

Advanced Seminar Letter #6

Dear Gang,

I want to write a bit about the larger perspective that we can hold when we begin to broaden the scope of our work to include the life cycle as a whole, and perhaps even life cycles, of the soul. Assagioli used to say that "an human lifetime is a day in the life of the soul", but, certainly, even if we do not embrace the possibility of "past lives", there are many different aspects of experience that bear on a life that go "beyond" immediate biographical experience. For example, transgenerational, cultural, and gender patterns can all influence attitudes and behavior and need to be taken into account in holding the whole life of a client and ascertaining the degree to which it embodies that person's soul force over its course.

The skill here lies in broadening the vision you have of, and the hypotheses that inform your work with, the person, while not sacrificing the present moment and the experiential process from moment to moment. It is very easy to develop theories/hypotheses about a person, and generalize in ways that do not hold the full complexity and mystery of that person's experience. And even if the theories/hypotheses are "right", they still can distract us from the moment-to-moment unfoldment of the unique ways and means by which the soul is working to fulfill its destiny. The theory/hypothesis is the map and not the territory, and what is most important is the actual journey through the territory of experience present moment to present moment.

At the same time this larger perspective and its hypotheses do help, and a way to develop it is to cultivate what I call "tri-focal vision". The long-range focus is the big picture, the life-as-a-whole thinking about the client, including perhaps essential qualities, values, life purpose, the nature of the psyche and personality in terms of balance and integration. The mid-range focus is on those emerging experiences that need to be attended to, such as healing from a trauma, subpersonality development, training of the will, developing the capacity to dis-identify. The immediate-range focus is on the present moment and what combination of experiences are emerging right now in the experiential process. This could be emerging thoughts, sensations, feelings, images, insights, resistances--the immediate experience.

The basic assumption, as I have said before, is that the soul will bring into the present moment just those experiences that are needed in order for the middle and long-term intents to happen, so that all you need to do is to be sure that you are right there also. But it helps to have the other foci as well, both because you can see more easily how the immediate experience

may fit into the larger process, and, energetically, if you are holding this larger perspective, and it resonates, it supports the immediate process implicitly.

If you can learn to hold the whole life in these three foci, while staying in the present and open to the mystery of how the soul is going to live this life moment to moment, then you are of immense support to the other person and there is a deep resonance established between you and the other that is healing and encouraging. We have called this the "field". It is Martin Buber's "I-Thou" experience with all three foci at once. It is, in fact, a replication of how the soul is holding that person all the time, and so, in doing this, you become a powerful spiritual ally to the soul of the other.

Of course, none of us can do this. But we can practice and get better at it and less in the way. It calls for a kind of invisibility on our part as well as deep compassion and understanding. You are holding a very wide and deep lens on this particular life within which the other person has a more limited and identified view. As you hold this perspective, and work within it in the moment, the person can begin to open to this perspective also without losing touch with the immediate experience of how he/she is living this particular life. The client can then begin to develop tri-focal vision for him/herself.

Assagioli used to call this "working under the aspect of eternity", and, when a person was stuck in some way through an identification, he would stop for a moment and turn off the lights in his office. Then he would switch on an illumined globe of the universe which he had on his desk and invite the person to contemplate it with him. Then, having evoked this perspective, he would return to the moment and the issues at hand.

With this tri-focal vision, again, what is most important is to honor the uniqueness of each person, each soul, and to have faith that he/she is finding, in ways you will never fully understand, his/her path through human experience to a fuller embodiment and expression of who they most are. However, with this tri-focal perspective you can work at these various levels, and, in all the ways we have discussed, and many more that we have not, support this process of soul-realization as it unfolds throughout the life and perhaps lifetime to lifetime. Big picture--emerging middle view--present moment/precious moment-- this is the tri-focal vision, integrated into an on-going, complex seeing and receiving of the client's experience, and working accordingly on whatever he/she brings to be explored.

I am sending you every good wish as Spring approaches. As ever Tom