



What is Psychosynthesis?

'The awakening of the soul, that first blinding flash of new spiritual consciousness which transforms and regenerates the whole being, is an event of fundamental importance and has incomparable value in the inner life of man'

There are certain situations and personal capacities towards which we are all more or less unconsciously attracted: for instance, the ability to enjoy good relationships with others, to have good health, to make free and conscious decisions, to use our mind to its maximum potential, to appreciate all that is beautiful, to be competent in our work and calm even in moments of crisis, to be open to serenity and joy, and finally, to be able to love and be loved. True, these are ambitious goals, but at the same time they are universal desires and the essence of the art of living. No authentic therapeutic approach can ignore them, and psychosynthesis, in over 70 years of research and verification, has developed simple and effective tools which can help us to approach these objectives, by understanding the factors which prevent us from reaching them.

Conceived by the Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), psychosynthesis is a unified conception of human development and an organised system of techniques which can be applied in the fields of therapy, education and medicine. It is concerned with the realisation of individual potential, and at the same time, to avoid unbalanced growth, with harmonisation of all elements of the personality. Among the methods used are creative visualisation, free drawing, the training of the will, physical expression, writing, disidentification, meditation, inter-personal and group work. Before founding psychosynthesis, Assagioli was a member of the Freud Society in Zurich in 1910, together with various other pioneers of the psychoanalytic movement, and was among the first to bring psychoanalysis to Italy. He subsequently withdrew from psychoanalysis and founded psychosynthesis. Since then, psychosynthesis has expanded theoretically, technically and organisationally, with more than 50 centres and institutes throughout the world.

Exploration of the Unconscious

The first step in psychosynthesis is the attainment of a certain level of self-knowledge, the ability to move within one's inner world with both ease and confidence. For this to happen, we must first enter into relationship with that inner universe of feelings, memories and images from which our extrovert society tends to alienate us. We then continue the exploration by contacting those aspects of ourselves which we have relegated to the unconscious because we found them too painful to experience, or because they conflict with the conscious image we have of ourselves, or with the dominant cultural norms. In this work we make a surprising discovery: instead of being consistent, unchanging individuals, we find ourselves to be

a mixture of contrasting, changing elements, which in psychosynthesis are termed *subpersonalities*. In the words of Assagioli:

'We are not unified. We often have the illusion of being so, because we do not have many bodies or many limbs, and because one hand does not fight with the other, but in our inner world this is actually the case - various personalities and subpersonalities struggle continuously with each other; impulses, desires, principles and aspirations are in continual tumult.'

Our essential task is to bring clarity into this confusion.

The 'I'

If this first task of self-knowledge is undertaken in the right way (avoiding the danger of losing oneself in a labyrinth of endless investigations), we become aware that within us there are many more or less conscious aspects, roles and attitudes with which we from time to time identify ourselves, to the point of forgetting or repressing the rest of our personality.

When we are identifying this way with one single part of ourselves, we become ruled by it, we are enslaved by an illusion. For example we have all seen someone dominated by anxiety or depression, or by a prejudice, or by ambition, and we have all felt ourselves at times to be prisoners of oppressive psychological patterns which appeared to be beyond our control.

Such identification is a universal process which can be reversed only by its opposite: disidentification, an attitude whereby we consciously detach ourselves from all the various aspects of our personality, thus allowing ourselves to discover our true 'I', our centre. This experience of being centred gives us a clear impression of inner freedom, helps us to perceive who we really are, and opens innumerable psychological possibilities; and so it evokes joy.

The Will

Self knowledge, particularly when it culminates in an awareness of our true centre, constitutes a decisive step forward. However, even after we have understood and exposed them, old complexes often persist due to the inertia acquired through years of unconscious repetition. Psychosynthesis recognises that even a deep and thorough self-knowledge may not be sufficient, in itself, to cause a lasting transformation; it must be accompanied by the discovery and use of the will.

Psychosynthesis conceives the will as being basic to mental health. At times we may experience this reality instantaneously, as in performing an act of courage, or making an irrevocable decision; at other times we may feel it as a continuous flow of energy, as when we concentrate all our attention on one subject, or when we persevere with a project which we are determined to actualise despite its inherent difficulties. At these times we discover within ourselves the capacity to choose, to direct, to be a cause; and this is the will.

The Superconscious

It may happen, in rare moments, that one has an intuitive vision of the nature of the universe or a particularly intense aesthetic experience of a sense of unity with all beings, a profound understanding of the meaning of life; or an outpouring of creativity, a succession of original ideas; moments in which one transcends briefly the limits of individuality and glimpses a universal reality.

These and other phenomena belong to a realm of experience which psychosynthesis terms the *superconscious*; that level of the unconscious which generates all that is highest and most meaningful for a human being.

While the superconscious is often ignored by the various schools of contemporary psychology, in psychosynthesis, particular attention is given to studying even undeveloped or episodic manifestation of these aspects, observing their effect on the rest of the personality, and using techniques designed to facilitate the manifestation of these energies and their integration into everyday life.

Interpersonal Relationships

Within every human being exists the desire to act freely, in harmony with his or her own intrinsic nature, rather than being at the mercy of external forces. This tendency towards autonomy manifests in the desire to distinguish oneself from others, to become an individual, to assume a precise and unique identity; to affirm oneself in the world.

Alongside this need, however, is a complementary tendency towards harmony, the desire to feel oneself to be part of a larger whole, to enter into relations with others and thus transcend the limitations of individuality; giving rise to the need for friendship, tenderness, and love.

Both of these needs must be recognised and satisfied effectively for true psychological health to occur. The need for autonomy is satisfied as the personality frees itself from past conditioning and gains the capacity to express itself fully. However, this alone is not enough; we must also learn to satisfy our needs for contact with others and for belonging. In this regard, focusing on the individual alone, although necessary, is not always sufficient by itself.

For this reason, we also need to develop other qualities and capacities, such as the ability to communicate clearly and directly, the experience of empathy, an accurate perception of others, free from projection and prejudice, a creative approach to inter-personal conflicts, and finally, the capacity to attain that sincere and total relationship, free from ulterior motives,

expectations and fears, the *I - Thou* relationship so well described by Martin Buber. In this field too, Psychosynthesis offers effective tools for growth.

Synthesis

According to the Belgian physicist Prigogine (Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 1977), we do not live in the universe envisaged by 19th century psychics, destined to degrade inexorably and ending in absolute disorder. Instead, there is an inherent tendency within organic matter to fluctuate and to organise itself in a coherent manner. This same tendency, we notice, can also be seen to operate within the individual; an innate propensity of the psyche towards ordering itself and becoming a living and harmonious whole.

We find when the various elements of our being are in conflict, our energy becomes blocked, and this causes pain. However, each time that a synthesis of two or more parts of our personality occurs, energy is freed and we experience a sense of profound well-being. This is the essence of psychosynthesis: *the harmonious integration of all our component parts around a unifying centre.*

The tendency towards synthesis is inherent within us. Psychosynthesis, rather than being an artificial imposition of techniques, simply unblocks and stimulates a process that is more closely allied to us than any other: becoming who we are.

A Vision of Unity

Psychology today presents a curious panorama, which distinguishes it greatly from other, older sciences. On the one hand, unlikely subdivision into contrasting schools, on the other, especially in the field of therapeutic practice, a disorganized eclecticism in which theories and techniques are brought together indiscriminately, with no precise vision of wholeness. It is natural for this to be so, as science historian Thomas Khun has demonstrated: every science in its initial phases - and psychology is still very young - presents strong internal differentiations. In time, the situation evolves, with the contrasting tendencies moving at least in part towards resolution.

In this context, psychosynthesis presents itself not as another school, but rather as a movement towards unification. It has, of course, its own structures, methods, and working hypotheses; but in addition it has the potential to serve as a point of reference for the co-ordination of many other ideas, attitudes and techniques which can contribute, on an individual or a social level, to the universal actualisation of human potential.

Open Evenings take place at the Trust on a regular basis. They provide an opportunity to find out more about the activities of the Trust and the courses offered. There is no charge for these evenings. Contact the Trust for the latest dates and times.