

Psychosynthesis is not a closed system but rather an evolving approach, a spirit more than a technique, and therefore it must be experienced and lived in order to be understood. It collaborates with processes much deeper and wider than the ones we may be conscious of. 'Like it or not', said Assagioli, 'man is a part of the Universal Will and he must somehow tune in and willingly participate in the rhythms of Universal Life.'

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Diana Becchetti

## Roberto Assagioli: The Spirit of Psychosynthesis

*All is possible and accessible to you: joy, serenity, I offer them to you as a gift. Roberto Assagioli*

Roberto Assagioli was a student of Freud and a contemporary of Jung. He pioneered psychosynthesis in Italy, but quickly saw its limitations. It did not encompass nor embrace the higher aspects of man - the main realm of creativity, inspiration, spiritual understanding, and of higher values like love, compassion, joy, wisdom - nor did it give recognition to man's existential search for meaning; a search which Assagioli believed to be an urge in human nature as basic and organic as any instinct or biological drive. So, as early as 1910 Assagioli began to formulate a holistic theory of man encompassing the groundwork of Freud but also reaching for the stars.

He elaborated on the difference between his view of man and Freud's in an interview published in *Psychology Today* in December 1974. 'In one of his letters Freud said, 'I am interested only in the basement of human being'. Psychosynthesis is interested in the whole building. We try to build an elevator which will allow a person access to every level of his personality. After all, a building with only a basement is very limited, We want to open up the terraces where you can sunbathe or look at the stars. Our concern is the synthesis of all areas of the personality. That means that psychosynthesis is holistic, global and inclusive.'

Any teaching is only as valid as the Being who creates it. Eloquent theories and models of the psyche of man require the addition of aliveness to fully portray the reality of life. This aliveness is often called the essence or spirit of such teachings. Assagioli was a being who fully embodied the spirit of his teachings.

What was this spirit? Who was this man? I asked myself these very questions before my visit to the old sage in Florence. It was not the eloquent theories nor their useful application that drew me to Italy, for coming from a broad and sophisticated background in the human potential movement, I was typically self-contained and all-knowing - and psychosynthesis was, I thought, just another 'trick' to add to my ever-increasing toolkit. I would not have to journey to Italy for that. However I intuitively felt that this man had a unique quality and I was not to be disappointed for the very moment of meeting Assagioli brought an unexpected surprise.

I walked into his study and there I found a slight frail man with white hair and beard, elegantly dressed in a velvet smoking jacket with a white shirt and tie. His study was in keeping with a man of humanity, dignity and caring. The furniture was sturdy and antique but simple and there were shelves full of books on every wall. On his desk stood a small United Nations flag symbolizing the unity of mankind and there were a number of rocks of interesting color and shape. There were fragrant fresh roses in the room. I later learned that to him the rose was a symbol for the spirit, and spiritual love was represented by several antique vases and chalice. An artist's drawing of Mount Fuji wreathed in clouds served as a reminder of the heights the human spirit can attain, and also on the walls photographs of the galaxies emphasized the insignificance of human problems in relation to the immensity and magnificence of the universe.

The twilight of his life was gentle, serene and rich with grace. Through his guidance during our time together I was able to free myself of my self-imposed bondage of insecurities and fears - my spirit sparked into action - many negative areas seemed to melt away. I don't know how he had this effect on me - simply by being who he was, I guess.

By his 'beingness' he exemplified that which in psychosynthesis terms is called the *Self* the inner core, dynamic and transcendent, radiant with consciousness, abundant with love and powerful with will. This Self is the source of individuality and universality, the spark of both one's uniqueness and of one's connection to all beings that form the greater whole of humanity. Assagioli affirmed that man's purpose is to fully manifest this essence or Self in daily living.

While sailing on Lake Geneva at the age of fourteen he made a resolution which set the course for his life: 'to always be present to my Self'. Over the years he became a master of this and therefore also of being totally present to anyone who passed his way - Self, I to Thou, essence to essence. This was the gift he gave to his students, sharing psychosynthesis with each one as if it were the first time he conceived it or spoke of its ideas. He honored me as he had honored all others who came his way, great men or small. He related to the essential goodness in each and took no account of their wordly achievements.

He taught me that by seeing my personality in 'the light of the Self', my problems would gain new perspective. 'See the galaxies'. he said, 'the stars in the evening sky. . . ponder on them also, we have not to solve problems but to learn from them. How do we face our darker side? By owning and accepting it, we may then rise above and it is no more; what remains is only a shadow. There are no problems', he would say, 'only tasks and opportunities'. Through this attitude I learned to 'bless the obstacle', to turn my obstacles into stepping stones, to learn the lessons that life was teaching me, rather than to view my problems as negative phenomena to be excised.

Assagioli stressed that the quality of Joy is the quality closest to the true Self. I believe that he was right, for when I am joyful I am manifesting the part of me that feels most real, most essential, my particular spark of divinity. He evoked in me only that which already existed in the realm that he defined as the superconscious, or man's higher

unconscious from which all our higher impulses originate: altruistic love and will, humanitarian action, artistic and scientific inspiration, philosophic and spiritual insight and the drive for purpose and meaning in life.

He never denied his basic humanness, nor sought to suppress it, each moment was for him a melody of joy. Those around him tended to revere him in the formal Italian style, but he preferred to wink, to laugh or dance a jig around his study when no one was looking, though his body was twisted with arthritis. He had a distaste for being idealized. It was a great relief to him that I treated him as an equal and not as a God.

Though his body was old and frail, it did not give him cause for denial - the chocolates that he was forbidden to have, were skilfully hidden in the folds of his handkerchieves in a secret drawer to be illegally acquired, enjoyed and shared with a co-conspirator as often I became. He enjoyed deceiving the doctors and, like a child, he refused to allow his spontaneity to be stifled. Yes, he was also childlike (not childish) in his awe and wonder of the universe and of his fellow man. While at the same time possessing the wisdom of antiquity and the grace of having lived a rich fulfilling life.

I remember his sparkle and his sense of humor. When leading me in meditation he would laughingly tell me to quiet my 'monkey mind' so we might 'spread our wings of aspiration and fly towards the Self'. Thus he gave me basic understanding of the positive thrust of the evolutionary process, of cooperation with life, of flowing with life and of the existential 'yesness'. This was his gift to all of humanity. However, mankind takes its time to accept its gifts; and when it does and Assagioli's work is more widely disseminated and understood, he will no doubt be accorded his rightful place alongside the other great pioneers who have contributed to our understanding of ourselves, our nature and our relationship to the universe.

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## **Diana Becchetti talks to June Posey**

*'Diana, please tell me about your background: how you got into the Growth Movement and Psychosynthesis.'*

In 1967 I was a drop-out, living in the mountains, when I went to my first group at Esalen and knew that was where I needed to be. I told them 'I'm here to stay and I want a job.' I managed to get a job as an organic gardener for one year. I started training with Richard Price in Gestalt. This was purely experiential. I was taught how to do it rather than how to learn about it. I also studied Tai Chi, did some bio-energetic work, ran Encounter Groups, and did massage and bodywork. I was at Esalen for three years. I threw myself violently into it. I literally deluged myself with growth.

Then I spent 18 months with George Brown's Confluent Education Programme in Santa Barbara and got my Master's Degree. This involved more Gestalt, Group Dynamics, all the humanistic Psychologies.