

Book Review

The Way of Psychosynthesis - A complete guide to origins, concepts and fundamental experiences with a biography of Roberto Assagioli, by Petra Guggisberg Nocelli, Translated by Edward Seagraves, first edition. Editor: William Burr. Synthesis Insights, 2018. Paperback, 356 pages. List price US \$24.00. Available at: Amazon.com. ISBN-13: 979-1220033336 CreateSpace Self-Publishing.

The release of the English edition of this stunning handbook on Psychosynthesis' origins, theory and experience/practice is a cause of great joy and merits celebration. It isn't an accidental occurrence that it is being published right now, but a fortunate choice at a time of great expansion and renewal in the Psychosynthesis field. To mention a few synchronicities, the online Archive of Roberto Assagioli's handwritten notes was launched in 2016, his previously unpublished manuscript *Freedom in Jail* became available in English in 2017, a documentary DVD on his life was released in the same year, and the Institute of Psychosynthesis National Conference on the theme "A Time for Renewal" just took place in April 2018. Concurrently, *The Esoteric Quarterly* has also been devoting a series of articles and book reviews on spiritual psychology and, especially, Psychosynthesis, with the aim of exploring "the relationship between the personality and the spiritual and transcendent aspects of the human experience." (Brown, D., *Editorial*, EQ, Fall 2017). *The Way of Psychosynthesis* is an important addition to this constructive momentum, an excellent piece that provides the framework to comprehend the depth and extension of Assagioli's work.

Originally written in Italian by Swiss Psychotherapist Petra Guggisberg Nocelli, this book is the result of a 17-year-long research, commenced as the author was concluding her university degree: "This book is born out of an attempt to answer a question often put to me by friends, patients, scholars and therapists of other orientations: *What is psychosynthesis?* This question, despite years of practice and study, fortunately succeeds yet again and always to get me into trouble."

The original manuscript was written in 2000 as a dissertation; it was later entirely revised and updated in 2011. The English translation incorporates all these changes, developed in tandem with Guggisberg Nocelli's own work, research and experience in the field as a therapist and trainer, and it includes a new preface. The book focuses on the history and development of the *conceptual aspects of Psychosynthesis*. The text became so influential in the field that the editorial project was followed up with a second handbook by the same author, this time focused entirely on the *techniques of Psychosynthesis*, which, hopefully, will soon be available in English too. The second book will be released as "*Know, Master, Transform Yourself - A collection of practical tools for inner harmony, development of potential, and personal and transpersonal Psychosynthesis.*" In this sequel the aim is to provide practitioners and the general public with more than 280 practical activities, visualizations, group work and transpersonal exercises. Indeed, the two books speak to each other and together work as an outstanding handbook for Psychosynthesis practitioners.

The first two parts of the book center on the life and work of Assagioli (part 1) and trace how Psychosynthesis came to be an original perspective within the five lines or forces of 20th century psychology (part 2). While these chapters provide all the information expected in a well-researched biography, they are much more than that as they are written with the aim of shedding light on the birth of Assagioli's original conception and his dialogue with other philosophical, spiritual and psychological approaches. These sections of the book explain the dawn and, what is more important, the originality of Psychosynthesis. Indeed, the book does a wonderful job in showing the epistemology that undergirds Psychosynthesis by highlighting that it is not just an approach that *adds* something to previous psychological approaches but a solid and original conception of the human being per se.

The last two parts look very closely at some of Assagioli's most important insights, the models and diagrams of the psyche, and the core ideas that he suggested, which were some of the fundamental stepping stones in the path of psychospiritual growth — “the way of psychosynthesis.” Themes like subpersonalities, self-identification, I and Self, superconscious, partial and complete synthesis, and human typology are all explored in detail. The book can be read in an orderly and pro-

gressive manner or, as Guggisberg Nocelli suggests, it can be “readily consulted as a manual, in its individual parts, chapters or paragraphs, according to the needs and interests of the moment.”

Guggisberg Nocelli's close reading of Assagioli's words, her detailed reference to documentation and exploration of current debates in the psychosynthesis literature is impressive and leaves us with the feeling that there is still so much to discover: “It was a difficult a decision to finalize the writing of this text as Psychosynthesis is wonderfully vast, inclusive and fruitful, and I dare say “infinite”: an adequate mirror for the spirit of the human being.”

This book has the great merit of showing Psychosynthesis' livingness and openness, an epistemology that is ever fresh and renewed. It is ever “in the making” for we are “in the making” and not yet a completed project. Psychosynthesis is one of those wells of experience to which we can go for fresh clean water and to which we can contribute our share of experience. Assagioli placed a great deal of emphasis in conceiving of Psychosynthesis as a step in humanity's evolution, an *Idea* incarnated and in evolution; and this book honors such a wonderfully original insight.

Contributed by Mike Malagrecia
Turin, Italy

Book Review

Dorje Jinpa (editor & commentator), *The Book of Hermes by Three Initiates*. Talent, OR: Pentarba Publications, 2018. Limited edition.

The mysteries, we are told, are not of human origin. They originated from the divine revelation received by the Brotherhood of Initiates from the Gods who guide and guard the spiritual evolution of the world (p. 5).

The ancient mysteries are very ancient, perhaps dating back to the time of Atlantis, when members of the Planetary Hierarchy “walked among men.” They are believed to underpin the esoteric traditions in all parts of the world. One of those traditions was the Egyptian mysteries, and multiple commentators have claimed that Egypt was one of the places where Atlantean initiates settled ahead of the deluge that would destroy their continent.

The Book of Hermes examines the Egyptian mysteries, as presented in texts attributed to the enigmatic personage Hermes Trismegistus (“thrice blessed”). Specifically, it examines twenty-two “mysteries” that encourage or challenge the seeker on his or her path to adeptship. In their totality they “comprise a complete spiritual doctrine.” Individually, they “correspond with a letter and a number of the Sacred Language. Each ... letter and number that is perceived by the eye expresses a reality in the three worlds—spiritual, mental, and physical” (p. 16). The twenty-two mysteries correlate with the Major Arcana of the Tarot.

The Book of Hermes seems to be an unpublished text that has come into Dorje Jinpa’s possession; efforts to locate it elsewhere, or even find references to it, failed. But another book attributed to the “Three Initiates”: *The Kybalion: A Study of the Hermetic Philosophy of Ancient Egypt and Greece* (1912), is relatively well-known. It discusses the Hermetic tradition from a different perspective. *The*

Book of Hermes, as edited by Jinpa, is not an extract from or summary of *The Kybalion*.

The Kybalion offers insights into who Hermes Trismegistus was and when he lived. Following a widespread belief among Hermeticists, it declares that Hermes was the Greek name for the Egyptian god Thoth, or an even earlier personage. In particular the proto-Hermes was Abraham’s teacher; and based on current estimates of biblical chronology, that would place him at around 2000 BCE. The earliest known depiction of the Egyptian god Thoth dates from about 1,400 BCE, or the time of the Exodus. The Homeric poems of ancient Greece, thought to have been written in the eighth or seventh century BCE, identify Hermes as a son of Zeus. “Hermes” may date back much farther than 2000 BCE: to or before the dawn of Egyptian civilization. Perhaps he incarnated multiple times—or inspired initiates over a long period of time without ever taking physical embodiment. Be that as it may, the earliest known texts attributed to Hermes Trismegistus date from the first centuries of the Common Era, and, although they claim to present the Egyptian Mysteries, were written in Greek.

To return to *The Book of Hermes*, the chapter “The Science of Will” presents the twenty-two mysteries as concise aphorisms. “The first mystery is called the Magus. It symbolizes the Will.” “The second mystery is called the Door to the Hidden Sanctuary. It symbolizes the Wisdom-Science that must guide the Will.” “The third mystery is called Isis-Urania. It symbolizes Activity generated by the Will united with Wisdom.” And so on through the twenty-second mystery: “the Crown of the Magi”, which “It symbolizes an Award given to every person who has completed his mission on earth by reflecting some features of the image of God” (pp. 16–18).

The letters associated with the mysteries are in a script, described as the “Alphabet of the ancient Persian Magi” (Figure 1). Jinpa asserts that it is closely connected with the sacred

language *Sensa*. The alphabet consists of twenty-two letters, divided into a “trinity of fundamental principles,” “seven evolutionary currents, or rays,” and “twelve progressive stations of manifested life.” For comparison, the Hebrew alphabet of the same length is divided into three “mother letters,” seven “doubles,” and twelve “simples,” or “elementals.”

Figure 1. Alphabet of the Ancient Persian Magi.



For his correlations with the Tarot, Jinpa makes use of the Marseille series of Tarot decks, which date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ Specifically he uses the versions reproduced in *The Tarot of the Bohemians* (1889), by Gérard Encausse, pen name Papus.² Papus illustrated his work with side-by-side images, the one set created by Jean Dodal (1701), and the other by Nicolas Conver (1760). The images are lively but somewhat crude, perhaps reflecting the Tarot’s use as a card game. Papus claimed that, in anticipation of destruction of the ancient Egyptian civilization, the Egyptian mysteries were transcribed onto cards and given to the nomadic Romani (“Bohemians” or “Gypsies”), whose interest in gaming and fortune telling assured their preservation.³

Jinpa adheres to the convention, promoted by Papus and others, of placing The Fool card

between Judgment and The World, rather than at the beginning of the deck. He also adopts the convention of identifying Justice as card 8, and Strength as card 11, whereas the positions of those two cards are often reversed.

Jinpa evidently feels that the Marseille images are superior to those on Tarot decks of the Italian Renaissance, or the popular Waite-Smith deck. Yet their lack of sophistication carries over into the discussion. For example, the Magus, or Magician, card is described in *The Book of Hermes* thus:

The first arcana is symbolized by the Magus, the perfected man, in full possession of his physical and moral faculties. He is represented as standing upright in the attitude of will, ready for action. He wears a white robe, the image of purity. His belt is a serpent biting its tail: a symbol of eternity. His forehead is enclosed in a fillet of gold, signifying light.... Before the Magus on a cubic stone are placed a chalice, a sword, and a golden coin in whose center a cross is engraved (pp. 22–23).

In the Marseille Tarot the card becomes “The Juggler.” It depicts the figure as such, wearing the gaudy clothes of his trade. Jinpa’s commentary is as follows:

Occupying the central position in the picture stands a young man with a rude wooden table in front of him upon which are placed three of the symbols which distinguish the four suits of Tarot cards, i.e., Cups, Swords [and] Pentacles.... On his head is a hat which forms the symbol of life and evolution ∞. As a sign of his dominion over the Earth and Her increase he stands firmly upon the ground, which is bringing forth vegetation (p. 23).

No mention is made of the “cubic stone.” Later in the book, however, the fourth mystery is introduced as “The Cubit Stone,” though “cubic” and “cubical” are found in the text (p. 41). In the Marseille Tarot, only the Dodal image shows a stone; the Conver image has the figure sitting on a throne. Jinpa’s discussion of the fourth mystery and card refers to “the four-fold Foundation Stone for St John’s ‘Temple Four-

square,’ and the ‘New Earth.’ He also links the foundation stone to “the essential nature of the first matter” and to the Philosophers Stone of the alchemists (p. 45).

More generally, “the fourth mystery is the manifestation of three primary principles: Will, Wisdom, and Creative Mind, down into the world of form” (p. 45). For comparison, Arthur Waite—whose emperor also sits on a throne—described him as “executive and realization, the power of this world, here clothed with the highest of its natural attributes.”⁴

The images with which Papus illustrates The Chariot both show the crowned male driver on a very solid—and implausibly mobile—chariot. They differ only in the choice of steeds pulling the chariot: Dodal chose the very “Egyptian” icon of sphinxes—also adopted by Waite in his Tarot deck—while Conver preferred horses. The latter choice may hark back to depictions of the horse-drawn chariot of the Vedic god Indra.

Jinpa’s treatment of The Chariot is also fairly conventional: “The seventh arcana represents the victorious warrior who has successfully passed the ordeal of the sixth book”—a reference to the previous mystery, “The Two Paths,” represented by The Lovers. “Through an act of will he has successfully overcome those influences that seek to divert us from the Path. He has mastered ‘both himself and the forces of nature’” (p 60).

The fourteenth mystery, we read, “is called the Angel of the Sun. It symbolizes the Divine Impulse that unites in man, Will, Wisdom and Activity.” The chapter devoted to it is headed “The Solar Angel, Transmutation.” And the extract from *The Book of Hermes* begins: “This mystery is represented by an Angel of the Sun, holding two urns in which the vitality of life is poured from one to the other combining the forces of nature in such a way as to create certain necessary alchemical changes” (p. 86). The corresponding Tarot card is Temperance, which shows a female figure pouring water from one vase to another.

Jinpa declares that “only the virgin pure mind, with the capacity to soar above the earth and

the worldly and perverted conceptions of sex” can successfully transfer the life-force from the silver to the golden vase without spilling any. He refers to an ancient temple ritual, “fore-shadowing... the perfect equilibrium and balance between the sexes.” It “was performed by a pure virgin Priestess who had been educated in the Temple and kept from all profanation. And woe to her if by any mischance, or by distraction of attention, one drop of the Water of Life in the vase should be spilled on the ground.” Spilled water “would symbolize that aspect of the Water of Life used only for physical procreation or... to bring forth the fruits of the earth.” Although these latter are appropriate in their place, the accident would testify that the young woman “had or was destined to fall away from the pure worship” (pp. 87-88).

Like Papus, Jinpa sees The Fool, or what he calls “The Crocodile,” as a card warning of danger:

[A] young man [is] pictured as wearing a fool’s cap as his Crown of Life. His clothes, although gaudily bedecked and adorned with the fool’s bells, are nevertheless badly torn, his trousers scarcely covering his nakedness. Yet he goes carelessly on his way, paying no attention to a dog, which is biting his leg.... He is unthinkingly approaching a precipice where a crocodile is waiting to devour him (pp. 121–122).

Jinpa comments that the figure “carries in his right hand and uses for a walking stick the rough limb of a tree instead of the straight wand or Rod of Power.” Yet the two images shown by Papus both show the figure carrying a straight cane. Moreover, only the Dodal image shows a dog and crocodile; Conver’s image shows neither, but it alone shows the bells to which Jinpa refers.

By contrast with the negative view of The Fool, another interpretation casts a very different light on the card—placed at the beginning of the Major Arcana:

The Fool is depicted as a youth lightly stepping to the edge of a precipice surrounded by lofty mountains. He looks out into the distance, the abyss at his feet holds

no terrors for him.... The Fool is about to enter the supreme adventure—that of passing through the gates of experience to reach Divine Wisdom. He is the cosmic Life-Breath, about to descend into the abyss of manifestation.⁵

Like many others, Jinpa views the Tarot and its underlying mysteries as a roadmap of the initiatory path. *The Book of Hermes* describes the twenty-second mystery as

represented by a garland of golden roses surrounding a star and placed in a circle, [around] which are set at equal distances the head of man, a bull, a lion, and an eagle. This hieroglyph depicts the Magus who has reached the highest degree of initiation and has thus acquired a power limited only by his own intelligence and wisdom (p. 125).

On the associated Tarot card, The World, the circle morphs into an oval. Jinpa comments: “In this card we find the picture of the oval shaped wreath of one who has conquered. This is the egg-shaped aura symbolizing the great mystery of creation held sacred in all ages” (p. 126). He adds: “Arcanum Twenty Two represents initiation into the Greater Mysteries, sometimes called the Third Initiation. Here is revealed the Mysterium Magnum, the great ‘Secret of Secrets’” (p. 128)

Dorje Jinpa’s *The Book of Hermes* is essentially a book on the Tarot, and its value lies in the fresh insights it offers. The author’s interpretations of the Major Arcana complement, but in some cases diverge from, those of other writers. Either way, his insights deserve to be taken into account in future studies of Tarot symbolism.

Tantalizing hints in the Introduction concerning the significance of number, and especially the ancient alphabetic script linked to *Sensa*, are left undeveloped. This reviewer hopes that the author provides new insights on these topics in the future. Jinpa wrote an excellent book on *Sensa*,⁶ but it does not discuss the alphabet

of the ancient Persian Magi, referenced herein. An appendix (pp. 129–164) provides useful complementary readings: *Egyptian Initiation*, by the Greek writer Iamblichus; and *Initiation*, by the nineteenth-century writer W. Marsham Adam. The latter, reprinted with an introduction by Dorje Jinpa, is a reinterpretation of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, presenting it, not as a funeral manual, but as a description of “the passageways and chambers the Pyramid of Light, the Temple of Initiation” (p. 144).

The Book of Hermes is recommended for all serious students of the Tarot and the Hermetic esoteric tradition.

Contributed by John F. Nash
Johnson City, Tennessee

¹ See for example John F. Nash, “The Origins and Evolution of the Tarot,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2017), 67-98.

² Papus, *The Tarot of the Bohemians* (transl.: A. P. Morton), reprint, (North Hollywood, CA: Wilshire), 1978, 12. The original French edition was published in 1889.

³ As noted in Nash, “The Origins and Evolution of the Tarot,” Papus’ account of the origins on the Tarot is problematic. The Romani may well have used cards for gaming and fortune telling, but their decks did not include the Major Arcana. These latter first appeared during the Renaissance, probably derived from medieval talismans. The talismans may well have originated in the Egyptian mysteries, but were preserved during the Dark Ages by Islamic scholars and esotericists and then brought to Europe.

⁴ Arthur E. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot: Being Fragments of a Secret Tradition Under the Veil of Divination*, (London: Rider, 1911), 84.

⁵ Eden Gray, *The Tarot Revealed*, (New York: Bell, 1960), 77.

⁶ Dorje Jinpa, *Sensa: The Lost Language of the Ancient Mysteries* (Ashland, OR: Pentabarba, 2012).