

When Roberto Assagioli formulated Psychosynthesis in the early part of this century, he was an eager young psychiatrist who felt he had discovered what was lacking in psychoanalysis. He already had a deep interest in esoteric and occult subjects, particularly the works of Alice Bailey. Returning to Italy after his training with Freud, he had the vision of bringing together his spiritual pursuits and his interest in the workings of the human psyche.

Freud's psychoanalysis delves into the past, looking for events, particularly from childhood, that have affected how the individual relates to the world. Assagioli agreed with this, clearly seeing how important such work is. In an attempt to be scientific, however, Freud had cut out all reference to spiritual or mystical matters. They could not be quantified so were best avoided. Assagioli considered that by cutting out these aspects of the human psyche, the whole person was not being addressed. As well as the basement of the past, we all also have an upstairs of potential, of future possibilities.

So he put them together and formulated Psychosynthesis. As an antidote to the over-rationalised world view held by psychoanalysis, Assagioli's work was a vital presage to the opening up of spiritual and esoteric realms that we almost take for granted now. For the age in which he was working, he took the best possible course: putting together the psychological and the spiritual, then somewhat disguising the esoteric background of some of his ideas so as not to put off the straight, scientific community who, in the early stages of this century, were still deeply rooted in Victorian, materialistic scientific values.

As the century has progressed, however, things have changed. Whilst there are still some old fashioned analysts who will have no truck with the spiritual in peoples lives, the idea of soul and spirit is included by the majority of psychotherapists in one form or another (even if it is not openly addressed as such). The acceptance of the transpersonal in the human psyche is more the norm rather than taboo. Of course, the work of Jung has played a major role in this.

### *Spiritual and Transpersonal*

To understand Psychosynthesis, it is important we distinguish the spiritual from the transpersonal. Spiritual psychology is concerned primarily with the accessing of mystical or transcendent states of being and then, equally, with the effect these states have on the individual psyche. The concerns of transpersonal psychology are wider than this. It includes all events that are more than just the everyday experiences of the personality. As well as spiritual experiences, it includes psychic and inter-psychic events, and all aspects of the working of the unconscious, whether brilliantly lighted with spiritual energy, or endarkened by the repression that characterises the shadow.

Psychosynthesis was never intended to be a pseudo-mystical system with guides who take their clients up and down imaginary mountains. Assagioli's intention was for it to deal with much wider issues - to include analysis itself, deep personal psychotherapy that includes all aspects of the psyche, and of course, access to and expression of creative and spiritual energies. Psychosynthesis has the potential, therefore, to be a truly integrative and holistic psychology, perhaps of increasing importance in the new century.

Assagioli's original intentions are clearly eclectic and a serious attempt at the integration of different realms of human experience. His methods of presentation have become outmoded, however. Psychosynthesis is too easily taken on and used superficially by people whose tendency is to be over-identified with the mystical side of their nature. Most of us have a mystic within us, a part of our personality that prefers to transcend everyday life, to slip out of ordinary realms of relating and at its most

ungrounded, float around with its head in the clouds. At appropriate times, this part of us can soar to great heights and bring us genuine (if partial) experiences of the spiritual aspects of our natures. If sometimes we choose to give space to this side of our lives, all well and good. The problem comes when the mystic within us takes over and we become so attached to it we never really get our feet back on the ground. We become astral junkies, spiritual side-steppers or new age trippers. We all know of people who live large parts of their lives in this state.

Psychosynthesis can be presented in a one-sided way that is ideal for the mystic aspects of ourselves. This Psychosynthesis puts its emphasis on the light, on ascension, on dealing with love and light through the denial of the darker, shadowy aspects of our being. It could almost be the ideal psychology for the love and light brigade of the so-called New Age. But even the new age is growing up and unless Psychosynthesis can move out of this side-track and return to its original direction that includes the dark as well as the light, perhaps its future is in jeopardy.

### *Darkness and Light*

For Assagioli, the psychological pendulum had swung far too far away from the spiritual, thus giving him his *raison-d'être* for Psychosynthesis. Now the Psychosynthesis pendulum has swung too far towards the pseudo-spiritual realm of the mystic, the avoider of the true spiritual practices that require real work on the earthly plane. We need ways that do not encourage us to slip out of reality, but which force us to come back into life, bringing our spiritual energies to earth where they are needed. The soul energy within has to be made manifest, and used to help us discriminate and ground ourselves in a true spiritual perspective that honours life in all its aspects. A complete Psychosynthesis includes our darker aspects as well as our lighter ones and can help us to create a more holistic world.

A key concept in Psychosynthesis has always been that of the central importance of the act of will. Assagioli's greatest contribution to psychology has to be his formulation of the will not as a rigid Victorian power that forces its way forward no matter what, but as a fluid energy that is both easy to operate and yet mysteriously undefinable. Indeed, Assagioli maintained there is no such thing as the will - rather we should talk of the act of willing, which can only take place through the agency of the individual being, the willer. When we stop trying, when we cease struggling, shoving, making things happen, when we relax into our own being, the act of willing happens. We can learn to honour our authentic totality: this means we are not just perfect beings of light, but also a mess of complex parts many of which we would rather not acknowledge let alone own as part of ourselves.

When we are willingly on earth, not trying to mystically side-step painful issues, we then move into the realm that includes but is not controlled by the mystic. We can use the energy of willingness to move closer to who we really are. We can choose the responsibility of incarnation rather than attempting to trip off somewhere else. This is the true goal of Psychosynthesis, which can help bring about the manifestation of soul-filled energies onto our planet at this crucial time. This renewed Psychosynthesis is integrative through including the dark as well as the light, through accepting our limitations as well as our potentials. This acceptance allows us to be ourselves naturally and with ease. There is no need to deny the shadowy aspects of ourselves or to project them onto other racial, social, political, or ethnic groups.