

Occasional Note #11

The Soul Process Adages of Roberto Assagioli

The Process of Psychosynthesis

The principles and practice of Psychosynthesis speak to the universal process of human development and maturation and to the multiple dimensions of human experience involved in that process. It is well known now in Europe and North America as a comprehensive approach to the issues of human psychological and spiritual development. The basic approach was first formulated by Roberto Assagioli in 1910 and methods and techniques continue to be developed within it. It is a field of psycho-spiritual work that is alive and well.

This Psychosynthesis Assagioli referred to with a capital “P”, and he thought of it as a movement, or orientation, to human development that was comprehensive in its inclusion of the soul, or Higher Self, as an aspect of psychological life and well-being. He also formulated another related concept which is less widely known-- “psychosynthesis with a small “p”, by which he meant, “the actual living process of psychosynthesis”. This process, he posited, works in all dimensions of our experience and is a natural force, or tendency, within our human nature toward integration and synthesis, or what we would say now, toward human maturity and wholeness. This psychosynthetic process is completely natural to the human being, and universal to all, and is at work all the time within us. It is built in, so to speak, and though it can be stunted, slowed, or thwarted, left to itself, it moves in the direction of full health and well-being. It has force and vitality and carries a deep

pattern of maturity for the individual which it is seeking constantly to express and be made known in the context of daily life. He further posited that this “process of psychosynthesis” is guided by the Higher Self, or soul, and that we can learn to cooperate with, and support, it, and so help the true nature of a human being emerge and be fully expressed.

To help with this work, in his teaching over the decades, Assagioli developed a set of adages that led to practices that would support this inner process of psychosynthesis, and he mentioned these again and again in his work with clients. For him they were a set of dynamic guidelines that quickened this natural process and kept it on course. They are as simple as they are profound, and it is these that I want to share in this occasional note, for they have proved invaluable to me in my work over the years, with both individuals and groups. In essence, they give us a way to stay close to the natural process of psycho-spiritual maturation (psychosynthesis) and to learn to cooperate with this life-force within ourselves and others. And they contribute to an overall experience of aliveness, for they also foster the vitality of the human experience in all its complexity. Jung termed this same process “individuation” and Maslow “self-actualization and realization”, so the acknowledgement of this natural process is not limited to Psychosynthesis. It is, however, a still largely hidden dimension of the increasingly complex image of the human being that Psychology has given us over the last 100 years.

Soul Process Adages

The reason I call the sayings “soul process” adages is to highlight another aspect of our psycho-spiritual development,

which is implicit in Assagioli's term, but I think now can be made explicit. To do this I have coined the term "soul process" as a way of speaking of this psychosynthetic movement in our immediate experience, for it makes explicit that the soul is guiding this process and enables us to hold both soul and the flow of immediate experience at the same time. *They are not separate from each other, but rather dimensions of our experience that are in constant relationship and interplay.* And this conception in turn begins to reveal a new image of the soul and how it works in human experience—a topic I will return to at the end of this note. Soul and the process of psychosynthesis are closely related, and the adages therefore are not only helpful psychologically, but are spiritual teachings in disguise.

The Adages Themselves (read slowly and reflect)

- 1- "Go slow to go fast", or "Make haste slowly"
- 2- "Work under the Aspect of Eternity"
- 3- "For one person, one thing; for another, quite the opposite"
- 4- "Never either/or; always both/and"
- 5- "Leave a little room for the Mystery"
- 6- "You are perfectly imperfect"
- 7- "Your soul knows all about it; is only waiting

for you to find out”

8- “Be a living example”

9- “The yoga of joy; joy makes “war” impossible”

1s- “There is no security, only adventure”

Soul Process Work

These adages give us very useful guidelines for how to support the natural process of maturation that moves in all of us—what I call the “soul process”. At the same time, they are in no way exclusive, for many approaches have been developed within Psychology in the last 50 years that help awaken, follow, and support this natural process. In many psychological orientations there is a growing understanding that the human being “knows” his/her deepest directions in life and how to heal and develop in order to express these. What is needed are ways—and the adages serve well here-- to remove the obstacles to this process, wherever they exist, and liberate the basic vitality of the person to live his, or her, life authentically. This is not to underestimate the degree of wounding and blockage that can occur, but I believe it is an emerging fundament of psychological work now--that we are capable of self-knowledge and self-direction toward our own good as well as the good of all beings. The field and practice of Psychology is coming alive in a new way, and even in the great grandparents, Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism, there are signs of this emerging new understanding. Basically, the idea is that we are capable of self-understanding and self-direction and that there is a

process alive within us that is seeking to work toward this all the time.

There is much more that could be said about this development in the field of Psychology as a whole, but here in this note I want only to share a bit about what I think is needed additionally in this work of cooperation with the soul process adages. There are three aspects.

Presence

The first is the practice of Presence. Without presence, nothing. A therapist, or coach, who is distracted, or identified with making something happen for the client, will diminish, or lose his/her presence, and in doing this will lose immediate touch with the soul process within the experience of the client. Presence is rooted in Being, and is the doorway, so to speak, to one's own soul. Presence enables a person to pay complete attention to what is going on, inside and out, in the present moment, and to pay attention to this flow of experience. Radiance follows from this of one's own soul qualities. Meditation is a major means for developing this attention, but anything that strengthens concentration of consciousness in the present moment, the eternal now, will enhance and strengthen our capacity for presence. Presence is the *sine qua non* of soul process work.

Soul Force Field

The second aspect is the concept of Soul Force Field. As a therapist, or coach, or parent, for that matter, begins to be truly present, this practice generates an energetic field which I call the "soul force field". This is experienced as an energetic "tent" in

which client and helper are sitting and working, and depending on the coherence of the helper's presence and the truth of the client's experience as it unfolds in the present moment, this field will grow in coherence and be almost tangible. Within this field the psychological work will be quickened and deepened, for the energies of both souls are being released into the work and are trying it. Mysteriously much happens and the process of psychosynthesis, or soul process, takes the work to where it most needs to go. This may be to explore a block, or to open to a new way of being. What is important is that it uncovers what really is most needed to be addressed, and the healing process becomes alive and relevant.

A student of Roberto Assagioli once asked him what he did that enabled so much to happen in the client's experience that was useful. Assagioli replied "I try to see the soul process (presence) and I pay close attention to this, and then I radiate." Those who worked with him could feel the soul force field that he generated in this way and were amazed to experience what followed in their personal work with him. I think Carl Rogers was trying to get at this experience through his concept of "unconditional positive regard." And the key here, whatever it is called, is that a soul force field is generated by presence and radiance and will wax and wane according to the degree of the attention given and the consequent coherence of that field. People thrive in this field when it is strong and coherent.

Soul as Experiential Force

The third aspect is Soul as Experiential Force here and now. Traditionally the soul has been conceived as being beyond immediate experience, transcendent to it, and in essence pure

Being at core, with transpersonal qualities radiating from this center and to some degree from time to time infusing present experience. This is still true, but what I am adding here is that it is also embedded in the experience of the present moment, whatever that experience is, and that through presence, field, and soul process we are able to touch these aspects of the soul which are descendent, or incarnated, and enable them to add to the richness and depth of the whole human experience in everyday life. Soul is not only transcendent, it is also wholly here and now, and its reality embraces this full spectrum, including the darkest aspects of human nature. Therefore, soul realization is the fruit of embracing and learning from all of our experience as it comes to us moment to moment as well as the “high” experiences more traditionally associated with it.

Present Moment, Precious Moment

Soul, then, is an experiential force in a human life that manifests through an on-going soul process moment to moment, or, to use Assagioli’s term, through the process of psychosynthesis. Nothing can be left out if true wholeness is to be the fruit of the process. Everything has value in its right place, and the soul process will guide us within the force field to those experiences that are needed now. What we need to do is to pay attention and be present to this flow of experience and radiate a field to support that work. Within this framework we can use any technique that might help, but without this, the field wanes and the soul process slows. Again, the adages are an implicit set of guidelines for supporting and enhancing this work. Thus, their power.

Existential Spirituality

These three aspects/practices have the effect of bringing psychological work into the present moment and positing that the work of healing and development, at all levels, happens best when it goes on in the present moment under the guidance of the soul which is embedded in that experience. There is vast differentiation, but no split and separation between the different dimensions of our experience. Rather they compose a kaleidoscopic flow of experience in the present moment that can be supported in its movement toward health and wholeness. We do not have to impose structures, or techniques, or methods arbitrarily, but rather need to be present to the soul process and then discern just how to be with it so that it takes its most natural directions. All good therapists, or coaches, just like all good parents, do this intuitively, but now it is possible to make this explicit and to teach people how to stay out of the way and actively nurture this natural process. The soul process adages were Assagioli's way of doing this. And what is truly exciting now is that, increasingly, this process is being recognized and named, and professional and lay helpers are learning to cooperate with it. We have come a long way in 100 years.

And this brings us to the possibility of an existential spirituality. Here the soul is seen as seeking full incarnation within a human life and that our spiritual practice is to be present to what is going on in our experience and to hold it in this larger light of being an aspect of the soul that is present now and needs our attention. If we do this, then there is nowhere to go to find our soul, and for that matter God, except the present moment. Everything is right here now, if only we pay attention and become present to it.

“Nowhere to go but now here” is the path and the fruit of practice is the full aliveness and realization of our soul on earth as a whole human being. I will take up this topic in a future occasional note.

I would like to close with a poem that speaks to this experience of soul process from the context of life journey. It is a poem I wrote some time ago as one of a series of sixteen, and it speaks to the experience of soul journey in our times. As for you, dear reader, I hope that these thoughts have been useful to you and I look forward to hearing from you your response. Wherever you are on the planet, I wish you well.

The Journey

Not that it is over, never say,
not that the journey,
anguish upon anguish,
through gateways of awakening, is
ever over, no, say rather
joy, sweet joy, increasingly presides.
in church, or railroad station,
midstride, mind otherwise,
there the veil lifts from human eye
and all creation shines.
Not this particular, or that, not one
fine ritual, nor fervent prayer,
but innate kindredness, cell to cell,
divine repose in flesh and bone.
The angel, now within our nature,

moves in beauty, breath, and blood,
and lifts us, even as we step
beyond the threshold stone,
enfolds our searching in her wings.
We fear not, for, behold!
we bear glad tidings to the King.

Beside the fountain pigeons strut and coo.
We sit a moment on the littered grass,
among the lounging students here on
holiday, and watch the old men chew.
Time consecrates and space renews.
Beyond the park the midday streets collide
and everywhere the world spreads wide. We,
shoulders touching, arms entwined, arise to
greet our ever mortal lives.

Thomas Yeomans
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