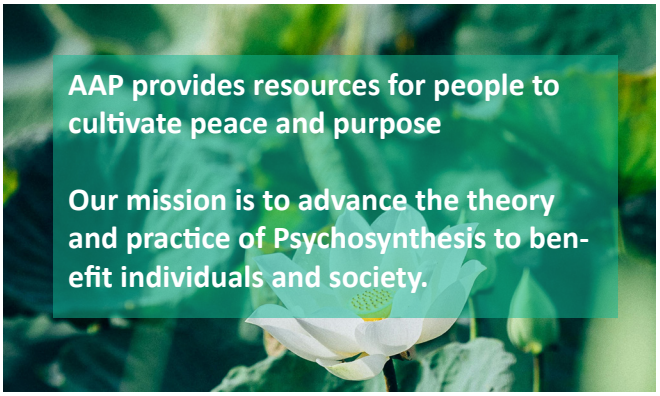
Psychosynthesis Roots and the Magic of New Beginnings



AAP
Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis

With Guest Editor Anastasia Wasko

The magazine of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis



The Psychosynthesis Quarterly is published by the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis (AAP) four times a year.

The AAP provides resources for people to cultivate peace and purpose. Our mission is to advance the theory and practice of psychosynthesis to benefit individuals and society.

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The Psychosynthesis Quarterly accepts announcements, ideas, reviews of books and events, articles, poetry, art, exercises, photos, and letters. Tell us what has helped your life and work, what can help others, and examples of psychosynthesis theory in action.

We hope our suggestion of from 250 to 1500 words may serve as a guideline that helps your writing. We prefer that you use the APA style guide when possible, for things like punctuation and references.

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Guest Editor Letter
Anastasia Wasko

In a world of polycrises, where is the magic?



It's in the roots of psychosynthesis. There, the elusive magic waits to be encountered.

Perhaps *waits* is not as precise as it should be. Perhaps it's better to say that the magic lingers in wait. We are waiting for ourselves to open our hearts to grow. When we open our hearts to ourselves, we open our hearts to each other. The magic trickles into our beings. We are made more whole by the ability to hold ourselves in love and therefore, others. Community is the magic of new beginnings made manifest.

After attending an online event about the launch of the community app on the Mighty, I reveled in the feeling of magic. I encountered (and in some cases, re-encountered) faces I knew from my academic study of psychosynthesis at The Institute of Psychosynthesis in London. I remembered fondly the time spent online in Zoom rooms with other individuals who were physically located at distant locations around the globe. Despite cultural differences, time differences, and varying experiences in the inner journey, we encountered each other online. This happens each time I encounter psychosynthesis community online. The magic emerges and is reflected by profound self discoveries, expressions of joy and pain, and an understanding of the mutual challenges of being human.

They say misery loves company, but I say that inner transformation loves community. That's my rebuttal for the continued effort on my part to find joy in this world of polycrises. And that's the spirit that I hope this issue of the AAP Quarterly: Psychosynthesis and the Magic of New Beginnings brings to you. New beginnings are dangling should we dare to grasp for them. It is our way through the polycrises. A person who is a practitioner of or a person simply vested in the tenets of psychosynthesis can encounter the hope inherent in the magic of new beginnings.

There's a human tendency to want to guard lineage, to harbor loyalty to a distinct style of thinking or practice. And if that tendency emerges in me, I remind myself that psychosynthesis is an ontological worldview centered on Self and a practice grounded in compassion and empathy. That's a multifaceted, multivalent, multi-petaled perspective. It facilitates poly-miracles. The stewardship of psychosynthesis is an ever evolving, ever transforming role in itself.

And, through that, there are many new beginnings to be had.

Alessandra Ferri addresses this sort of custodianship of psychosynthesis. This includes the work that the Istituto di Psicosintesi does as a guardian of the work. Ferri writes that "While psychosynthesis has been widely applied in psychotherapy and counseling, Assagioli himself emphasized that it is first and foremost an approach to human development. It speaks to the fundamental questions of identity, meaning, will, values, and purpose. Questions that concern every human being, not only mental health professionals."

David England writes in "Journey of Becoming," that "Engaging with another at the Becoming One phase means: expressing our point of view with integrity; being willing to listen and seek to understand their point of view; recognising their right to their point of view, without offering counter argument; yet, being willing to engage openly with them towards a synthesis of ideas." We need each other in community to facilitate this process. We need each other to encounter the magic at the core of this synthesis.

It's relational, really. And Molly Brown moves into the space of this idea through her exploration of systems

theory. She writes that "We could use the term 'system' for any pattern of relationship, from an atom to a galaxy, from a cell to an ecosystem, from an organ to a human being. As a system, I function through relationships within and around 'me.' These words flow onto this page through a myriad of complex interrelationships within this 'body-mind.' As you read them, the words create a relationship between you and me, as you process them within the intricacies of relationships within your body/mind. My words are intelligible to you through the complex of relationships that form the language and cultural systems we share. Living systems adapt to their environments."

Admittedly, outside of safe containers like the ones held my psychosynthesis training schools, the world is on fire. The environments we find ourselves in might not be safe for inner transformation. The weight of systemic injustices is much. These polycrises drip into our being and trickle through our inner ecosystems. An inevitable part of the journey of transformation–reaching for that magic–is the crisis of being. Dysregulation within our being–we have to bear witness, and then we have to let go. It is messy work. Sabu Bhugobaun meets this challenge. He brings in the beautiful image of an angel to start his existential rumination. He reminds us that "The Self is both universal and specific and we have become overly identified with the specific. We rely on specifics for our sense of self and identity." Perhaps part of the journey is realizing that we identify too much with pieces of the polycrises and not with the inherent magic we each possess?

The lived experience is the mud. It took me a while to get out of it. Maybe in the future I'll return or realize there's more to unpack around it. And this is precisely the beauty of psychosynthesis–our stuff shows up. When challenged about a part of the intellectual integrity of psychosynthesis, I was reminded that psychosynthesis is both a noun and a verb. To grow from the mud to a lotus takes time and dynamic motion. It takes psychosynthesis, and it is the very core of our practice.

Richard Schaub and Bonney Schaub write about this, bridging the clinical space and psychosynthesis and bringing case studies to bear. They write that "Mindfulness is taught as a mental health skill. The person learns how to observe their thoughts and feelings without acting on them or even engaging with them. Through this process, reactivity is reduced, and the conscious choice of how to act and think is increased." So our "stuff" that is showing up is brought for transformation.

Likewise, Allan Frater says that "Psychosynthesis is an innate experience, a living process, not a static 'thing' capable of being definitively pinned down in words. It is therefore not so much explained or taught or proven by ideas or theories as discovered by an experiential engagement. Establishing this first principle, divergent theoretical perspectives then fell into place as only so many different ways to notice and think about the singular and recognisable experience of psychosynthesis; and the numerous techniques and applications as so many different ways to actively participate and engage with this same experiential ground." Mark Skelding's review of Allan's book underscores this–there are multi-fold ways to engage in this inner transformation.

Damian Granier fleshes out these ideas further. "Synthesis, in this view, is less about assembling inner parts and more about the reorganisation of patterns toward coherence. It is a movement toward alignment—within the person, between people, and between the individual and the larger field in which their life unfolds."

So when life is unfolding, crises sing but magic dances in the field. It is there for you. It is a new beginning to reach for it. The magic is there when you don't feel it. And the journey from awareness to transformation to an encounter with the magic–the divine–that takes community. It takes the conscious choice–the will–to continue to reach for new beginnings despite the mud and challenges of being human.

It also takes art. The beautiful poetry and images submitted by Shamai Gabby, Judy White, and Damian Grainer remind us that the messiness of being human matches our need to express our experiences. But we aren't speaking into a void. We are speaking to ourselves and others. What other desire do we have than to be seen?

The gift here is to be able to turn to someone else, someone in the community, and whisper or shout, "Did you feel that magic, too?"



Living Heritage

The living Heritage of the Istituto di Psicosintesisi in Italy

By Alessandra Ferri

Every authentic beginning is rooted in something older, deeper, and often invisible. In psychosynthesis, beginnings are never isolated events: they arise from a living continuity that connects past insight with present experience and future aspiration. The theme *"Psychosynthesis Roots and the Magic of New Beginnings"* invites us to reflect not only on the historical origins of psychosynthesis, but also on the ways in which those origins continue to generate renewal, creativity, and transformation today.

In Italy, at the heart of this continuity stands the **Istituto di Psicosintesi**, founded in 1926 by **Roberto Assagioli**. Nearly a century later, the Institute remains both a guardian of Assagioli's legacy and a fertile ground for new beginnings: personal, collective, and spiritual. Its work embodies a central intuition of psychosynthesis itself, that human development is an ongoing process of integration, education, and awakening, accessible to all.

The Historical Roots: A Living Archive



The Istituto di Psicosintesi was founded during a period of intense intellectual and spiritual ferment in Europe. Roberto Assagioli, physician, psychiatrist, and pioneer of transpersonal psychology, envisioned psychosynthesis as an approach capable of integrating psychology, education, ethics, and spirituality into a coherent framework for human growth.

One of the Institute's most precious roles today is the **custodianship of Assagioli's personal archives and libraries in what was Assagioli family home and study**. These collections include manuscripts, correspondence, lecture notes, unpublished writings, and a vast personal library that reflects the breadth of Assagioli's interests from psychology and philosophy to spirituality, education, and the arts.

Importantly, this heritage is not preserved as a static monument to the past. On the contrary, the Institute has made a significant portion of this material **freely accessible to the public**, with many documents available online and others open for consultation on site. Researchers, scholars, students, and practitioners from all over the world are welcomed and encouraged to engage with these sources.

In doing so, the Institute affirms a key psychosynthetic principle: **knowledge grows through sharing**. The archives are not meant only for specialists or historians, but for anyone interested in understanding how psychosynthesis was born and how it can continue to evolve.

An Open Door for Research and Dialogue

True to Assagioli's spirit, the Istituto di Psicosintesi remains **open to researchers and scholars from diverse backgrounds**. Psychologists, educators, philosophers, historians, and students of spirituality find in the Institute a place where interdisciplinary dialogue is not only permitted but actively encouraged.

This openness reflects Assagioli's own intellectual style. He never conceived psychosynthesis as a closed system, but as an evolving framework, capable of dialogue with other psychological models, spiritual traditions, and cultural contexts. The Institute continues this attitude by supporting research, publications, conferences, and collaborations that explore psychosynthesis in relation to contemporary challenges.

In this sense, the Institute functions as a **bridge between roots and innovation**: grounding inquiry in the original vision while allowing new interpretations, applications, and perspectives to emerge.



Psychosynthesis as Education, Not Only Profession

Perhaps one of the most distinctive and transformative aspects of the Institute's mission is its commitment to spreading psychosynthesis **not primarily as a professional qualification**, but as a **path of education and formation**.

While psychosynthesis has been widely applied in psychotherapy and counseling, Assagioli himself emphasized that it is first and foremost **an approach to human development**. It speaks to the fundamental questions of identity, meaning, will, values, and purpose. These are qQuestions that concern every human being, not only mental health professionals.

The Istituto di Psicosintesi has remained faithful to this vision by offering educational pathways designed for anyone who feels called to explore psychosynthesis as a guide for personal, relational, and spiritual growth. In doing so, the Institute resists the reduction of psychosynthesis to a technical method or a specialized career track, and instead **preserves its broader humanistic and transpersonal scope**.

Another expression of this inclusive and educational vision is the Institute's **articulation into centers located in many Italian cities**. These local centers act as living laboratories where psychosynthesis is experienced, practiced, and shared within communities.

Each center offers **short courses, seminars, and workshops** that introduce key psychosynthetic concepts and practices. These activities are accessible, experiential, and grounded in everyday life, allowing participants to immediately connect theory with lived experience.

Through this decentralized structure, the Institute ensures that psychosynthesis remains close to people's real lives, rather than confined to academic or professional settings. It becomes a shared language for inner exploration, relational awareness, and conscious action.

The Course of Self-Formation: A Threshold Experience

At the heart of the Institute's educational offering lies the **Course of Self-Formation (Corso di Autoformazione),** a cornerstone of psychosynthetic education in Italy. This program, comprising **over 250 hours**, is open to all and does not require any prior qualifications or professional credentials.

The absence of entry requirements is not accidental. It reflects a profound trust in the human potential for growth and self-awareness. The course is conceived as a **threshold experience**, a structured yet open journey that participants undertake for themselves, not to become something, but to become more fully who they are.

The curriculum offers a **comprehensive theoretical overview** of psychosynthesis, introducing core concepts such as the structure of the psyche, the self, the will, subpersonalities, synthesis, and the transpersonal dimension. However, theory is never an end in itself. It serves as a map to orient a process that is fundamentally **experiential**.

Participants engage in practices of self-observation, reflection, group work, guided exercises, and shared inquiry. Through this process, psychosynthesis becomes something lived and embodied, rather than merely understood intellectually.

One of the most meaningful outcomes of the Course of Self-Formation is its emphasis on **integration into daily life**. Participants are encouraged to apply what they learn not only in moments of introspection, but in relationships, work, creativity, and service.

For many, the course becomes a **springboard for a personal spiritual path**. Psychosynthesis does not prescribe a specific spiritual belief system; instead, it offers tools to explore meaning, purpose, and inner guidance in a way that respects individual freedom and diversity.

This openness creates space for authentic new beginnings. Participants often describe the course as a moment of reorientation, a time when inner resources are recognized, values clarified, and a deeper sense of direction emerges. In this sense, the magic of new beginnings is not dramatic or sudden, but **quietly transformative**, rooted in awareness and choice.



An International Space for Shared Inquiry

Each year, the Istituto di Psicosintesi also gives concrete expression to its commitment to openness and dialogue by organizing the **International Meeting**. This annual gathering brings together researchers, scholars, practitioners, and students from different countries and cultural backgrounds, creating a space where psychosynthesis can be explored as a living, evolving field of study.

The meeting offers participants the opportunity not only to study directly on the personal notes of Assagioli but also to **present research, share experiential insights, and engage in collective reflection**. Contributions come from diverse contexts and traditions, enriching the dialogue and highlighting the many ways in which psychosynthesis continues to be applied, interpreted, and developed around the world.

Beyond the exchange of knowledge, the International Meeting fosters a sense of **shared belonging and co-creation**. It is a place where study is inseparable from relationship, and where learning unfolds through listening, dialogue, and mutual inspiration. In this setting, the roots of psychosynthesis meet contemporary questions, and new perspectives emerge from the encounter between generations, disciplines, and cultures.

New Beginnings Rooted in Continuity

As psychosynthesis approaches its second century, the Istituto di Psicosintesi stands as a powerful example of how roots can nourish renewal. By preserving Assagioli's archives, opening them to the world, fostering research, and offering inclusive educational pathways, the Institute strives to embody the living spirit of psychosynthesis.

In a world marked by fragmentation and uncertainty, the Institute's commitment to education, integration, and spiritual development would like to offer a quiet yet profound contribution for the whole world of psychosyntesis.

Psychosynthesis, as Assagioli envisioned it, is not a finished doctrine but an invitation to become, to integrate, and to begin again, willfully and consciously. And in this ongoing process, the Istituto di Psicosintesi continues to serve as both a guardian of origins and a catalyst for magical new beginnings.

Author Details

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I have trained as a psychologist, with a doctorate in Neuroscience of Meditation, as a Mindfulness teacher and a Feldenkrais Pratictioner. I have worked in business training for ten years and then for twenty years in international cooperation for the management and training of social projects in Africa and Asia. For the last seven years I have worked part-time as a Digital Archives Manager.

Psychosynthesis is not my profession, it is my way of life, my meditation practice and how I share my presence in relationships. I am the Secretary of the Rome Centre and a member of the Alle Fonti Group.



Psychosynthesis in the Field From Inner Synthesis to relational and Energetic Coherence

Damian Granier

Introduction: Roots That Are Still Alive

Psychosynthesis has always described itself as a psychology of wholeness, yet its roots reach far beyond any single model of the psyche. From its earliest formulations, it carried an intuition that human life unfolds within a larger context of meaning, relationship, and purpose. In this sense, its roots are not simply historical origins, but living sources, still capable of nourishing new growth.

At a time when psychology is increasingly shaped by relational, systemic, and embodied perspectives, the question arises as to whether Psychosynthesis might now be understood not only as an intrapsychic framework, but as a practice attuned to a wider field of relationship. Such a re-visioning does not require abandoning its core principles; rather, it invites a return to what was always implicit but only partially articulated.

The theme of roots and new beginnings thus offers an opportunity to revisit Psychosynthesis as an unfinished project—one whose deeper orientation may lie not only in the synthesis of inner parts, but in the cultivation of coherence across personal, relational, and transpersonal dimensions of experience.

Assagioli, Energy, and the Unfinished Horizon

Roberto Assagioli consistently resisted presenting Psychosynthesis as a closed system. He understood it instead as an evolving framework, capable of further development as psychology itself matured. This openness becomes especially evident in his later reflections on what he termed the third, fourth, and fifth forces in psychology (Assagioli, 1973).

While the third force sought to move beyond psychoanalysis toward humanistic concerns, and the fourth expanded psychology to include transpersonal experience, Assagioli suggested that a further development was both possible and necessary. He referred to this emerging dimension as psychoenergetics, a psychology concerned with the study of energy in its physical, psychological, and spiritual expressions.

For Assagioli, energy was not merely metaphorical. Psychological life was understood as a dynamic movement, shaped by forces that organise experience, influence motivation, and orient the will. At the same time, he recognised that the conceptual language and scientific instruments of his era were insufficient to explore these dimensions rigorously. As a result, psychoenergetics remained largely a horizon rather than a fully elaborated discipline.

This unfinished quality is significant. It suggests that Psychosynthesis was never intended to remain confined to an intrapsychic model, but was oriented toward a broader understanding of the human being as participating in energetic and relational processes that extend beyond the boundaries of the individual self. Contemporary psychosynthesis writers have continued to explore these themes, particularly in relation to psychoenergetics and the dynamic nature of the Self (Sørensen, 2019).

The Hidden Lineage: Spiritual, Mystical, and Esoteric Roots

Assagioli's openness to energy, non-local dimensions of consciousness, and the reality of transpersonal experience did not arise in isolation. His work emerged within a wider intellectual and spiritual culture that included Eastern philosophies, Western mysticism, and esoteric psychology, alongside early developments

in depth psychology and humanistic thought. While he consciously translated these influences into a non-dogmatic psychological framework, their presence can be sensed in his insistence that synthesis involves alignment across multiple levels of being, and that psychological growth is inseparable from questions of meaning, purpose, and service.

Read in this light, Psychosynthesis can be understood not only as an integrative model of the psyche, but as an early attempt to articulate a psychology attuned to relational, energetic, and transpersonal dimensions of human life. This wider horizon becomes more visible when Psychosynthesis is approached not solely as an inner cartography, but as a way of orienting human experience within a living field of relationship.

From Inner Structure to Living Field

Classical presentations of Psychosynthesis emphasise its structural elements: subpersonalities, levels of the unconscious, the personal self, and the Transpersonal Self. These remain central. Yet they may also be understood dynamically, as processes unfolding within a relational field rather than fixed inner locations.

Disidentification, for example, is often described as the capacity to step back from thoughts, emotions, and roles. From a field perspective, it can also be understood as the creation of space within relationship, allowing habitual patterns to loosen so that new configurations can emerge. Similarly, the experience of the "I" need not be conceived as a detached observer, but as a point of conscious presence that orients attention, intention, and meaning within a wider context.

Synthesis, in this view, is less about assembling inner parts and more about the reorganisation of patterns toward coherence. It is a movement toward alignment—within the person, between people, and between the individual and the larger field in which their life unfolds. This understanding resonates with experiential approaches within Psychosynthesis that emphasise the Self not as an abstract construct, but as something encountered and embodied through practice and relationship (Parfitt, 2003).

Animism and the Living Field

A field-based understanding of Psychosynthesis also invites dialogue with animistic ways of knowing—not as belief systems, but as experiential orientations to relationship and aliveness. Animism, in this sense, refers to the perception that life is inherently relational, and that meaning emerges through participation rather than observation. From such a perspective, the human psyche is not separate from the world it inhabits, but embedded within a living field that includes body, place, other beings, and the more-than-human world.

Viewed this way, core psychosynthesis concepts take on a subtly different quality. The Transpersonal Self may be understood not only as an inner reference point, but as a relational presence that arises through attunement to the wider field. Will becomes less an act of control and more an expression of alignment and response. Synthesis itself appears as a process of restoring right relationship, within the person, and between the person and the larger field of life.

My own engagement with ceremonial and land-based practices within the lineage of Painted Beautiful Arrow has deepened this understanding. These practices emphasise listening, reciprocity, and the cultivation of presence within a living field of relationship. Approached through a psychosynthesis lens, they have clarified how coherence is not generated solely through inner work, but through embodied participation in relational and transpersonal fields. Such experiences have informed my understanding of both Psychosynthesis and the field-based perspective explored here, not as a departure from Assagioli's vision, but as a further articulation of its participatory depth.

The External Unifying Centre and the Therapist as Harmonic Anchor

One of Assagioli's most subtle contributions is the notion of the external unifying centre. He observed that at certain stages of development, or in states of fragmentation and distress, individuals may be unable to access an inner organising principle. In such moments, the presence of another who is stable, aligned, and centred, can temporarily serve as a unifying reference.

Viewed through a field-based lens, this concept takes on renewed depth. The therapist's presence functions not only psychologically, but relationally and energetically. When grounded and self-aligned, the therapist can act as a harmonic anchor within the therapeutic field, offering coherence, stability, and orientation without imposing direction.

In this shared relational space, regulation and safety are communicated implicitly. Therapeutic change does

not occur solely within the client, but between client and therapist, within a field shaped by resonance and attunement. Over time, the client may internalise this organising quality, allowing the unifying centre to be reclaimed as an inner resource.

Such an understanding echoes later psychosynthesis writers who have emphasised embodiment, attunement, and the therapist's relationship to Self as central to the work (Brown, 2017). It also finds support in contemporary relational neuroscience, which highlights the therapist's role as a regulating presence and the foundational importance of safety and emotional resonance (Cozolino, 2010).

Contemporary Resonance and Field Perspectives

Across many disciplines, there is growing recognition that human experience emerges relationally rather than in isolation. Systems theory, complexity science, embodied psychologies, and relational approaches all point toward models in which meaning and regulation arise through interaction within dynamic systems.

Within this wider context, works such as Lynne McTaggart's The Field (2001) have sought to synthesise research suggesting that life may be organised through informational and relational fields. While such perspectives remain debated, they reflect a broader cultural movement toward understanding human beings as participants in interconnected, dynamic processes.

Seen in this light, Assagioli's intuitions about psychoenergetics appear less speculative and more prescient—anticipating contemporary efforts to articulate a psychology that accounts for energetic, relational, and transpersonal dimensions of experience.

New Beginnings: Toward a Field-Oriented Psychosynthesis

Approaching Psychosynthesis as a field-oriented practice has significant implications for both training and application. It foregrounds presence over technique, coherence over intervention, and relationship over method. It invites practitioners to attend not only to psychological content, but to the quality of the relational field in which work unfolds.

Such an orientation does not replace classical Psychosynthesis; it deepens it. The language of field offers a way of articulating what many practitioners already recognise implicitly that synthesis occurs most readily when conditions of safety, resonance, and meaning are present. This understanding has also shaped the evolution of psychosynthesis in educational and training contexts, where emphasis has increasingly been placed on presence, integration, and lived experience (Whitmore, 1991). This was my experience at the Institute of Psychosynthesis in London.

From this perspective, the future development of Psychosynthesis may lie in the emergence of a more explicitly field-based psychology, one that honours its roots while giving language to the relational and energetic dimensions of healing. Such a development points toward what might be called Field Psychology: not as a departure from Psychosynthesis, but as a natural maturation of its original vision, attuned to the living field in which self, other, and world continually meet

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A Poem
By Damien Granier

Hollow Bone

Oh Holy Creator
Great Mother and Great Father
pour your spirit through this vessel
My dry tears
are the letting go
of who I thought I was
The dust of old prayers
falls from my skin
Make me hollow
Make me a reed
through which your breath may sing
Teach me to love
all of your creation
to find strength in weakness
to stand in the wind without resistance
Let me be a cup
that overflows only with you

Let me carry your water
to the thirsting ones
Beyond the hunger
beyond the ache
there is a stillness
the pulse of you within me
the seed that does not die
In that stillness
I am neither dancer nor dance
but the space through which
the sacred moves
Teach me to serve in joy
to turn suffering into soil
that love and light may grow again
Oh Holy One
let this hollow bone
be your song

Author Details

Damian Grainer began his training with the Institute of Psychosynthesis in 2000. For over thirteen years, he applied the principles of Psychosynthesis, both implicitly and explicitly, within health and social care settings, particularly in substance misuse and criminal justice services, working first as a practitioner and later as a senior leader. For the past eight years, Damian has worked at the intersection of psychotherapy, psychedelic integration, and sound and energy-based practices, with a particular interest in relational presence, coherence, and field-based approaches to healing.

Psychosynthesis: A Systems Psychology

Molly Brown

My study of psychosynthesis over the last 54 years ago has shaped the philosophical foundation of my life. When I encountered systems thinking (also known as General Systems Theory or GST) over 30 years ago, I welcomed this scientifically based explanation for understandings I already held. I rejoiced in how congruent psychosynthesis seemed with the systems perspective.



Photo by Daniel Stanitzki on Unsplash

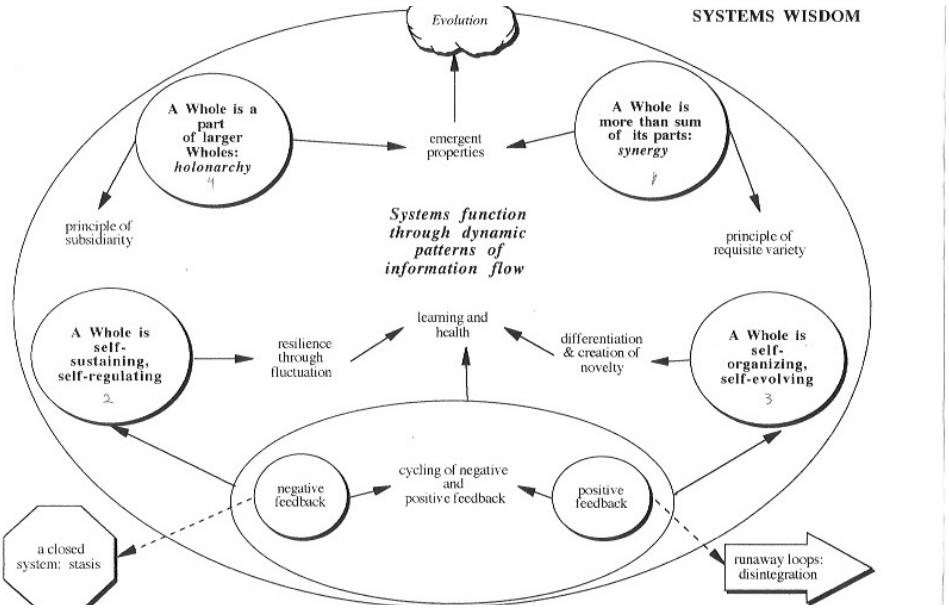
Recently, I had the honor of reading an advance copy of Allan Fraser's new book, *The Act of Imagination: Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy in Experiential Context,* in which he draws many parallels between systems thinking and psychosynthesis. This inspired me to revisit the the relationship between these two powerful fields.

Psychosynthesis is a systems-based psychology, firmly based in an understanding of our essential relatedness. Psychosynthesis studies the relationships among the various dimensions and structures of the personality; between the personality and Self; between the individual and the society; within groups, families, and communities; among nations; between humans and the natural world (in which we are inextricable embedded.) Articulated in different languages, the same principles inform psychosynthesis and General Systems Theory. I want to explicate those similarities, and explore how each school of thought supports and augments the other.

General Systems Theory arose out of the biological sciences, attempting to map principles for how all living systems work. Instead of examining phenomena by attempting to break things down into component parts, GST explores dynamic patterns of relationship. This shift in focus– from entities to dynamic relationships– underlies systems thinking.

We could use the term "system" for any pattern of relationship, from an atom to a galaxy, from a cell to an ecosystem, from an organ to a human being. As a system, I function through relationships within and around "me." These words flow onto this page through a myriad of complex interrelationships within this

"body-mind." As you read them, the words create a relationship between you and me, as you process them within the intricacies of relationships within your body/mind. My words are intelligible to you through the complex of relationships that form the language and cultural systems we share.



The Basics of Systems Thinking

Certain patterns of relationship and information flow seem to inhere in all living systems, in plants, animals, ecosystems, social groupings, communities, and organizations. Below is a graphic I created many years ago, which you can refer to as you make your way through the following basics of systems thinking.

1. **Every living system functions as a whole,** manifesting properties that are not evident in its parts. The whole is more than the sum of its parts! A human being is something more than just a conglomerate of carbon, oxygen, and water, mixed in with a few other minerals, and more than a conglomerate of cells and tissues. How these elements, cells, and tissues are *organized* makes for humanness, and for the distinctiveness of each individual human system as well. So at each new level of systemic organization, a new "whole" or " holon" emerges, with new properties and capacities beyond anything we can predict. I believe that psychosynthesis concept of "self" points to the same phenomenon: the organizing pattern of any living being.

Science has often tried—and failed— to describe or define a system by enumerating the properties of its parts. Describing electrons, photons, neutrons, and so forth doesn't give us a complete picture of an atom. Even if we try to include the relationship of the electron to the nucleus, the protons to the neutrons, and so on, we fall short. Similarly, in the macrocosm, we cannot define a nation by enumerating its citizens and their characteristics, its laws, its institutional structures, and so on. A nation is a "whole" comprised of all its parts and all their interrelationships, and the irreducible properties that emerge from this dynamic process. Each person is a whole or "holon"–a self, more than the sum of his or her characteristics, gifts and skills, wounds and complexes, subpersonalities, family of origin, language, religion, gender, sexuality, and so on.

2. Remarkably, the parts of each whole are also wholes. **Every living system is made up of subsystems and in turn holds membership in larger systems,** forming a kind of "nested hierarchy" or "holonarchy"–systems within systems, fields within fields. For example, our bodies are made up of a respiratory system, a digestive system, a reproductive system, and so on. Our bodies even contain tiny ecosystems for various symbiotic microbes that help us digest our food and keep the proper chemical balance in various fluids. At the same time, our bodies are part of larger systems: families, communities, and ecosystems that provide them with food, air, water, and other life necessities. Our biological waste in turn provides food, air, water and other life necessities to other parts of these larger systems. We are "nested" within these larger systems, and "nest" other (sub)systems within us.

These holonarchies are of a totally different structure than the kind of hierarchy of power so familiar to human societies. No one individual rules at the top; instead the collective membership of a system governs the whole by the magic of synergy: mutual benefit and cooperation among the parts, and between the parts and the larger whole.

A subsystem may specialize to perform needed functions of coordination, but we would hardly say the nervous system is the "boss" of our body. It simply carries messages around about what is happening elsewhere and what responses are required. In psychosynthesis, we might see the self and the will as the "boss" of the system, but I believe this is a distortion arising from our cultural bias towards hierarchy. **The self is the system and the system is the self**; it is not some distinct part of us that rules the rest.

3. **Living systems respond to change; they survive and thrive within changing environmental conditions, sustained by the constant flow of energy, substances, and information.** This in-and-out flow would result in the immediate demise of a system if it could not maintain its structure, its essential pattern over time. Living systems can do this; they maintain their form in a kind of fluctuating, dynamic balance. Warm-blooded animals maintain a body temperature within a certain range; all living creatures take in nourishment in some form, and manage to carry out the necessary responses to receive that nourishment, whether by absorbing sunlight (and leaning towards the light) or by consuming other organisms. Although we can see changes over time in the faces of our friends, we still recognize them; they maintain a coherency in the pattern of their facial structure, as old skin cells slough off and new ones are created, as muscle tone changes, and through variable weather conditions and life stresses.

4. At the same time, **living systems adapt themselves to changes in their environment they learn, grow, develop, evolve.** When the mouse population in a region suddenly declines because of an epidemic, the predators who adapt to a new prey survive; those who remain determined "mouse-ivores" starve. Life events change us, and we can see these changes reflected in the nevertheless familiar faces of our friends. The ability of living systems to adapt and self-organize allows them to defy the second law of thermodynamics, which insists that everything runs down and returns to a state of disorganization and homogeneity. Living systems, however, continuously reorganize themselves into ever more complex patterns and interrelationships.

Self-maintenance & self-organization

These two dynamics of self-maintenance/regulation and self-organization/adaptation must work in balance. Psychologically, inflexible self-maintenance can lead to egotism and rigidity, and to behavior that reacts out of habit instead of responding appropriately to the changing situation. Problematic subpersonalities may be subsystems within the personality that are too tightly maintained, and do not adapt adequately to new situations.

The opposite tendency—inadequate self-maintenance or over-adaptation– might cause a person to take on the perceived attitudes, values, and behaviors of others, unable to maintain any sense of personal integrity or identity. (Even this complex, however, may actually come from the self-maintenance of a codependent subpersonality created to defend against primal wounding. [see Firman & Gila, 2002]).

To self-regulate, systems respond to counteract any deviation from their established patterns of interaction. Systems thinkers call this interchange between system and environment "negative feedback" because it reduces deviation. Such responses attempt to restore conditions to a tolerable range. When we become overheated, for example, negative feedback loops within our body create perspiration, the evaporation of which cools our bodies back to within our optimal temperature range, reducing the deviation of our temperature from this norm. **Negative feedback regulates every aspect of systemic functioning;** it essentially defines and delimits every system, in complex and interpenetrating webs.

However, changes in the inner or outer environment may be such that the established patterns of response cannot accommodate them. **Systems must adapt themselves, must find new responses.** They must deviate from their established patterns; they must seek responses that will bring them back into harmony with their environment. A response that formerly reduced deviation fails to do so under the new conditions; the deviation goes unchecked and even amplifies, becomes greater. Systems theorists call this process "positive feedback." If this amplification continues long enough, it becomes "runaway positive feedback," which can destroy the system. The system must quickly establish new responses adapted to the new demands of the environment and supported by negative feedback once again.

It's difficult to give examples of positive feedback loops in living systems in nature, because they are usually very short-lived (unless humans get into the act). Some systems thinkers resist associating learning with positive feedback for this reason. They would say that learning is essentially the creation of new negative feedback loops. It may be that positive feedback only delivers the "kick" that moves a system into new patterns of response.

Positive and negative feedback operate together in living systems. If a system only maintained itself according to established patterns (as most mechanical systems do), it would be unable to adapt to changing conditions in the environment and eventually wear out, or blow up, or collapse. This is why we humans must constantly tinker with our machines to keep them functioning. If a system only experienced positive feedback, it would have no "integrity," it would maintain no pattern and instantly cease to exist as a coherent whole. So while adapting to changing conditions when incited by positive feedback, all living systems maintain themselves through negative feedback, and reduce deviation around new response patterns as soon as possible.

Positive feedback in nature is usually part of a more inclusive negative feedback loop (e.g. birth process). Within social systems, however, positive feedback can be deliberately induced or prolonged by inputting a "kick" at some point in an existing loop, or by suppressing negative feedback. And here "modern" humans get into trouble, by suppressing feedback deliberately through lies and cover-ups, denial and self-deception. Feedback from the natural environment might slow the industrial jihad; feedback from those impoverished by our economic system might diminish corporate profits.

Human systems and feedback

On a personal level, feedback might contradict a carefully constructed self-image, or call into question the way we are handling critical aspects of our lives. Such feedback demands that we change, and rather than doing so, we may ignore or suppress the feedback itself and go right on behaving in the same unhealthy ways, even spinning into a run-away positive feedback loop.

Addictive behaviors often set up positive feedback loops that can continue for months and years on end. To relieve our pain or give ourselves a jolt of pleasure, we use substances or sex, gambling, etc. When we stop using, the pain returns and the pleasure vanishes, so we use again. Eventually we crash and burn, lose family and friends and jobs, become ill, and that negative feedback may wake us up. If not, we can die of overdose or the side effects of our addictive behavior.

Enlightened self-interest

If we do not understand that we are each a subsystem within larger systems, we may make choices as if our self-interest was separate from the welfare of the whole, be it family, community, or the natural world. When I act out of narrow self-interest, I set up perturbations in larger systems that sustain me. Most of the time, the larger systems are able to self-maintain around these perturbations, and I will receive feedback that causes me to change my actions accordingly. But I may also react competitively and intensify my behavior. I may continue to do more of what is not working—yelling at my spouse, punishing my children, buying more stuff I don't need. My spouse will become angrier and more alienated from me, my children more rebellious and resentful, and my credit card bill will mount while my house fills up with stuff that brings me no satisfaction. Yet I may continue to resist this increasingly intense feedback, escalating my futile struggle to "win." I have set up runaway positive feedback loop by my careless and ignorant action, with damaging reverberations throughout the larger systems of family and community, and within my own psyche.

In one example of this on a socio-economic scale, we continue to manufacture fossil fuel-driven automobiles, requiring more and more oil to fuel them, depleting natural resources, destroying more and more delicate ecosystems, intensifying the climate crisis, forcing Indigenous peoples off their lands, increasing poverty for many and wealth for a few, creating wars, and on and on. We ignore the signs that resource depletion, pollution, ecosystem destruction, and even the "military/industrial/financial complex" are reaching lethal limits. Negative feedback will eventually bring the larger ecosystem back into balance—but without thousands of other species and possibly without us humans.

Psychosynthesis helps us respond to feedback

Helping people to open up to feedback enables them to move towards greater health and creativity. Psychosynthesis techniques facilitate this essential process. Awareness exercises, guided imagery, inner dialogue, free drawing, and talking with a skillful counselor can help people access information (feedback) in a safe context. Once the feedback is unblocked, the person (system) can self-organize with new, more responsive patterns. When we dialogue with a subpersonality, for example, and learn what it needs and what it is trying to do for us, we can meet its needs and bring it into harmony within our personality and life situation. The subpersonality system can then self-maintain according to this new, healthier norm.

Psychosynthesis teaches that we cannot "get rid of" any pattern or subpersonality—we can only heal and reintegrate them into our self-system. Systems thinking offers a similar notion: we cannot disentangle any system enough to throw it "away" somewhere, because every *somewhere* is connected to *here*. We are stuck with ourselves and all our parts and dimensions, so we had better find a way to live more harmoniously within and with others. We had better pay attention to feedback—so the magic of mutual self-regulation and adaptation can occur.

Systems thinking and the will

What understandings in systems thinking might correspond to the concept of will, so central to psychosynthesis? Most systems thinkers understand that living systems do move to self-regulate and self-organize themselves. When faced with novel circumstances, they don't just curl up and die. They attempt to deal with the situation first by utilizing self-regulatory responses, and when those fail, they try new ones, apparently through trial and error. The fact that this process invariably takes place speaks to me of some sort of inherent drive towards life—could this phenomenon correspond to what we call the will in psychosynthesis?

A "systems" understanding of will would be similar to our understanding of Self; the motive power for each holon or system could be called its "will." And just as we have an holonarchy of systems, we would have an holonarchy of will: personal will, Transpersonal Will, perhaps Gaian Will, and Universal Will. To the degree that our personal will aligns with or acts in harmony with Transpersonal Will, we move toward optimal harmony and health within and in relationship to our world.

In psychosynthesis we often speak of tuning into our inner wisdom. It has seemed paradoxical (although congruent with my own experience) that when we go deeply "within," we connect more completely with the world around us—the human world and the natural world that contains the human. In this way we align our personal will with Transpersonal Will and Universal Will. I believe that we are all deeply attuned to the whole as systems within a larger system; we receive and send information constantly along the strands of the living web that holds us all. We merely need to take time to quiet the noise of our daily lives and to pay attention to this subtle flow of information with patience and serenity. Moment to moment as conditions change, feedback from the larger system will guide us in responding powerfully and harmoniously, in ways that benefit not only ourselves, but also the larger whole.

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The Act of Imagination
Allan Frater

My new book - 'The Act of Imagination: Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy in Experiential Context' – is to be published by Transpersonal Press this coming spring 2026 (exact date to be announced). This article charts the story of how it came about.

While a completed book gives the illusion that the author set out with a clear plan of everything to be written and how to write it down, the actual writing process is not like that at all. In reality, as is also the case with practising psychotherapy, the writing proceeds in uncertain fits and starts, across a series of unexpected and vague intuitions, growing with clarity and coherence only very slowly, in the course of thousands of word choices, into the creation of something new, which had no previous existence.

After publishing my first book, *Waking Dreams* in 2021, the drafting of a second book immediately began. The plan was to further develop the image-based approach to therapy set out in *Waking Dreams*[1]. And yet, despite this approach having emerged from the context of my work as a psychosynthesis psychotherapist and teacher, there was no intention to write a book explicitly about psychosynthesis. I did not think I had anything particularly interesting or new to say on the topic of psychosynthesis.



Then one rainy afternoon in December 2022 something happened which directed me towards writing on psychosynthesis.

I was sitting in a meeting at the Psychosynthesis Trust in London, UK. The room on the first floor was incredibly familiar, as were my colleagues and the topics under discussion. But there was nothing familiar about the realisation which suddenly forced itself into my awareness: if psychosynthesis is anywhere, it must be right here, right now, happening among these people.

It did not feel like my own thinking. It was as-if someone had whispered in my ear. It seemed extraordinary. To call it an epiphany might appear inflated. There were certainly no bright lights or angelic choirs. But there was no denying its standout significance.

I needed time to reflect upon what had just happened. Walking home slowly through the central London shoppers and party goers, it was clear that some new understanding of psychosynthesis was calling. But in what manner was psychosynthesis right here, right now, happening among these people? It simultaneously made a lot of sense and also no sense at all.

It made no sense because, on the face of it, among these colleagues, there was no singular and agreed upon understanding of psychosynthesis and how to put it into practice. If anything, the meeting had evidenced a wide variety of psychosynthesis perspectives and applications. Which was nothing unusual. Indeed, psychosynthesis is somewhat renowned for its elusiveness. Ask any two people 'what is psychosynthesis?' and you'll probably get at least two answers. On the level of ideas and practices, my colleagues were if not divided, certainly varied and diverse. A diversity which is seen to create problems, according to Roberto Assagioli:

"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 drawback."[2]

Since this statement, attempts have been made to resolve this 'drawback'. One influential contribution suggests an over-arching framework of 'core-concepts' which determine what constitutes a genuine psychosynthesis. Others have tended to emphasise psychosynthesis as a particular set of techniques or methods. Others have done the historical detective work of tracing the roots of psychosynthesis to the original influences Assagioli drew upon, which they assert as a basis for determining what to accept as psychosynthesis.

And yet, by adding further presentations to the 'too many sides' which causes the lack of limits in the first place, such attempts to provide limiting frameworks arguably only exacerbate the limitlessness they attempt to resolve. Whereas my realisation of psychosynthesis happening among these people seemed to be pointing towards a much more interesting possibility.

The important thing was to stop searching for psychosynthesis as a static theoretical framework. Once I switched away from a purely conceptual enquiry and instead began to wonder about psychosynthesis as a 'happening', which is to say, what my colleagues were doing together, a new understanding began to appear as a living culture, a particular *modus operandi*, a way of being and doing, found in the relationships between teachers and students, therapists and clients.

I intuited it would be in focussing upon this network of living relationships that a new appreciation of psychosynthesis might be discovered. It seemed to me this was a deeply implicit level of psychosynthesis training, something passed on from teacher to student but not necessarily named or even noticed, like the proverbial water in the goldfish bowl to the goldfish. I wanted to make this implicit understanding explicit.

I began writing over the following days and weeks, initially as a blog post for the Psychosynthesis Trust website. But just like the beanstalk in Jack and the Beanstalk, it quickly grew and grew. Firstly, it grew into a long-form essay and then it grew into a series of essays. I then pitched it to my publisher, as an idea for a short book of about a hundred pages, and still it continued to grow, such that the final submitted manuscript covered nearly three hundred pages.

The length of the book was due to attempting something which had not been done before. Indeed, searching for a shared distinctiveness across all psychosynthesis theory and practice was arguably an impossible task. Given Assagioli's encouragement for others to develop his teachings a next generation of teachers and writers have shaped psychosynthesis into a multitude of presentations, some more similar than others, but nevertheless with significant differences emerging between them, moving psychosynthesis ever further away from an easily recognisable and distinct set of teachings and practices.

What helped was coming across this line from Assagioli: "What is important are the principles and the basic purpose of the entire endeavour."[3] I thought these principles would be a way to get beneath the surface level of concepts and find what connected the various approaches of psychosynthesis. While Assagioli does not explicitly state what these principles are, the writing process nevertheless drew upon what he does say, to establish two guiding principles.

The first guiding principle of psychosynthesis is its experiential emphasis. What is held in common by psychosynthesis psychotherapists, to the extent what they are doing is indeed psychosynthesis, will be recognizable, not on the level of concepts and practices, but rather in how these ideas and methods are expressed and actively put into practice within an experiential context. As can be seen in Assagioli writing:

"[Psychosynthesis] is proven by its direct experience; it is one of those primary experiences which are the evidences of themselves. Just as colour, a sense of beauty...need no explanation."[4]

Psychosynthesis is an innate experience, a living process, not a static 'thing' capable of being definitively pinned down in words. It is therefore not so much explained or taught or proven by ideas or theories as discovered by an experiential engagement.

Establishing this first principle, divergent theoretical perspectives then fell into place as only so many different ways to notice and think-about the singular and recognisable experience of psychosynthesis; and the numerous techniques and applications as so many different ways to actively participate and engage with this same experiential ground. But this first principle alone was not sufficient, as it did not describe what type of experience was particular to psychosynthesis.

A related second guiding principle is 'synthesis'. While Assagioli was not the first to use the term 'psychosynthesis', he was the first to base a whole psychology around a comprehensive application of 'synthesis'. Synthesis has a two-fold dictionary meaning as both 'the process of combining objects or ideas

into a complex whole' and also 'the combination or whole produced by such a process.' On a principial basis psychosynthesis can therefore be understood as the experiential process and outcome of 'synthesis' within psychological life, a gathering together of the various elements – feelings, thoughts, sensations, memories, perceptions, actions etc. - facilitating what Assagioli suggested to be a natural evolutionary tendency towards increasingly complex levels of synthesis.

Having established the twin principles of experiential-synthesis, the writing then proceeded by turning them back upon psychosynthesis itself, and in particular the original Assagioli presentation. By painstakingly describing the networks of relationships between teachings, techniques and influences as a whole, rather than focussing upon the parts in isolation, a distinctive pattern emerged: recognizable in how each individual therapist draws upon a synthesis of ideas, philosophies and methods to notice and participate in the synthesising of experiential elements. Which was indeed, on that rainy December afternoon, what my colleagues were doing in the meeting at the Psychosynthesis Trust.

In summary, the writing process created a conversation which gently allowed me to question and re-vision the richness of psychosynthesis – indeed, for much of the time, it felt like being in conversation with Assagioli. The book is full of ideas, stories, clinical examples and practical techniques that address psychosynthesis in its experiential context. And in the end, indeed in the final chapter, an image-based approach to psychosynthesis did get more than a mention, as an 'act of imagination', which while differing in style is nevertheless shown to maintain the principial 'spirit' of the original presentation from Assagioli.

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Growing in the Mud
Anastasia Wasko

I found myself in an odd position a few years ago. I was reading a piece of work about psychosynthesis written by someone who wasn't a practitioner and who hadn't studied at one of the schools in London or elsewhere abroad. It was a scholarly presentation in a discipline in which psychosynthesis hadn't been formally present. I didn't know how someone could write about it without actually understanding it.

There was a focus on the Egg diagram, dynamic movement from the subconscious to the I-center, and the way that different parts of the psyche interact with the superconscious. The picture of psychosynthesis didn't seem complete to me without explicit engagement with the will and the individual's journey toward expanded awareness.

I was perplexed and defensive that the depiction of psychosynthesis wasn't *what I learned.* And I didn't know how to reconcile the accolades the work received and what I believed to be true for psychosynthesis. I wanted to be sure in my assessment that *this wasn't the psychosynthesis I learned.*

During a therapy session with Dr Richard Schaub, I brought up this discrepancy.

"But how could someone write about what they don't know?" I asked. I see now that I was being defensive about psychosythesis. People write about things they are not familiar with all the time. What was my issue?

Dr Schaub's answer surprised me. He said that the work reflected a version of psychosynthesis that was true for that person. And, that my relationship with it might be different.

How could there be versions for each person?

This inquiry came during the course of studies for a masters in psychosynthesis psychology at the Institute of Psychosynthesis in London. I was learning about psychosynthesis and its place in mental health counseling. I grasped that psychosynthesis is both a noun and a verb. But where this idea took root in my psyche–I'm not sure. Was it something that I read from Assagioli's writings or a point discussed in seminars? Or was it something that I found through my growing use of psychosynthesis in my own practice?

I reflected on the intellectual material I was learning as well as the inner experience that confused me. I asked myself, "But what version of me is encountering truth here? Why do I need to be *right*, and why do I need to have a hold on a body of knowledge in psychology?" It was as if I was compartmentalizing the intellectual from the philosophical, the mundane from the spiritual.

The slogan at the Institute – "Serving Humanity in Transition" – also piqued my interest. I do remember a lively seminar online in which the group (around 17 students and 2 tutors) discussed this. Humanity transitioning to what? Where was humanity coming from, and where was it going?

There was a lightheartedness to the conversation, and in hindsight, I believe it was due to the fact that a slogan as provocative as "Serving Humanity in Transition" was effectively an invitation for a deeply personal reflection. It was then that I started to understand how to apply Dr Schaub's guidance. It was then that I realized each person would have an answer that mirrored their understanding of psychosynthesis. That meant all the answers were true since they would be given by each person based on their understanding of psychosynthesis.

This is the mud, where elements are mixing but form is fluid. This is where an intellectual inquiry reveals its nature as a matter of the heart. I was moved to be defensive, but I also knew that if I didn't establish roots in my understanding of psychosynthesis, then I could never really call it my home, my preferred way of understanding myself as well as the world.

Psychosynthesis is a verb as well as a noun. As I am transitioning toward a deeper relationship with Self and inner knowing (the verb), I am also eager to orient myself intellectually and have a fixed body of knowledge to refer back to (the noun).

The ontological premise of psychosynthesis is the idea that the Self is an unchanging reality. The body and mind are impermanent. The Self is timeless. Likewise, Assagioli's writings are at once practical and mysterious.

The mundane comprises, in my opinion, aspects such as the will and disidentification. Those are lived experiences (making conscious choices and cultivating space between you and your subpersonalities, mind, and body). Those are human experiences. That's the work we put in to open our hearts. We have to find our spiritual nature and encounter the Self.

The transpersonal is forever mysterious. It is that elusive and awe-inspiring encounter with intelligence beyond our own. It is timeless. An encounter with the transpersonal is a spiritual experience. Together, the mundane and the spiritual, the verb and the noun, enrich our lives and help us on our individual journeys. I tell my students that we are seeking integration–naming it as a sensation of wholeness or good mental health–of the mundane and the spiritual. Achieving integration is like creating stable ground. The roots have taken hold, and then the opportunity to grow from that integration is next. This is the true experience of mental health, bolstered by our self-awareness that grows along the way.

My interest is in something I have casually referred to as "applied psychosynthesis." This isn't a clinical term or any term, really, except one that I use to organize my own thoughts. Applied psychosynthesis is how we achieve mental health. I am a mental health practitioner, and psychosynthesis is my framework. I believe in the spiritual nature of the world. I believe in psychosynthesis as a psychology of energetics. I believe in the power of psychosythesis to create a map for understanding the outer world and the inner experience. But sometimes, I'm missing something. Or, I feel more could be added. It's not that I believe psychosynthesis is incomplete; rather, it can grow. Its roots are in mud. That which emerges, the plant that will emerge, is to be determined.

So I turned toward learning about other modalities, others such as somatic experiencing and gestalt therapy. I favored humanistic and transpersonal approaches since I cannot accept the world as purely physical and soul-less. My exploration was on a "want to know basis," and I reasoned that if psychosynthesis was as all-encompassing as I believed it to be, I would find ways to layer on more intellectual material. Sometimes, people don't like to talk about their sacred encounters in a clinical way, one that would allow for dissecting by scientific method. Sometimes, discussing the inner experiences takes you out of it and its visceral processing. Psychosynthesis has space to hold all of this and more, including unusual experiences of consciousness, such as a near-death experience or awakening, as true and veritable inner experiences. And then, I grew from there.

I reached for texts on the psychology of religion and parapsychology. It's interdisciplinary exchange that serves my own students and clients. There are those who don't yet speak in the language of psychosynthesis, are aware of their inner transformation, and don't see the Self apart from philosophical discussions. Dr Everton Maraldi, a professor of religious studies and a parapsychologist based in Brazil, asks, "How can parapsychology, a field intrinsically linked to spirituality, leverage [...] growing interest and foster interdisciplinary exchange?" (Maraldi, 2025). In a column for *Mindfield Bulletin* (2025), he writes that "In studying the phenomenology and correlates of anomalous experiences in the general population, psychologists and social scientists are in essence engaging in parapsychological research—even if they do not label their work as such."

That statement takes my breath away.

Being courageous enough to go on a journey of inner transformation and be open to all experiences of transformation–wow! A person in transformation is living psychosynthesis. They are embodying the noun and the verb. And they probably don't know they are doing it.

Naming things is so important. Disidentifying is so important. Bringing awareness to places in consciousness

that might have long been difficult to be in – so very, tenderly, softly important. I think the trend is toward a more spiritual orientation in mental health practices. I sense that other people want to name what their truth is, and truth is bigger than one person.

This is why it is hard for psychosynthesis to be in the world. I'm learning now that, years after my reflection on another person's interpretation of psychosynthesis, I would do well to disidentify from psychosynthesis *so that* it can grow in my mind, heart, and being. What do I know with any finality? Why do I think a static understanding of a dynamic discipline is right? How could I try to place a "hold" on what psychosynthesis is? I named my issue, but what I hadn't done was let it go. I hadn't integrated the lesson.

And there is more work of integration because more individuals are writing about psychosynthesis who haven't had the formal academic training, more individuals bringing psychosynthesis into conversation with other disciplines and frameworks, and more individuals who are benefitting from an applied form of psychosynthesis in their mental health and self-awareness journey.

Years later, I am closer to that integration. As I serve my students and clients, I am serving myself, a being in constant transition. May I continue to root in psychosynthesis so I can hold and grow into the other versions of it and of truths that are not my own but that I honor regardless.

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Psychosynthesis as a Teaching of Mental Health Skills

By Richard Schaub and Bonny Gulino Schaub

This article features two case studies to demonstrate the usefulness of psychosynthesis as a teaching of new mental health skills.

Mindfulness, Psychosynthesis and Mental Health Skills

The current popularity of mindfulness as a therapeutic tool provides a basis for also recognizing the benefits of psychosynthesis. The original Buddhist religious goal of mindfulness was to attain liberation from this plane of existence. Traditionally, this is accomplished by cultivating non-attachment to both the bad and the good of life in order to live harmoniously with the inherent impermanence and the guarantee of sorrow and loss in life. In its Westernized, non-religious, therapeutic version, mindfulness research ignores such an existential reality and focuses instead on having less stress, better memory, and increased neurons in the executive center of the brain – in other words, ways to make life better.

In these approaches, mindfulness is taught as a mental health skill. The person learns how to observe their thoughts and feelings without acting on them or even engaging with them. Through this process, reactivity is reduced, and the conscious choice of how to act and think is increased.

The capacity to observe your thoughts and feelings and to decide whether or not to engage with them is well-known to psychosynthesis practitioners as *disidentification.* Clearly influenced by Buddhist and Vedantic sources, Assagioli pre-dated the Western therapeutic use of mindfulness by 90 years. He built his process of psychosynthesis around the core capacities of self-observation, self-knowledge and choice. But unlike the current Western use of mindfulness-based therapies, which have ignored the original spiritual goals of mindfulness, Assagioli included in his outlook the spiritual possibility of self-observation leading to Self-Realization, i.e., directly experiencing and merging with the Self that is observing, often stated in the non-dual meditative tradition as *awareness of awareness* or *awareness itself.* In commenting on the essence of the spiritual search, the phrase attributed to St. Francis of Assisi points to the same discovery: "What you are looking for is what is looking."

Mindfulness and psychosynthesis are the same in that 1) you strengthen the observing function of the brain-mind, and 2) you choose not to engage with the thoughts and feelings that you observe. Psychosynthesis goes beyond mindfulness, however, in that you consciously choose to identify instead with the pro-active, creative and spiritual thoughts, images and feelings that are present in the psyche and rising up into awareness. In this way, psychosynthesis is broader than mindfulness, or a kind of *mindfulness plus*.

Case Study: Gestalt Psychotherapist fearing depression

Paul, a 64 year old experienced therapist trained in Gestalt, complained of feeling increasingly detached from life and obsessed about his upcoming 65th birthday. Several of his contemporaries who had died in the past two years were very much on his mind, and he feared that his detachment was going to lead him into depression.

The psychosynthesis therapist heard it differently, however. Paul's detachment sounded like an understandable attempt to blunt the existential anxiety he was feeling about aging, loss and death. The detachment wasn't effective, however, since it was manifesting as a disconnect from everything – his wife, his adult children's problems, and his work. His wife was disturbed by his growing indifference, and he was feeling bored and annoyed with his psychotherapy patients. He said that he wanted to break free of his detachment.

As with any human being, Paul was a complex mixture of many themes. No single term or diagnosis can describe his complexity. In undated notes (Assagioli Archives), Assagioli commented that a psychotherapist can only determine a patient's accurate diagnosis "about a year *after* the work with the patient is finished." Since Paul identified his detachment as the problem, the psychotherapist decided to follow Paul's lead by teaching him a new, psychosynthesis-based mental health skill to work with the detachment – the balance and synthesis of opposites.

Paul was asked to remember a recent time when he was deeply detached. He saw himself in his therapy office, shifting around in his chair and barely able to listen for another second to a patient's narrative. He was then asked to remember a moment when he was the complete opposite of the detachment. A memory came rushing back to

him of a time when he saved a man from drowning in a river. What was the essence of that memory? His answer surprised him: he said he felt generous. What did that mean to him? He had given himself to another person, the drowning man, without a second of concern for himself and without any hesitation to do what was required.

The psychotherapist said that Paul now had a dynamic tension inside him - detachment vs. generosity. His new skill was to notice (self-observation) when he was acting detached and instead to consciously and deliberately *choose* to act generous, whether that be toward his wife, his patients, or just a simple encounter on the street or in a shop.

At the level of his new plan, Paul was being guided in a behavioral approach. He was replacing a self-defeating behavior with a life-affirming behavior, and he was engaging his therapeutic skills of self-observation more fully to help himself. Assagioli's balance and synthesis of opposites, however, goes further. As is the entire outlook of psychosynthesis, the balance and synthesis of opposites method is an energy model. The energy going into suppressing his feelings (Paul's detachment) was now being transferred to generous thoughts and actions. Who or what was involved in this transfer? In Assagioli's language, these were acts of skillful will. Paul was liberating energy (consciousness) which had been trapped in the pattern of detachment.

Paul's willingness to practice the balance and synthesis of opposites led to moments when he experienced the release of trapped energy-consciousness as a *lightness of being*. This is the very lightness of being that Dante describes in the *Divine Comedy* (Assagioli's model of the complete psychosynthesis) when he learns how to free himself from the negative patterns in hell.

Paul's *lightness of being* experiences intrigued him. He practiced the polarity of opposites method whenever he felt detached and was always surprised by the shift of feelings and the new state of consciousness that came to him. His results were a good example of psychosynthesis as an inner skills practice.

Case Study: Stage Four Cancer Diagnosis

Sara, having received a recent diagnosis of Stage Four lung cancer, came to her first psychosynthesis session saying that she was trapped in a terrifying nightmare. She couldn't work, she couldn't think clearly, she couldn't do the simplest things. As a highly experienced psychotherapist, she could observe herself, but the terror was overwhelming her ego. She had been prescribed an anti-depressant medication (Prozac) to modify her anxiety, but it made her feel more nervous, and she stopped taking it.

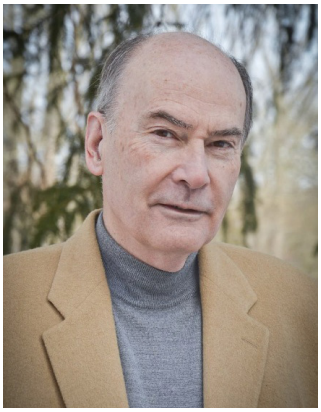
In psychosynthetic thinking, nothing exists on its own, and everything exists in a polarity to its opposite. (In this regard, Assagioli's outlook can be seen as compatible with Taoism). Even terror has its polarity. The patient was asked if she could imagine the opposite of the terror, and she remembered a blissful walk by the seashore. Her memory relaxed her. She then commented that her terror also has memories attached to it: she was always terrified of her "crazy" father.

A key method in psychosynthesis is dialoguing with parts of our psyche. We can dialogue with anything – a dream, an impulse, a thought, a memory, an image of a spiritual teacher, a pattern, etc. Sara was guided to dialogue with her frightening father. She cursed at him and screamed in the office. Then she looked at the psychotherapist and said, "Oh my God, I feel so much better."

This was not magic. Her anxiety about her cancer diagnosis did not go away, but now she had a choice when the anxiety built up in her. Increasingly, it is becoming recognized that anger is the antidote for anxiety sufferers, and Sara had experientially discovered it.

Conclusion

In these two case studies, we see some of the effectiveness of psychosynthesis as a way to work with the complexity of the mind. No single system works for everyone nor works every time, but the map of consciousness in Assagioli's school of psychology offers many ways to reduce suffering and increase peace.



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Richard Schaub PhD and Bonney Gulino Schaub RN, MS, PMHCNS, NC-BC were among the original founders of the first psychosynthesis institute in New York City in 1980. They continue to train professionals internationally through their Huntington Meditation and Imagery Center and have had the privilege of teaching many times at Assagioli's original institute in Florence, Italy. They can be reached at drrichardschaub@gmail.com.



Journey of Becoming
David England

AIMS AND SCOPE

Assagioli's letter (1967) expresses the roots of Psychosynthesis, "Psychosynthesis is not a doctrine or a 'school' of psychology. There is no orthodoxy in Psychosynthesis and no one, starting with myself, can claim to be its true or authentic representative. Each of its exponents tries to express and apply it as best they can," as I try to do in this paper.

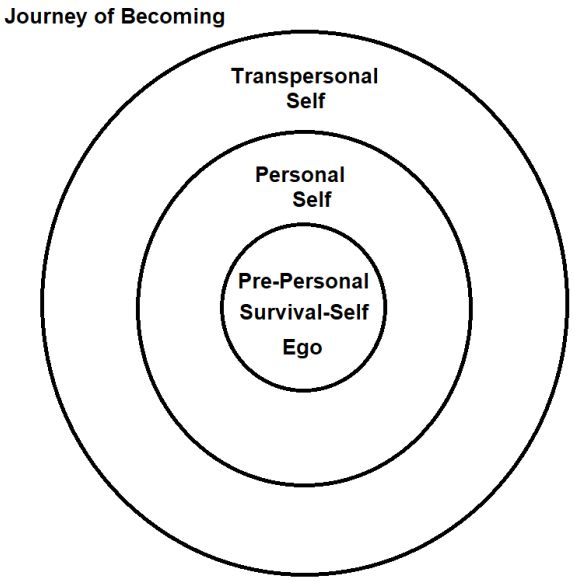
The *Journey of Becoming* is a map of the psychospiritual route from childhood conditioning and wounding to Transpersonal consciousness, referred to here as 'Becoming One'. It's origins are Gilot, 1997, and Evans, 2025.

The *Journey of Becoming* diagram depicts the expansion of our Consciousness and Will as an expanding spiral through three phases of growth:

Becoming Conscious, we are learning to be conscious of having the ***will to survive in the world***.

Being Conscious, we are learning to be conscious of our ability to be self-reflective, to recognise choice, and to exercise our ***will to make choices***.

Becoming One, we are increasingly conscious of being in union with the whole, of being ***willing to be part of the whole***, along with all people, living things, and the natural world, to acknowledge and respect people, living things, and the natural world, within the whole of existence.



In the spiral of expanding our Consciousness and Will, the three phases coexist; Being Conscious transcends and includes Becoming Conscious, Becoming One transcends and includes Being Conscious.

The core of the *Journey of Becoming* can be summed up in two words, ***differentiation*** and ***integration***. The process of ***differentiation*** and ***integration*** is fundamental to the *Journey of Becoming*.

Soul

I speak not about *having a Soul* but *being a Soul*. The expressive definition of 'Soul' in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary is 'animate existence'; 'animate', from Latin *animatus*, meaning 'give breath to,' 'enliven.' So, for me, Soul is the animate experience of being alive, Soul is my present, whole, lived, embodied experience of myself, my existential reality.

Healing Soul is the journey of Soul towards the experience of wholeness, of **Oneness**. In speaking of Oneness as the 'telos' of the Journey of Becoming, it is important to identify this as a 'destination' Oneness is never fully attainable, and yet like a star it guides our course through life. It is also central to understand that the Oneness of transpersonal consciousness is of a fundamentally different level to the oneness which an infant experiences prior to the stage of symbiosis. The infant's experience is undifferentiated, whereas the mature experience of Oneness is fully differentiated. Transpersonal Oneness incorporates the dynamic complexity of the soul of the world as a whole (the 'anima mundi') and seeks to be in relationship with the 'otherness' of all the other living souls.

Becoming Conscious

In the moment before a newly born baby first looks into mother's eyes, the baby is one with mother, with no sense of themselves as a separate being, an undifferentiated fusion with mother, having no sense of personal identity. Within seconds, however, as he or she is mirrored in mother's face, fusion gives way to a symbiosis, where the child's identity is found in the relationship with mother, a gradual process of ***differentiation*** culminating in the ***integration*** of a sense of personal identity.

Children are impressionable, and throughout childhood assimilate the 'way of being' of parents, family, society, in which they are growing up, its values, beliefs, attitudes, aspirations.

Then again, a family's 'way of being' is not always child friendly; the mother, father, caregiver may offer an inauthentic mirror. Ill-treatment and neglect become part of what is assimilated, leaving the person with false beliefs about themselves, like, 'I am not good enough,' 'I am unlovable,' etc.

Become Conscious

To become conscious means ***differentiation*** from fusion with mother and ***integration*** of a self who is **Conscious of having the Will to survive in the world**. This 'survival-self' has achieved the ability to survive in the world by following the 'way of being' they know, the 'way of being' they have assimilated throughout childhood. The survival-self has the level of Consciousness and Will with which we all enter adulthood, and many of us continue at the Becoming Conscious phase well into adulthood.

Whilst a self who has become conscious has the will to survive in the world, they still run on rails, restricted to the tracks laid down in their assimilated 'way of being', with their system of values, beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, and their false beliefs about themselves.

Being Conscious

A self who has become conscious exercises the will to survive in the world by following the tracks laid down in their assimilated 'way of being'. This is the state of fusion at the start of the Being Conscious phase, a self stuck in the assimilated 'way of being' they acquired as they grew up.

The Being Conscious phase involves ***differentiation***, from fusion with the 'way of being' of the survival-self, and the ***integration*** of a fully conscious self.

The process of differentiation is characterised by: **a capacity for self-reflection; increasing consciousness; the will to make life choices**. The person increasingly attains a capacity for self-reflective thought, so they can recognise choice and exercise their will to choose.

The Being Conscious phase transcends, includes, and moderates the Becoming Conscious phase, retaining the will to survive in the world. The Being Conscious self has an increasing capacity to question the survival-self's assimilated system of values, beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations, and to choose differently. One of the choices the Being Conscious self can make, though rarely without struggle, is to set aside false beliefs in favour of right beliefs, 'I am good enough,' 'I am lovable,' etc.

Experiencing Being Conscious

Being Conscious means being self-conscious, maybe experienced at first as an uneasy throwback to childhood, before the full realisation of being a unique self, free to make choices, to exercise will, to be proud of our achievements, to know the exhilaration of being alive and full of ourselves.

At the same time, the Being Conscious self views the world from a subjective personal perspective. When we choose our opinion about something, arrived at through self-reflection, we can typically be self-opinionated and self-assertive, pressing our opinion upon others. Self-reflection sometimes means a self-reflective mirror. This Being Conscious self has an overwhelming sense of our own centrality.

Becoming One

The Being Conscious self views the world from a subjective personal perspective. This is the state of fusion at the start of the Becoming One phase.

The Becoming One phase involves ***differentiation*** from fusion with the self-opinionated and self-assertive Being Conscious self. Becoming One is a lifelong journey towards wholeness; we spend the rest of our lives integrating our sense of wholeness, within ourselves, with others, and with the natural world.

The process of ***differentiation*** is characterised by: **a facility to see through the self-reflective mirror;**

increasing consciousness; an increasing sense of oneness and willingness to be part of the whole, along with all people, all living things, the natural world, with all existence.

The Becoming One phase of human life is in the growing sense that *one* is not separate from the time/space continuum which is the whole of existence. While once existing as stardust, *one* is not separate from sun and stars from which *one* came, not separate from the elements—water, earth, air, fire—existing within and without *one*, not separate from *one's* seed flowing back in time to the first self-reproducing organism, not separate now from other people, other species, nor from responsibility. Such self-reflective consciousness is what we as therapists need to seek if we are to help our clients to find it.

The Becoming One self possesses increasingly: a sense of self; a sense of integrity; the reception, expression, and communication of emotions and feelings; the ability to regulate stress; empathy with others; compassion for others; a sense of humour; insight, intuition, and creativity. The Becoming One self learns humility, understanding that Becoming One is not better than Being Conscious, just as Being Conscious is not better than Becoming Conscious; these are just phases in an expanding spiral of growth.

The Becoming One self transcends, includes, and moderates the Being Conscious self, retaining the full realisation of being a unique self, free to make choices, to exercise will, to be proud of our achievements, to know the exhilaration of being alive and full of ourselves.

Engaging with another at the Becoming One phase means: expressing our point of view with integrity; being willing to listen and seek to understand their point of view; recognising their right to their point of view, without offering counter argument; yet, being willing to engage openly with them towards a synthesis of ideas.

On the Becoming One journey, I need to acknowledge and respect my integrity—as a unique, separate, and independent self within the whole—before I am equipped to acknowledge and respect another's integrity—as a unique, separate, and independent self within the whole—and by the same token to acknowledge and respect other living things within the whole.

We are becoming free to relate to one another, to agree to dialogue together, to work together, to love each other and all living things, without ego projection or subjective personal assertion.

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Author Details

David England is a Psychotherapist, Writer, and Storyteller.

"As a UKCP Registered psychotherapist, I am a novice of 25 years standing. As a writer and storyteller, I have three published books: Soulfulness : The Marriage of Shamanic and Contemporary Psychology (Routledge 2017); Lancashire Folk Tales (David England and Jennie Bailey, The History Press, 2014); and Berkshire Folk Tales (David England and Tina Bilbé, The History Press, 2013). And a fourth to be published in Spring: Storytelling from a Psychotherapy Perspective : Bawdy and Beastly Tales (Routledge 2026).



That is what I choose to do. It is not who I am. This is who I am: I am imaginative and intuitive, original in my thoughts. I believe in the power of language, spoken and written, to create meaningful connection. I value love, friendship, clarity, and authenticity. My favourite word is 'grace'. I take no credit for such qualities and values: they come by grace from a source deep within me and from my familial and social inheritance. They are the guiding principles of my life and the legacy I am here to pass on to others.

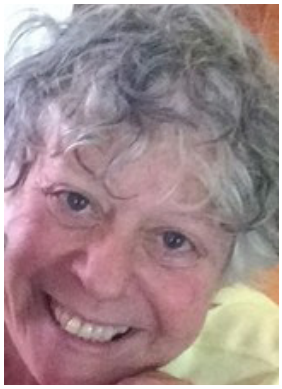
A Poem and Image by Shamai Gabbay

me



I look to the sun
For my work has begun
A learning a change in my style
For there is more to be learnt
And so much more to absorb
As I walk through my life
Single file
I don't always know
What to do what to say
So many voices inside to be heard
And I take just one more
And then another
Sometimes flying as high
As a bird
To learn and to grow
I need more than I am
Need to try and rehearse for the part
For standing and waiting
Will not get me there
So I look back to find out
Where to start
Personalities and history all play a part
They direct me and show me the triggers
Forgiving letting go is I style I need
Forgetting to check all the rigors
Who can I be in this game we call Life
What direction should I now take
How to pronounce life and live in one breathe
Making through all the shame for my sake
I am I will be and I have always been
For sure this I will not be forsaken
To just be my self is as it should be
For everyone else is already taken

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Shamai Gabbay, PhD, lives in Karmiel, Israel. She is a graduate of Psychosynthesis Pathways of Montreal and has served for many years, in many varied positions, on the Steering Committee of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis. She is a retired psychotherapist, educator, and educational consultant and has done volunteer work in hospice and home care services, prisons, and senior's residences and has presented at numerous conferences, been published in many peer review journals, and is the author of Meaghan's Story. Shamai expresses her creativity through all the senses.



A New Beginning and an Endless Story

Ewa Danuta Bialek

Psychosynthesis became part of my story, which began around the age of 50 at a turning point in my life. Until that point, I thought everything was fine. I enjoyed my job, my children growing, and I was happy. And then one day I woke up with the conviction that this was an illusion. I realized I loved science, but not the kind I was involved in, because it was leading me nowhere. Above all, it did not provide me with answers to the questions I asked myself about the meaning of what I was doing.

And then I had the idea of changing jobs. I got a new one related to science, but it should have been more practical and more connected to life.

Then, once I was there, someone assigned me to a workshop for managers. It was the American School of Development. John Cullen led my first class, which lasted five days. The next one was due to be in a month and would last 9 months, but at that point, I had no guarantee that I would still have this opportunity.

The opportunity repeated itself, and so nine months passed. I soon realized that this was “mine” and that it was the beginning of a fresh path that I would follow.

In the following years, I changed jobs several times before finally “settling down.” I created the “work of my life,” which led me through “the synthesis of my history and understanding of who I am, where I come from, and where I am going.

This is how I wrote over 50 books, as well as dozens of conference presentations and scientific articles published in various outlets. I dedicated the first 25 years of my professional life to medicine, which was the root of many of the books, while the rest were concerned with upbringing, education, and life in the broad sense. In this new stage, I first explored the causes of auto-immune diseases, for which I found I needed psychosynthesis, and through which I laid the foundations for understanding the “model of education for the future”–education for health at home, at school, and in the world.

Psychosynthesis permitted me to see more and more the meaning of my traumatic experiences, which had resulted in autoimmune diseases. It was a path I discovered thanks to John and the American School of Development, where I learned to manage myself. Over the next few years, I “dug deeper” into the causes of my dramatic experiences. I needed to understand not only their meaning in terms of what had happened to me and what I was suffering from, but also the obvious effects of civilization-related diseases on society. These diseases affected the entire body, attacking various systems and organs, although these were given different labels (by which I mean, “daignoses”). These problems involved chronic inflammation and led to the disruption of the body, including cancer and degenerative diseases. However, these diseases present in similar ways. They differ only in the stage of their development and consequences. Because they attack the entire body, over time, they merge into one another.

Over the past month of the previous year, I had completed three more syntheses and published three more books. This was what I had always been looking for–linking causes with effects. John Cullen said in one of his classes that managing others starts with managing ourselves.

My childhood, unknowingly, laid the groundwork for autoimmune disease. It resulted from nearly 10 years of stress caused by my father’s imprisonment as a political prisoner in Poland when I was 2 years old. When, at a turning point in my life, I discovered psychosynthesis and learned to manage my health problems, I could diagnose myself and, over the following years, I lived with my illnesses, paving the way for their departure and my recovery.

Understanding the reason is the first step on this path. The rest depended on me, on my will and determination. This exploration of the roots resulted in my involvement in pedagogy. I created a "model of education for the future" so that years later, therapy would not be necessary, as in my case. I dedicated three decades of my life to this.

Summarizing the effects and causes, I noticed that proper upbringing in the family, followed by school education, should support the harmonious development of the child from an early age, including coping with stress, difficult situations, and self-expression. This is how my self-education guides came about, which I later used for many workshops with kindergarten and school teachers and children. A few years later, I could teach health education classes at the university.

At each stage of education, I prepared evaluation surveys of the effect of the program I had created. Although I expected positive results, the outcome exceeded my expectations. And so, I published more books, summarizing the effects of the workshops on both psychosynthesis itself and its application in health education at all stages of education . But most importantly, two works of my life came into being: a book on education in the new era for personal and planetary health , and the University of Integrated Education . The latter summarizes a model of education for the future, integrating upbringing, education, and academic training into one's life mission. Over the years, I published all the books in Polish.

Back to my health, I have already said goodbye to many problems. This applies, for example, to fibromyalgia. I have dedicated seven of my books to this topic.

I have learned to control, influence, and change the course of other problems. Over the years, I have consulted dozens of people who did not find support in the classic approach to treating symptoms. While working with them, these people experienced self-understanding. Over the course of three months, I showed them Vivian King's "inner theater." From then on, they could switch to "self-power" as self-observation and making changes that engaged their will to act.

This is a never-ending story related to the "psycho-synthesis of age," showing that synthesis is essential in all areas of life, in integrating one's experiences to understand one's health/illness issues, but above all, one's life path and mission.

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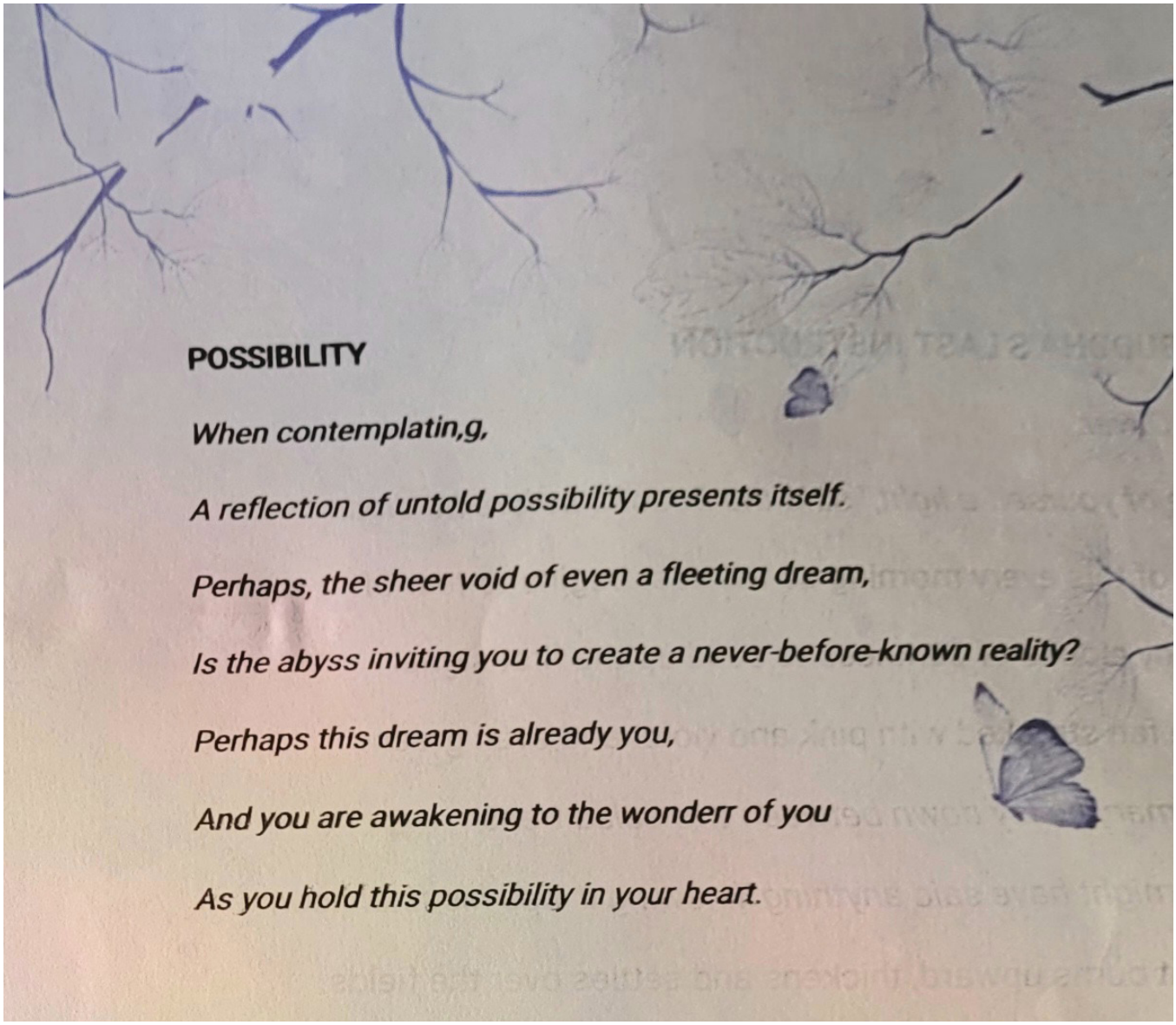
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Dr. Ewa Danuta Bialek—a lifelong scientist in medicine—completed postgraduate studies in psychology and has Psychosynthesis training. In 1997, she founded the Association, Education for the Future, and in 2004, the Institute of Psychosynthesis in Warsaw, Poland. She has written 52 books and over 60 articles in scientific journals. Most of her books are now on Amazon in English: https://www.amazon.com/author/dr.ewa-danuta-bialek1 . Topics include: raising children to be healthy; the causes of autoimmune diseases and the possibilities of their healing; increasing women's consciousness; entrepreneurship with a soul; transpersonal coaching; models of education and a new paradigm in science, all seen through the lens of psychosynthesis. Ewa teaches people about well-being and develops comprehensive methods to address the need for health education at all life stages. https://psychosynteza.pl and ewa.bialek@psychosynteza.pl



A Poem
By Judi White



Author Details



Judi White, M.S. Special Education, M.Ed. Counselor Education, trained in Psychosynthesis with Martha Crampton and Edith Stauffer in the 1980's and integrated this spiritual paradigm into her career as Teacher and Guidance Counselor. She also established Sophia Circle, a group counseling business. Now retired, Judi lives in northeast Florida. As a member of AAP, she served as co-chair 2011 to 2013. During this time, she initiated the rebirth of this AAP Newsletter and coordinated the 2013 AAP conference where the now established Psychosynthesis Coaching was introduced. Journal writing became an essential practice for maintaining resilience in her career and in the turmoil of these changing times. These days, she integrates Psychosynthesis with the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village tradition. Gracefully aging with a fairly solitary life style, she practices and teaches meditation and journal writing. Her recent book Bodhi Leaves, published in August 2024 and available on Amazon, was a two-year project to celebrate 80 years of being alive and reinventing herself as an elder for the 21st Century.

The Existential Edge

A Psychospiritual Perspective on the Will to Live and the Wish to Die

By Sabu Bhugobaun

"Nothing beyond yourself can make you fearful or loving, because nothing is beyond you. Time and eternity are both in your mind, and will conflict until you perceive time solely as a means to regain eternity. You cannot do this as long as you believe that anything happening to you is caused by factors outside yourself. You must learn that time is solely at your disposal, and that nothing in the world can take this responsibility from you. You can violate God's laws in your imagination, but you cannot escape from them. They were established for your protection and are as inviolate as your safety." (A Course in Miracles -ACIM)



History, not being an actual presence and therefore having no capacity to repeat itself, holds the great lesson that we still fail to learn; that until mankind takes a very good look within and understands the depth of his shadow, there will be no change. As much as he tries, and may beautifully garnish his predicament to look like change, death and destruction still take hold until man decides to awaken to his true Presence; that which "makes all things new." (Rev 21:5) Only then will he have no need for destruction. Many philosophies, religions and psychologies know this, but still we see no real change. The past and future are dependent on time; and yet "time and eternity are both in (the) mind." (ACIM) It seems to me that no psychology will be able to make a difference until a certain existential edge is addressed, which must happen individually before it can collectively achieve its critical mass.

In previous articles, I talked about the shadow side of the psyche. I mentioned Freud's death drive as a form of psychological survival, and the need to differentiate the Self from the superego. But I neglected to unpack them. Building on themes from previous articles, I attempt to unravel Freud's instinctual drives as I see them, and the function of the superego. Whilst the superego seems to act as a moral compass, it is actually in service of the shadow; that destruction and death are an egoic human need to prevent existential guilt surfacing to consciousness. This does not negate that in our current times the superego's caretaking aspects are sorely lacking and sorely needed. The rebellion against the superego without having the Self to replace it is a very serious problem.

I chose the quote above, which in parts is revisited in the text, because it sets the task for the inner work and where the responsibility lies. It also suggests that much of our use of what we know as 'free will,' is an imaginary violation of Universal Law; that despite our experience, we are safe. One would hope that this is a relief, where the body and mind can relax, open, and let the light in.

We are spiritual beings existing in unity. “The isolated individual does not exist.” (Assagioli,1993) Theologian Paul Tillich (1980) expressed that “... under the conditions of human finitude and estrangement, that which is essentially united (Being) becomes existentially split.” We have become separated from the awareness of who we are - the Self. The split engenders a void which is experienced as nihilistic, and gives rise to anxiety. Tillich (1980) adds, that “anxiety is the existential nothingness of non-being.”

As a defence against non-being, the ‘I’ fills the void with ego identification, and becomes fused with it to deny existential anxiety and guilt. By both using and denying the essential power of what it is - Self, to preserve what it is not - ego, an inner conflict is maintained. This is a form of aggression and also a source of anxiety. Dissociation, as an attempt to further repress and deny the conflict, is the survival response.

Through the experience of fear, the ego splits to construct the superego in order to help manage repressed spiritual energies that now appear polarised and considered to be instinctually aggressive - Freud’s Id, which he believed to be biological. Although the ego and superego appear to be formed during childhood, the process is due to existential fear and anxiety, caused by the experience of separation. By suppression and repression, the superego helps the ego to contain the Id pushing it into the shadow - Assagioli’s lower unconscious.

The aggression, which is both the result of the split and also the energy needed to maintain it (Kalsched, 1996), is projected onto the Self. This enables the ego to feel rejected, although by a power it is no longer aware of because it has pushed it into the unconscious. It is similar to the allegorical Adam and Eve who became unconscious to Reality by believing they were thrown out of the Garden for disobedience. Thus the ego identified ‘I’ is able to deny its power and become victim to the Self, but which it now sees as the superego. The Self and the superego are conflated, resulting in fear of the Self.

The ego-identified ‘I’ now seems to be victim to the body’s vulnerability. The body in its original state will be spiritual and eternal, and not physical in a process of growth over time to end in death. As Wilber (1993) put it, “...all things are being created Now.” In Reality, Self is being us, Now. The resurrection of Christ is reported to have been a physical resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:27), although he also demonstrated a body of light. (Matt 17:1-2) There have also been reports of Christ appearing physically and spiritually since those times.

I see the aggression associated with the death drive (Thanatos) as a form of psychological survival, since aggression is a form of protection that also uses libido. Despite the excruciation that we might endure in physical death, this points to the idea that the ego does not end in our physical death. In my view, while Freud (2003) suggested a need to return to an inorganic state, the death drive provides a continuity of identity for the ego. This would affirm the eternal but spread over time.

Eros, as a drive towards life -- survival and gratification -- is also aggressive because the Self has no survival needs. Self is and in its wholeness is completely satisfied - a state of eternal gratitude and grace - bliss. Our creation is not dependent on physical procreation. Nor is it dependent on the ‘survival of the species.’ Our birth was not our beginning. Beginning is a concept of time, and “time and eternity are both in the mind.” (ACIM) This does not in any way justify the barbaric nature of the shadow.

Whilst on the surface, the conflict of instinctual drives seems to be a confused state, which it is, both drives serve the same purpose: to keep the Self out of awareness. They both thereby serve the ego’s primary function of self-preservation. The ego defends against these drives because deep down in the unconscious they are constituted of the only energy there is -- spiritual energy, the full embodiment of which, is in the letting go that renders the ego obsolete. And so it is not the energy within the drives that is so much the problem, but the defence against them that makes them seem polarised and aggressive.

If the ego could successfully defend against the death drive alone and maintain the drive towards life, which it has not been able to do, we could dissolve our destructive behaviour and have no need for Self-realisation. Impossible! And so it seems, that the way the ego maintains itself is through death. Its function is solely to defend. The Self, which is invulnerable, is incapable of both defence and death. What Freud construed to be the ‘conflict’ of instinctual drives are made conflictual and aggressive by the perceived need for defence against spiritual energy - against one’s own Self.

In this sense, the will to live and the wish to die are two sides of the same coin, because to repress the Self is to repress Life. Experientially, this is still one of "the darkest and most impenetrable area(s) of the psyche" (Freud, 2003). As I see it, both drives work together in a conflicting drama to end in death, while leading us to believe that we have a genuine drive towards life; which we do, but not at this level and not as a drive. Self *is* -- not driven. The instinctual drives culminate in Freud's "repetition compulsion," but with the intent to repeat death over and over - reincarnation.

There is an unconscious will to get back to eternity - wholeness. This is why Almass (1996) says that "Freud's death instinct is a distortion of the longing for the cessation of psychic structures ...not for the death of the body (but) for the death of the ego." In the still tranquillity of the Self we are at peace, alive to Life, and the will flows freely. As we sense the call of the Self, we can perceive life as a vehicle to become more conscious and embark on a psychological journey. As the journey deepens, we might question our existential condition, and may see "time as a means to regain eternity," (ACIM) while suffering a series of psychological deaths along the way.

Being the result of a split, the superego can only suppress unhealthy desires up to a point because it is part of the conflict and also a source of anxiety. The aggression hidden within the split is part of a protective defence against the felt experience of the most catastrophic loss imaginable - separation from the awareness of Self, which is unconsciously triggered by each loss we suffer. As well as profound grief, archetypal energies of anger and rage reside in the unconscious. Rage is not just infantile and narcissistic - pre-personal and personal. It is a defence against the perceived threat of non-being as we approach the transpersonal Self.

Kalsched (1996) noted that "splitting is a violent affair." When our defences loosen their grip, we can feel murderous rage at the threat of these energies resurfacing as the split potentially comes together. This can be conscious and also very unconscious. In the final analysis, man is willing to kill or die rather than face the totality of his psyche, which includes the immense invulnerable Love that he is. In the form of aggression, he has become very weak.

Yet, "Cause lies at the level of the Self," (Evans J, IoP) and Wilber (1993) reminds us that separation does not have an actual cause. It is a present experience. Therefore, despite our experience, it does not have a real effect and isn't actually happening in Reality. This points to the power of our imagination, which Assagioli (1999) reminds us, has power over will in our experience. We believe it is actually happening. This cannot be denied. We not only see what we believe, but are caught by believing what we see. It is very real to us and we act accordingly, as we must, until we can see differently.

The Self is both universal and specific and we have become overly identified with the specific. We rely on specifics for our sense of self and identity. Central to psychosynthesis is the importance of disidentification, and the more we disidentify, the more we journey back towards our Home in the Self. This sends us back into the void where a terror of non-being to our adapted self may be experienced, and will likely be confused with the fear of death. "There is no death, but there is a belief in death." (ACIM) Again, pointing to the power of the mind and imagination.

We suffer the spirit/matter split. I believe this should always be kept in mind. Spirit is experienced as matter through the lens of a split mind, and believed to be two separate realities in two separate places - heaven and earth. Thus this life is not without profound meaning, but obscured by ego identification. Wholeness is experienced as lacking, and the eternal seems subject to decay and death. Spirit being whole cannot be subject to such an experience. They are an experience within consciousness, and therefore within the mind - the seat of awareness.

From the perspective of the concrete mind, spirit may seem to be without substance and intangible, and a fear of dissolution may ensue, because there is not enough stable ground in awareness. We can perceive danger and the need for escape - flight. Unfortunately, flight can also take the form of death. It is the psychic structures used to repress the rage that dissolve as the split comes together. Spirit is alive and absolutely substantial, and its forms (creation) are of course tangible. We can surmise, as the Universal Self is, and is all, creation did not come out of a void. The seeming void is part of our experience as we disidentify, and can only seem to be real

while there is an unconscious. If the fear of dissolving is a closer experience of the moment, it could present a doorway to the Self.

Attention is therefore misplaced outside of ourselves according to our sense of separation. Again, not denying that we need to do this. We do need to do this, otherwise we risk becoming ungrounded and physically unsafe. However, as a centre of awareness, the distinction between outer and inner is not real, which is why ultimately we cannot successfully hide the shadow. I see the natural gravitational pull to be grounded physically as a physical expression of the natural gravitational pull back into the void where we may reacquaint with the Ground of Being - the Self. This is why grounding is both desired and resisted - expressing a conflicted will.

Our genuine need is to feel safe and secure. Whilst we can gain a sense of safety and security through the development of a coherent ego structure, real safety is impossible through ego identification. As a defence mechanism the ego is always on guard to protect its sense of separateness. It therefore always perceives attack. The inner 'attack' which is projected outward, is actually the pressure of one's own inner call to awaken, pushed down and pressurised by the use of defensive structures, perpetuating Self betrayal and existential anguish - guilt.

As a need to compensate, the will to do good in the world and live a meaningful life, as wonderful and as needful as this is, is unconsciously driven by existential guilt. This is in conjunction with the superego. It is an attempt to bargain with the Self, and we cannot love that which we bargain with. It exposes the superego's aggression as a fear of condemnation and pushes the conflict of instinctual drives further into the shadow.

The need is to ward off the existential anguish, and the 'solution' is to kill off the Self. This is what I call the 'inner murderer' which I believe, to whatever degree, is unconsciously acted out in every moment of the un-awakened life, and spread over time to deny eternity. This is part of the existential edge. The Self is in every living thing. Death is inflicted inwardly and outwardly to keep the ego alive.

Tillich (1980) says that, "...the threat of death has always awakened and increased the consciousness of guilt." On the surface, Assagioli's statement (1993) that "...(our) belief in a future 'heaven' ...is altogether theoretical ...proved by the fact (that we) take the greatest pains to postpone as long as possible (our) departure for its joys," is of course wise and up to a point life- affirming. But to reiterate, whilst the impulse to prolong life appears as a will to live, it is still part of the conflict of instinctual drives and is often motivated by a fear of death. The fear of death can be unconsciously activated by the need to delay the onset of existential anguish, the uncovering and releasing of which paves the way for the return to innocence - the Self, in which ego identification will have no function and therefore no life.

According to *A Course in Miracles*, we seek our own death to mitigate the punishment we believe will come from God. This speaks to Freud's idea of the Deity as a projection of the superego. Although he did not believe in the spiritual, it is no wonder he took this position, which he believed stemmed from childhood with Oedipal dynamics. The seeking of death, however unconsciously it occurs, is an assertion of power in the disguise of powerlessness. It is a covert attack on the Self, 'affirming' that we are Its victims. It is a form of narcissistic behaviour. If the superego is healthy enough, it can protect us from acting out our destruction onto others, and may protect us from overt suicide; but in the end, it is part of the ego and therefore ultimately has the same goal; and so the ego has it's way.

Theoretically at least, we can see that the fear of punishment from Unconditional Love is an obvious mistake and delusional; that the superego and the Self are conflated. The ego identified 'I' is in an unconscious constant state of persecutory anxiety. Forensic psychotherapy believes that murder represents the 'solution' to feeling persecuted by a threesome experience ...in the delusional belief that the resulting twosome will eliminate any further feelings of persecution." (Aylward & Wooster, 2008) The fusion of the 'I' with the ego helps to ward off the perceived punishment from the Self - a kind of Oedipal triangle. Our strong affection for our defences renders the Self to be an unconscious rival or enemy, and projecting the superego onto the Self can only contain the conflict up to a point because the ego and superego work together for psychological survival, for which eternality is seen as a threat. Until awakening/integration/synthesis is fully complete, the Self is still seen as the superego.

In a nutshell, my ego's survival is dependent on my death. This is the depth of my shadow, which I need to keep unconscious to avoid the perceived threat from an eternal Self that seems to be unknown to me. And "not knowing who one is represents annihilation." (Benson, IoP) The dynamics surrounding the crucifixion story speak to this. In order to save their sense of identity, the religious authority in collusion with the Roman occupation sought to kill off the representative for the Self (another triangle), which of course could not be done because the Self is incapable of death. This speaks to Assagioli's tenet (1993) that the 'I' only "...appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no independent autonomous substantiality." It is therefore completely safe. "You can violate God's laws in your imagination, but you cannot escape from them. They were established for your protection and are as inviolate as your safety." (ACIM)



The crucifixion, while demonstrating our belief in judgement and punishment, was not a death for our 'sins,' but for our off-centred delusion; and the resurrection, a witness for our Reality and innocence; and reveals that the ghost we need to give up is not the body. As ridiculous as this seems from the perspective of the concrete mind, this is what I see as the existential edge. We work to uncover our existential guilt, not for the purpose of convicting us, but for the purpose of discovering our greater conscience as we travel the path of differentiating the Self from the superego, in order that Self-realisation may become a safer option.

I agree that from the perspective of ego identification, full Self-realisation seems an impossible task; but if the Self is what we are, it has to be inevitable, and it's seeming impossibility, nothing more than another defence to protect us from the existential anguish. It is not yet fully wanted. It is a matter of will and "nothing in the world can take this responsibility from (us)." (ACIM) The belief that by my death I can overcome the power and will of the Universal Self, is 'playing god' - psychospiritual narcissism. Inevitably I will feel fear and guilt, for this is a responsibility the un-awakened, isolated 'I' cannot cope with; that it has killed off the Source of its protection, without which, real identity is lost and shame ensues.

This existential edge is a very fine line to walk. Existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (2008) suggests that "death anxiety is the mother of all religion" and that "every nightmare is a dream in which death anxiety has escaped its corral and menaces the dreamer." And yet Freud (1997) tells us that "dreams are a wish fulfilled." The Bible states that the last to be overcome is death. (1 Corinth 15:26)

The biblical story of King Herod, upon hearing of the birth of Christ, and ordering the killing of all the newborn children so that he may protect his identity and kingdom, speaks to the striking parallels between incarnation, murder and Self-realisation. It is worth reiterating Wilber's (1996) point that "under the desire to kill lies the extroverted death impact, and under the death impact lies the pull of transcendence."

Exclusivity is the road to specialness, and specialness is the road to narcissism. Psychospiritual narcissism is an unavoidable dynamic of separation. There are many helpful psychologies in the world today; but like anything, if they are overly identified with, they will miss the mark and their use will become narcissistic because unavoidably, survival dynamics are still present. Psychosynthesis is always evolving and would be insufficient in exclu-

sivity, which is why it includes aspects of many other psychotherapeutic modalities that help to integrate the psyche. Such was my training.

Psychotherapeutic modalities are "here to serve, but are not supposed to be the main dish." Psychosynthesis knows that the psychological on its own will likely keep us bound in ego dynamics. It is also aware of how the spiritual can be used to deny the shadow. I believe its strongest point is that it teaches us Who the Real Therapist is; and it's not us. Yet, we are still bound in ego dynamics and the extent of the shadow is still largely denied.

Evans J (IoP, 2007) says that "unless psychotherapy takes on such issues as morality and responsibility for the 'more than the individual' i.e. beyond narcissism, then it fails in its promise to society." But as we have seen, there is a deeper narcissism hidden in the depth of man's shadow that is generally not considered; that while his real power, his eternal innocence, patiently waits for him, he prefers a pseudo power and death. Arguably, this is a right and an authority that we have, while suffering guilt and grief for the loss of our true Authority. Only through the experience of separation can the omnipotent power of the Universal Self be considered to be narcissistic.

As much as I appreciate the profound journey my psychosynthesis trainers have taken me through, which cannot be overstated, I am cautious not to wear a psychology as an identity. It is the depth of their own journey and integration, which I am sure is still ongoing, that enables its students to trust being held in the depths of their suffering. Like any psychology, psychosynthesis is not the be all and end all. Being is all and will end all suffering, and psychosynthesis is just another tool along the way, but a very important one for those who are drawn towards it.

Even with its roots in the spiritual, psychosynthesis does not attempt to explain the great Mystery. It stops at its door (Assagioli, 1993). But if we are to genuinely experience the awakening of a 'new beginning,' we must go back to our roots. The so-called 'magic' of new beginnings will not take hold in service to humanity until we find a way to own the depth of the shadow. "We cannot transform that which we do not own." (Evans J, IoP) It is a delicate road and a delicate balance. Too much exposure to the unconscious before one is ready can be dangerous, and potentially bring the unconscious conflict of instinctual drives as a defence against the spirit, intensely and forcibly into action.

Seeds need to be sown, and watered by those who care to water them. The will to do good in the world while neglecting to tackle this existential edge does not suggest an evolution in consciousness. It will not move us beyond our collective co-dependence, commonly known as the human condition, in which death and destruction are all too familiar.

"The illusion of separation is created by our minds," (Evans J, IoP) and "the 'I' awakens through the confrontation with its existential dilemmas." (Evans J, IoP) It is the 'magician' in us that needs to be seen for what it is; that it believes it can suffer an illusion as real and oppose the will of a Universal Self that has no opposition. Suffice to say, until we know who we are, we cannot know what we are doing.

Although a number of psychologies come close, I take the view that they will not help to resolve man's predicament without this deeper exploration, which is so desperately needed in our current times. What we see in the world today is what history continues to reveal; that despite our best attempts we simply cannot hide the shadow. The belief that we can is part of the delusion because the distinction between inner and outer is not real; and we will not see this "as long as (we) believe that anything happening to (us) is caused by factors outside ourselves." (ACIM) "When (we) have become willing to hide nothing, (we) will not only be ready to enter into communion, but will also understand peace and joy." (ACIM.)

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The Act of Imagination: A Reader's Response By Mark Skelding

Following is a review by Mark Skelding of Allan Frater's upcoming book "The Act of Imagination: Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy in Experiential Context" (see article above by Allen Frater).

The world, let alone the Psychosynthesis community, has been blessed by a recent blossoming of rich, thoughtful and gently radical writing about our practice, its theory and its founder from some of our community's most thoughtful and attentive authors. Allan Frater's contribution to this potent contemporary canon is another milestone, marking a particular moment of synthesis. Or, in his words, a recognition of "the twin principles of experiential-synthesis".

With the patience of an archaeologist reconstructing an Etruscan vase, and with comprehensive reference to Assagioli's writings and subsequent commentators and theorists, Allan reveals - and even revels in - the tension between what he terms "the synthetic-experiential" and "the analytical-empirical". The first refers to "the dynamic process of participation within the flux and flow of experiential life", in the sense of this is what living feels like, moment by changing moment. The second refers to a much more abstract, conceptualising overlay that seems to offer the reassuring consistency that defines any good theory. Leaning into such reassuring certainty, the therapist can inadvertently lose sight of the messy, visceral flux and flow of lived experience and get carried off down an "intellectual by-pass" of their own need to do a good job.

Of course, even if the meaning making emergent from holding the tension in the paradox comes like a lightning strike, there is much more here. Holding the paradox is a key that sets the way for unlocking and exploring a pattern that repeats throughout Assagioli's thinking.

This reader was especially entranced by the clarity with which such paradoxical experiencing is expressed and then transmuted into deep, underpinning wisdom. And as if that were not enough already, one must also commend the elegant grace with which its insights are translated into practical guidance for the therapist, complete with striking case examples that may well cause the reader to experience some "intervention envy".

The developmental psychologist, Robert Kegan, has observed that, so often, a therapist assumes a higher level functioning in their client than is useful. One of the many great gifts of this vital book is to remind us that the person most suited to understand their personal psychosynthesis is the client. Allan demonstrates how, by surrendering to the imaginal guidance proffered from the client's own language, metaphor, dream and experience, a guide can enable a client to meet themselves at exactly the level needed in the moment, freed "from the limitations of a psychology of 'the unconscious' and the related influence of 'inner empiricism'."

Assagioli said Psychosynthesis takes us to the doorway of the mystery, the rest is up to us. Allan charts how, as we approach the doorway, inevitably we find it shifting deeper into the endless mystery. If it is acts of will that keep us moving, he suggests, it is acts of imagination that keep us oriented and inspired. Alan reminds us that, before we became "people of the book", we were always and already the story and its tellers, and therein lies creativity, connection and freedom. Without the sharing and intertwining of stories, we become increasingly dessicated, "like a pot-bound geranium, drying out on a windowsill in the

hot summer sun". Synthesis comes when the window is opened and, yes, the light pours in, but so too the refreshing, moist air. The stiff, dried out frames of our worldview soften to new meaning, new stories, new shape, as we open again to a world of renewal, possibility, play and adventure.

This milestone of a read will bring practitioners and newcomers alike to a profound reassessment and appreciation of the depth and vitality of this work, the power of individual and connected imagination, and how both work and imagination are essential. Allan brings us to Assagioli's doorway where the living, embodied energy of psychosynthesis can lift us all, carrying us into these increasingly liminal times with acknowledgment of the pain and loss involved in transformation, yet with our curiosity and delight in the unfolding process undimmed.

Mark Skelding

December 2025

Salt Spring

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Beginning his career in wildlife conservation communications in the 1980s and '90s, Mark transitioned to psychosynthesis in 1998 after realizing that ecological issues were rooted in human psychology and worldview. Discovering Psychosynthesis through Will Parfitt's seminal "Essentials" he returned and trained in Aotearoa/New Zealand. He was later invited and joined the teaching faculty of the NZ Institute of Psycho synthesis for over a decade. Influenced by thinkers like David Abram, Andy Fisher, Tom Yeomans, Molly Brown and Joanna Macy, he explored ecopsy chosynthesis and completed a Master's in Social Ecology. Now based on Salt Spring Island, BC, he maintains a global practice, is active in the Climate Psychology Alliance, writes an occasional Substack blog, Exploring the Blue, and advocates for psychology's role in transforming our relationship with the planet - and ourselves.

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