

**The Soul of Psychosynthesis;
A Hundred Years on Planet Earth**
AAP Keynote
June 25, 2010

Gratitude

This is a moment for me of deep gratitude.

First of all, I want to thank the conference committee for inviting me to speak and all the people who have worked so hard these last two years to make this conference possible. There is no way to count the hours that have gone into its preparation and to measure the commitment of a small number of people to make this gathering happen. Thank you, each and all.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge and thank the many people with whom I have shared the journey of this work in Psychosynthesis over the last forty years. It has not been an easy path. Rather, it is has been at times turbulent and challenging, at times joyful and deeply satisfying, and has annealed us in the fire of transformation as we sought to nourish this potent seed of human consciousness on this continent. We are colleagues, yes, but we have become also sisters and brothers in this quest, and I am very grateful to be part of this professional family that has lived and suffered and rejoiced together over the years.

Thirdly, I want to acknowledge and thank Roberto Assagioli-- of course for his conception of Psychosynthesis a hundred years ago-- but more immediately here for how he received me as a young man of 32, he 84, and embraced my young and immature being, tutored it, and gave me his blessing. He saw me, both in my shortcomings and my gifts, and affirmed my soul and path in a way no one had up to that time. He set me on a course that has taken me to so many inner and outer places and through so many trials, but which always strengthened me and rooted me more deeply in my own soul. I was so fortunate to meet and work with him at that time, and I am deeply grateful for what he gave me and gives me still.

Context

We sit together in this hall at a time when the world is in major crisis. On all sides, in all countries, old systems are breaking down, chaos and uncertainty grows, and suffering among all ages, in all counties, rich and

poor, is rampant. You know the litany of events and conditions. They stretch from personal sorrows, depression, and loss of meaning and direction to social ills of unemployment, homelessness, population displacement, crime, war, and exploitation, to the environmental conditions of climate change, species extinction, resource depletion, and increasingly violent weather conditions. Life is out of balance on all levels, and the momentum of catastrophic events is increasing. Every day somewhere on the planet there is some new disaster, and our means for dealing with it are increasingly insufficient in many cases. We have lived for too long beyond our means, in ways that are disconnected from Nature and are unsustainable economically, politically, socially, and ecologically. And the institutions that we thought would help are turning out to be either helpless, or too corrupt to respond.

This, of course, is frightening, and we all have a part of us that would like it not to be happening. But there is also a part in each of us who is rising to the occasion, and as we see that we are on our own in this, and that the big systems are no longer working, we begin to consider more seriously what our responsibilities and opportunities are at this time of crisis. “In Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity” goes the old saying. Crisis can bring out the best in us, both individually and as a species, and it is. Everywhere on the planet there are individuals and groups who are responding to these crisis conditions and finding new ways of living and working that can correct the imbalances and corruptions and bring sanity back to life on earth. Paul Hawkin in his book Blessed Unrest documents the unseen global movement of small groups of people and non-profit and volunteer organizations in every country that are taking on the problems of this crisis and finding new ways of living and building community and nation that are sustainable and life giving. In the midst of the death of the old ways, new ones are springing up, and, though there is no guarantee that we will make it through, there is cause for hope and optimism that the species is ingenious and aware enough to solve these problems and able to become wise enough to live together in a new and nourishing way. As Martin Luther King said “We will either learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we will perish as fools”.

A way to look at all this that I have found useful is to see this period that we are in as an awakening in human consciousness and a shift in how we experience who we are as individuals, groups, and a species. Human consciousness is actually transforming, and all the tumult of death and birth is part of this process. We have outgrown our worldviews and so the

organizations and structures that express them are breaking down. And a new world view is being born, one that shifts our self-image and self-understanding, and changes our relationship with each other, with other species, with the planet, and even with God. We are in the process of learning to see the world in a new way and from this new vision to act differently in our daily lives. Many people have written about this shift, and among us, Molly Brown has been courageous in her speaking to the need for this awakening. Her term for this new consciousness is “Gaia Mind”. Joanna Macy speaks of this time as “the Great Turning” and Duane Elgin refers to it as “The Awakening Earth”. The term I have been using is “Species Maturity”, entailing the realization by a critical mass of the human species of its full maturity and its right place and part on the planet. All our woes can be traced to the present spiritual immaturity of the species and the individuals that make it up, and the woes will end when we can ripen into who we most fully are and live accordingly on planet earth.

This shift is described by those who are speaking about it as the shift from the experience of separation to connection, from uniformity to diversity, from entropy to syntropic vitality. At root it is a shift from seeing the planet and universe as dead to beholding it as a living whole organism, and from experiencing Life as a detached observer to embracing it as an enlivened participant. Again, I will not rehearse the litany of ways this shift is described, but only say that this idea gives us a way to see creatively the crisis we are in, and it gives us, as psychosynthesists, a real way to help with this transformation, for this is essentially what Psychosynthesis is about, person to planet. Knowing what we know about the process of psychosynthesis, the life cycle, the dimensions of consciousness, the will, transpersonal qualities, and the Higher Self, we are in a position to really respond deeply to this crisis and bring everything we know to this world awakening and spiritual maturation of the species. Others are at work on this through new economics, politics, social innovations, and environmental work, and we can take on the task of transforming human consciousness so that these new outer forms, as they grow, are sustained in humanity’s daily attitudes and behaviors. How, specifically, do we do this?

Means

First and foremost is the work we do on ourselves. There is no substitute for this engagement with our own process of maturation and dealing with the wounds and limitations that we all have. Too much world work has been

attempted on the basis of flawed and troubled personalities and the results are always mixed to disastrous. Our first responsibility is to our own soul, psyche, and personality, to work out the blocks, distortions, and projections that keep us from our own maturity and capacities. Of course, this is a process and we learn as we go, from both our mistakes and successes, but without this personal commitment to live an “examined life” and be conscious of our shortcomings as well as our strengths and callings, we are in danger of getting in our own way, despite our best intentions.

Secondly, we need to examine our relationships to others and be sure that, in the families and groups that we live, we are in true and creative communication and community. No one of us can live apart from other humans, even if we were to live in solitude, for we are inherently interconnected, and we are sustained, for better or worse, by the company we keep and how we contribute to the social whole. We will not be able to solve our problems in the world if we do not face them at home in the relationships with those close and dear to us, and take steps to heal and develop trust, harmony, and love in our immediate social lives.

Thirdly, we need to examine and change our relationship to other species, both plant and animal, and change our collective and individual behavior so that these beings with whom we share the planet do not suffer from our unconsciousness and narrow self-interest. Again the litany is long of how other species are exploited and sacrificed for our human “needs”. At the same time more and more people are realizing that this relationship is an aspect of our soul, and that in neglecting these near neighbors, we are, in fact, impoverishing ourselves. It is striking that in the last years there has been a heightened interest in animal communication and a greater sensitivity to the welfare of both domestic and wild creatures. There is also much greater sensitivity to the health of plants and to the means of growing them, both for our own health, and for the health of the environment.

Fourthly, we need to begin to think of the planet earth as a living whole organism of which we are a living part, and for whom we have a responsibility to cherish and sustain, rather than exploit and destroy the many gifts she provides us. This was a consciousness that did exist among native peoples, but civilization has lost it, and it is time now to restore it amid the complexity of the life we have created. We cannot go back to the old sensibility, but we can bring it forward and add to it, so that we become

stewards of the planet and her resources and work out ways to live on her that sustain Life both in us and in all beings.

Finally, we need to reexamine our relationship to the Divine. We have outgrown the old understandings of God, and most of the religious forms that held them, and in this century a new spirituality is emerging which re-owns our projection of an all knowing divinity onto a God “out there” and claims our own divine knowing as human beings. This does not mean that God disappears, or is dead; it means that we become “the co-creators of the world we want”, to use the phrase from the conference brochure, within the inherently divine context of the Universe. Our relationship to divinity shifts, we become responsible ourselves for the health of the whole, and we no longer look to God, or any force outside us, to help. “We are the ones we have been waiting for” says it another way. There is no one “out there” who is going to intervene. Rather we need to grow up, to mature sufficiently that we root ourselves in inner divinity and take care of Creation from there. This is what I mean by “species maturity”. It is time for us to grow up as a species and to realize both in awareness and action who we truly are.

All levels are important. All interpenetrate and contribute to each other. Each of us is called to work in a different way. The question is, what is the work you need to do at any of these levels and how are going to use “your one wild and precious life”, to quote Mary Oliver. We are all in this together and each of us has a part to play. And if we commit to this, and work at it, the shift will come, the awakening will happen. There are no guarantees, but there is tremendous movement right now and possibility and we are alive to be part of it.

A Brief History of Psychosynthesis

Where does Psychosynthesis come in? What is its contribution at this time of crisis and awakening? Roberto Assagioli, in his book Psychosynthesis, on page 8 says

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 a new civilization characterized by

an harmonious integration and co-operation, pervaded by the spirit of synthesis.

On page 27 he follows:

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 toward 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.

It is so striking that Assagioli from the very beginning takes humanity and the planet as the context for his and our work. Psychosynthesis has many different applications and has been used in a wide range of fields, but its underlying purpose, given his words, is to contribute to what I have been calling “species maturity”, what Molly Brown calls “Gaia Mind”. So, as Psychosynthesists, we are in the right time and the right place. The question is how can we best make use of the opportunity that is afforded us? Everything we do needs to be done within this context of this global crisis and awakening. Some of what we are doing already helps: some may be hindering. It is in this light that I want to look briefly at the history of Psychosynthesis on the planet.

First of all, I like to think of Psychosynthesis as having a very long half-life. It is like the medieval cathedrals, not built in a day, but over generations and mostly by anonymous craftspeople, each of whom contributed to the whole and most of whom died before it was completed. Psychosynthesis is this kind of endeavor. Roberto Assagioli was keenly aware of this when he said in a letter, written in 1967,

There is no orthodoxy in psychosynthesis and no one, beginning with myself, should be considered as its exclusive representative, or leader. Each of its exponents tries to express and apply it as well as he, or she, is able to, and all who read, or listen, to the message, or receive benefit of the use of methods of psychosynthesis, can decide how successful any exponent has been, or will be, in expressing its ‘spirit’.

He knew that it would take generations to fill out the vision he had conceived in 1910 and he wanted people to be left free and responsible to develop Psychosynthesis in an open way, so that it would grow over time into its full maturity and not be limited by orthodox dogma, as so many schools of thought and practice come to be. One hundred years later we are perhaps half way there, and I want to lay out this development briefly as a way of holding the history and seeing where we are in it.

During the first 50 years Psychosynthesis was a newborn, way ahead of its time, and Assagioli was quite alone with his vision of a psychology that would include the spiritual dimension in a practical, grounded way. In Florence he was known as the doctor who helped people through visualization pass exams. Michael Eastcott, an Englishwoman whom Anne and I met at Sundial House told us that his wife, Nella, was always worried about the marginal spiritual groups that Roberto would try to link up with. He was very lonely in his work, and very far ahead of his times. Yet he established an Institute of Psychosynthesis and pursued his ideas for over twenty years before he happened to hear about Sundial House and the Arcane School in England, which was based on the work of Alice Bailey. In the early thirties he decided to enroll in the school and started sending in papers. Michael Eastcott told us that the papers were so extraordinary that the readers exclaimed, "Who is this student in Italy?" and they invited him to come over for a visit. They asked him to lecture and admired his work very much. He, for his part, was very glad to be received and appreciated, and so he continued to come every summer and in this way became part of the Alice Bailey Group and contributed to its work, both in England and eventually at Meditation Mount in Ojai, California. By the late thirties. Assagioli had become central to this group and had found a spiritual home in it. But he kept this connection completely separate from his work in Psychosynthesis, and was committed to Psychosynthesis developing on its own as a depth psychology with no dependence for validity on esoteric sources.

In the 40's and 50's a growing group of professionals were attracted to Psychosynthesis, both in Europe and in America, and small institutes began to form in various countries. Assagioli came to the United States in 1957 and the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation was founded the next year in New York City. Monthly seminars were held under its auspices, but Psychosynthesis was still small and young, a visionary child. It was not until

the 60's, with the advent of Maslow's work and the Human Potential Movement, which was so kindred in orientation, and the opening of the culture to these ideas, that it began to develop a personality and become more grounded and in the world.

In the decade of the 70's the development of Psychosynthesis quickened and these years were a rich period of experimentation and differentiation of the original vision. In this process a number of different identifications developed as to what Psychosynthesis was. In this way it was leaving childhood and becoming an adolescent. Different institutes, as they developed, created different versions of Psychosynthesis, and even within institutes there were different understandings of what it was. For example, in the institute in which I worked we went through a period when Psychosynthesis was all guided imagery, and then we rejected this, and it became the "choose or die" version with the will being central, and then there was the cathartic version, and so forth. Some people to this day think that Psychosynthesis is subpersonalities. The vision was so vast that, as it became differentiated and more grounded, it was reduced to different versions of itself, and these versions eventually came into conflict—all part of adolescent development.

This differentiation and development during the 70's generated conflict between the various centers and institutes as to whose version was the "right" version, and what was "true Assagioli" and what departed from his teaching. This was sometimes covert, sometimes overt, and it evoked the darker aspects of the personalities involved. It is interesting to note that this kind of struggle was also going on between Psychosynthesis and Transpersonal Psychology, as both were becoming more visible during this decade, and there is a series of letters which I saw once between Roberto Assagioli and Tony Sutich, the founder of Transpersonal Psychology, as to which field was bigger and more inclusive. Sounds very adolescent, yes?

Further, in 1974 Assagioli died and was quoted as saying, shortly before his death "Après moi, le deluge" ("After me, the flood"). He was seeing this growing competition among centers, both in Europe and North America, and sensed that it would get worse after his death. And it did. The end of this decade saw increasing disconnection between centers, and in San Francisco, the full demise of a powerful institute, due to dysfunctional power dynamics, both within the institute and in its relationships to other centers and disciplines. It was a dark time.

In the 80's the healing and recovery from this adolescent period began and, through a series of conferences and summer training institutes, publication of books, and the restoration of communication, the professional community that had been so fragmented began to gather again. The personality began the long process of integration and harmonization of the various subpersonalities, and the "I" of the movement began to emerge. This "center" was first expressed in the willingness of countless people to come together and talk, to reconnect, to apologize, if need be, to take responsibility for their immaturities, and to begin to be and work together as colleagues, even in their differences.

With the founding of the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis in the 90's the "I" took more concrete organizational form, and, through its agency a functional integrated personality began to emerge. There were a range of training programs in existence, and communication and collaboration grew between them. More contact was established with European centers and the personality of Psychosynthesis matured in ways that made it more open to the infusion of the energies of its soul, or Higher Self (I use these two words synonymously). This coordination and integration process continued in the new century, and, as this decade begins, Psychosynthesis is solid in personal relationships, well organized on this continent, and open to further soul infusion, much as a person in midlife might be after having passed through and healed from a midlife crisis. In short, we are ready to take on the next steps in the vision that Roberto Assagioli formulated 100 years ago. We have come through several developmental crises and are the stronger and wiser for the experience. And we have at least another 100 years to go. And as I said earlier, we are right on time to help with the shift of consciousness that is trying to happen and we have the means to do so.

Challenges

I want now, as I move toward closing, to speak some about the possible challenges I see to the further development and maturation of Psychosynthesis. We have a potentially powerful vehicle for spiritual transformation, person to planet, and there are ways in which we could "get in our own way" in further developing its use and gift.

One is if we hold onto some aspect of its past and claim that this is the true Psychosynthesis. All the aspects have been necessary to its development, but we need at this point to let them go and let the soul of Psychosynthesis reorganize and rearrange our collective life in ways that we cannot know yet. The Hopi prophecy says it well.

“ There is a river now flowing very fast. It is so great and so swift
That there are those that will be afraid. They will try to hold on to
The shore. They will feel they are being torn apart, and they will
suffer greatly.

Know that the river has its destination. The Elders say we must let
Go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes
Open and our heads above water. See who is in there with you and
Celebrate.”

We need to let go of the past and trust that the soul of Psychosynthesis will guide us. We have been preparing a long time for this moment, and, if we can let go, the future will unfold well.

Another is if we stay private and separate from other work that is going on in the larger field of psycho-spiritual development. Psychosynthesis has developed apart from the mainstream, and this has been appropriate up to now, for it is a rare vision, but the world is ready for it now, and we need to step forward and join the many people, from many disciplines, who are at work on “the Great Turning” and “the Supreme Synthesis”.

A third is if we fail to discern where the greatest human suffering is now and bring Psychosynthesis to bear on it. In the last generation we developed the consciousness that was needed and the forms for the work and now we need to bring these to bear on the acute problems that rack humanity, to take on the task of healing and growth where there is the most sorrow. The soul, I believe, always seeks out sorrow and seeks to assuage it, and finds joy in this. It is the personality that holds back. There is very specific work to be done, and a new generation is already engaged in it. Where we were idealistic we now need to be pragmatic and engaged.

A fourth is if we do not ground fully and make public the work we are doing through writing, research, publication, conferences, trainings, the Internet, in faith that its time is still coming. We need to affirm that, in fact,

we are entering a very rich period in its long history where the soul of Psychosynthesis can really begin to act through the healed, developed, and integrated personality.

A fifth is if we fail to recognize that Psychosynthesis stands on its own, as Assagioli initially envisioned, Certainly Esoteric Psychology nurtured it as a child, the Human Potential Movement fed it as an adolescent, and Buddhism and Transpersonal Psychology contributed to it as a youth, but none of these can claim authority over Psychosynthesis theory and practice and its further development. The Alice Bailey work, or Esoteric Psychology, is in particular danger of doing this, because it was there first, but the effect of this claim would be to keep Psychosynthesis a child at home, rather than letting it go out into the adult world. In this specific regard, I asked Assagioli about the Alice Bailey Work and how important it was to Psychosynthesis and he replied “No more than anything else. It is simply my religion. Don’t worry about it”. Most people trained in Psychosynthesis know nothing of Esoteric Psychology and this will be even truer in the future. Certainly this body of work has its place in the history, but no more than that. Psychosynthesis is fully grown now, has its own unique soul, and is ready to deepen and expand into the next 100 years in ways we cannot possibly know. To stand fully as a legitimate and respected psychology in today’s professional world, it cannot secretly depend on some esoteric body of teachings.

Possibilities

In an interview in Psychology Today Assagioli responded to Sam Keen’s question about the limitations of Psychosynthesis by saying, “ The limitation of PS is that it has no limitation”. It is a complex, diverse, and comprehensive vision and now a highly differentiated theory and practice, and therefore the question arises, what is the common ground for work within the field? What can we focus on in common while affirming and accepting our many and wonderful differences? I have an idea about that which I’d like to share with you.

Assagioli made the distinction early on between Psychosynthesis with a capital “P” and Psychosynthesis with a small “p”. The upper case was the growing compendium of theory and practice; the lower case was the natural process of bio-psycho-spiritual-social-global integration and synthesis by which the soul builds and infuses the personality. This “process of

psychosynthesis” he posited as inherent in all human beings, guided by the Higher Self, and always moving naturally toward an increasing experience of mature individuation and expression. Obviously, the process can be blocked and stunted in many ways, and it can also be liberated and nourished. The work, at whatever level, is to do just this.

Perhaps this process of psychosynthesis with a small”p” could be the common focus for our future work and the questions of how exactly it works and how do we best support it. Any technique, or method, if used rightly, can do this, and any technique, or method, even Psychosynthesis ones, can be used, if misguidedly, to slow and stunt it. If we can shift our focus from theory and technology to natural process, and learn to support that skillfully, using whatever works, I think it will open up the whole field to new energy, creativity, and usefulness.

Most important in all this is to go where the work is most alive for you and trust this, even if it does not seem to fit with what has gone before. I think the soul of Psychosynthesis will take us far beyond its present personality, if we let it, and certainly the time is right for this. Psychosynthesis is not a belief system; it is a way of cooperating with the force of Life in people, groups, nations, and the planet. So trust where the vitality and creativity is for you and make your contribution from there. Frank Haronian, who was part of the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation group in the 50”s said to me in the 90”s just before he died. “Assagioli would be so happy, because the principles of Psychosynthesis are everywhere in the culture. He would not be concerned as to whether they were called Psychosynthesis or not.” And I love this quotation from Howard Thurman, “ Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what brings you most alive and then go do that, for what the world needs is people who are fully alive.”

And finally, most crucial at this time is to frame our work in the context of global crisis and “the Great Turning”, to let go of anything that gets in the way of this, and to make a full commitment to help, in the ways that are most natural and vital to each of us, with the situation we face on the planet now as individuals and as a species. Joanna Macy is fond of quoting Deena Metzger’s short poem.

“There are those who would set fire to the world.
We are in danger.
There is only time to work slowly.
There is no time not to love”

And Assagioli was fond of saying, “Make Haste Slowly”. There is urgency and there is no time not to do the job well. The future of Psychosynthesis is in our hands and we who are alive now and working have the opportunity and responsibility to continue to build on what has been and to respond to the soul of Psychosynthesis with our work and lives. So find your particular way of responding and go for it, and keep going for it, and we will discover in doing this that we are all together with each other and with all beings.

Exercise

Trouble most/Love most, relationship between/dialogue WOB
Share in quads

Invitation

I want to read the quotation from Assagioli that I cited earlier and ask you to listen with this experience you have just had from listening to this address.

“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 toward 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.”

And I want to invite you be silent and to look around the room and feel your place and part in this growing living organism of Psychosynthesis.

(pause)

We have the weekend together and the next 100 years. Let’s make the most of it and enjoy every moment.