ASSAGIOLI'S SEVEN CORE CONCEPTS
FOR
PSYCHOSYNTHESIS TRAINING

BY

JOHN FIRMAN AND ANN GILA

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In an interview with *Psychology Today*, Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974) spoke about what he considered the weakness of psychosynthesis:

> 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. (Keen, 12)

Why is being too extensive and comprehensive a drawback? Because without limits psychosynthesis ultimately becomes anything and everything, an eclectic collection of concepts and techniques, possessing no identity of its own. True, a gift of psychosynthesis is that it can understand and draw upon many different approaches to the healing and growth of the human being. But this inclusive understanding is not eclectic; it is *synthetic*—psychosynthesis holds all approaches and methods within a coherent view of the person and the person's unfoldment.

However, unless this overarching synthetic viewpoint is made clear, individual concepts and techniques become the focus and the broader perspective is lost. Thus for example, psychosynthesis can become equated with subpersonality work or guided imagery—common confusions—and what is forgotten is that these are simply two among many possible methods which can serve the unfoldment of the human being, and in fact, psychosynthesis can be practiced without either.

What can happen over time is that psychosynthesis fades into oblivion, its insights and techniques incorporated by other approaches. This possibility led Frank Haronian, one of Assagioli's early collaborators and author of "Repression of the Sublime" (1974), to muse that perhaps psychosynthesis was like yeast—it is an essential ingredient in the making of bread, but it is absent in the final product (Haronian 1989). Haronian's thought was echoed recently in a review of our second book in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in which the writer noted that many of the techniques and concepts of psychosynthesis have become integrated into the larger field of psychology, leaving psychosynthesis languishing, "the victim of its own success" (Cortright 2006).

Thus, while this inclusiveness of psychosynthesis has allowed it to relate to a wide array of approaches and to generate many techniques and methods, it has also led it towards having no recognizable identity, no form of its own. So *is* there an identifiable form that is psychosynthesis? Or is psychosynthesis destined to evaporate into anything and everything? Assagioli himself did in fact believe there was a fundamental structure or form that expresses the essence of psychosynthesis, and he affirmed this explicitly at the end of his life in the brief paper, "Training" (1974).

ASSAGIOLI'S PAPER ON TRAINING

In May of 1974, a few months before his death, Assagioli was moved to dictate, in English, brief notes or *appunti* on psychosynthesis training considered by some his "last will" (Dattilo 2007). These notes are collected in a paper entitled simply, "Training," and describe what he considered essential to any training in psychosynthesis, and thus, presumably, to psychosynthesis as a whole (this paper is included here as an appendix).

Most of these 12 notes offer principles for psychosynthesis training in general, but one of them explicitly enumerates seven key concepts that Assagioli believed should be

included in any psychosynthesis training program. To our knowledge, this is the first and last time he ever specified a curriculum for psychosynthesis training—a significant act from someone notoriously reticent to make categorical statements about such matters. This important note presents seven "fundamental facts," "experiences," or what we are here calling, "core concepts," for psychosynthesis training. Here then is Assagioli's brief but weighty "appunto":

> 2) While psychosynthesis is offered as a synthesis of various therapies and educational approaches, it is well to keep in mind that it possesses its own original and central essence. This is so as not to present a watered-down and distorted version, or one over-coloured by the concepts and tendencies of the various contemporary schools. Certain fundamental facts exist, and their relative conceptual elaboration, deep experience and understanding are central, and constitute the sine qua non of psychosynthetic training. These experiences are: 1) Disidentification, 2) The personal self, 3) The will: good, strong, skilful, 4) The ideal model. 5) Synthesis (in its various aspects), 6) The superconscious, 7) The transpersonal Self... (Assagioli 1974, 1)

Assagioli is in this passage keenly aware of the danger of psychosynthesis becoming "watered-down and distorted" by its inclusiveness. These seven core concepts are then a direct response to the "weakness" of psychosynthesis, offering a definite identity or form that expresses the essence of psychosynthesis. While he is not saying that psychosynthesis training should be limited to these seven core concepts, he is saying unequivocally that without these concepts one does not have psychosynthesis training.

It is important to note that Assagioli is here addressing psychosynthesis as a whole and not any particular application of psychosynthesis. In this same paper he lists five "fields" in which psychosynthesis can be applied: "the *therapeutic* (psychotherapy; doctor-patient relations); *personal integration and actualization* (realization of one's own potentialities); the *educational* (psychosynthesis by parents and by educators in school of all degrees); the *interpersonal* (marriage, couples etc.); the *social* (right social relations within groups and between groups)" (Assagioli 1974, 1). So when he uses the term, "training," he does not refer only to training as a psychosynthesis therapist or teacher but to training in the application of psychosynthesis within any of these five fields—his "last will" is clearly directed towards psychosynthesis as a whole.

If we accept these seven core concepts as the foundation of psychosynthesis training and so of psychosynthesis, it follows that any theory or practice presenting itself as psychosynthesis would need to demonstrate a relationship to this foundation. That is, any theory or practice—including those presented by Assagioli himself—can be evaluated by how closely related they are to these fundamental concepts. Here are cornerstones of psychosynthesis that ask any other building blocks to come into relationship to them. As we shall now briefly outline, these core concepts can then serve to a) guide psychosynthesis in its relationship to other approaches, and, b) guide psychosynthesis in its own evolution.

RELATING TO OTHER APPROACHES

Adopting these seven core concepts would not mean forsaking all non-psychosynthesis approaches in training programs or in psychosynthesis thought,

because as Assagioli stated above, "psychosynthesis is offered as a synthesis of various therapies and educational approaches." However, it would mean disclosing when a particular approach did not derive from psychosynthesis, describing the nature of its actual origin, and offering the rationale for including it as a part of a psychosynthesis training program.

This type of disclosure would be of immense benefit to students, clients, practitioners, and to psychosynthesis itself. It would support the introduction of non-psychosynthesis approaches, as long as their origin and relevance were made clear. At the same time, core psychosynthesis thought and practice would remain clearly delineated, and so retain the ability to comment upon, refine, and even critique the non-psychosynthesis approaches—something impossible if the new approaches were simply presented as "psychosynthesis."

The core concepts would throughout allow psychosynthesis to maintain its own unique perspective even while relating to a wide variety of other viewpoints and methods. There could therefore be both a breadth in psychosynthesis training, including "the concepts and tendencies of the various contemporary schools," and also a depth gained by fidelity to the essential foundation of psychosynthesis.

THE EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

In addition to guiding psychosynthesis in relating to other approaches, the core concepts can also guide the evolution of psychosynthesis itself. Assagioli of course firmly believed in, and fervently hoped for, the further development of psychosynthesis beyond his early and often sketchy formulations:

> …I should not want by any means to give the impression that it [psychosynthesis] is, or that I consider it as, something already fully developed or satisfactorily completed. On the contrary, I consider it as a child—or at the most as an adolescent—with many aspects still incomplete; yet with a great and promising potential for growth.
>
> I make a cordial appeal to all therapists, psychologists and educators to actively engage in the needed work of research, experimentation and application. Let us feel and obey the urge aroused by the great need of healing the serious ills which at present are affecting humanity; let us realize the contribution we can make to the creation of a new civilization characterized by an harmonious integration and cooperation, pervaded by the spirit of synthesis. (Assagioli 1965, 9)

If this type of impassioned statement and his affirmation of the core concepts were both honored, new developments in psychosynthesis thought and practice would be very much encouraged. However, those offering a particular innovation would make it clear what the innovation adds to the core concepts, how it is related to the core concepts, and how and why it may modify or add to the understanding of them. Thus it will be clear how the innovation might be considered a natural "branch" of the fundamental "trunk" of psychosynthesis and not something brought in from elsewhere.

The larger community of psychosynthesis practitioners would then be in a position to make informed choices about whether and how to include any new developments in their work. In this way, growth is supported while at the same time the essential identity of psychosynthesis is respected.

ABOUT THIS MONOGRAPH

We are excited about the prospect of psychosynthesis continuing its dialogue with other approaches and moving vigorously forward in its own evolution, all the while remaining faithful to its foundational principles. We believe that the seven core concepts offer psychosynthesis practitioners a structure that does not stifle or dogmatize, but instead a way to empower and guide the unfoldment of psychosynthesis thought and practice. This monograph is offered in support of this unfoldment.

Borrowing freely from our other writings, we in the following chapters examine each of the seven core concepts in turn, attempting to illuminate the connections among them as well. This follows Assagioli's statement that extended study and experience with the concepts "will always reveal new and more interesting aspects, which link the experiences together. That is to say, each experience will be seen to be not isolated, but to imply others" (Assagioli 1974, 1).

This monograph has been written for students and practitioners within all five fields of psychosynthesis application, and assumes the reader has some familiarity with psychosynthesis theory and practice. This is not an introductory or a comprehensive presentation of psychosynthesis and contains few experiential examples, vignettes, or methods. Also in the interest of brevity there has been no attempt to reference the many rich resonances between psychosynthesis and other approaches. For these interdisciplinary connections, for practical applications, and for more in-depth theory, we refer the interested reader to the larger body of psychosynthesis literature and to our past writing (Firman and Gila 1997, 2002, 2007).

We seek in this monograph to explore Assagioli's concepts by drawing upon his own writings and then upon our own experience as therapists, trainers, and teachers of psychosynthesis. Psychosynthesis is about "mapping" the "terrain" of human experience, and all our elaboration of the models of psychosynthesis have been inspired by the need to have these models more accurately represent lived human experience. More than anything else it is lived experience—our own and our clients'—that has driven our refinements, additions, and modifications of the theory through the years. However, we attempt always to remain true to Assagioli's original thought and to carefully explain the reasons for any amplifications, changes, or additions either to his ideas or to earlier interpretations of his ideas—following the principles of the evolution of psychosynthesis given above. To this end also, we carefully use references throughout the monograph, a practice we cannot recommend highly enough.

The reader will note too that we have here followed our usual convention of not using definite articles or possessive pronouns with the psychosynthesis terms, "'I'" or "Self." We believe that the use of such articles and pronouns in phrases such as, "my 'I'" or "the Self," tends to suggest an object of awareness rather than the pure subjectivity these terms are meant to convey. We have found that attention to these seeming minor details has been important in representing—always imperfectly—the illusive and ineffable mysteries of "I" and Self.

. Lastly, let us say we by no means consider our thinking in this monograph the last word on these seven core concepts (even our own last word!). Rather, we offer this exploration as a part of an ongoing discussion of fundamental issues within the psychosynthesis community. Our hope is that such ongoing dialogue within the community can become a rich creative milieu, nurturing the growth and development of psychosynthesis while remaining true to its "original and central essence."

Think of times you have spent with a close friend, someone who knows you well, accepts you, and with whom you feel free to be yourself—someone who loves you for yourself. Notice that in the presence of this friend you can for the most part allow your spontaneous inner experiences to be felt and shared. You can be relatively non-defensive and unguarded, feeling safe to be happy or sad, angry or hurt, serious or playful. The two of you can relate spontaneously and authentically, talking about virtually any topic that comes to mind and perhaps laughing good-naturedly at the foibles of your humanness.

In moments of such intimate empathic, loving connection you are profoundly seen, heard, and met by the other. Your friend does not see you in a limiting or constraining way; you are not expected to fulfill a role, maintain a particular belief system, or express a particular emotional tone. This empathic relationship in turn allows you to be empathically loving with yourself—you are free to allow all parts of yourself to come and go, to be aware of all of them as they arise, to move easily among them, and to express them at will. As psychosynthesis therapist Chris Meriam (1996) put it, "Empathy begets empathy."

DISIDENTIFICATION

This empathic experience with your friend allows an experience of *disidentification*. That is, you are not stuck in, *identified* with, any particular pattern of feeling, thought, and behavior but can shift and move among all of them. You are clearly distinct-but-not-separate from the various contents of your inner world, that is, *disidentified* from them all. You are someone who, because distinct from the contents of your inner world, can potentially interact empathically with any and all these contents.

In other words, there is here the emergence of essential empathic you—"I"—with the functions of *consciousness* and *will*. This meeting with your friend might be diagrammed as in Figure 1.
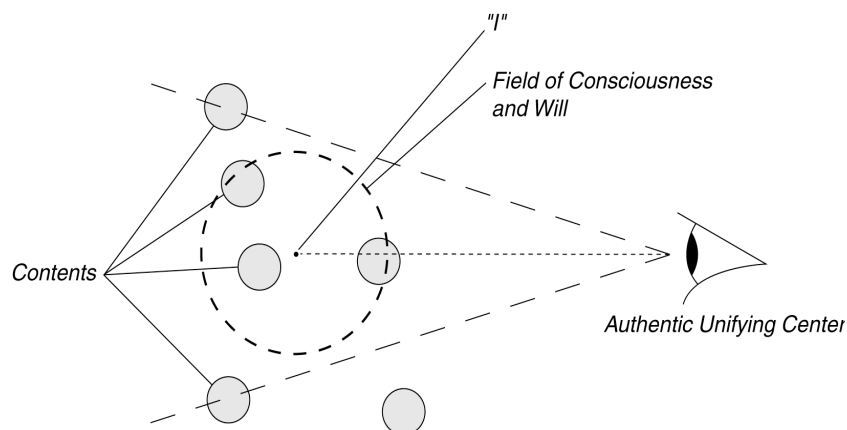

Figure 1

The seeing eye illustrated at the right side of Figure 1 represents your friend and the empathic, loving gaze with which you are seen. Note, *you* are seen—the horizontal line is focused directly upon "I," not upon any one particular content of experience (thoughts, feelings, sensations, subpersonalities, etc.). You are not seen as this or that content, but as the one who is embodied within these various contents. In psychosynthesis terms, your friend is acting as an *external unifying center* (Assagioli 1965, 26)—a context in which you can be in contact with who you truly are and so help you to "unify" or "synthesize" your experience.

Furthermore, all the contents (shaded circles) that move into awareness are also seen and accepted by your friend (an acceptance represented by the two broken lines radiating from the eye). This empathy allows the contents to then flow freely into and out of your field of consciousness and will, with no need to censor or control them. You—"I"—remain disidentified from any particular content, and are free to relate to all of them.

This diagram thus represents openness to—*and a full engagement with*—your ongoing, spontaneous experience as it arises in the moment. This is empathic love for yourself, an acceptance and respect for all of your personality aspects. (In an empathic relationship, this empathic gaze is often reciprocal, each person functioning as an external unifying center for the other. We have, for simplicity's sake, only illustrated one side of the relationship.)

In development over the course of the human life-span, such empathic external unifying centers—what we call *authentic unifying centers*—are taken in by the individual, becoming internal unifying centers. This allows the person to develop *authentic personality*, an orientation that includes disidentification from, and so full engagement with, all developmental gifts and life experiences as they arise, as well as a sense of meaning, purpose, and "call" in life.

IDENTIFICATION

Again, your friend above is functioning as an authentic unifying center, allowing you an experience of authentic personality. This is quite different from relating to environments that do *not* see, accept, and love you, but that are open to only a limited range of who you are. In the later case, you become *identified*, not disidentified.

In the case of a young woman named Ellen, for example, most of her life she had been seen simply as the self-effacing "Good Girl" role she played in her family, not as someone with a life of her own. Within the nonempathic family environment, she developed what we call *survival personality*, an inner and outer orientation motivated to ignore her own needs and instead only serve other people. This type of nonempathic relationship can be illustrated as in Figure 2.

Over the years Ellen became *identified* with survival personality, believing that this was who she truly was. She was not aware of her personal needs, passions, pain, or anger—all of these were kept out of her awareness by the identification with survival personality.

The eye depicted on the right side of Figure 2 now represents the nonempathic mirroring from Ellen's family system—what we call the *survival unifying center*—that does not see Ellen ("I") but rather sees and demands only the self-effacing survival personality (the horizontal broken line from the eye reaches only the survival personality, not "I"). They may feel love towards Ellen, but it is love for this role or

persona, not Ellen herself. This is not empathic love, but self-centered love. "I" thus becomes identified, embedded within survival personality; Ellen can only use her consciousness and will from within the world of the quiet, dependent, helper role.
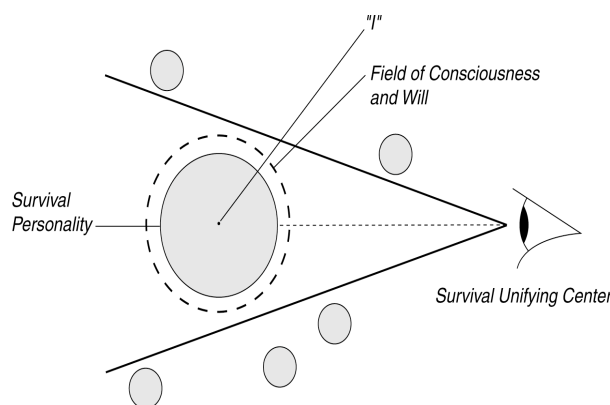

Figure 2

Note that without empathic love "I" is not free to move spontaneously throughout a natural range of experience—the empathic love of "I" is not free to embrace all aspects of the personality. Contents of experience that are not consistent with the survival personality (the small circles) are blocked from entering Ellen's consciousness (the unbroken lines radiating from the eye are barriers). For her to be aware of contents outside the self-effacing identification—her own needs and passions, for example, or the guilt and shame associated with these—is simply too dangerous, as this places her in effect outside her role and so outside the family. To the extent she breaks her role to engage these forbidden contents, she will experience psychological isolation and abandonment by the family—an unthinkable prospect for a child.

This situation is what we have called *primal wounding*, the wounding caused by not being seen as who we truly are. Ellen is not seen, so she must dissociate certain parts of herself. Later in her life, when the bounds of her survival personality are breached (see below), she confronts this wounding in a journey towards wholeness and authenticity.

Survival personality is held in place even after childhood because the survival unifying center is internalized. This survival orientation is further reinforced because it guides the selection of career, friends, romantic partners, and spouses. Survival personality builds a life style around it, creating a life that reflects the early environment in subtle and not so subtle ways.

THE TURMOIL OF DISIDENTIFICATION

There is a further important insight about disidentification to be gained from Ellen's experience when one day she suddenly became furious at being passed over for a promotion. This anger surprised and shocked her, as this was beyond the image she held of herself (in psychoanalytic terms, "ego-dystonic"). While disidentification can be associated at times with experiences of freedom, peace, and serenity, Ellen's experience reveals that it may just as easily involve turmoil, inner conflict, and anxiety. That is, on the surface she was much more serene while she was still identified with her survival personality. She was relatively content, experiencing little or no inner conflict; her inner world, though severely contracted, was at least stable and secure.

However, when she was passed over for the promotion, some contents from outside her identification—hurt and anger—became so energized that they burst into her consciousness in a very upsetting manner and she entered what we have termed a *crisis of transformation*. No longer the eager helper with no needs, she found to her distress that she was feeling pain, rage, and an impulse to violence. This was a bursting of the bounds of her survival personality, and led to her moving forward in her growth by expanding the range of her personal experience to include much of her hidden heights and depths.

Thus for Ellen, disidentification was not a calm, quiet, centered experience. Quite the contrary, in disidentifying from her calm, quiet survival personality she found herself plunged into the intense and tumultuous experiences so long hidden by her chronic identification. She began grappling with the unconscious inner structures that had been conditioning her sense of identity all those years. Disidentification simply moves us towards a deeper experience of our existence, and this may or may not be serene or even pleasant.

THE IDEALIZATION OF DISIDENTIFICATION

Unlike Ellen in this experience of disidentification, we may indeed have a particular experience of disidentification that feels liberating, gives us a sense of serenity, or allows a feeling of expansion. Such experiences will occur especially when we disidentify from patterns that are oppressive, chaotic, or constricting. *But it is important not to make the mistake of then equating disidentification with these particular experiences.*

That is, we must not then assume that disidentification *is* an experience of liberation, serenity, or expansion. As Ellen discovered, disidentification can just as easily mean engaging difficult experiences as well. If we confuse disidentification with any particular type of experience, there is a danger that we will begin to confuse "I" with particular types of experience: "When I disidentify, I feel _____, therefore, 'my true I' is _____." The problem here is that "I" is becoming objectified. "I" is here understood not as who we are, but as a psychological place, an attainment, a certain type of experience. In other words, "I" is misunderstood as a potential *mode* of consciousness rather than as the *one who experiences* all modes of consciousness.

Confused by this objectification, we may make statements such as: "When I am identified with my I, I feel free," or "I feel serene when I am in my I," or "I feel expanded and enlarged when I am in the I-space." But then, who is this "I" who "identifies with my I," or "is in my I," or "is in the I-space?" There are suddenly two "I"s running around here. Befuddled by this misunderstanding of the nature of disidentification and "I," we may then begin to seek these freeing or serene experiences and ignore less pleasant experiences, thinking these pleasant experiences constitute who we essentially are—and thus we begin to form a survival personality based on acquiring and maintaining these experiences.

Ironically, of course, you can never become "I," identify with "I," or move towards "I," because you always *are* "I" and cannot be other than "I." Whether feeling liberated or oppressed, serene or conflicted, expansive or contracted, identified or disidentified, on the heights of a unitive experience or in the depths of despair, merged with the Divine Ground or experiencing the Void, you are "I." To think "I" is a place to get to or a goal to attain completely misses the essential nature of "I." Again, "I" is not any particular experience, but the experiencer. You are already, right this instant and forevermore, "I." We take this subject up again in the next chapter.

CORE CONCEPT TWO: PERSONAL SELF OR "I"

> The "self," that is to say, the point of pure self-awareness, is often confused with the conscious personality just described, but in reality it is quite different from it. This can be ascertained by the use of careful introspection. The changing contents of our consciousness (the sensations, thoughts, feelings, etc.) are one thing, while the "I," the self, the center of our consciousness is another. (Assagioli 1965, 18)

Assagioli's insight into the nature of personal identity, personal self, or "I," is perhaps one of the most central and profound within psychosynthesis. Unlike many (most?) psychological thinkers, Assagioli did not confuse personal identity with organizations of psychological content, as do conceptions such as "ego," "ego complex," "self image," or "self representation." Rather, he saw "I" as distinct but not separate from any contents of experience, from any and all processes or structures of the personality.

While this view of "I" underpins all psychosynthesis thought and practice, Assagioli's most direct approach to revealing the nature of "I"—of "you"—is via the experience of introspection (see quote above), the act of simply observing the contents of experience as they arise in consciousness. This chapter will outline how the experience of introspection, an act of self-empathy, allows insight into the nature of "I." (Note: we use "I" rather than "personal self" and reserve the term "self" for "Transpersonal Self" or simply "Self." We have found this to lessen confusion in discussing these already illusive concepts.)

NURTURING INTROSPECTION

It seems that introspection—the free, open witnessing of arising experience—demands a particular type of environment. Many environments draw us away from listening to our private inner experience. Whether the demanding rush of modern life, the hypnotic bombardment from mass media, or a materialistic culture unappreciative of the depths of personal experience, there are active forces drawing us onto the surface of our lives (not to mention the limitations on introspection from survival unifying centers such as Ellen's in Chapter 1). Such environments—survival unifying centers—neither see nor support the exploration of our unique experience. Assagioli acknowledged the power of these environments when he wrote, "the self, the I-consciousness, devoid of any content...does not arise spontaneously but is the result of a definite inner experimentation (Assagioli 1965, 112).

In fact the "inner experiment" of introspection asks for an environment of empathy and love, an authentic unifying center. We need to be seen and understood as not identical to, nor separate from, our physical, emotional, or mental experience; to be loved and respected as distinct, but not separate, from our appearance, behavior, or roles. Such empathic love supports an inner space in which we are able to look unwaveringly at whatever experience arises, knowing we are safe to do so. This love allows self-empathy or self-love, as we are able to include all of our experience and ultimately to form it into a creative expression of ourselves in the world (see the previous chapter).

Such an empathic environment may take many forms, from friends and family, to intimate community, to a spiritual retreat, to psychotherapy, to psychological or spiritual systems. Psychosynthesis is one such environment, positing that the essence of human being cannot be equated with or separated from physical, emotional, or intellectual experience. Assagioli's very invitation to introspection as a way to self-discovery is an expression of empathic love, an invitation to explore for ourselves who we are. Having said all this about the environment that nurtures introspection, let us look at what introspection can reveal about the nature of "I"—of you.

THE FIELD OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Supported by the proper inner and outer authentic unifying center, you can achieve a sustained introspection that reveals a wide variety of passing experiences: sensations, feelings, images, impulses, thoughts. You can be aware of heat then cold; of sadness then joy; of thoughts then images. Clearly, you are someone who has consciousness, a consciousness that is distinct but not separate from the passing contents of consciousness. Your field of consciousness allows you to be aware of each succeeding content of experience much like a spotlight illuminates different objects in a dark room. It then makes sense to say that "I" has *awareness* or a *field of consciousness*.

PERSONAL WILL

As you continue this inner observation, you may notice you can choose to place your awareness on various contents of experience. You might choose to focus on an inner image, a train of thought, a particular feeling, or the sounds around you. Or you may choose to allow all contents to pass through awareness without focusing on any particular one. That is, you not only have awareness, but you have the power to direct that awareness as well. This ability to direct your awareness can be called *will*. Thus the concept of "I" may include will: *"I" has consciousness and will*.

TRANSCENDENCE-IMMANENCE

Introspecting over time, you may find that at times your consciousness and will are taken over by strong inner contents, causing you to lose contact with other arising contents. Lost in a vivid daydream, you may be unaware your foot has fallen asleep. Or feeling anxious, you may be unable to access your ability to think logically. In other words, you find yourself *identified* with the experience of daydreaming or anxiety and thus dissociated from the experience of your foot or logical thought.

But as time passes you may find your consciousness and will becoming free to reach beyond the thrall of that intense experience; you may begin to feel your tingling foot while experiencing the daydream, or think clearly while feeling anxious. You have here *disidentified* from a particular experience, becoming open to other experiences as well.

To put it another way, you have discovered that you are transcendent of—distinct from, not identical with—the specific experience; and in the same moment have discovered that you can be immanent within—embodied in, engaged with—a broader spectrum of experience. Therefore you, with your consciousness and will, can be considered *transcendent-immanent* within experience (Firman and Gila 1997, 2002). You are distinct but not separate from, transcendent-immanent within, any and all contents of experience.

It follows also that you are "I" no matter the experience, whether identified or disidentified, comatose or alert, young or old, lost or enlightened. In fact, you are not any experience at all; you are the one who experiences. (See Chapter 1.)

EMPATHIC LOVE

As you proceed over time with this type of inner observation—made possible by ongoing contact with supportive inner and outer authentic unifying centers—you can find that since you are not any particular experience, you can embrace any and all experiences as they arise. These experiences can include moments of ecstasy, creative inspiration, and spiritual insight (*higher unconscious*); feelings of anxiety, despair, and rage (*lower unconscious*); as well as ongoing engagement with various patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that you have formed over the course of living (*middle unconscious*). By virtue of your transcendence-immanence, it would seem there is no experience you cannot embrace. In the words of one early psychosynthesis writer:

> There are no elements of the personality which are of a quality incompatible with the "I." For the "I" is not *of* the personality, rather it *transcends* the personality. (Carter-Haar 1975, 81)

You discover, in other words, that you are fundamentally loving towards all aspects of your personality. You can love, accept, and include a vast range of experience, take responsibility for the healing and growth of this range, and even over time form these experiences into a rich, cohesive expression in the world. You have the ability to have "selfless love" or "agape" towards all of your personality aspects—not taking sides with any, understanding and respecting all, embracing all. The tremendous healing and growth from this emergence of empathic love—from the emergence of "I"—towards one's personality is a commonplace occurrence in psychosynthesis practice; indeed, this is at the heart of psychosynthesis therapy. As Assagioli affirms, "I am a living, loving, willing self" (Assagioli 1973, 176).

"I" AND SELF

So the loving, empathic presence of an authentic unifying center allows you to discover yourself as loving, empathic, transcendent-immanent "I." You realize more "you," as if your essence has become more intense or more potent—you are more disidentified and more embodied at the same time. But one of Assagioli's strongest contentions was that the source of "I," from which would come such increased intensity and potency, is Self. He wrote that "I" is a "projection" or "reflection" of Self (Assagioli 1965, 19, 20, 37), that is, our being ultimately flows from the Ground of Being, Self.

If this is the case, your authentic unifying center could be seen here as an intermediary between you and Self, facilitating this connection between you and the source of your being, thereby energizing and empowering you, "I." The authentic unifying center is in other words a channel for Self, allowing you to experience your own connection to your Source and thereby allowing you to emerge. This is precisely what Assagioli considered an *external unifying center*: "An indirect but true link, a point of connection between the personal man and his higher Self, which is reflected and symbolized in that object" (Assagioli 1965, 25). The empathic, loving power of the other to facilitate loving, empathic "I" ultimately flows from Self (see Figure 3).

"I"

Field of Consciousness
and Will

Contents

Self
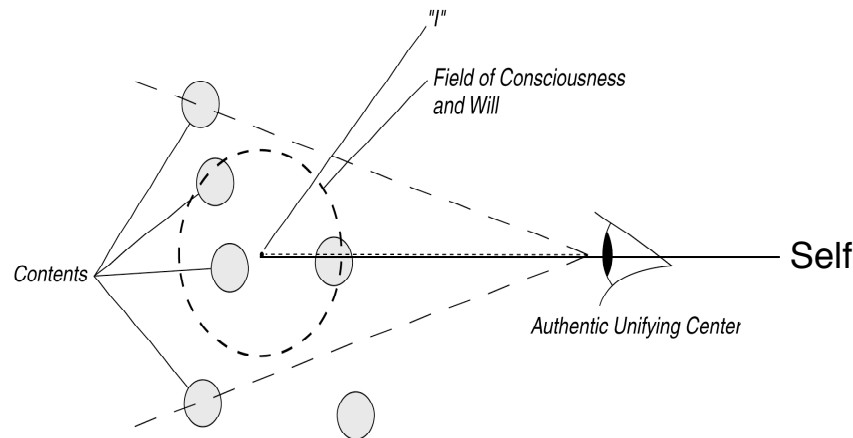
Authentic Unifying Center

Figure 3

Here we see the altruistic love or agape of Self flowing through the authentic unifying center, giving existence to loving, empathic "I"; the famous line that Assagioli always drew connecting "I" and Self runs through internal and external unifying centers. Such unifying centers allow the realization of the abiding connection to the Ground of Being from which we draw our individual being (the primal wound is an *experienced* break in this connection, not an *actual* break, which is impossible, see next).

THE UNION OF "I" AND SELF

Finally, from this direct connection between "I" and Self it can also be seen how completely "I" is in union with Self. This is an unbreakable, unchanging union because it is distinct but not separate from any content or context, any psychological mass, energy, space, or time, i.e., it is transcendent-immanent. So complete is this union—a union between the source and its reflected image—that Assagioli wrote there were not in fact "two selves" but only one: "The Self is one" (Assagioli 1965, 20).

But he added that it was also crucial to remember the *distinction* between "the Self and the 'I'…[or else]…the inflowing spiritual energies may have the unfortunate effect of feeding and inflating the personal ego" (p. 44). He describes the blurring of the distinction between "I" and Self as a confusion of levels: "In philosophical terms, it is a case of confusion between an absolute and a relative truth, between the metaphysical and the empirical levels of reality; in religious terms, between God and the 'soul'."

In short, while "I" is in union with Self, "I" is not Self. This seeming paradox makes sense if we think of the union between an object and its reflected image in a mirror, the analogy that Assagioli is using here: there is a complete union between an object and its reflected image such that any changes in the object are reflected in the image (but not vice versa); yet the image has its own relative independent existence at its own level on the mirror. Self is like the object reflected and "I"—with consciousness and will—is the "reflection of the spiritual Self, its projection, in the field of the personality" (p. 34).

Given this profound union of "I" and Self, it makes sense that as this self-awareness, freedom, and love of "I" emerge, these can allow an increasingly conscious relationship to a deeper sense of values, meaning, and life direction—Self, the ultimate source of this self-awareness, freedom, and empathic love, the ultimate source of "I." (See the stages of psychosynthesis in Chapter 4.)

CORE CONCEPT THREE: WILL – GOOD, STRONG, SKILLFUL

Assagioli's presentation of will in *The Act of Will* (1973) includes three "dimensions" or "categories" of will. These he termed, 1) *aspects* of will (good, strong, skillful, and transpersonal), 2) *qualities* of will (energy, mastery, concentration, determination, persistence, initiative, and organization), and 3) the *stages* of the act of will (purpose, deliberation, choice, affirmation, planning, and direction of the execution).

Assagioli's statement of the seven core concepts for psychosynthesis training focuses on the aspects of will and does not mention the qualities and stages (he also leaves out the transpersonal aspect). His focus on the aspects makes sense, given his belief that this category "is the most basic, and represents the facets that can be recognized in the fully developed will" (Assagioli 1973, 14). That is, for Assagioli, the aspects represent a full picture of will per se, while the qualities and stages describe the expression of will or the act of willing. We will therefore now follow Assagioli in his focus on the aspects of will.

To begin, it should be remembered that will is one of the functions of "I" along with consciousness (see Chapters 1 and 2). "Will" describes the dynamic function of "I" (Assagioli 1973, 12). This is the capacity that allows you to direct your consciousness from this to that content of awareness, and also to guide structures of the personality:

> The will has a *directive* and *regulatory* function; it balances and constructively all the other activities and energies of the human being without repressing any of them. (1973, 10)

Note that will is distinct from other activities and energies of the personality, and thus has the ability to engage and shepherd all of them. In other words, will partakes of the transcendence-immanence and empathic love of "I," enabling it to be fully distinct yet fully embodied within content. This is why will can engage and affect all other aspects of the personality "without repressing any."

So intimate is the relationship between "I" and will that Assagioli considered the experiential discovery of will as culminating in the realization of the person *"being a will"* (p. 7, emphasis in original). No matter where you go, there is your will. This intimacy with "I" offers an insight into the aspects of will and into their "development."

WILL DOES NOT DEVELOP

Given the nature of "I," we posit that will is *by nature* good, strong, skillful, and attuned to the transpersonal will (the will of Self). When these aspects are not apparent, it is because "I" is identified with some part of the personality that does not allow the full expression of will. Just as "I" does not technically "develop," but rather emerges, so will does not technically "develop" but instead emerges. As with "I," it is more a matter of working with the identifications that obscure and limit will. Here is one woman's experience of will:

> I was hurt and furious with him for criticizing me like that. Part of me wanted to lash out, to hurt him like he hurt me, even to do something evil to him. But instead I counted to ten like my warm, wonderful

grandmother used to tell me. I gradually could look deeper into him and see his pain too. There I was, feeling my hurt, my fury, and also now my compassion for him. It just felt much more right to say, "Sounds like you're really hurt, but don't take it out on me." He immediately softened and apologized. And we eventually made up. He's been pretty good so far, too.

In this woman's experience we initially see the potential for the expression of what might be called "ill" or "bad" will, "strong will," "unskillful will," and "self-centered will"—that is, her doing "something evil" to her friend. But in truth, none of these are will at all; they are merely the expression of a part of her that has been triggered by pain and gripped by rage and revenge. Moreover, if she had been conditioned by an inner and outer "holding environment" (Winnicott) that condoned violence—a survival unifying center—she might easily have acted out her rage.

However, her relationship with her grandmother (among others) gave her another holding environment, an authentic unifying center. Here the loving connection with her grandmother allowed her to disidentify from her rage and become open to a wider range of her inner experience. This empathic self-love allowed in turn an empathic love for her friend, enabling her to see beyond his behavior to his pain as well.

In this disidentification, moderated by her authentic unifying center, she was able to express *good will* in seeking to treat her friend as a person; *strong will* in that she was able to strongly assert herself; *skillful will* in that she accessed her grandmother's presence and then moved skillfully among her various motivations without repressing any; and a sense of *transpersonal will*, intuiting that her own deepest truth was to behave in the way she did.

But again, will did not in fact "develop" in this experience; it was rather uncovered and made manifest. If she had been unable to disidentify from the rage because the pain was too great, this would indicate that there was underlying wounding being triggered by the behavior of her friend. In this case over time she would need to attend to this wounding in order to free her will and manifest it as she did here, in alignment with her own felt sense of what was right.

No Methods for Developing Will

While psychosynthesis offers numerous methods for "developing" will, we believe that without understanding and working with chronic survival patterns, strong identifications, and primal wounding, such methods may be used in ways that are superficial and ultimately unsuccessful. Indeed, without such inner work, "developing will" may in fact support and empower destructive behaviors and attitudes driven by wounding, that is, survival personality. (Methods for "developing" will are in fact ways to develop qualities and habits that can aid the expression of will, rather than developing "will" per se.)

Again, "ill" or "bad" will, "weak will," "unskillful will," and "self-centered will"—the opposites of Assagioli's "aspects"—are identifications within the personality underpinned by primal wounding, not actual aspects of will; beneath these identifications lies the true will, already good, strong, skillful, and attuned to the transpersonal.

THE WILL TO BE POWERLESS

Having presented the freedom and power of will, it must be said too that as this potential for freedom and power emerges, it can mean at times an experience of limitation and powerlessness—we are free to accept such abyss experiences as well.

There are times in life—some would say all times in some way—which call us to accept our very real human limitations, to come to grips with the fact that we are far less in control of ourselves than we would like to think we are.

For example, many of the deeper layers of our psyche contain wounds from traumatic experiences of helplessness and victimization. Thus, when these memories begin to re-emerge and disrupt our lives, it is often necessary to enter into a full experiencing of the powerlessness characteristic of the original painful events. Only in this way can we accept, love, and then begin to heal them. Plumbing these depths shows true disidentification and love, because here one may actually choose to give up for a time any sense of independence and freedom, in order to embrace and redeem wounded aspects of ourselves.

If during these times we attempt to maintain a centered, choosing, self-actualizing persona, we are in effect dissociating from the depth of our own humanness. And this is dissociation, not disidentification; it is an identification with a survival persona. If on the other hand, we accept such existential helplessness, we can then disidentify from the "centered" persona and allow a deeper emergence of "I"—we "lose self to gain self."

Acceptance of our real weakness leads to finding our true strength. This acceptance allows us to break denial, move through the abyss of powerlessness, and eventually proceed towards a more authentic experience of freedom than ever before.

There is a profound general principle in this acceptance of our human weakness and limitation. We may infer from Assagioli that helplessness and dependence are not simply manifestations of early childhood experience, but are actually at the very core of our being—because, as we have described in Chapter 2, our very existence is totally dependent on deeper Self:

> The reflection ["I"] appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is, in other words, not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source. (Assagioli 1965, 20)

The process of *Self-realization* may thus involve the discovery and acceptance of this ontological dependence and helplessness. There may be times on this path when we are invited to experience the fact that we are severely limited creatures, in fact, that we have "no autonomous substantiality." If Assagioli is correct in the above statement, there will indeed be times when we are called to meet Self in experiences of powerlessness, disintegration, and loss of identity.

Paradoxically, at this level of experiencing, the true will of "I" is so very free that it can embrace the experience of absolute powerlessness and dependence. The transcendence-immanence of will is so profound that it allows engagement with freedom *or* limitation, strength *or* weakness.

Core Concept Four: The Ideal Model

To our knowledge, there are two major expressions of the *ideal model* in Assagioli's writing in English. The first of these expressions is as a theme in the four stages of psychosynthesis; the second is in the formal "Technique of Ideal Models," both described in his first book (Assagioli 1965).

As seen in both of these presentations, the ideal model in psychosynthesis is essentially an awareness—a sense, image, vision, or understanding—of how you wish to be in your life, an awareness that provides direction and guidance for the change and growth you wish to pursue. Assagioli views this as an essential method for Self-realization, of hearing and responding to Self's invitation to move or grow in a particular direction. The ideal model is not "ideal" in that it is idealized, unrealistic, or perfect, but is instead a realistic awareness of one's own attainable next step on the journey of Self-realization.

Accordingly, the first step in ascertaining an ideal model is a period of self-exploration in which one seeks to discover the unconscious images, injunctions, and conditionings that have up to this time provided a sense of identity and direction in one's life. This is a "clearing the channel," so to speak, in order to then be open to your own authentic sense of who you are and where you feel called.

The Ideal Model Exercise

For example, the formal "Technique of Ideal Models" begins with an exploration of the "multiplicity of models which prevent or obscure our self-recognition of what we actually are at present." The problematic models to be uncovered include:

> 1. What we believe we are. These models can be divided into two classes: those in which we over-evaluate ourselves, and those in which we under-evaluate ourselves.
> 2. What we should like to be. Here come all the idealized, unattainable models very well described by Karen Horney.
> 3. What we should like to appear to be to others. There are different models for each of our important interpersonal relationships.
> …
> 4. The models or the images that others project on us; that is, the models of what others believe us to be.
> 5. Images or models that others make of what they would like us to be.
> 6. Images which others evoke and produce in us; i.e., images of ourselves evoked by others. (Assagioli 1965, 167)

These steps show clearly the self-exploration initially involved in the ideal model; here is an extended exploration to uncover survival structures (see Chapter 1) that hold roles and rules, images and ideals conditioned by earlier nonempathic environments. In fact, it is likely that all the inauthentic models uncovered will be a product of this earlier primal wounding—of not being seen for who we truly are. Only after having gained some insight into these "survival models" is it time to ask ourselves how it is we truly wish to be, what we sense our authentic direction of growth to be. The ideal model per se finally arises as step seven:

7. There is finally the model of that which we can become. This constitutes the goal of the technique. (Assagioli 1965, 167)

The entire, formal Technique of Ideal Models is not a part of our current practice as Assagioli originally presented it. For example, his "aggression approach" in which the therapist actively debunks the false models of the client, showing the "hard facts" that prove the client's model is "impossible" or "dangerous," seems a bit heavy handed to us. However, the principle remains profound and extremely powerful: to explore one's psychological make-up and past conditioning as a means of discerning one's authentic sense of direction (we do employ a modified version of the technique with students in our professional training program). This principle of the ideal model is even more developed in Assagioli's stages of psychosynthesis.

THE STAGES OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

What have become known as the stages of psychosynthesis are presented by Assagioli immediately after his oval or "egg" diagram of the person (see Chapter 6). These two models, one a personality theory and one a process or transformational theory, are two major pillars of psychosynthesis thought. The stages are offered as a way to gain freedom from "enslavement" to what Assagioli called the "fundamental infirmity of man" which he describes in this way (he is using "man" generically):

> In our ordinary life we are limited and bound in a thousand ways—the prey of illusions and phantasms, the slaves of unrecognized complexes, tossed hither and thither by external influences, blinded and hypnotized by deceiving appearances…. No wonder that he, not knowing or understanding himself, has no self-control and is continually involved in his own mistakes and weaknesses; that so many lives are failures, or are at least limited and saddened by diseases of mind and body, or tormented by doubt, discouragement and despair. No wonder that man, in his blind passionate search for liberty and satisfaction, rebels violently at times, and at times tries to still his inner torment by throwing himself headlong into a life of feverish activity, constant excitement, tempestuous emotion, and reckless adventure. (Assagioli 1965, 20-21)

In response to this infirmity, Assagioli presents the stages as a way "to achieve an harmonious inner integration, true Self-realization, and right relationships with others" (p. 21). The stages thus begin by grappling with past wounding and dysfunctional patterns, then continue into deep exploration of the personality, and then move towards contacting and expressing one's deeper sense of authenticity and life meaning—the ideal model principle.

As described elsewhere (Firman and Gila 2002), we have elected to include Assagioli's "fundamental infirmity" in the stages themselves, adding to his original four what we call *stage zero* or the *survival stage*. We also have renamed and elaborated his original four stages. We will now briefly outline the stages, as an extended example of the ideal model principle. As we do, it is important to keep in mind that although the linear progression of the stages does make logical sense, these stages may not in fact be experienced in this sequence; they are not a ladder to climb but integral aspects of a

single process. Further, it seems that one never outgrows these stages; any stage can be present at any moment no matter how long one has trod the way of Self-realization.

0) *Stage Zero, Survival of Wounding.* This stage derives from the fundamental infirmity and can be seen to occur along three dimensions, all creating addictive, unconscious, inauthentic lives. In each dimension, there are "inauthentic" or "survival" models of self and other operating—"the multiplicity of models which prevent or obscure our self-recognition of what we actually are at present," in Assagioli's words.

> a) *Attachment to the survival unifying center.* Bonding to the nonempathic environment as an internal survival unifying center allows us to conform to its expectations, avoiding transgressions that would risk our being dropped from the relationship into apparent annihilation and nonexistence. Here is a source of strong images about who we are: "the prey of illusions and phantasms, the slaves of unrecognized complexes."

> b) *Identification with survival personality.* Here we identify with the role or image dictated by the survival unifying center in order to survive—"I" becomes immersed or possessed by the role—forming a sense of personhood or personal identity. Here we in effect become the images given to us: "not knowing or understanding himself, has no self-control."

> c) *Entrancement in the survival trance.* Attached to a survival unifying center and identified with survival personality, our experiential range is limited to the world of the nonempathic environment; we split off higher and lower unconscious and so constrict the middle unconscious (see Chapter 6). Here our ongoing daily experience is enthralled by false images of self and world: "blinded and hypnotized by deceiving appearances."

As one moves through the stages each of these dimensions of survival reverse themselves to become dimensions of authenticity: the person gradually connects to authentic unifying centers (e.g., ideal models) that support who the person truly is, disidentifies from the survival personality to manifest authentic personality, and becomes what we call *disentranced* from the survival trance, experiencing an expansion of one's experiential range, the middle unconscious.

Progress through the stages begins when there is the realization—often through a *crisis of transformation* (Firman and Gila, 2002)—that one's normal everyday life is far from satisfactory, and that there must be a change in one's way of living. Here begins the journey towards an authentic sense of self and world, an ideal model.

1) *Stage One, Exploration of the Personality.* In this stage the ideal model principle continues and broadens the phase of self-exploration. A key factor in the movement into the exploration stage is a shift towards more empathic, loving relationships—authentic unifying centers—that can nurture the emergence of "I." Here our consciousness expands and allows both a disidentification from older, chronic ways of being and an empathic connection with the many split-off sectors of our personal experience. Assagioli points out that this stage can include an exploration of personal

history; family of origin; intergenerational history; ethnic, class, and national background; and even "the present collective psyche of humanity as a whole."

The expansion of consciousness in the exploration stage can be facilitated by any of the many growth methods now so widely available. The current culture is filled with techniques to alter consciousness, to get more in touch with feelings, to become aware of our bodies, to contact collective and archetypal material, to explore our family and cultural history, to gain more serenity and peace, to uncover the sublime states of consciousness in the higher unconscious, and to uncover the wounding in the lower unconscious. So many are our options in this regard that it is frequently more difficult to choose among methods than it is to find them.

2) *Stage Two, The Emergence of "I."* While in the exploration stage we become conscious of the different levels of ourselves, in the emergence stage we realize that we are distinct from all these levels and can take responsibility for them—an important step in moving towards the discernment of our authentic path, our ideal model.

In this stage there is the realization that we can assist in the healing, nurture, and growth of these different aspects, and finally that we can guide them into a more authentic expression of ourselves in the world—the burgeoning of personal will (see Chapter 3). This more full emergence of "I" involves then an active relationship with the material that has been uncovered in the exploration stage.

This stage is often rich with creativity and spontaneity, with self-expression over a wide dynamic range, and with an increasingly empowered way of being in the world. But at this point further questions arise: "What is my life about? What am I here for?" Here the issue becomes our lived relationship with our deepest values, meanings, and life direction—issues of the ideal model principle, of Self-realization.

3) *Stage Three, Contact with Self.* As we have an increasingly clear sense of the many levels of ourselves, and assume the responsibility of actualizing these levels, we are led naturally to questions of direction. It is in this stage that Assagioli begins to use the actual term, "ideal model." Now that we can express ourselves authentically, what is important to express? Now that we have the wherewithal to create, what is important to create? What seems to be my calling in life, my path, my direction? In psychosynthesis terms, this is asking for a more intimate, conscious relationship to a deeper source beyond the conscious personality—Self.

In this stage there is a willingness to enter into a dialogue with whatever we feel to be the ultimate truth of our lives, an openness to hear from the most profound levels of our being. Enacting this openness can take many forms, but invariably it will involve being in relationship with people, places, and things that support asking ultimate questions—authentic unifying centers. All such authentic unifying centers work to expand a sense of relationship to Self and refine the ability to hear the call of Self—listening for one's ideal model.

4) *Stage Four, Response to Self.* The last stage of psychosynthesis Assagioli describes as concretely responding to the invitations of Self and engaging personal transformation and life choices within this context. Here we are actively manifesting our ideal model, our felt sense of truth, our calling from Self.

Many stories could be told illustrating this stage. Perhaps we immediately think of famous people who throughout history responded to a powerful call and were led to great tasks. More common, of course is the imperfect discernment and acting out of

one's sense of truth that occurs moment-to-moment on a daily basis. All of this is a seeking to respond to our felt direction and sense of rightness whether assisted by ideas and insights, images and visions, or simply a vague felt sense—all ideal models.

There is a crucial point to be made about this discernment and response to invitations from Self, the principle underlying the ideal model. Since the I-Self relationship is transcendent-immanent, this relationship is present in *all* the stages of psychosynthesis, including the survival stage. Thus no matter what stage is being engaged, the guidance from one's sense of rightness and truth—Self—is always present. (The stages of "contact" and "response" thus might more accurately be called "a more conscious and purposeful contact and response.")

Furthermore, since the I-Self relationship is at the very core of human being, we can hypothesize that every person is seeking to respond to this relationship in some form, although often in unconscious, distorted, or destructive ways. *Everyone is seeking to discern and manifest his or her ideal model.* Even the outdated models from the past, as painful and limiting as they may now be, indicate a groping towards Self-realization; they were ways of being that we needed at some point in our lives, images and patterns that gave us some sense of existence, some way to survive within environments that could not see or meet us. It is possible to appreciate these old, outdated images even as we seek to move beyond them to a more authentic or "more ideal" model.

THE IDEAL MODEL AND PSYCHOSYNTHESIS PRACTICE

In sum, the ideal model is essentially about delving into oneself, exploring outdated or inauthentic conditioning from the past, and then seeking to discern and manifest a more authentic way of being—to hear and respond to invitations from Self. In that the journey of the ideal model is one that asks for a disidentification from habitual patterns and openness to new ways of being, this journey unfolds best within a field of empathic love. As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, it is empathic love—being seen, respected, loved for who we are rather than what we have or do—that allows the freedom and safety for such candid introspection, disidentification, and openness to new experience.

Thus a primary task of psychosynthesis practice—in all five fields of application listed by Assagioli in his "Training" paper—is to function as an authentic unifying center in which people in various life situations can feel free to uncover their own unique sense of direction in their own way. Active, responsive, empathic love, combined with the skill and experience of the practitioner, will allow people to clarify, refine, and follow this unfolding direction. Practitioners' belief that the quest for an ideal model is fundamental to human beings supports deep respect and trust for the person's unique unfolding journey and discourages attempts to manipulate, force, or formalize the journey.

The challenge in any practice of psychosynthesis is then to recognize the search for the ideal model as this is experienced by those seeking our service—no matter how seemingly mundane this model may seem initially—and to empathically love and support the person in the intention to actualize this model. It is this non-coercive love that can facilitate the clarification, refinement, and manifestation of this intention, allowing it to become increasingly authentic or "ideal." In short, the ideal model principle invites psychosynthesis practitioners to embrace, trust, and enact their empathic love, knowing that this is what people need in order to become who they most deeply are.

Assagioli recognized very early that the human personality did not function as a unified whole but comprised, among other things, semi-autonomous and often-conflicting subsystems that he called *subpersonalities*. He stated that a task of psychosynthesis was "to synthesize these sub-personalities into a larger organic whole without repressing any of the useful traits" (Assagioli 1965, 75). Although Assagioli's conception of synthesis was not simply about subpersonalities, by examining synthesis in relationship to subpersonalities we can shed light on the meaning of synthesis within psychosynthesis thought.

Synthesis, understood as movement towards union within the personality, became the hallmark of subpersonality theory. This tendency towards union was subsequently seen as proceeding through five stages: *recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration,* and *synthesis* (Vargiu 1974). Over the years, it seems that most books about psychosynthesis have included some discussion of subpersonalities and how these parts are synthesized into a harmonious whole. This thrust towards union and wholeness was a major element in the developmental theory of early psychosynthesis thought.

However, unity as a necessary factor in healthy human growth has subsequently been called into question. One text on subpersonalities (Rowan 1990) specifically criticized psychosynthesis for an overemphasis on union, stating that psychological health may involve simply being "in touch" with subpersonalities with no need for harmonious unity at all. Furthermore, dissociation within the personality has been viewed as healthy and natural in many cases rather than as something to be eliminated, and even the treatment of dissociative identity disorder (formerly termed, "multiple personality disorder") may not involve integration of the "alters" but simply better communication and cooperation among the alters; terms like "co-consciousness" and "community of selves" here offer alternatives to terms like "integration" and "union" (see Richards 1990).

This growing de-emphasis on harmony, integration, and union is quite like the change in the United States from the notion of the country as a "melting pot" of diverse ethnic groups, to concepts of diversity and multiculturalism in which ethnic and cultural identity is respected and preserved. Here the norm becomes acceptance of differences and tolerance of the tension and conflict that may be caused by these differences. But is not the synthesis of parts into larger and larger wholes a fundamental meaning of the very word, "psychosynthesis"? It depends on what is meant by "synthesis" and "larger whole."

SYNTHESIS EVOLVES

"Synthesis of the personality" need not imply bringing the parts of the personality into a harmonious whole; it may instead mean an empathic love and communion between "I" and the parts of the personality—a process not necessarily implying harmony or union among the parts themselves. This is the same empathic love or agape we have seen to be so essential to "I," Self, and their relationship.

At the level of personality development, a view of synthesis as empathic love is completely supported by the understanding of "I" as transcendent-immanent—"I" is

distinct from all parts, and can therefore can connect empathically with all parts whether these parts themselves are in conflict or harmony with each other:

> To be integrated is to be more in touch with more of one's subpersonalities, particularly the ones which have been feared, hated, and denied. (Rowan 1990, 188)

"To be more in touch with more of one's subpersonalities" does not imply union or harmony among the subpersonalities, but only that "I" is empathically related to each one of them. So a transcendent-immanent understanding of "I" allows psychosynthesis to relinquish the idea that all parts of the psyche need to come together into a harmonious whole, and to emphasize instead a direct, empathic, loving connection between "I" and each of the parts.

It is important to point out that the role of "I" may or may not be obvious in the person working out this type of synthesis within the personality. It is not that one must develop a clear, strong sense of identity in order then to engage the different aspects of the personality; a sense of identity can emerge gradually as a function of working with the different parts. And in cases of more complete dissociation such as seen in people diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, "I" may merely function as the implicit, shared ground of being among co-conscious parts working out their relationships.

Of course we need not rule out the harmonious integration of personality aspects, and in fact as "I" connects with all the different aspects some may in fact move towards increased harmony and even union. The point is that this understanding of synthesis does not hold union as the prime value or goal, and focuses much more upon the empathic love between "I" and the various multiplicities that make up the personality. The "glue" of the healthy personality is not a seamless pattern of wholeness forged from multiple parts, but is rather an empathic loving of all parts.

TRANS-INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

We have thus far been describing an understanding of synthesis within the personality, with an emphasis on subpersonalities (we could also speak of other multiplicities such as body, feelings, and mind; the psychological functions; or even the levels of the unconscious). In this final section we shall explore the nature of synthesis as it occurs beyond the individual. Psychosynthesis theory has a strong tradition of extrapolating the synthesis of the personality into synthesis among individuals, groups, countries, and even all humankind (*inter-individual psychosynthesis*). Here is Assagioli undertaking such an extrapolation (again he uses "man" generically):

> Thus, inverting the analogy of man being a combination of many elements which are more or less coordinated, each man may be considered as an element or cell of a human group; this group, in its turn, forms associations with vaster and more complex groups, from the family group to town and district groups and to social classes; from workers' unions and employers' associations to the great national groups, and from these to the entire human family. (Assagioli 1965, 31)

In the most far-reaching extrapolation, Assagioli viewed psychosynthesis as taking place throughout the entire cosmos (*cosmic psychosynthesis*):

> From a still wider and more comprehensive point of view, universal life itself appears to us as a struggle between multiplicity and unity—a labor and an aspiration towards union. We seem to sense that—whether we conceive it as a divine Being or as cosmic energy—the Spirit working upon and within all creation is shaping it into order, harmony, and beauty, uniting all beings (some willing but the majority as yet blind and rebellious) with each other through links of love, achieving—slowly and silently, but powerfully and irresistibly—*the Supreme Synthesis*. (Assagioli 1973, 34)

According to this majestic vision, just as the synthesis of the personality may be understood as leading towards a harmonious unified personality, so contact with Self may be understood as leading towards a synthesis that unifies us and the cosmos in a harmonious whole. Here the emphasis on union over multiplicity is strongly evident, as the multiple and diverse move towards a union of "order, harmony, and beauty."

However, as we have discussed, this emphasis on synthesis as a progression towards union can be misleading, and an alternative view holds that synthesis may or may not involve this type of unity, order, harmony, or beauty. So how might this alternative vision of synthesis be applied to trans-individual and even cosmic psychosynthesis?

SYNTHESIS AS LOVE

At this level beyond the individual the focus is again not upon unity, but upon empathic, agape love. Assagioli's beautiful phrase in the quotation above, "through links of love," points well to this notion of synthesis as loving relationship. The fundamental principle of any larger evolutionary process would not be that all beings are drawn into a harmonious whole, but that *all beings are increasingly responding to their direct, loving relationship to Self.*

So just as subpersonalities can be embraced by the empathic love of "I," but not necessarily form a harmonious union among themselves, so individuals and groups can be embraced by the empathic love of Self, but not necessarily form a harmonious union among themselves. This view of synthesis and Self-realization implies a community formed of "links of love" that can include multiplicity, disharmony, and fragmentation:

> …a unity which includes fragmentation as well as wholeness would not imply the usual harmonious synthesis of parts; it would refer instead to Self's ability to be immanent in any type of experience, whether that experience is of brokenness or of wholeness. In such a unity, individual elements are not unified by virtue of coming together (although they may come together as a by-product), but are unified insofar as each has a direct relationship with the same, one, Self.
>
> There is more thinking to be done along these lines in psychosynthesis, because most often "synthesis" is thought to imply parts coming together into a harmonious whole. But the thrust of our current

study is precisely that "psychosynthesis," at least in terms of Self-realization, may not involve parts coming together in this way at all.

Perhaps the term "psycho-synthesis" can be thought to denote the process of synthesis or union based upon a relationship to Self, with no necessary implication of specific psychological or social unification at all. Again, it is the personal I-Self relationship here which is forefront. One may tread the way of disintegration or wholeness at different times in Self-realization—it all depends on whither the relationship leads.

We may think of psychosynthesis then, as the process by which we develop an ongoing relationship and at times communion with Self. This relationship with Self may in turn at times allow the experience of union or connection with all things—*whether or not we and those things are fragmented or whole, in harmony or conflict*.

Thus, this union is not a far-off goal at the end of an evolutionary process which will establish a harmonious planetary or cosmic synthesis. This is a type of union which exists *now*, right in the midst of current personal and world crises. (Firman 1991, 95-96)

Even as the notion of synthesis as love does not preclude the harmonious integration of the personality, so it does not preclude "order, harmony, and beauty" in the larger evolution. But this understanding does shift the focus away from broad conceptions of harmony and order towards something much more immediate and personal: our relationship to Self. It is the love manifest in the "spiritual marriage" between "I" and Self that is foreground here (see Chapter 7), not the attainment of specific experiences, states of consciousness, or stages of development.

Here we do not strive for particular experiences of unity, do not aspire to climb some ladder of enlightenment, or even attempt to stimulate loving feelings in ourselves; instead we seek a relationship to our life's calling or dharma—the transpersonal will—in relationship to other people and the world. Instead of being concerned about climbing up the Great Chain of Being, we seek our right place within it.

And if Self is transcendent-immanent, then our loving relationship to Self can be expressed in all the relationships that make up the fabric of our lives. Whether relating to our own personality aspects, other people, larger social systems, or the natural world, it is within networks of relationship—networks of multiplicities and diversities—that we meet and respond to the love of Self.

In this view, then, the larger sweep of evolution would not be a matter of forging an ordered, harmonious unity from all the multiplicities that surround us; it would be more a matter of manifesting love for all these multiplicities as they are. Evolution would be about our authenticity or deceit within these relationships, about our care or neglect within these relationships, and about our fidelity or betrayal within these relationships. It would be our love that would allow—or not—the realization of our right place in any greater synthesis. Let us close this chapter with a passage from Dante, quoted by Assagioli in *The Act of Will* (1973, 130), that points to synthesis as a response to universal love:

> But, rolling like a wheel that never jars,
> My will and wish were now by love impelled,
> The love that moves the sun and all the other stars.

In order to explore the nature of the superconscious or higher unconscious, it is necessary to examine all the levels of the unconscious recognized within psychosynthesis. In this way, the higher unconscious can be distinguished from other levels of the unconscious and can be understood in the broader context of the whole person. We thus spend most of this chapter establishing this context. Here is our modification of Assagioli's original model of these levels of the unconscious (Figure 4):
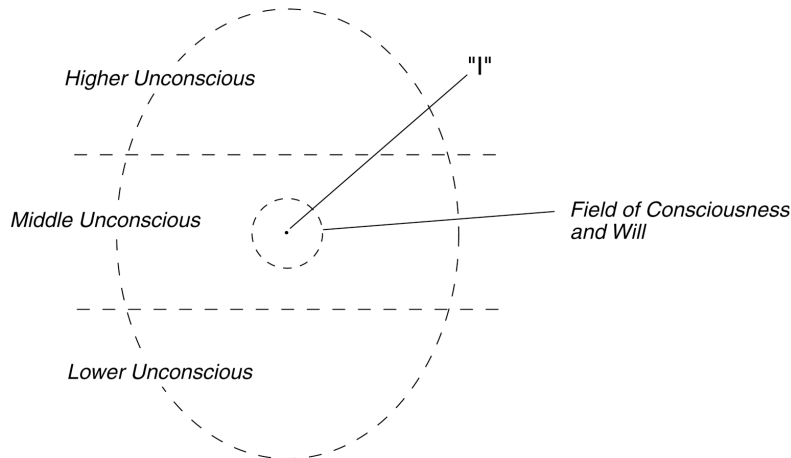

Figure 4

The major difference between the above diagram and Assagioli's (1965) original is that Self (or Transpersonal Self) is not depicted at the apex of the higher unconscious, half inside and half outside the oval (more about this later). Instead, Self is considered to be pervading all the areas represented in the diagram and beyond.

Another general comment about the diagram is that Assagioli understood the oval to be surrounded by the *collective unconscious* (Jung) comprising inherited propensities or capacities for particular forms of experience and action shared by the species as a whole and developed over the course of evolution.

We shall in this chapter address the levels of the personal unconscious, leaving "I, the field of consciousness and will, and Self for other chapters.

THE MIDDLE UNCONSCIOUS

Assagioli wrote that the middle unconscious "is formed of psychological elements similar to those of our waking consciousness and easily accessible to it. In this inner region our various experiences are assimilated..." (Assagioli 1965, 17). Thus this is the area in which we integrate the experiences, learnings, gifts, and skills—guided by the patterns from the collective unconscious and in relationship to our particular environment (unifying centers)—which serve to form the foundation of our conscious personality.

This structuralization of the middle unconscious pertains to all dimensions of human experiencing, including physical, emotional, cognitive, intuitive, imaginal, and transpersonal experience. It appears that through interacting with the different aspects

of our own psyche-soma, and with the environment, we gradually build up structures that synthesize various elements of our experience into meaningful modes of perception and expression.

The function of the middle unconscious can be seen in all spheres of human development, from learning to walk and talk, to acquiring a new language, to mastering a trade or profession, to developing social roles. All such elaborate syntheses of thought, feeling, and behavior are built upon learnings and abilities that must eventually operate unconsciously. It is important to remember that the individual elements of these structures are not extinguished but merely operate in the unconscious—thus, they can often be made conscious again if need be.

THE DEPTH OF THE MIDDLE UNCONSCIOUS

There is also a mysterious profundity of the middle unconscious that can be seen in the creative process. Here we may have been working towards a creative solution to a problem, become frustrated, and finally let go of consciously working upon it, only to suddenly have an "Aha!" in which the solution appears to our consciousness fully formed. This type of experience is common in human creativity, in flashes of intuitive insight, and in the wisdom of nocturnal dreaming.

Such experiences make sense in light of the middle unconscious, an active organizing area operating outside consciousness that can draw together many disparate elements into new patterns, wholes, or syntheses that can then be expressed in conscious functioning. As Assagioli wrote, in the middle unconscious "our ordinary mental and imaginative activities are elaborated and developed in a sort of psychological gestation before their birth into the light of consciousness" (Assagioli 1965, 17).

The depth of the middle unconscious has further been revealed by biofeedback research. Here autonomic processes formerly thought beyond voluntary control—such as brainwaves, heart rate, and blood pressure—have been brought under the influence of consciousness and will through various feedback devices. Similarly, the study of the mind-body connection in medicine has shown that conscious beliefs, attitudes, and images can influence physical health and disease. All of this research illustrates the interplay between consciousness and the deepest levels of psyche-soma organization in the middle unconscious, that supportive unconscious substrate of our conscious lives.

Lastly, the middle unconscious is that area in which we integrate material from the repressed sectors of the unconscious. As we shall discuss shortly, there are sectors of the personality which have been rendered unconscious not in service of self-expression, but in order to manage psychological wounding. After discovering and reowning repressed material, whether the heights of transpersonal experience or the depths of childhood wounding, we can eventually integrate these into expressive patterns that support our lives rather than disrupt them.

So the gift of unconsciousness is clear. It is that ability by which aspects of the personality remain outside of consciousness, and yet make an active contribution to conscious expression. Here is a potential for developing increasingly creative modes of self-expression that allow us to bring the widest range of our human potential to our lives. If we had to remain continuously conscious of all the minute individual components of our inner and outer expressions, we would function with only a very small percentage of our potential.

However, in order to survive primal wounding from early nonempathic environments, we utilize this ability of unconsciousness in another, more desperate

way: to repress important aspects of our experience—both negative and positive—which are not acceptable to those environments. The sector formed by repressing the rich human potentials threatened by wounding—perhaps our abilities to love, create, express joy, commune with nature, or sense a unity with the Divine—is called the *superconscious* or *higher unconscious*. Similarly, the sector that hides the pain of the wounding—whether from covert or overt neglect and abuse—is termed the *lower unconscious*.

THE LOWER UNCONSCIOUS

The first thing that must be disowned in order to survive within a nonempathic environment is the fact that we are being wounded. Our wounding will not receive an empathic ear in such an environment, because for the environment to accept our wounding it would need to acknowledge its role in this wounding and begin its own process of self-examination, healing, and growth. (Good-enough parenting, as good-enough friendship and psychotherapy, seeks to acknowledge empathic failures past and present so the wounding can be held.)

In the face of a survival unifying center, we thus develop a survival personality that eliminates the impact of primal wounding from our awareness. We enter what can be called a *survival trance* (see Chapter 4) that in effect breaks off our awareness of wounding and any experiences associated with annihilation and nonbeing, forming what is called the *lower unconscious*.

The lower unconscious is then a particular bandwidth of our experiential range that has been broken away from consciousness, altering our awareness of both the inner and outer worlds; it is the disowned range of our self-empathy that would normally attune us to experiences most directly related to primal wounding—to the threat of personal annihilation, destruction of self, and nonbeing, and more generally, of the painful side of the human condition.

THE SUPERCONSCIOUS OR HIGHER UNCONSCIOUS

But there is something else that cannot be held by the survival unifying center and thus must be disowned so to survive in that environment: those positive aspects of ourselves, those authentic gifts, that are unseen and rejected by the nonempathic environment. These gifts are in effect under attack within the environment, and their possession places us under constant threat of wounding.

As with the wounding experiences, these gifts must be hidden in what psychosynthesis therapist Frank Haronian (1974) wrote about as the "repression of the sublime." So we do much the same as we did with the lower unconscious. We break off that range of our experience related to whatever positive qualities of being that are threatened by the survival unifying center, which might include beauty, compassion, courage, creativity, wonder, humor, joy, bliss, light, love, patience, truth, faith, and wisdom.

Such qualities, termed *transpersonal qualities* in psychosynthesis, are characteristic of the higher unconscious. These are the types of qualities that are eliminated from our experiential range, rendering us safe in the nonempathic environment, but also leaving us with an impoverished sense of ourselves and the world.

The higher unconscious then denotes "our higher potentialities which seek to express themselves, but which we often repel and repress" (Assagioli 1965, 22). As with the

lower unconscious, this area is by definition not available to consciousness, so its existence is inferred from moments in which contents from that level affect consciousness. Higher unconscious contents are experienced perhaps most strikingly in *peak experiences* (Maslow) which are often difficult to put into words, experiences in which we sense deeper meaning in life, a profound serenity and peace, a universality within the particulars of existence, or perhaps a unity between ourselves and the cosmos. This level of the unconscious represents an area of the personality that contains the "heights" overarching the "depths" of the lower unconscious.

It is important to note, however, that although contact with the higher unconscious often feels "unitive," the higher unconscious for the most part actually *excludes* the lower unconscious (ergo they are depicted as discrete areas on the oval diagram). It is not the higher unconscious that can eventually embrace the wholeness of the person, but rather the middle unconscious as it expands to include the material from both the heights and the depths. It is the middle unconscious that allows our experiential range to expand over time, to include both the joyous heights and agonizing depths of human experience.

Furthermore, this integration of higher and lower—the expansion of the middle unconscious (see Chapter 7)—is guided by the individual's unique path of Self-realization. That is, one's journey with Self does not simply lead into the higher unconscious but may lead into any of these levels of the unconscious at different times. Although there are times Assagioli's writing does seem to confuse Self or Self-realization with the experience of higher unconscious material, he is fundamentally very clear about their difference:

> Spiritual awakening and spiritual realization are something different from conscious awareness of the Self. They include various kinds of awareness of superconscious contents, either descending into the field of consciousness or found in the process of ascending to superconscious levels and thus having what Maslow (18) calls a "peak experience." (Assagioli 1965, 38)

> One can become so fascinated by the wonders of the superconscious realm, so absorbed in it, so identified with some of its special aspects or manifestations as to lose or paralyze the urge to reach the summit of Self-realization. (P. 39)

> There are many ways in which one may have a living contact with the Self, which have no mystical quality at all, taking mystical in the precise sense just mentioned. The dialogue between the spiritual Self and the personality can be unaccompanied by any emotional exaltation; it can be on a clear mental level, in a sense impersonal, objective, and therefore unemotional. (p. 207)

For these reasons, among others, we do not represent Self in the direction of the higher unconscious on the oval diagram and instead consider Self as pervading all levels of the person and beyond (for further discussion of this, see Djukic 1997; Firman 1995, 1997; Marabini and Marabini 1996).

> The reflection ["I"] appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is, in other words, not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source. (Assagioli 1965, 20)

> ...the personal conscious self or "I," which should be considered merely as the reflection of the spiritual Self, its projection, in the field of the personality. (p. 37)

Assagioli was quite clear that he considered "I" to be a "projection" or "reflection" of Self. This concept gives us a way to approach Self via the method of analogy, a method used by Assagioli himself (1973, 125, 129-30). That is, if "I" is an image of Self, we can use the experiential understanding gained from studying "I" to speculate about the nature of Self.

So, if "I" is conscious, willing, transcendent-immanent, and empathically loving (see Chapter 1 and 2), it would seem that the source of "I" must also be conscious, willing, transcendent-immanent, and empathically loving. We may then logically assume that Self is more profoundly conscious, willing, loving, and transcendent-immanent than "I." Just as "I" is distinct-but-not-separate from the flow of immediate experience, so Self might be thought of as distinct-but-not-separate from any and all content and layers of the personality, both conscious and unconscious. Self is transcendent and so may be immanent in love anywhere, any time, within the entire personality and beyond.

Quite practically, Self can therefore be thought of as ever-present and actively loving whether one is experiencing a traumatic memory from the lower unconscious, a peak experience in the higher unconscious, working with middle unconscious patterns, engaging existential issues of mortality and meaning, or expressing oneself in the world. As the direct and immediate source of "I," Self is always present as a source of dialogue, support, and guidance no matter what our experience, no matter what our stage of development, no matter what our life situation (again this is why we do not represent Self only in the direction of the higher unconscious). Indeed, it may be that every person is in their own way seeking to follow this guidance in life, to commune with Self, no matter how distorted, destructive, and wounded their efforts may be—what can be called the *Self-Realization Hypothesis* (Firman and Gila 2007).

SELF-REALIZATION

Many psychological thinkers have recognized within the human being a sense of wisdom and direction that operates beyond, and often in spite of, the conscious personality. For Assagioli, the source of this transpersonal impetus is considered to be the person's "spiritual Self who already knows his problem, his crisis, his perplexity" (Assagioli 1965, 204). Note the profound empathy implied in that statement.

Self-realization then has to do with our relationship to this deeper, transpersonal wisdom, love, and direction, a relationship that can be characterized as that between the *personal will* of "I" and the *transpersonal will* of Self. Self-realization is the story of our contact and response to Self, our forgetting and remembering Self, our union and relatedness to Self, our movement in and out of alignment with the deepest currents of

our being. Self-realization is the ongoing, lived, loving relationship between ourselves and our most cherished values, meanings, and purposes in life:

> Accounts of religious experience often speak of a "call" from God, or a "pull" from some Higher Power; this sometimes starts a "dialogue" between the man and this "Higher Source," in which each alternately invokes and evokes the other. (Assagioli 1973, 114)

And if Self is transcendent-immanent throughout all levels of the personality and beyond, then such an ongoing loving relationship may well take us into any and all levels of human experience. Relating to deeper Self may for example lead us to an engagement with our addictions and compulsions, or to the heights of creative and religious experience, or to the mysteries of noself and unitive experience, or to issues of meaning and mortality, or to a grappling with early childhood wounding.

Another way to say this is that Self-realization is a "spiritual marriage" to Self "for better or worse" (see Chapter 2). Just as with a life partner, we will experience the full gamut of an intimate committed relationship, from the blissful self-forgetfulness of nondual union, to the give and take of daily dialogue, to stormy conflicts.

But throughout, whether in union or dialogue, the relationship is the thing. Self-realization is not here an arrival point, a particular state of consciousness or developmental stage, not something we must search far to attain. Self is right here. Now. Talk to Self, sit with Self, be with Self, know your oneness with Self. Every moment. Every day. Self is not far away, but as near as your breath, the direct source of your ability to be present to yourself and others. Now.

So the dynamics of Self-realization have to do with how we perceive—or ignore—the deeper truth of our lives, and how we respond—or not—to this in the practical decisions of everyday life. It is fair to say that all theory and practice in psychosynthesis ultimately has to do with uncovering, clarifying, and responding to this deeper sense of who we are and what our lives are about.

PERSONAL AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

Self-realization as a loving relationship with Self allows this to be distinguished from psychological or spiritual growth per se. While such growth can and does occur as we walk our path of Self-realization, this is a by-product of this journey and not the goal. Accordingly, Self-realization can be differentiated from two important lines of human development discussed by Assagioli: *personal psychosynthesis* and *spiritual* or *transpersonal psychosynthesis*.

Assagioli writes that personal psychosynthesis "includes the development and harmonizing of all human functions and potentialities at all levels of the lower and middle area in the diagram of the constitution of man" (Assagioli 1973, 121). He is here referring to the oval diagram and to working with the lower and middle unconscious, a process leading towards a clearer sense of autonomy, personality integration, and personal power. The path of Self-realization may well lead us into such "self-actualization" (Maslow) because Self is transcendent-immanent throughout these levels and may invite us to engage them.

Distinct from personal psychosynthesis is the task of transpersonal psychosynthesis: "arriving at a harmonious adjustment by means of the proper assimilation of the

inflowing superconscious energies and of their integration with the pre-existing aspects of the personality" (Assagioli 1965, 55). So transpersonal psychosynthesis is a process of integrating the contents and energies of the higher unconscious, of learning to contact and express transpersonal qualities, spiritual insights, and unitive states of consciousness. Here too, our ongoing relationship with Self may lead us to this type of integration because Self is transcendent-immanent throughout this level as well.

As fundamental as personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis are, each has a limitation—each can leave out the other dimension. For example, an exclusive involvement with personal psychosynthesis may lead eventually to the *existential crisis* (see Firman and Gila 1997, 2002; Firman and Vargiu 1996) in which there is a loss of meaning and purpose in one's personal life. Likewise, an exclusive involvement with transpersonal psychosynthesis may lead to a *crisis of duality* (see Firman and Vargiu 1977; Firman and Gila 1997, 2002) in which there is the realization that higher unconscious experience does not automatically lead to a stable, embodied expression of this higher potential. Each *crisis of transformation* indicates an imbalance that is often corrected when the missing dimension is included.

The journey of Self-realization will usually involve both personal and transpersonal growth at some point, and more often perhaps, include them both in an ongoing way. But again, Self-realization is distinct but not separate from, transcendent-immanent within, both types of growth because "I" and Self are distinct but not separate from, transcendent-immanent within, any and all experiences. (Assagioli's writing does at times confuse Self-realization with transpersonal or spiritual psychosynthesis, but he is absolutely clear that engagement with higher unconscious material is distinct from Self-realization—see the quotations at the end of Chapter 6.)

For example, if we ask questions such as, "To which type of growth am I called at this moment in my day? This period in my life?" we are thrown back on our sense of what is right for ourselves (i.e., the ideal model principle)—to our relationship to Self, a relationship that is more fundamental than either of these two dimensions of growth. To answer such a question we can consult theories and therapists, teachers and sages, but even then it is up to us, based on our own sense of "rightness," to follow our path as it wends its way through different dimensions of growth.

EXPANSION OF THE MIDDLE UNCONSCIOUS

Over time, it is common to find an interplay between personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis such that both the higher and lower unconscious begin to be integrated. In this process we may find ourselves enjoying experiences of creativity, spiritual insight, and joy in our artistic or spiritual practice; then find ourselves joining a self-help program for a compulsion and thereby increasing our personal freedom; and perhaps entering therapy to uncover and heal aspects of experience related to childhood wounding.

All such exploration opens to, and integrates, the higher and lower unconscious into the middle unconscious. These heights and depths of ourselves are no longer sealed off from us, but begin to find their rightful place as structures supportive of our ongoing functioning, i.e., in the middle unconscious.

An expansion of the middle unconscious is also an expansion of our experiential range. We hereby become more open to being touched by the beauty and joys of life, more open to the pain and suffering of ourselves and others, more able to live a life that

embraces the heights and depths of human existence. In other words, we are becoming disentranced from the survival trance.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, disentrancement is one of three ways we move from survival towards authenticity. The other two ways—detachment from survival unifying center and disidentification from survival personality—may also be involved in this expansion of the middle unconscious. Indeed, the existential crisis and the crisis of duality mark just such detachment and disidentification from survival systems that have formed along the personal and transpersonal dimensions, respectfully. These crises will, in the best cases, lead to an increasingly authentic personality that will include the missing dimension within an expanded middle unconscious.

But even then, although this expansion of the middle unconscious is often a product of following our path of Self-realization, the two processes yet remain distinct. Again, Self-realization is about our relationship with Self, a transcendent-immanent relationship of empathic love that abides whether we are identified or disidentified, entranced or disentranced, on the heights or in the depths, functioning from an expanded middle unconscious or not. Self-realization refers to our journey with Self, not to any particular terrain the journey may take us through.

Self as Universal

From the broadest point of view, Self can be conceived to be universal (Assagioli 1973) much along the lines of C. G. Jung's statement that "self is not only in me but in all beings, like the Atman, like Tao" (Jung 1964, 463) or as in Ken Wilber's description of what he calls "Spirit":

> Spirit transcends all, so it includes all. It is utterly beyond this world, but utterly embraces every single holon in this world. It permeates all of manifestation but is not merely manifestation. It is ever-present at every level or dimension, but is not merely a particular level of dimension. Transcends all, includes all, as the groundless Ground or Emptiness of all manifestation. (Wilber 1996, 38)

Wilber's "transcends and includes" is an excellent description of what we are calling transcendence-immanence, and if Self were universal, this transcendence-immanence would indeed embrace "all of manifestation." This universality would be one possible explanation for the fact that Self can be present to us via such a staggering variety of authentic unifying centers: oceans and mountains, animals and plants, blankets and teddy bears, people real and fictional, religious ritual and spiritual practices, symbols and beliefs, and so on.

Of course, as Assagioli (1973, 125-6) points out, such a profound, universal omnipresence of Self would be beyond the human mind's power of comprehension, so the universality of Self cannot be proven or denied intellectually. However, he would point to the fact that one can have an "intuitive, direct experience of communion with the ultimate Reality" (p. 124), and this type of experience *does* constitute an observable fact (see Bucke 1901/1967; Laski 1968; Maslow 1971).

No Need for "Transpersonal" or "Universal" Self

Assagioli proposed a system with three selves: 1) personal self or "I," 2) Higher or Transpersonal Self, and 3) Universal Self. In this way, Self-realization could be understood as a movement from the experience of separate, individual, personal self to an experience of the "synthesis of individuality and universality" of Transpersonal Self that was in communion with Universal Self. In Assagioli's words: "The real distinguishing factor between the little self and the higher Self is that the little self is acutely aware of itself as a distinct separate individual," while, "In contrast, the experience of the spiritual Self is a…sense of Universality. It feels itself at the same time individual and universal" (Assagioli 1965, 87).

However, Assagioli's "three self model" leaves a subtle but fundamental question unanswered: Who moves from the experience of "separate individuality" to the experience of "individuality and universality"? Is there yet *another* self, one who can move from the experience of "personal self" to the experience of "Transpersonal Self?" We think not. It seems obvious that it is "I" who initially experiences separate individuality and then experiences a synthesis of individuality and universality. *The synthesis of individuality and universality is not a characteristic of some other, "Transpersonal" Self, but the experience of "I" in communion with universality.*

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, "I" is not an experience but the experiencer. Changes in experience, however transformative and sublime, are still changes in experience, not in "I" who is distinct but not separate from any and all experience. So while in Self-realization you may have an increased sense of connection with others and the cosmos, may be more "infused" with transpersonal qualities, and may even experience a union with Universal Sprit, God, or the Divine, these are not changes in you—"I"—per se but rather changes in the experience that you—"I"—are having. Thus there is no need to posit a Higher or Transpersonal Self interposed between "I" and Universal Self in order to describe communion with Universal Spirit.

Even more important, the idea that you *are* going to become some other "higher" self in Self-realization can lead to an overemphasis on the higher unconscious as one is enjoined to "reach up, following the thread or ray to the star [in the higher unconscious]; to unite the lower with the higher Self" (Assagioli 1965, 24). In some cases this can support what Haronian (1983) called an "infatuation with the sublime" and what we have called a *transpersonal identification.*

Finally, eliminating the problematic term, "Transpersonal Self," also allows relinquishing the problematic term, "Universal Self," which has been needed to distinguish the (supposed) two "Selves" beyond "I." In truth there is no need for any adjective preceding "Self" at all, adjectives that only serve to needlessly limit and prejudge the conception of Self. Better to have a concept of one Self that then can, for example, be seen as pervading either the entire personality or the entire universe, leaving the concept more flexible both in theory and practice. Do clients of psychosynthesis practitioners—individuals and couples, students and teachers, business people and public servants, groups and corporations—need to accept a "Universal" Self to work in psychosynthesis? We would hope not. May we suggest simply: "Self."

POSTSCRIPT AND MESSAGE TO OUR COLLEAGUES

We have now come to the end of our discussion of Assagioli's seven core concepts for psychosynthesis training. We hope you have found this useful and that it has stimulated your own thinking about these concepts and about psychosynthesis in general.

Let us say once more that we do endorse Assagioli's seven concepts as a foundational starting point for thinking about what constitutes psychosynthesis training and psychosynthesis itself. We believe that these concepts—as limited as they might seem given the traditional breadth of psychosynthesis—nevertheless offer an initial structure that can guide the ongoing deepening of psychosynthesis theory and practice. Again, some such structure is needed if psychosynthesis is not to be vulnerable to being "too extensive, too comprehensive" and so perhaps drifting towards "a watered down or distorted version, or one over colored by the concepts and tendencies of the various contemporary schools" (Assagioli 1974, 1).

We would also like to reiterate that while the particular understanding of these seven concepts presented in this monograph derives from our work in psychosynthesis since the early 1970s, it remains simply our own particular understanding. We do not want to speak for psychosynthesis as a whole or create any sort of psychosynthesis dogma. In fact, we fully expect that our *own* understanding will continue to change in the future—as it has for over 30 years.

This treatment of the core concepts has instead been offered in the spirit of sharing ideas and as a stimulus for dialogue within the psychosynthesis community. We hope that this monograph does not remain a lone statement of our views, but that it might inspire sharing and discussion of questions, corrections, elaborations, and alternative viewpoints of these "fundamental facts" or "experiences" at the core of psychosynthesis.

We hope further that these core concepts might support the psychosynthesis community in taking up the question of whether and how different concepts and techniques—both new and old—are related to psychosynthesis. Using the core concepts, the community can evaluate, critique, and discover the right use of any ideas and methods that might be employed in psychosynthesis. Again, the core concepts do not argue against practitioners using diverse approaches, but simply ask for clarity about the relationship of any approach to the fundamental core of psychosynthesis. Such open discussion will allow students and practitioners to make informed decisions about different theories and practices as they seek their own unique expression of psychosynthesis.

Lastly, let us say that we believe with Assagioli in the notion of psychosynthesis evolving as a "constellation" rather than as a "solar system." That is, there need be no authoritative body standing at the center of psychosynthesis dictating policy and practice or controlling the expression of psychosynthesis in the world. Rather, it can be the relational network of all who love psychosynthesis—the ongoing dialogue within the community itself—that can provide the nurturing unifying center for the evolution of psychosynthesis. We are confident that it is through such ongoing dialogue among the points of light in the constellation—a kind of "music of the spheres"—that psychosynthesis can continue to grow and develop while remaining faithful to its "original and central essence."

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TRAINING
A statement by Roberto Assagioli

1. Undertaking training in psychosynthesis means beginning to learn about psychosynthesis and experiment with it on oneself, in order then to help others to use it on themselves. Before being able to communicate psychosynthesis to others, we must have experimented with it in depth on ourselves. Intellectual knowledge is not sufficient. Every single technique must be tried out at length on oneself. Only thus shall we be in a position to communicate it with authority.

2. While psychosynthesis is offered as a synthesis of various therapies and educational approaches, it is well to keep in mind that it possesses its own original and central essence. This is so as not to present a watered-down and distorted version, or one over-coloured by the concepts and tendencies of the various contemporary schools. Certain fundamental facts exist, and their relative conceptual elaboration, deep experience and understanding are central, and constitute the sine qua non of psychosynthetic training. These experiences are:

1) Disidentification
2) The personal self
3) The will: good, strong, skilful
4) The ideal model
5) Synthesis (in its various aspects)
6) The superconscious
7) The transpersonal Self (it is not possible in the majority of cases to have a complete experience of this; but it is good to have some theoretical knowledge of its characteristics and the experience of its guidance).

3. Different levels of meaning are associated with each of these experiences, none of which will ever be definite and complete. Continuance of one's training, however, will always reveal new and more interesting aspects, which link the experiences together. That is to say, each experience will be seen to be not isolated, but to imply others. It is therefore unrealistic to speak in terms of "having understood or not having understood". Understanding being ever partial, belief in having understood all indicates lack of understanding. It is a question of a gradual process.

4. The preceding point clearly suggests that the best attitude to adopt – and one that is at the same time more realistic, more honest and more effective in achieving rapid progress in training – is one compounded of humility, patience and experimentation.

5. Psychosynthesis is not identified with any technique or practice. Despite the fact that in group work use is often made of guided imagination and visualization exercises, psychosynthesis can by no means be levelled [sic] down to these techniques.

6. One can know all the principal ones and still not have grasped the spirit of psychosynthesis. And vice versa. Real training entails both these factors—intuitive understanding of the spirit of psychosynthesis and a sound technical knowledge.

Psychosynthesis functions in five main fields: the *therapeutic* (psychotherapy; doctor-patient relations); *personal integration and actualization* (realization of one's own potentialities); the *educational* (psychosynthesis by parents and by educators in school of all degrees); the *interpersonal* (marriage, couples etc.); the *social* (right social relations within groups and between groups).

Each one can choose a particular field of work and specialize in it alone. Being familiar with the other fields, however, is valuable, since all fields are interconnected. But the field of self-actualization and integration being the heart of psychosynthesis, a thorough knowledge of it is necessary for anyone operating in the other fields.

7. The achievement of a certain degree of mental polarization is required for becoming a psychosynthesist. This does not mean developing the mind while repressing or ignoring the emotions. On the contrary it means cultivating the mind and not only the emotions, as well as acquiring a personal centre of gravity within a sort of balanced and loving "reasonableness" (in the widest and deepest sense of the word) rather than an uncontrolled emotionalism.

8. Training in psychosynthesis has no end. At a certain point hetero-training (meaning training guided by someone else) is replaced by self-training. Psychosynthetic self-training should never stop. Psychosynthesis is an open system: there is no end to it, but only temporary halting places.

9. Only when one has acquired a thorough training (and this in the judgement [sic] of whoever is directing the training) is it wise to commence to engage in psychosynthesis professionally with individuals or groups. The time this needs is impossible to establish in advance, there being many variables involved.

10. Since the training is endless, it is wise to modify both the duration and intensity of the hetero-training received: by intensity is meant the number of sessions a month.

11. Since each can only be a partial expression of what we call "psychosynthesis," it is well to gain experience of psychosynthesis through the methods and personalities of various psychosynthesists.

12. Like any other form of training, training in psychosynthesis can fall away and become distorted after a certain period of time, particularly when not actively maintained and continued. Therefore it pays to undergo a refresher period now and then.

Source: Istituto di Psicosintesi, Via San Domenico, 16 -- 50133 Firenze, Italy