psychosynthesis-day-september-20>

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