

# PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

## A holistic, systemic and networked psychology

### The foundation for TRANSPERSONAL COACHING *fit for a VUCA world*

Hetty Einzig

“True Self love is about loving our potentialities for growth, for development, creative ability and communion with others and that self-love becomes a powerful means of loving others”  
Assagioli

Psychosynthesis is a transpersonal psychology – that is, it goes beyond the personal to include the collective, the social and the universal and beyond the psyche to include the spiritual. As its name suggests, Psychosynthesis seeks to synthesise more than analyse, to connect and heal fragmentation rather than break down the complexity of the whole to a study of its smallest constituent parts. It offers a practical way of working based on the core assumption that while the human being *has* a personality (complex, changeable, visible) it *is* a soul (essential and enduring, oriented towards good). It sees the individual as embedded in the world and the health of the whole dependent on awareness, choice and right action.

Founded by Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), an Italian psychiatrist who lived and worked in Florence, Psychosynthesis grew out of Assagioli's deep study of both Western and Eastern philosophies and religions (eg. he studied Jewish, Greek, Latin, German, English, French, Italian, Russian and Sanskrit). Considered by Jung and Freud as their man in Italy, Assagioli was involved in the early development of Psychoanalysis but kept a critical distance. He saw that Freud's model was partial, giving scant attention to the dimensions of joy and will, creativity and wisdom. Assagioli's vision was of something that spoke to the whole of being human.

Assagioli sought to create a psychology to help those 'who refuse to submit passively to the play of psychological forces which are going on within them'. Furthermore, in contrast to the intrapsychic focus of most Western psychologies, he saw the individual as interdependent, 'an element or cell of a human group...the entire human family' (Assagioli cit Hardy p.16-17) and Psychosynthesis as making 'a valuable contribution to the spiritual, psychological and external integration of humanity. Such integration is its urgent need...[to] counteract the dangers at present menacing it, and to help usher in...a new way of living' (Assagioli, statement re. Training. Undated). In this sense Psychosynthesis is a psycho-spiritual philosophy of living: blending Eastern and Western thought and methodologies it provides practical guidelines for living emotionally conscious, spiritually enriched, active lives of engagement and contribution in the world.

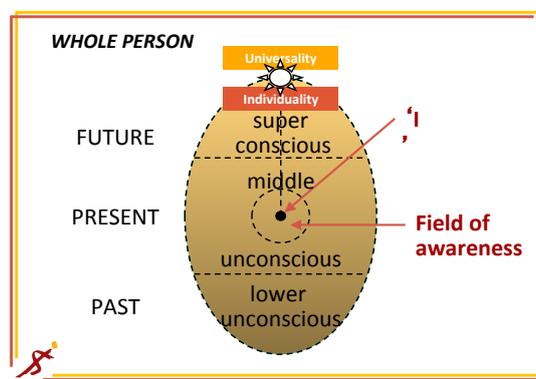
The first Psychosynthesis Institute was founded in Rome in 1926 but was closed down under the Fascist era in 1938; the 40's and 50's were decades of study, development, and dissemination, with Psychosynthesis gaining increasing numbers of advocates and practitioners, spreading to France, USA, the Netherlands and England. The 1960's saw an explosion of interest as Psychosynthesis joined the flowering of humanistic psychologies in the US and elsewhere, its central tenets chiming with those of the work of Maslow, Fromm, Rogers. However, distinct from these but aligned with Jung's orientation, Psychosynthesis sought to create a language for a secular spirituality, to provide a lexicon for our yearning to express ourselves not just *in* the world but *for* the world.

There are similarities between the 1960's and today. We are again living in times of social disintegration, of loss of faith in political solutions and in the institutions of church, law, education and state. For many these now seem irrelevant and bankrupt. There is a deep disappointment in the cynical power play and failures of appointed leaders. In a globally networked world, which is increasingly open source and communitarian through the influence not least of Generation Y (rising to become the dominant demographic in the workforce by 2020), political spin and blind denial in the face of evident crises, provoke disgust, despair, anxiety and anger.

But the bankruptcy of our systems is also stimulating an active search for other paths and other solutions. Increasingly, faced with the stunningly complex, entangled issues of environmental degradation, economic collapse, climate change, and rising social inequity, people - individually and in groups of kindred spirits - are looking for a way to comprehend and navigate our world, and to make a difference. Psychosynthesis offers us now, as in the 60's, a robust psychological model that speaks to our yearning to be the best we can be, not simply understand our worst, to lead lives of meaning and purpose; and it offers a manual for maximising our contribution, not just surviving in a fearsome VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous).

There are useful parallels with other ontologies:

- Daoism – another ontology attracting renewed interest. Just as the birth of Daoism grew out of a quest to restore harmony in a time of feuding clans vying for power by asking 'What is the Way?', so Psychosynthesis asks: 'What is the journey, what is the path that each of us must tread, to make the most of our individual skills and gifts in service to this world?' And like Daoism, instead of withdrawing from the difficulties of the world, Psychosynthesis advocates and supports engagement and service, offering guidance and practices to live a spiritually engaged life within the 'market place', with all its demands and compromises.
- Buddhism and other theories of how to lead the Good Life, which actively cultivate the 'virtues' of courage, generosity, compassion and altruism.
- Complexity Theory. An underpinning concept of Psychosynthesis is the natural tendency towards synthesis and 'syntropy' (the opposite of entropy): a spontaneous organisation of meaningful and coherent fields within the psyche and in our environments (families, organisations, societies and Nature).



In the Psychosynthesis 'egg' model of the psyche equal weight is given to past, present and future, especially to balancing attention on our lower unconscious, repository of memories or fixed models that may block our energy, with our higher unconscious, domain of our aspirations, wisdom and creativity. Surrounding the psyche is the collective unconscious, the dotted lines indicating that all boundaries are permeable, past, present and future interacting to affect the individual who in turn influences and is influenced by society, environment and the global zeitgeist. At the top of the model balanced between the individual and the collective is what Assagioli called the Higher Self.

This acts like a magnet drawing us always towards actualisation of our best in service to the world and its future. There are echoes here with the indigenous concept of [Pachamama](#) which extends beyond the Gaia model to encompass earth, sky, wind, all time and all place. Working with the egg model has a similar simplicity to [Three Horizons](#) futures work, in that it enlists present awareness of emergence (H2) in service to a visionary future (H3) in response to breakdown of current systems that may keep us stuck in the past (H1).

The central concepts and working techniques of Psychosynthesis are as follows:

- **The I** or 'self' is not the equivalent of Freud's ego. It is conceived as a still centre of pure consciousness, essential and enduring, composed of the energies of Love and Will. Like yin and yang these are complementary, both necessary for psychic health and expressed via the personality in the creative tension between being and doing, reception and assertion, awareness and responsibility, understanding and expression.
- **The Personality.** The personality is multiple (rather than dual or triune – eg. id, ego, superego). Thus essential drives and human tendencies (empathy, collaboration, care, compassion, envy, competitiveness, fear and anxiety etc) can be addressed by seeing them as sub-personalities – eg. my frightened child, my bully, my warrior, my critic and judge and therefore understood, accepted and transformed into higher expressions in the case of 'negative' traits or refined and expressed more fully in the case of 'positive' ones. For example, rather than endlessly turn my critic on myself I can come to understand the drive, the inner need and especially the hidden gift of discernment; this enables me to deploy this skill more effectively. The metaphor of the orchestra is useful: no one instrument is better than another or should be suppressed. All are inter-connected. The task is to seek to play more harmonious music.
- **Dis-Identification.** The I is like the conductor. Dis-identified from any one instrument (sub-personality) the 'I' is a place of choice, a focus for integrating and coordinating the personality.
- **The Will.** Central in this is the concept of the Will – which lies at the core of our being. We are not condemned to be victims of our personality or of the vagaries of life but can make conscious choices to live lives of purpose and meaning. There are 4 types of Will: strong, skilful, good and transpersonal will – the latter taps into the greater good and the greater need or collective yearning.
- **The Transpersonal.** The Higher Unconscious is a source of inspiration, intuition and illumination. It is within us all and can be actively worked with, explored, strengthened and drawn upon in empowering the individual to 'self-actualise'. The personal self, or 'I', is a reflection of the higher or transpersonal Self (or soul): our highest expression, experienced as both individual and universal. We become most aware of the Self in moments of profound or transcendent experiences: eg. Feeling a part of all that is, at one with the world, feelings of joy, of rightness, alignment and connection, and deep compassion. Growth is seen as an expansion and shifting of consciousness.
- **The Two Dimensions of Growth.**  
This simple model captures the felt truth that we develop along two main axes. Horizontally we acquire more knowledge, things, status, money, psychological understanding, cleverness. The vertical axis expresses our spiritual growth, the development of our reflexivity, our compassion, our appreciation of the numinous and the beauty of all life, our wisdom. Of course we need to develop along both axes. If one or other dominates our trajectory then each axe will hit its own existential crisis. A dominance of the first axe results in the Crisis of Meaning, a creeping or sudden loss of meaning and purpose which causes us to ask: why am I doing this, what for? The spiritual axe hits the Crisis of Duality, when the gap between the vision of wholeness and the messiness of the actual world yawns wider than is bearable, causing loss of 'faith', disgust, self-abnegation or self-destruction, summed up by the

question: what's the point? The model is used to raise awareness, develop a cogent purpose, harness vision and, critically, ground this in the body and in action in the world. In this way we move towards the mid-line, drawn by the magnet of the Higher Self. This is healing and empowering.

- **Pathology of the Sublime.** The recognition that much of what gets categorised as mental illness, depression or anxiety is instead expression of spiritual longing, an inborn yearning for fairness, wholeness, harmony and the deep need in us all to express the best of ourselves, our gifts and values, in making a contribution. Conversely beauty and aesthetic harmony are recognised as healing and regenerative; experiences in nature, art, music, poetry, dance and the cultivation of appreciation, compassion and gratitude are actively pursued as core elements of transpersonal growth.
- **Imagery.** A wide range of active techniques is used – in particular guided visualisation and meditation, imagery, metaphor, drawing and dialogue – to stimulate right brain functioning (imagination, empathy, pattern recognition), right and left brain collaboration, the capacity for concern and for creative actions. The toolkit was always intended to be open source; it has been added to by many practitioners and many techniques have found their way into other schools – eg. NLP.
- **Ideal Model and Wise Being.** Just as the acorn has the coding within it to become an oak tree, so each human is born with an emergent life purpose. Working with the ideal model is about realising our highest potential and living congruently with our ideals, not about conforming to a socially defined ideal. This takes time, facilitated through co-opting our imagination. As energy follows thought so all images have motor force; imagination can be used to facilitate development or distort it. By giving form to our innermost wisdom (as the 'Wise Being') we consciously access this power to envision our highest purpose and choose the steps to realise it.
- **The Journey.** Life is conceived as a personal journey with a starting point and a sense of direction, a purpose, constantly unfolding. Challenges will be met along the way but the core of the individual is recognised as courageous and resourceful rather than weak and helpless. Part of our work on this journey is to come to terms with our Shadow: working with the dark as well as the light to enable us to own and transform our very human contradictions, weaknesses, failings, fears, greed and envy, rather than project them onto others and the world.
- **Emergence.** Pain, crisis and failure are seen as natural occurrences on our journey and times for learning (the school of life) if we can attend to what is seeking to emerge through these situations; rather than 'solve' or 'excise' we can discover what is trying to be born. Every situation provides creative possibilities for gaining mastery over one's inner states and for transformation. "There are no problems, only tasks and opportunities" Assagioli.
- **The Ways.** All functions are valued - thinking, feeling, sensation, imagination and intuition. All intelligences are valued. All provide routes to raised consciousness. In the same way there are seven broad Ways that individuals follow to fulfilling their purpose and expanding consciousness. These ways are not exclusive, often overlap, and have a deep resonance in the style of operating, the quality and way of being in the world of the person. They are the Way of: Will; Love, Activity; Beauty; Knowledge; Devotion; Ritual.

Psychosynthesis blends the pragmatic with the mystical, engaging head, heart and hands by marrying reflection with action, inner understanding with outer service. It is holistic, global and inclusive, appealing to those of every faith and to those of none, offering a practical path for the human-within-the-world. In practice it is full of fun, laughter, wit and beauty – an inclusive embracing of the gifts brought by all. It likewise provides a robust and compassionate container for the expression, diffusion and transformation of anger, pain, rage or envy and shame. While created within a therapeutic setting Psychosynthesis is applicable, and applied, in many contexts, therapeutic, educational, health, organisational and business.

Assagioli recognised that for Psychosynthesis to flourish and its ideas to stay relevant, it must remain organic, adaptive and open – indeed he referred to the institutes around the world as a ‘constellation not a solar system’, and resisted publishing definitive works until the mid 1960’s. In 2002 John Whitmore and Hetty Einzig with Diana Whitmore, adapted Psychosynthesis to create a programme of Transpersonal Coaching in order to bring the models, ideas and techniques to the world of work.

“From a...wider and more comprehensive point of view, universal life itself appears to us as...a labour and an aspiration towards union. We seem to sense that - whether we conceive it as a divine being or as cosmic energy – the spirit working upon and within all creation is shaping it into order, harmony and beauty, uniting all beings with each other...achieving – slowly and silently, but powerfully and irresistibly – the supreme synthesis” Assagioli

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