

To those that study both psychosynthesis and the Kabbalah, the many correspondences between the two are striking. Although Roberto Assagioli, the founder of psychosynthesis, does not mention the Kabbalah in his writings, it is clear he was strongly influenced by it, both directly through Jewish mysticism, and more indirectly - although perhaps more potently - through mystical teachings from other sources. Assagioli had books by Gershom Scholem (the 'founder' of modern Jewish mysticism) in his library, a friendship with Martin Buber (whose interest in Kabbalah is well known), a general interest in esoteric subjects and philosophies, the works of Alice Bailey and Theosophy, the works of Plato and Dante, and a lively, inquiring mind. It is virtually impossible to imagine him not having a knowledge of the Kabbalah.

Sheldon Kramer, the American author and psychologist, researching Assagioli's library in Florence, found papers written by Assagioli on Judaism and Jewish mysticism. Most striking are writings which mention a psychospiritual description of the psyche that exactly matches that in the Kabbalah: '...the traditional Jewish teaching of the human psychological condition consisting of three elements: nefesh, ruach, and neshamah ... my main endeavor has been to give scientific proof of the existence and activity of the spiritual soul (neshamah) with the psyche (ruach) as an inspiring and unifying factor.'

So what is the relevance of these terms nefesh, ruach and neshamah? They describe quite complex ideas that have whole Kabbalistic books written about them. Put simply, nefesh corresponds to the lower unconscious (including the basic activity of subpersonalities); ruach corresponds to the middle unconscious (including the personal 'I'); and neshamah to the higher unconscious (including all the Soul Qualities familiar to psychosynthesis practitioners, and the 'Self').

These three parts (or perhaps more correctly, activities) of the human being have been compared to a candle flame. The blue/black part of the flame, at the bottom nearest the candle, constantly changing, 'invisible' to regular sight, is the nefesh or animal soul. It corresponds to the id and ego, being reactive, and based on inner and outer desires. The middle, more usually visible portion of a candle flame, the yellowish glow in the centre, is equivalent to the ruach. It burns with a steady light, and conveys a sense of continuity and certainty. The light at the top of the candle, the white flickering edge of the flame, corresponds to neshamah, the higher Self.

These three aspects, nefesh, ruach and neshamah, correspond exactly to the three divisions Assagioli assigned to his diagram of the human psyche, the well-known 'egg diagram'. It is interesting to note that the shape of the egg is suggestive of a candle flame in itself. By being egg shaped, it also brings the psychosynthesis model into alignment with Western esoteric teachings that describe the energy bodies of a human being as being egg shaped. The Kabbalistic diagram known as the Tree of Life, which is also divided into these same three divisions, is often drawn as enclosed in a vesica or egg shaped container.

At the time of developing and formulating psychosynthesis, Assagioli followed the stance of his contemporaries Freud and Jung in aiming at a scientific exposition of psychology. In those pre-Quantum days, these pioneers in psychology believed that to be taken seriously they had to place their investigations in a scientific framework. Perhaps this is why Assagioli generally avoided talking about the esoteric foundations of psychosynthesis, and specifically did not mention the Kabbalah. Also, in the first half of this century founding a psychology on Jewish mysticism may well have led to negative

repercussions that Assagioli understandably would have wanted to avoid. Anti-Semitism was rife even amongst the so-called more enlightened esoteric and psychological circles. Anti-Semitic attitudes have been uncovered in the writings of no less than Jung himself.

Further to this, as Jean Hardy has pointed out, the Kabbalah has traditionally been a 'secret' doctrine, its practitioners avoiding revealing their source of inspiration for fear of contaminating the source with cultist, personality distortions. Assagioli may well have ascribed to this viewpoint. However, despite this avoidance of quoting mystical sources, Assagioli, in creating psychosynthesis, constructed a psychological system that is clearly in tune with the ancient wisdom of the Kabbalah. Many of the main principles of psychosynthesis reflect those found in Kabbalistic teachings, especially the central importance attached to the act of will, and the inclusion of a 'transpersonal will' (or Purpose) as well as the individual will.

It is clear that the main Kabbalistic diagram, The Tree of Life, is at the core of the spiritual psychology in which Roberto Assagioli, the founder of Psychosynthesis, had a life-long interest. It is therefore not surprising that Psychosynthesis easily interfaces with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life to create a model that can be effectively applied in many areas, particularly in the fields of healing, counselling and psychotherapy. Indeed, an understanding of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life is useful for practitioners of all types of therapeutic work. The larger, synthesizing context of the Kabbalah enables different models to be included without any subsequent loss to the integrity of each system.

The Kabbalah can enable practitioners of psychosynthesis particularly to deepen their knowledge of the human psyche and to understand their basic models in a simple yet deeper (and wider) context. The Kabbalah helps practitioners to develop their own style in accord with universal principles, develop relationship in line with these principles, and apply methods relevant to each situation. Both the basic Psychosynthesis model and the Kabbalistic Tree of Life are systems of stunning clarity and simplicity. Using the two approaches together creates a meaningful synthesis that adds new depth to our work in service to others.

1 Kramer, Sheldon: 'Jewish Meditation' in 'Opening The Inner Gates', ed. Edward Hoffman, Shambhala, USA 1995

2 Hardy, Jean: 'A Psychology with a Soul'. Arkana, UK 1987.