

The Seven Core Concepts –The Soul of Psychosynthesis

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Even if Psychosynthesis is presented as a synthesis of different therapeutic and educational approaches it is important to remember that it has its own original and central essence.

(Roberto Assagioli)¹

Abstract

Shortly before his death at 85 in 1974, Dr. Roberto Assagioli, one of the founding fathers of transpersonal psychology, described what he regarded as the essence of Psychosynthesis. It was, for him, a psychology which had the soul as a spiritual Being at its center. It is no surprise that Psychosynthesis has since been seen as a “Psychology with a Soul.”

This article presents the essence of Psychosynthesis through the Seven Core Concepts that Assagioli defined as the foundation of his work, and which some today see as his “Last Will,” his final statement about these ideas and their practical application. The article will enable the reader to discover the wisdom in the Seven Core Concepts and realize that:

Disidentification—is a way to Freedom. The self—is a way to Presence. The will—is a way to Power. The ideal model—is a way to Focus. Synthesis—is a way to Flow. The Superconscious—is a way to Abundance, and The Transpersonal Self—is a way to Love.

The article is based on chapter one from the book: *The Soul of Psychosynthesis*, but adapted to this journal by tracing the Seven Core Concepts to esoteric teaching where possible. It is intended to serve as a concise introduction and practical guide to the fundamental ideas of one of the most important therapeutic, educational, and relational approaches in the modern world.

Introduction

Psychosynthesis is known as “a Psychology with a Soul.” The etymological meaning of “Psychology” is “the study of the Soul,” but

where mainstream psychology largely denies the existence of a soul as a spiritual core, Psychosynthesis places the soul at its center. I have chosen the title because my aim is to identify what is the core, the essence or the soul in Psychosynthesis.

Psychosynthesis presents such a broad and inclusive view of humanity and of our spiritual journey that we can easily lose sight of its central ideas. In *Psychosynthesis – A Collection of Basic Writings*, Assagioli’s first book, he uses a wide range of ideas and psychotherapeutic techniques from many different sources. This can easily confuse a reader and give the impression that more or less everything can be included under the Psychosynthesis umbrella.

Interviewing Assagioli shortly before his death in 1974, Sam Keen, an editor from *Psychology Today*, asked: “What are the limits with Psychosynthesis?” Assagioli answered: “The limit of Psychosynthesis is that it has no limits. It is too extensive, too comprehensive. Its weakness is that it accepts too much. It sees too many sides at the same time and that is a draw-

About the Author

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back.”² This is a positive admission, and is true exactly because Psychosynthesis *is* so integrative. It is an attempt to fuse the deep wisdom of the self, coming from the East, with modern western psychology and its insight into the unconscious.

The Central Ideas of Psychosynthesis

Nevertheless certain core ideas underpin all of Assagioli’s writings and connect all the disparate parts. These are: synthesis; the evolution of consciousness; energy psychology; and the manifestation of spirit. These themes can also be found in Evolutionary Panentheism, the metaphysical philosophy on which Assagioli seems to have based his work.

This is a concept that Ken Wilber and the co-founder of Esalen Institute, Michael Murphy, use to define their philosophy. In his article on Evolutionary Panentheism, Murphy shows how some of history’s greatest intellectual giants have arrived at this concept. They have used different names, but enough common features recur to link them.³

Evolutionary means that God (Brahman, the Spirit, the One) permeates *and* transcends the universe. God’s presence in creation is both transcendent *and* immanent. God is in everything, but is greater than the created universe. It is through evolution—and therefore humanity and nature—that God’s inherent potential unfolds. According to this theory the human soul, and all other beings, “emanate” from God or “Pleroma” (psychologically the Great Self within) The word emanation comes from the Latin “emanare” which means, “flowing from,” in this case, God’s abundance. All creatures have emanated from the same divine Source and have journeyed down through the various levels of consciousness into the physical world. Here man “forgets” his origins. The unconscious / conscious yearning for his lost original unity creates the desire in man to return to the Source, and this urge drives evolution. The purpose of our being is to awaken to the divine potential we are here to unfold and manifest.

In connection with the publication of my book I have compiled a series of quotations from

Assagioli’s books and articles for readers who want to verify the background of my thoughts. These clearly show that Assagioli based Psychosynthesis on Evolutionary Panentheism.⁴

To understand these themes we must look at the big picture. In Psychosynthesis the many techniques and theoretical elements can be seen as parts of an overarching process.

In *Psychosynthesis* Assagioli describes this perspective:

From a still wider and more comprehensive point of view, universal life itself appears to us as a struggle between multiplicity and unity - a labor and an aspiration towards union. We seem to sense that - whether we conceive it as a divine Being or as a cosmic energy - the Spirit working upon and within all creation is shaping it into order, harmony, and beauty, uniting all beings (some willing but the majority as yet blind and rebellious) with each other through links of love, achieving - slowly and silently, but powerfully and irresistibly - the Supreme Synthesis.⁵

This quote seems to be a direct interpretation of the great law of synthesis, such an important aspect of esotericism.

Synthesis

Synthesis is hence a law of nature. It is the aim of life, a developmental process which governs all living beings. Its intention is to unite all living beings with their divine source through the energy of Love and Will.⁶ Assagioli relates this law to the scientific principle of “syntropy,” referring to the mathematician Luigi Fantappiè as well as to Buckminster Fuller and Teilhard de Chardin.⁷

The Evolution of Consciousness

Assagioli presupposes the existence of a creative divine intelligence driving the unfolding of life, expressing itself in us as a longing for a greater and all-embracing love. This inner power directs our evolution through certain universal stages of development, from body, psyche, and soul to spiritual consciousness. It is the evolution of consciousness from Ego-centric to Cosmic-centric love. Not only humans evolve, all of creation does too. For As-

saggioli our development moves through “various levels of reality” or “energy fields,” from the physical to the psychological, and then to the spiritual and transcendental. According to Assagioli these energy fields are an “essential aspect of Psychosynthesis.”⁸

Assagioli says:

that the great evolutionary process culminated in the mineral kingdom, as far as we know, and then started the reverse movement or process of evolution. Slightly optimistic we can say that we are half way. We have passed through mineral, plant, animal and partially the human kingdom. So we have to continue this evolutionary work towards the “One,” but it is still far away.⁹

In the compilation of quotes by Assagioli: *Psychosynthesis and Evolutionary Panentheism*, he refers to the evolution of consciousness in several places,¹⁰ and he describes this evolution in individual as well as in social terms.

The psychological life of a nation corresponds to a great extent to that which is *unconscious* in individuals. Modern investigation of unconscious psychological activities has ascertained that these are chiefly instinctive, emotional and imaginative.... The conscious part of an individual corresponds, in a people, to a minority constituted by its thinkers (philosophers, historians, psychologists, sociologists and other scientists), who endeavour to develop the self-consciousness of the nation, to interpret its past, to assess its present conditions and to point to the future. ... It happens also at times that these great individuals become inspired not only from their own Selves, but also from the soul of their nation, which uses them as its instruments and representatives, in order to reveal itself and achieve its group purpose.¹¹

As mentioned, in this respect Assagioli's psychology is closely related to that of Ken Wilber and the contemporary research Wilber draws on, as I have been demonstrating in my Master of Arts dissertation on *Integral Psychosynthesis*.¹²

Psychosynthesis, then, is a psychology that deliberately seeks to cooperate with evolution. Humanity is the first species on this planet to have become conscious of the evolutionary process. Psychosynthesis recognizes this process of evolution through its psychological approach to Harmony and Unity. Synthesis is a gradual process. It begins in our inner world, first unconsciously then consciously when we embark on our own personal and transpersonal Psychosynthesis. Its goal is the harmonization and reconciliation of the conflicts and divisions we experience within ourselves as well as with others and the planet as a whole.

Energy Psychology

Psychosynthesis is an Energy Psychology. Assagioli saw the need for “a science of the self, of its energies, its manifestations, of how these energies can be released, how they can be contacted, how they can be utilized for constructive and therapeutic work.”¹³ Assagioli admits that “hard” empirical evidence for such a “science” may still be lacking; yet contemporary research on consciousness and its effects on the brain related to the scientific study of “Mindfulness”—which Assagioli was unaware of—gives clear indications of a Mind-Body connection.

Through Psychosynthesis we gain extensive phenomenological access to the world of energies. We can experience these worlds directly through introspection, and through Psychosynthesis techniques learn how to direct our physical, psychological and spiritual forces. To work with and within energies, is a prerequisite in the work of Psychosynthesis.

The Manifestation of Spirit.

Finally, I want to highlight that Psychosynthesis is not necessarily about having a “mystical experience.” Its aim is not to withdraw from the world, to “transcend” it and reach some other “divine world.” For Assagioli, Psychosynthesis is about being *in this* world fully. It is about making use of all the creative resources we have at our disposal. In this way we can contribute to the evolution of life.¹⁴ For Assagioli, Synthesis is a union that includes

the body because it is through the body that spiritual energies can manifest in the world. The grand vision is of the manifestation of spirit on earth; it is a vision Assagioli shares with many contemporary evolutionists, especially the Integral Yoga of the Eastern mystic Sri Aurobindo.

Assagioli's "Last Will"

From this general overview of Psychosynthesis, let's move to a more detailed account of its unique qualities, particularly those relevant for Psychosynthesis training and education. We begin with an important document Assagioli wrote shortly before his death.

In his announcement to Psychosynthesis institutes around the world, Assagioli said that Psychosynthesis has "its own original and central essence." According to John Firman and Ann Gila,¹⁵ a few months before his death Assagioli left behind a document outlining the essentials for Psychosynthesis training. Firman and Gila report that it is understood by some as his "last will."

In this document or testament, Assagioli maintained that Psychosynthesis is an experiential approach to the "facts" on which Psychosynthesis rests. Anyone can experiment with these facts in the laboratory of consciousness, and it is essential for the understanding of Psychosynthesis to undertake such experiments. As Assagioli writes:

While Psychosynthesis is offered as a synthesis of various therapies and educational approaches, it is well to keep in mind that it possesses its own original and central essence. This is so as not to present a watered-down and distorted version, or one over-coloured by the concepts and tendencies of the various contemporary schools. Certain fundamental facts exist, and their relative conceptual elaboration, deep experience and understanding are central, and constitute the sine qua non of Psychosynthesis training.¹⁶

These experiences are:

Dis-identification, the personal self, the Will: good, strong, skillful will, the Ideal Model, Synthesis (in its various aspects), the Superconscious, the Transpersonal Self

(in the majority of cases it is not possible to have a complete experience of this self, but it's good to have a theoretical knowledge of the characteristics and experience of its guidance).¹⁷

These are the seven "facts" and fundamental features of Psychosynthesis that must be part of Psychosynthesis training and its education syllabus. These core concepts are what we can call "the soul of Psychosynthesis."

As understood by Assagioli, any authentic practice and training in Psychosynthesis must involve a direct experience of these areas. This doesn't mean that Psychosynthesis can't or won't develop. Naturally it must and will, otherwise it would not be psychosynthetic. Yet the Seven Core Concepts form the cornerstone of Psychosynthesis and represent the foundation and starting point for the training.

In the same document Assagioli defines five relevant areas for the application of Psychosynthesis:

The therapeutic (psychotherapy; doctor-patient relations); personal integration and actualization (realization of one's own potentialities); the educational (psychosynthesis by parents and by educators in schools of all degrees); the interpersonal (marriage, couples, etc.); the social (right social relations within groups and between groups).¹⁸

The above must be based on Personal Psychosynthesis and later on Transpersonal Psychosynthesis, the first-person experience of integrating the Seven Core Concepts into one's life. Psychosynthesis is oriented toward experience; it is a practical approach to personal and spiritual development, and can only be understood and communicated through one's own experiences. What comes out of the practice of these core concepts is interesting. What, for example, are the direct benefits of practicing dis-identification and developing the self and the Will, etc.?

I believe that each core concept reveals a developmental path or way to seven different dimensions of consciousness, to freedom, presence, power, focus, flow, abundance and love. The aim of this article is to show how this is so, by applying it to the field of individ-

ual psycho-spiritual development, so the readers can see the principles and transfer it to the other areas mentioned above.

There are two broad developments in psychosynthesis, where the Seven Core Concepts are applied—personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. The former is the foundation of the spiritual work and is about integration of all the personal energies (1+2 in Figure 1) around the personal self. Maslow calls this development self-actualization and it relates to the integration of the personality in the esoteric language. Transpersonal or Spiritual Psychosynthesis is related to the Soul-infused personality and beyond, and to the integration of all the Superconscious energies (level 3 in the Egg) around the Transpersonal Self and expressed in service.



Figure 1: Assagioli's Egg Diagram¹⁹

The Seven Core Concepts in Psychosynthesis

Before discussing these concepts, I would like to briefly outline how I understand Assagioli's Seven Core Concepts, based on quotes from Assagioli and my personal experiences and reflection. I will also link them to similar concepts in DK's philosophy. In order to really support our understanding of how the

Seven Core Concepts are applied in real life, I have included Figure 1. This is an illustration of Roberto Assagioli's Egg-Diagram. It gives a good perspective of how the self (5) and Soul (8) interacts through the bridge of consciousness (7). The self moves from birth to spiritual maturity up through different levels of consciousness—from the lower unconscious (1) to the superconscious (3). This version of the egg must be considered transparent so there is an inflow and outflow between all levels and the collective unconscious.

Assagioli's Egg Diagram

1. Lower Unconscious
2. Middle Unconscious
3. Higher Unconscious
4. Collective unconscious
5. The self/Observer
6. Field of Consciousness
7. The Bridge of Consciousness
8. The soul/the Transpersonal Self

Figure 2: Assagioli's Egg Diagram

Let us now proceed to the central topic of this article.

Dis-identification – The Way to Freedom

The mother of all the other Psychosynthesis techniques is dis-identification; this is acquired through the Self-Identification exercise. Assagioli advised using the Self-Identification exercise “as early as possible” because it gives the practitioner the skills needed to use the other psychotherapeutic techniques.²⁰

The aim of the dis-identification exercise is to discover the Self. Assagioli defines our identity, the Self or the conscious “I,” as “a point of pure self-consciousness.”²¹ Our sense of identity is often conditioned by our social roles (parental, professional, gender) or by different thoughts, feelings and sensations. Consequently we do not recognize who we really are. Assagioli points out that our true identity is not

found in any of these roles; it is the observer which is *aware of the content of consciousness*, and which is experiencing and expressing itself through these roles.

Our roles and the content of consciousness constantly change, while consciousness itself and the “observer” is a permanent, unchanging center.

To experience this permanent, unchanging center of consciousness we have to dis-identify from our roles and the passing content of our consciousness. We have to mentally step back and experience thoughts, feelings and sensation as objects that can be observed. This is difficult. Our unconscious and semi-conscious identifications are hard to abandon, and this is still only the first step. Fundamentally, we want to identify with consciousness *itself*, the subject and the observer, and no longer lose ourselves in its various contents.

Why is this important? Because, Assagioli says, “We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we dis-identify ourselves.”²² In other words it is a question of becoming *free* enough to master everything that is contained within us.

Assagioli was inspired by the Eastern practice of *Vipassana*.²³ In *Vipassana* we dis-identify from the objects of consciousness in order to reach a direct experience of the Self as pure consciousness. Psychosynthesis, then, can be seen as a radical psycho-spiritual practice, similar to some yogic practices, and it offers techniques to achieve this level of consciousness.²⁴

To awaken to and recognize ourselves as pure self-awareness is a process and a journey. Although the self / subject is always potentially present, it is usually hidden behind multiple layers of identifications, with thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. These layers must first be recognized and detached before our identity as pure self-awareness can emerge.

In order to reach this level Assagioli developed the Self-Identification exercise.²⁵ Disidentifying with the body, emotions and thoughts enables us to identify with consciousness it-

self. By noticing the body, feelings, and thoughts we recognize that these identifications are not who we are, rather we come to realize that we are the “observer.” This leads to greater freedom. Instead of mechanically following certain roles we can now choose whatever we wish to identify with. It is a way of awakening to the pure consciousness of the self. It is a technique to achieve freedom because the self is open and without content.

Assagioli, as previously mentioned, was influenced by Vipassana or insight yoga, Raja yoga, and perhaps by what is known as “the neti neti exercise.” This Sanskrit expression means “not this, nor that.” Through it one comes to understand the nature of Brahman, by understanding what he is not. That is, the distinction between consciousness itself and its contents.

I haven’t been studying his esoteric papers in the archive at his institute in Florence, so I cannot draw any clear conclusions about the esoteric origin of his seven principles, but I can come up with my own qualified suggestion based on my many years of studying and practicing esotericism as well as Psychosynthesis. The Tibetan (Djwhal Khul) who worked through Alice A. Bailey, does not use the term dis-identification in his books, but it seems to me that Assagioli was inspired by the Tibetan’s “three D’s”—detachment, dispassion and discrimination—when writing about dis-identification.

Psychosynthesis is about self-initiated growth and individual effort to achieve personal and transpersonal Psychosynthesis, and the method the Tibetan suggests is: “using the technique of detachment, of dispassion and of discrimination which the Buddha taught.”²⁶

It is my suggestion that the practice of dis-identification actually develops or makes possible detachment, dispassion and discrimination between the self and not-self.

Dis-identification is a prerequisite for identification with the self as pure self-awareness. This takes us to Assagioli’s second core concept: the self.

The Self – The Way to the Presence

Assagioli describes “the self” in different ways. He speaks of the personal self, the conscious “I” and even the ego.²⁷ Assagioli’s use of the word ego is something very different from other psychological disciplines, and this can create confusion.

Here, I will refer to the personal self as the self or the observer, and we should remember that self, as defined by Assagioli, always means “a center of pure self-awareness and will.”²⁸ This self is not a thought, a feeling or sensation, but a dynamic consciousness that can observe and learn how to master its content. The ego in traditional psychology is always some kind of mental formation, so it is something quite different from what Assagioli points to.

Focusing on the self as pure self-awareness, let us see why, compared to other Western psychologies, the psychosynthetic approach is unique. Experiencing the self as pure self-awareness usually does not happen spontaneously. It requires introspection and the ability to dis-identify from the “stream of consciousness.” Most of the time we identify with everything that passes through the field of consciousness, and so we completely ignore consciousness itself. This is a point to which Assagioli often refers²⁹ Why, then, is pure self-awareness so important?

The goal of dis-identification is to find a center, around which we can integrate the resources available to the personality. Psychosynthesis is precisely the process by which we recognize, develop and unfold all our psychological resources. This includes the superconscious or higher spiritual potentialities. The self is such a center. It is through the presence of the self that we awake as the observer—presence as focused self-awareness. Through this faculty we can achieve a harmonious and liberated life.

Identifying as the observer gives us a vantage point from which we can recognize all that our

consciousness contains. We have found the source of light, which illuminates and clarifies. To be truly free we must be able to make choices based on a conscious awareness of our resources, needs and values. Otherwise, we are driven by unconscious desires, fears and emotions, which may indeed not come from ourselves, but from the collective unconscious. When we discover the self as the observer, we have the opportunity to evaluate our actions. This should not inhibit spontaneous self-expression, but ensures that we act out of our deepest values and authentic needs.

Psychosynthesis is known as a “Psychology with a Soul.” The etymological meaning of “Psychology” is “the study of the Soul,” but where mainstream psychology largely denies the existence of the soul as a spiritual core, Psychosynthesis places the soul at its center.

Self-awareness is “presence”: the ability to be awake and aware here and now in a non-attached manner. It is a loving presence that contains, observes and interacts with the contents of consciousness.

The development of the self is therefore a development towards greater presence: the ability to be completely grounded in one’s self and one’s awakened being. The development I am speaking of is a gradual *awakening* to the self; this implies a process and a development, an uncovering through dis-identification.

The path of awakening to pure consciousness, by observing consciousness itself through awareness meditation, is emphasized in Djwal Khul’s teaching. Bailey says:

“The true meditation is something that requires the most intense application of the mind, the utmost control of thought, and an attitude which is neither negative nor positive, but an equal balance between the two.”³⁰

Assagioli concurs, suggesting introspection through his dis-identification technique and creative meditation.

The Tibetan is surely emphasizing the attitude of the observer or the onlooker in his teaching and encourage his students to develop it:

You have two things to do which—if successfully accomplished—would very much increase your output in service and reorganise both your inner and your outer life. You have to work conscientiously with the time factor and you have to make out of life a fuller expression of work well done. You have also to cultivate more definitely than you do the habit of mind, the trained attitude of the Observer of life, of people and of yourself. You must develop the attentiveness of the One who looks on at life and at the life struggle of others. It is necessary for you to learn that when you can avoid identifying yourself so closely with people, refraining from suffering so consciously with them, you can be of greater service to them and a finer friend and helper. Therefore, for you, detachment is an outstanding requirement and a quality to be cultivated.³¹

From this perspective, Assagioli's objective and that of the Tibetan's is all about discovering the self, as the observer; so we might guess that Assagioli also found inspiration here in respect to the second principle.

The Will – The Way to Power

Assagioli's third core concept is the will. Of all the great psychological pioneers, none have written so extensively on the will as Assagioli. That Assagioli connects the will directly to the self makes it clear that it is one of the key features of Psychosynthesis.

As mentioned, Assagioli describes the self as "a center of pure self-awareness and will." The experience of the will, is according to Assagioli, an inner existential fact, and involves a three-stage process. You first recognize the existence of the will. Then you discover that you *have a will*. The third stage is complete when you realize yourself *as being a will*.³² It is during this last stage, according to Assagioli, that we can affirm: "I AM A WILL; I AM A CONSCIOUS, POTENT, DYNAMIC WILL,"³³ which is the central aim of self-realization. Before this process begins we can feel that we have no will and that life develops as a result of chance events and unconscious impulses.

When the will is so closely linked to our identity it is obvious why it is first and foremost connected with the will-to-be-self. The will-to-be-self is our urge and our longing for authenticity and the need to be a unique individual. When we connect the will *directly to our identity*, as the will-to-be-self, the reality of the will becomes existential much sooner, that is, it is felt as a direct inner experience.

When our will is the will of the conscious personal self, it becomes a dynamic power through which we express ourselves. When Assagioli speaks of the will, he means something quite different than the "Victorian will" and the repression of our desires and sexual drives. Assagioli believes that if sufficiently developed, the will can become a central force directing and regulating desire (and all the aspects of our personality) according to the self's authentic self-image.

The will is not desire. More times than not our desires run counter to our will. For example, when we don't want to do something—because we know it will be humiliating—but we do it anyway because of the power of desire. The will is associated with conscious choice and consent, the observer's consent. The will is basically the will-to-be-self. But we are not always able to express this will, because we have come to rely on—or are even addicted to—a behavior that is not consistent with our authentic self-image.

If we want to be ourselves, we must develop our connection to our will. Self-awareness (the observer) is an indispensable prerequisite for individuality, because it creates awareness. The will is equally important because it provides us with the strength and freedom to be ourselves. The will opens up a developmental path towards an exponentially greater power, because there is no greater power than being a unique self.

The will is often the last aspect of our nature we discover. It can be frightening to become who we are because we have to learn how to stand alone. Freedom comes with a price. We must deliberately reject the herd instinct and its dependency on social roles, conformity and

“normality.” The will gives us the courage to step away from herd mentality into self-awareness and individual expression. It is not enough to recognize our uniqueness; we must *express* it in our choices. True identity is not something we just *have*; it is something we must manifest via our choices and expressions. We need the will as the power to assemble, integrate and express the many resources at our disposal. It is through the will-to-be-a-self that we create a consistent direction in our lives and start acting as an independent and free human being. Assagioli refers to this achievement as “Personal Psychosynthesis” and when under the direction of the altruistic transpersonal will, he refers to it as “Transpersonal Psychosynthesis.”

Assagioli’s views of the will were highly influenced by the Tibetan’s writing. There are few, if any traditions, that offer such an elaborate philosophy about the will, as the so-called “Bailey books.” It seems possible, that Assagioli, as the disciple “FCD” in volumes I and II of *Discipleship In the New Age*, actually obtained the incentive to write about the will from the Tibetan:

I would like you to write an article upon the Power of the Dedicated Will. It is the use of the will aspect that second ray disciples have to acquire and this, for you, is an immediate problem. The will of persistence you have. The dynamic will which breaks down barriers and carries all before it is your next achievement and unfoldment.³⁴

In a letter from 1935, the Tibetan writes to Assagioli:

You could write a book which would be a synthesis of these new psychological ideas, subordinated to a central theme which would dominate them as the head dominates the activities of the body . . . opportunity will come to you to reach the world with ideas that are relatively new . . . you must work for a year at the organization of your thought and material so that you can reach the thinkers of the world with the new ideas in the field of that oncoming major science, that newer field of service – the field of psychology.³⁵

This theme could be either synthesis or the will, because we know that 30 years later, Assagioli published his book: *Psychosynthesis – A Manual of Principles and Techniques*, and 8 years later *The Act of Will*.

As I am in possession of a comprehensive compilation on the will, created by Roberto Assagioli, and found in his archive, I am convinced of the deep influence from the Tibetan.

The Ideal Model – the Way to Focus

The fourth core concept Assagioli mentions in his “Statement on Training” is the Ideal Model. As with the self-identification exercise, the Ideal Model is an important tool in the work of creating a harmonious and integrated personality. It is a visualization technique in which one creates an image of what one can be. One then focuses his or her resources to realize, or manifest, this image. The overall objective is synthesis, the gathering and coordination of all our inner powers towards a single unity. It aims at developing a liberated, vibrant and spontaneous ability to actualize all our creative resources.

The Ideal Model presents a realistic image of what one may be, when one focuses the will and enthusiasm on becoming the model or ideal. An Ideal Model is an authentic self-image guiding one’s imagination and patterns of behavior. It is a technique that combines self-awareness, will, imagination and passion with the aim to become the best version of you.

This technique makes use of nature’s own design, in the sense that we already contain a number of self-images and self-perceptions that we have consciously and unconsciously “recorded” during the course of our lives. These inner self-images control our lives because they make us act according to their content. Assagioli refers to psychological research that supports this notion and the following psychological law: “Images, mental pictures and ideas tend to produce the physical conditions and external acts that correspond to them.”³⁶ He is referring to several psychological laws, but with respect to the Ideal Model this is the most important.

Marketing and advertising are well aware of this principle and frequently use it to manipulate consumers.

Assagioli mentions six categories of false self-images³⁷ including self-concepts that either underestimate or overestimate one's sense of self. These are often rooted in the need to adjust to one's environment. Psychosynthesis aims to expose these false self-images and to redefine and create a new ideal model, "the image of himself that he can and will eventually reach when Psychosynthesis is completed."³⁸

The Ideal Model uses the imagination, one of the seven psychological functions Assagioli includes in his Psychosynthesis. Creative visualization is a powerful technique because it can synthesize all the other psychological functions.³⁹ When we visualize an image of what we realistically may be, we develop concentration and will. We awaken feelings and desires that motivate us to actualize the image. This strengthens the image, which in turn increases our desire. We create a new personality around the Ideal Model, based on our knowledge of available psychological resources and what is meaningful to us. This work strengthens our focus on becoming an authentic self, and working with the Ideal Models is in itself a path to greater focus. Being an authentic self is the most important goal we can have, because it implies that we express this creative self in joy and for the benefit of ourselves and others.

Assagioli recommends that we should start with the Ideal Model in order to develop certain psychological qualities. The Ideal Model is useful when we work with the inferior aspects of our nature, helping to achieve more peace, will, empathy or whatever the individual needs.

I also see an especially close relation between Assagioli's Ideal Model technique and the Tibetan's teachings in *Letters on Occult Meditation*, where he says:

In the second method the student pictures himself as the ideal man. He visualises himself as the exponent of all the virtues,

and he attempts in his daily life to make himself what he visualises himself to be.⁴⁰

This quote from Djwhal Khul is the essential point in respect to the work we apply with the Ideal Model.

Synthesis – The Way to Flow

Clearly, synthesis has a central focus in Psychosynthesis. As described earlier, it is one of the laws of nature and is expressed as the movement toward harmony, wholeness and unity. We can see this everywhere. It is the energy behind the evolution of consciousness.

Historically, humanity has organized itself into exponentially larger groups. One effect of this is what we today call globalization. This has both good and bad consequences. This movement towards wholeness begins in the individual when the need to "know oneself" emerges. Because of this the resources available to the personality gather around certain goals and values. It seems clear that this need for personal development and self-realization has never been greater.

When opposing forces collide, whether in oneself or between people, groups or different nations, life turns into conflict, war and struggle. Duality seems inescapable; it appears at all levels of existence: physically, psychologically and spiritually. It is precisely this tension that creates the possibility of harmony through conflict.

We are all familiar with the psychological dualities at play in ourselves and our lives, pleasure-pain, confidence-fear, attraction-repulsion, and so on. Psychosynthesis offers the possibility of harmonizing and managing these conflicts. The guiding rule is that a conflict cannot be solved at the level of consciousness at which it began, but only at a higher level. It is precisely here that the recognition of the observer and our ability to dis-identify becomes crucial. When we dis-identify from our conflicting poles, a higher level of consciousness (the observer) emerges, through which the recognition, acceptance and creative techniques can be used to reconcile the opposing forces.

For example, when we take on a new challenge, we may find that we react with both excitement and fear. The solution is not to repress the fear, but to address the part of us that is afraid with insight and love. Our fear, when it is transformed, can then cooperate with our excitement and these opposite poles can be synthesized. This does not mean a bland balance between opposing forces but something entirely new, a synthesis, and subsequently a sensible engagement is possible.

The result of synthesis is flow: the spontaneous ability to freely express oneself in the particular area. Working with synthesis is a developmental path that increases “flow” in many areas of our lives.

Anyone familiar with the Tibetan’s teaching will know that synthesis plays a crucial role in his teaching. A search on synthesis, synthesize, etc. generates 1250 hits. One of the essential laws in the universe is the “Law of Synthesis.” Assagioli writes eloquently about the Supreme Synthesis in the quote above, so it seems reasonable to suggest a close inspiration here too.

The Superconscious

Psychosynthesis is also a transpersonal psychology. It speaks of so-called “peak experiences,” which involve the mystical and transcendental levels of consciousness. Throughout history people have had inspirational experiences, which in some instances have changed the world. These experiences may be felt as a union with an all-embracing love or as deep insights into existential laws. Although rare, these extraordinary experiences are, nevertheless, as “natural” as more common experiences, such as hunger, aggression and sexuality.

The Superconscious is Assagioli’s sixth core concept in Psychosynthesis. It relates to his focus on the exploration and development of

transpersonal states. The Superconscious is an upper floor in our inner house (personality), which contains energies, values and modes that involve holistic and universal experiences.

Here we come to understand and directly experience the world as a unified network of energies with which we all are connected.

The Superconscious is the higher aspect of the personality.⁴¹ We can say that the different levels of consciousness outside ordinary awareness consist of various types of interconnected energy. The Superconscious consists of energies

with a higher frequency than that of our “normal” consciousness.⁴²

It expresses itself through our enlightened poets, politicians, artists, educators, scientists, mystics and creators. These individuals share a universal ethic, and display a genius and depth of insight that has often shaped our civilization and culture. Although these individuals may be unaware of it, they are expressions of the spirit of synthesis. They show us the higher spiritual possibilities we all can acquire.

Psychosynthesis has developed methods of tapping into the higher levels of the Superconscious in order for the experiences of beauty, love and power to creatively manifest. Just as the forces from the Lower Unconscious must be purified, transformed and integrated, so too must we integrate our spiritual energies in order for us to actualize all of our human potential. The Superconscious is the soul’s inner treasure chamber, where we can find and express an abundance of creative potential. We can say that the techniques connecting us to the Superconscious represent a developmental path towards greater abundance. Instead of filling empty lives, we *create* an abundant life, which we share with the world. Assagioli describes this goal as Transpersonal Psychosynthesis.

Through Psychosynthesis we gain extensive phenomenological access to the world of energies. We can experience these worlds directly through introspection and through Psychosynthesis techniques learn how to direct our physical, psychological and spiritual forces. To work with and within energies, is a prerequisite in the work of Psychosynthesis.

The Superconscious is also a familiar concept in the Tibetan's esoteric philosophy, and even the three major stages used in Psychosynthesis are mentioned:

It will be found that between each of the different stages of consciousness (from the subconscious through the self-conscious to the superconscious) there is a period of linking, of building, and of bridging ...⁴³

This is a very precise description of the goals related to personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. This brings us to the last core concept.

The Transpersonal Self – the Way to Love

Our focus has been to explore the essential elements of Psychosynthesis and this brings us to the further step of fostering the full experience of the Transpersonal Self. While such a step is difficult, as Assagioli admits, it is useful to have a theoretical understanding of the Transpersonal Self, since it serves as an important guide when using the technique of speaking with the inner wise teacher. Assagioli sometimes called the Transpersonal Self the Higher Self, or simply the Self (with a capital S) or the soul. I call it the Transpersonal Self or soul.

Many people have experienced the soul and Assagioli writes: "In any case, thousands of individuals, millions perhaps, have had the experience of the Self and have given testimony to it. In India, it is traditionally called the 'Atman.' Some of the Christian mystics have been aware of it and have called it variously, the 'divine spark' of the person, the 'apex,' the 'base,' the 'center' and the 'innermost essence.'"⁴⁴

But we do not *have* a Transpersonal Self; we *are* this Self. When Assagioli distinguishes between the Personal self and the Transpersonal Self, he does not assume two "selves." The Personal self is a pale reflection or emanation of its source, the Transpersonal Self. It is a phenomenological difference, one of experience, between the self of the world of the personality—experienced through the filters of our mind—and the soul in its own transcendental world. The Self is always the center of

pure self-awareness and will, no matter what. Assagioli explains the difference:

The real distinguishing factor between the little self and the higher Self is that the little self is acutely aware of itself as a distinct separate individual, and a sense of solitude or of separation sometimes comes in the existential experience. In contrast, the experience of the spiritual Self is a sense of freedom, of expansion, of communication with other Selves and with reality, and the sense of Universality. It feels itself at the same time individual and universal.⁴⁵

The Transpersonal Self creates the Superconscious⁴⁶ with all its creative processes of light, beauty and love. The soul is a static centre of pure being and self-awareness whose energies radiate, in the same way as the Sun's do, a comparison Assagioli makes often. We see the sun's rays but not its stable core.⁴⁷

For Assagioli, the soul is a divine living being, and we experience its essence as a quiet intimate connection with all living beings and the cosmos. In the center of the soul, we discover ourselves as a calm, observing and dynamic presence, a universal and unchanging awareness and consciousness, permanently present in the background. The soul is witness to all our levels of consciousness and processes, which themselves come into being through the soul's emanation and its will-to-be. The soul is individual. It has a unique purpose: to manifest the universal consciousness through a concrete physical expression. The soul and its emanation represent the relationship between being and becoming. The soul is never anything else but "I am-ness," but where our personal self is constricted by the body, emotions and thoughts, the "Self is above and beyond the personality and untouched by the mind stream and bodily conditions."⁴⁸ "The Self is outside time and above it. It exists and lives in the dimension of the Eternal."⁴⁹

The soul is limitless. What we identify with in the world of personality is like a drop of water in an ocean of endless possibilities and resources. The Transpersonal Self can never be fully "explained." It transcends factual language, and we can only refer to the quality of

the experience. One quality more than anything else describes the soul, and that is love. This love can be called “unity consciousness”; through it the soul experiences a deep connection with all living beings. The soul experiences no separation because it realizes its essential unity with all living beings as an existential fact. Contact with the Transpersonal Self hence opens up a developmental path towards limitless love, whose description is beyond the scope of this article.

In the above text, we see how Assagioli discriminates between the Transpersonal Self, and the Superconscious. The Transpersonal Self *creates* the Superconscious and in respect to esotericism, we can say that the Transpersonal Self—the star at the top of the egg-diagram—is the Jewel in the Lotus, the monadic point—Atman—and the Superconscious represents the energies and qualities emerging from the 12 petals.

This is also in alignment with DK’s teaching, and a wonderful article, *The Superconscious and the Self*, based on an interview with Assagioli that shows this distinction clearly.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Roberto Assagioli’s “Psychosynthesis” is a far-reaching synthetic expression of the Eastern Wisdom Traditions and the western scientific approach into the subconscious, conscious and superconscious worlds of man. He was a true frontrunner and an explorer into the depths and heights of man. His true legacy will be his endeavor to introduce by example and in literature the Eastern concept of Atman or the Higher Self into mainstream psychology. Roberto Assagioli accomplished this decades before Abraham Maslow in the sixties initiated the fourth force of transpersonal psychology. His seven core concepts and the application of them in practice form the backbone of a modern yogic path of Self-realization from prepersonal to transpersonal consciousness and beyond.

Readers interested in exploring further the application of the seven core concepts to spiritual psychotherapy may well consider reading the printed/e-copy version *The Soul of Psychosynthesis* by this author.

- 1 Roberto Assagioli, “Training—A Statement from Roberto Assagioli,” Florence: Istituto di Psicointegrazione, 1974. See <http://www.psykosyntese.dk/a-167/>. See also the Assagioli archive: http://www.archivioassagioli.org/info_pub_eng.php
- 2 Sam Keen, *The Golden Mean of Roberto Assagioli*, Psychology Today Interview, 1974.
- 3 Michael Murphy, 2012, “The Emergence of Evolutionary Panentheism”: <http://www.itp-international.org/library/print/emergence-evolutionary-panentheism>.
- 4 Kenneth Sørensen, 2015, “Psychosynthesis and Evolutionary Panentheism,” <https://kennethsorensen.dk/en/psychosynthesis-and-evolutionary-panentheism/>.
- 5 Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis* (Winnipeg, MB: CAN, Turnstone Press, 1975), 31.
- 6 Roberto Assagioli, *The Act of Will* (Winnipeg, MB: CAN, Turnstone Press, 1974), ch. 9-10.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 8 Roberto Assagioli, Undated 2, *Talks on the Self*, (Handed out from The Psychosynthesis and Education Trust, London).
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 There are many references about evolution in the collection of quotes *Psychosynthesis and Evolutionary Panentheism*, see the compilation of quotes at: <https://kennethsorensen.dk/en/psychosynthesis-and-evolutionary-panentheism/>
- 11 Roberto Assagioli, Undated 4, 1965. *From the couple to the community*, (unknown source).
- 12 Kenneth Sørensen, MA-dissertation: *Integral Psychosynthesis*, a comparison of Ken Wilber and Roberto Assagioli: <http://www.integralworld.net/sorensen1.html>.
- 13 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 194.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 207.
- 15 John Firman & Ann Gila, *Assagioli’s Seven Core Concepts for Psychosynthesis Training*, 2007.
- 16 “Training – A statement by Roberto Assagioli,” Florence: Istituto di Psicointegrazione, 1974.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Writings*, The Synthesis Center, 2000.
- 20 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 119.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 111.
- 23 Keen, *The Golden Mean of Roberto Assagioli*, <http://synthesiscenter.org/articles/0303.pdf>.
- 24 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 19.

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- 25 Ibid., 11.
- 26 Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, Vol. 1 (reprint 1972; New York: Lucis Trust, 1944), 3.
- 27 Ibid., 7-18.
- 28 Roberto Assagioli, *The Act of Will* (Winnipeg, MB: CAN, Turnstone Press, 1974), 216.
- 29 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 112.
- 30 Alice A. Bailey, *The Consciousness of the Atom* (reprint 1989; New York: Lucis Trust, 1961), 111.
- 31 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, 130.
- 32 Assagioli, *The Act of Will*, 7.
- 33 Ibid., 176.
- 34 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, 141.
- 35 Ibid., 146.
- 36 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, 51.
- 37 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 167.
- 38 Ibid., 164.
- 39 Ibid., 144.
- 40 Alice A. Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation* (reprint 1978; New York: Lucis Trust, 1950), 146.
- 41 Ibid., 89.
- 42 Ibid., 198.
- 43 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (reprint 1979; Lucis Trust. 1951), 643.
- 44 From and interview with Roberto Assagioli.
- 45 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 87.
- 46 Assagioli, *Training—A statement*.
- 47 Assagioli, *Undated 2*.
- 48 Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 19.
- 49 Roberto Assagioli, *The Conflict between the Generations and the Psychosynthesis of the Human Ages*, Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, 1973, Issue No. 31.
- 50 Roberto Assagioli, *The Superconscious and the Self*, <http://www.psykosyntese.dk/a-172/>.