

Stepping into Assagioli's Vision of the Fifth Force: Psychoenergetics
by John Coan

We are stars wrapped in skin. The light you are seeking has always been within.

~ Rumi

In 1980, at just twenty years of age, I went on a vision quest with a handful others who were seeking a connection to something deep and vital within. Leaving our watches and old identities behind, we hiked several miles into the woods, chose new names for ourselves to support the journey, and created a sacred space next to a river that would be our home for the next nine days. The initial rituals focused on developing one central question upon which we would meditate during our solo time. The question that emerged for me? "What is my purpose in life?" I didn't know it at the time, as this was more than a decade before psychosynthesis found me, but this was a conscious call to Self, an invitation for something greater to come forward and give me direction and guidance.

Praying and chanting in the sweat lodge the night before our actual quest, we set a clear intention that we would receive an answer to our question. The next day, on the bald face of a stone outcropping, within a circle about 10 feet in circumference, I settled in to what would be my home for the next 24 hours. No food to distract me, no walks to take, the question became my mantra, my prayer to something larger than myself. "What is my purpose in Life?" The answer, when it came, was clear and specific: "Your Purpose is to Help Others Heal Their Own Pain."

Almost forty years later this same purpose of helping others to heal their own pain remains my guiding principle, although the form it has taken continues to evolve. I tacked back and forth between body centered and psychological approaches until 1993 when I found psychosynthesis, which made room for both. In fact, Assagioli, in his monograph *Psychosomatic Medicine and Bio-psychosynthesis* (1967) said, "In practice it is usually more convenient to employ the word 'psychosynthesis;' but it must be understood at all times that it includes the body, the *bios*, and that it always stands for 'bio-psychosynthesis'." At the time, body and mind seemed to cover it all. Then, in 1997 at the International Psychosynthesis Conference in Pohénégamook, Canada, Martha Crampton gave a presentation on working with subtle energies, my first introduction to the subject. She said Assagioli had spoken to her about energy methods, predicting that "energy psychology" would emerge as the Fifth Force in psychology, and suggesting that powerful ways of working with these energies would develop by the end of the 20th century. If Assagioli were alive to see the explosion of energy techniques and practices, I wonder if he would revise his monograph to include the phrase bio-energetic-psychosynthesis. In fact, Assagioli ended up using the term psychoenergetics, holding in that phrase his greater understanding of energy work and psychosynthesis.

As a Diplomate in Comprehensive Energy Psychology, and a Certified Eden Energy Medicine practitioner, I recognize the seeds Martha planted that day have taken root and blossomed, since the primary way I work with clients is through assessment and manipulation of energy. I

was never very comfortable using a disease model, preferring one that sees people's behaviors and choices as adaptive, often habitual. Energy methods share the view that dysfunctional behaviors, beliefs or health states are habits, and as such can be changed. Much like psychosynthesis, the goal of these energy methods is not just the elimination of an undesired state, but the active and intentional development of higher-level habit fields that support optimum health and well-being. In psychosynthesis, there are exercises for strengthening the will or engaging the active imagination, both of which allow the client to take an active role in their own transformation. Energy medicine and energy psychology have exercises designed to do the same. Clients learn easy-to-do exercises, specific to their needs, because even if habitual and non-adaptive, energies can be re-patterned.

Both energy medicine and energy psychology work with dual states of awareness. As a practitioner, I see the wholeness of the client as well as the parts of them that feel broken or damaged. To begin a session, I invite the client to see themselves as whole, and I let them know that every part is welcome in the session; the pain, the fear, the strength, the potential. I want the client to cultivate bi-focal vision, seeing, even if only briefly, their own divinity as well as their struggle. When I look at the iconic photo of Roberto Assagioli that graces the cover of *Psychosynthesis* (Assagioli, 2000), I believe he did the same. I feel myself soften just thinking about his welcoming and accepting eyes and smile. And that is what I want my clients to experience; a softening towards themselves, a moment that speaks to possibility, a listening to deep wisdom below the constant chatter of the mind. I want them to simultaneously be aware of who they are and, to paraphrase Piero Ferrucci (1982), who they might be.

I believe all healing work requires presence, and working with subtle energies is no different, although I find being present to myself is as important as being present to the experience of the client. As an empath, I often have "hits" that appear to materialize out of nowhere. Not long ago, while doing hands-on work with someone who had recently lost her mother, I felt momentarily dizzy and nauseous, which I shared with her, as I wondered if it was connected to our work together. She explained that her mother, an immigrant to this country, was pregnant with her on the boat trip to the U.S., and my client, in a moment of dual awareness, felt as though she could tap into her mother's pain of leaving her homeland as well as her excitement at being pregnant. She saw her mother through different, more compassionate eyes. This energetic connection to her mother, to which she was fully present, expanded from a profound sense of loss to include feelings of gratitude for all her mother had done for her. My presence to her experience, and non-attachment to the path it took, allowed her to weave her own narrative to this experience, thus transforming her pain into something meaningful and relevant.

Both energy medicine and comprehensive energy psychology use muscle testing, or energy testing, to assess the body's energies and energy fields, including the meridians, the chakras, the biofield, among several others. When testing reveals energies that are congested or stuck, there are scores of techniques one can use to balance the energies, thereby allowing for the smooth flow of chi, or energy, in the body. Think of a naturally occurring dam in a stream, where twigs and leaves block the movement of water. If backed up for too long, the water

becomes stagnant, unable to flow. If I remove the twigs and leaves, the water naturally begins to move again on its own. The same is true of energy. It wants to move, and when it does so we are healthier, more resilient, and better able to handle stress. Energy testing allows me to rely on the inherent wisdom of the client's body to tell me what areas need attention. I attend to energy constrictions, releasing them when possible, but the client's body ultimately does the healing.

A fellow student in my energy medicine training, a physician who is an ear, nose and throat specialist, told the story of his wife who developed frozen vocal chords. He and his colleagues did everything at their disposal to heal his wife, using all of the techniques and technologies at their disposal, but nothing worked. Willing to try anything for relief, his wife went to an energy medicine practitioner who worked on her throat chakra for the entire session. The next day, to the amazement of the physician and his wife, her vocal chords were completely back to normal. I wouldn't say the energy medicine practitioner healed this woman, since I don't believe any of us actually have the power to heal another. But I do believe by removing the congested or stuck energy from the throat chakra, by eliminating the obstacles to the natural flow of chi, healing occurred. If my purpose is to help others heal their own pain and/or illness, then bio-energetic-psychosynthesis appears to be the ideal model.

I saw Martha Crampton again at the Minneapolis Psychosynthesis conference in 2007, where she presented on psychoenergetics and the "power therapies" of energy psychology and energy medicine. By then, I realized that even without a conscious awareness of it, I'd been using energy medicine in the form of flower essences and dowsing for a decade. Martha was convinced that Assagioli would have been on board with subtle energy methods, adding "there is nothing in energy psychology that is not psychosynthesis." I absolutely agree.

References:

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