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The Psychosynthesis Approach

Roberto Assagioli was the founding father of psychosynthesis. What led him to develop psychosynthesis? What was his background? What kind of person was he?

- As a young medical student in 1910, with much enthusiasm he introduced Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis to his professors in Florence, and then later that year severely criticized it.
- In 1927 he proposed that the purpose of psychological healing was to contact a deeper centre of identity, the Self, to nurture its unfoldment while removing obstacles to its actualization.
- He created an optimistic vision of human nature in spite of the dominance of the pathologically orientated psychology of that time; and maintained this vision for sixty years.
- He dared to emphasize the Soul; man's spiritual Being, by postulating that this was the source of psychological health.
- He recognized the need for meaning and purpose as being fundamental to human existence and well-being.
- He perceived life as an evolutionary journey of development and differentiation, and problems as opportunities which aid this unfoldment.
- He viewed a human being both as individual with unique qualities and as universal, intimately interconnected both with others, the entire world and with the environment.
- He maintained that the active evocation of potential was necessary for the treatment of neurosis and pathology.

- He noticed that people repress not only the unacceptable aspects of themselves but also their higher impulses such as intuition, altruism, creative inspiration, love and joy.

It is useful to place Assagioli in his historical context. As a young medical doctor he was in his prime at the time when Einstein was developing his theory of relativity in Berne, Freud was pioneering psychoanalysis in Vienna, James Joyce was revolutionizing literature in Trieste, Jung was giving birth to analytical psychology in Zurich, Lenin was formulating the Russian revolution in Zurich and Heidegger was preparing to espouse existentialism in Fribourg. Most of the great intellectual revolutions were initiated in central Europe around this time, and everywhere new trends of thought were springing up.

In addition to his Western medical and psychoanalytic training, Assagioli studied the major world religions and was touched especially by the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian traditions. He was a friend of Martin Buber and was knowledgeable about Judaism. He practised Hatha and Raja yoga, the yoga of the body and of the mind. He was influenced by many Eastern and Western visionary approaches and was actively involved in the explosion of new thinking in the first thirty years of the twentieth century.

In 1910, while still in his early twenties, Doctor Roberto Assagioli was the first psychoanalyst to start practising in Italy. During this period he visited Zurich to train in psychiatry with Bleuler, the pioneer who defined 'schizophrenia' and one of the first doctors to accept psychoanalysis. There he met Jung, with whom he established a life-long friendship.

An abundance of contacts and interchanges was significant in Assagioli's background. Among these were: Russian esotericist P.D. Ouspensky, German philosopher Hermann Keyserling, Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, Sufi mystic Inayat Khan, Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki, psychologists Viktor Frankl, the founder of Logotherapy, and Robert Desoille, creator of the guided day-dream. These contacts, made before and after his separation from psychoanalysis, both inspired and motivated his creation of a wide perspective and vision, which he called psychosynthesis.

Although he was touched deeply by his studies with Freud and his exploration of the unconscious psyche, Assagioli quickly became dissatisfied and was inspired to delve into the further reaches of human nature. Thirty years later his ideas were in agreement with psychologist Abraham Maslow, who maintained that one could not draw universal conclusions or theories about human nature by extrapolating from the pathology of human beings or studying the sick psyche, but that one should study humankind in its greatest, most beautiful manifestations.

Although its roots are in psychoanalysis, psychosynthesis went beyond the two previously recognized forces in psychology, behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Freud's theory of the unconscious psyche stressed the impact and consequences of childhood experience upon adult behaviour. Behaviourism addresses itself to dysfunctional behaviours and is used to replace them with socially acceptable and less painful adaptations. However, in the late 1950s a radical shift occurred in the field of psychology, a shift which even today is not fully integrated into conventional psychology – the emergence of the third and fourth forces, of humanistic and of transpersonal psychology.

Humanistic psychology promoted a movement away from the earlier tendency of psychology to limit itself to pathology, towards what the human being is capable of *becoming*. It studied self-actualized people and psychological health, and formulated a model of a healthy, fully functioning human being. It focused on the evocation of potential, on higher values, and on the enhancement of that which is beautiful and inherently positive in man. Psychosynthesis, which had held a similar perspective since 1910, gained more acceptance with this larger development.

Born in the late 1960s, transpersonal psychology, the fourth force, took psychology one developmental step further. It enlarged the vision of health to include the search for meaning and purpose and extended the domain of psychological enquiry to include the individual's experience and aspiration for transcendence as well as the healing potential of self-transcendence. Andras Angyal, for example, addressed not only the individual's need to become autonomous, but also his need for the experience of *homonymy*, of union with the greater whole.

James Hillman (2000) in his book *The Soul's Code* spoke against what he called the psychology of causality and the parental fallacy – that psychology needed to recognize that the idea that we are 'caused' by childhood and parental conditioning doesn't work any more. He goes on to say that we have been analysing our pasts, our childhoods, our memories and it is not changing our lives. It is just too simplistic a view of human experience. Furthermore, he stresses that in the cosmology behind traditional psychology there is no real reason for anyone to be here or do anything with their lives and that ultimately we are all victims – of past experiences of upbringing, social class, race, gender, social prejudices.

Transpersonal psychology recognized that the integrated personality would not only have a balanced development of the psychological

functions, but also an experience of human interconnectedness and an awareness of those social conditions most conducive to fostering potential. This further development emphasized more than the power of the individual for self-regulation and responsibility. It also emphasized the creative capacity for global thinking and vision, and is concerned with meta-needs, ultimate values and mystical experience. As this new field has evolved it has increasingly stressed the actualizing dimension of transpersonal experience.

Psychosynthesis, as one of the prime forces in transpersonal psychology, stretches beyond the boundaries of personal psychology and individuality by postulating a deeper centre of identity: the Self, our essential Being. It includes, but transcends, our personal day-to-day consciousness, leading to an enhanced sense of life-direction and purpose. It is the postulate of the *Self*, the value placed upon exploration of potential, and the hypothesis that each individual has a unique purpose in life that primarily differentiates transpersonal from humanistic psychology. At the transpersonal level we find many important aspects of being human; acts of altruism, creative and artistic inspiration, the perception of beauty, intuition, curiosity about the universe and our place in it, and a sense of the universality of life.

We can perceive these four forces of psychology as a developmental flow with each force representing a step forward and a transcendence of what has come before. Viewed in isolation they form unique psychologies, each with their own contribution and therapeutic system. If framed as an evolutionary unfoldment, each force builds upon the strengths and includes the best of what existed previously. Psychosynthesis seeks to incorporate elements of each of these forces in psychology while further stepping into the exploration of values, meaning, peak experience and the ineffable essence of human life.

Goals of Psychosynthesis Counselling

Assagioli recognized and developed two mutually dependent and interactive aspects of psychosynthesis: *personal psychosynthesis*, which aims to foster the development of a well-integrated personality; and *transpersonal psychosynthesis*, which offers the possibility of realizing one's higher nature and purpose in life. He recognized the individual's need for meaning, both the meaning of our own individual existence and the meaning of

the world in which we live, indeed of life itself. This need is a major concern of our world today and we are impoverished without it being addressed.

Traditionally, psychological growth and the spiritual quest have been labelled and sometimes experienced as separate and essentially antagonistic directions. Freudian psychology rationalized spiritual pursuits as escapist or delusional, and tended to view man's higher values and achievements as adaptations of lower instincts and drives. On the other hand, those following spiritual disciplines have often dismissed psychology as an unnecessary distraction to the path of inner awakening. Psychosynthesis seeks to integrate these interdependent levels and asserts them as complementary aspects necessary for the resolution of psychological problems and the awakening of the Self.

Although Assagioli was perhaps the first to make the above assertion, his work corresponded with Maslow's later article, 'Theory Z' (1971, 1993), in which he discriminated between two types of self-actualizing people: those who were clearly healthy, free from basic deficiency needs and effectively functioning in the world; and those who achieved the above but went further in their development by recognizing the limitations of personal identity and transcending them to move towards the realization of higher values.

Personal psychosynthesis fits within the domain of humanistic psychology. It employs many techniques to assist the integration of the personality while dealing with personality deficiencies, psychological conflicts, archaic behaviour patterns and neurotic complexes. The client's ability to function effectively and invest herself fully in the achievement of a rewarding and productive life is of key importance. Hopefully, the outcome of this work is a strong sense of personal identity.

Hence the goals of psychosynthesis parallel those of humanistic psychology and in particular Maslow's concept of self-actualization. Of course the primary and most immediate objective of psychosynthesis is to alleviate suffering. Other objectives are: to evoke strengths and latent potential; to foster integration between the inner and outer world of the client; to help the client become the creator of her own life and to express herself meaningfully; and, finally, to evoke the client's inner authority and wisdom thereby rendering the counsellor obsolete.

All of the above are worthy goals for counselling. To become a strong individual fully invested in life, and to function well and effectively can be a great achievement. But what next? What is this Self? What follows

when a person has attained a reasonable measure of competence and well-being? What are we to do with this hard-won psychological integration? What are the deeper values to live for? Am I evolving in a positive direction? These questions are well worth asking anyway, *but the success of counselling may depend upon their exploration.*

Assagioli maintained that the purpose of psychosynthesis is to help integrate, to *synthesize*, the multiple aspects of the individual's personality around a personal centre and, later, to effect a greater synthesis between the personal ego and the transpersonal Self. According to Kaufman ([1984]2010) Jung also postulated a similar drive towards individuation or intrinsic wholeness and believed that this force autonomously pushes us towards fulfilling our truest self. This groundwork is also essential to authentic transpersonal awakening in order to ensure that a pathology of the sublime does not replace previously neurotic symptoms.

As previously mentioned, the transpersonal dimension is that area of the human psyche which is qualitatively higher than, and which transcends, personal existence. It is the home of greater aspirations, the source of higher feelings like compassion and altruism, and forms the roots of intuition and creative intelligence. Transpersonal awareness emerges in different ways at different times. At any point in life an individual may experience an inner awakening, a longing for life to be more deeply fulfilling and inspiring than it previously has been. This awakening is not necessarily religious by nature.

There can be an inflow of superconscious energies, peak experiences in Maslow's terms, which momentarily foster clarity of vision, a transcendence of personal identity, an awareness of the oneness of all life, and may provide experiences of a qualitative nature like serenity, love and beauty. Transpersonal experiences have a reality which many feel to be more profound than normal everyday existence. They embody an intrinsic value, a noetic quality, leaving the individual with a deepened sense of value and meaning.

It is also not unusual for transpersonal interests to be evoked by a trauma or serious disruption in a person's life. A divorce, an accident, a near-death experience can force an individual to let go of something to which she was attached and in which she had invested a great deal of life-energy. This disruption can lead to questioning the significance of life and a search for meaning and answers beyond individuality and one's everyday existence.

Levels of Psychosynthesis Counselling

The purpose of this section is to establish the groundwork of psychosynthesis counselling by examining the three psychological levels which it addresses: the past, the present and the future. At the heart of psychosynthesis is its emphasis on the *transpersonal*, the primary factor differentiating it from other schools of counselling. This section also includes an introduction to the transpersonal dimension.

The Past

Freud's work demonstrated that various physical symptoms and psychological disturbances were due to instincts, drives and fantasies buried in the unconscious and retained there by resistances and defence mechanisms. It is an exaggeration to say that we are our history and yet it is commonly understood that our past and childhood experiences influence how we behave as adults. This influence is multi-dimensional, often indirect and pervasive. It profoundly affects our capacity for love and intimacy, for assertion and self-affirmation; it determines our perception of life, and colours our deepest attitudes and values. Unless we are to remain puppets of the past, our unresolved elements must be brought into consciousness and transformed.

Assagioli (1965: 21) believed that the first step towards self-actualization was a thorough knowledge of one's personality. He wrote:

We have to recognize that in order to really know ourselves, it is not enough to make an inventory of the elements that form our conscious being. An extensive exploration of the vast regions of our unconscious must also be undertaken. We first have to penetrate courageously into the pit of our lower unconscious in order to discover dark forces that ensnare and menace us – the phantasms, the ancestral or childish images that obsess or silently dominate us, the fears that paralyze us, and the conflicts that waste our energies.

In this sense the counsellor must begin by assessing the personality's blocks and potentials to allow a purposeful exploration of the underworld of the unconscious. In order to reach the roots of psychological complexes, childhood experiences are uncovered with particular regard to the impact they currently have on the client's life.

The lower unconscious in psychosynthesis corresponds to the *unconscious* in traditional psychology. This contains:

1. the elementary psychological activities which direct the life of the body; the intelligent co-ordination of bodily functions;
2. the fundamental drives and primitive urges;
3. many complexes charged with intense emotions;
4. various pathological manifestations, such as phobias, obsessions, compulsive urges and paranoid delusions;
5. a reservoir of childhood experiences, stored as memories, some of which may have a traumatic nature.

Few of us had a childhood free from negative conditioning and the limitations of our parents. We may have experienced a sense of betrayal by the adults upon whom we were so dependent and to whom so vulnerable. Nearly all of us retain 'unfinished business' with our parents; pain and psychological dysfunction may lie in a client's early relationships. It is not that all parents are bad. Perhaps they were not psychologically mature enough to parent well or they themselves lacked positive models. As children we sometimes fall prey to the unfulfilled needs and expectations of our parents, and to conditional loving.

In addition to the problems which stem from parental relationships, the conditioning that we receive from our culture may later create difficulties. Childhood experiences are stored in the lower unconscious, and have an effect on the development of our personality, which in turn penetrates our future behaviour. A therapeutic relationship can provide a safe, inclusive environment for a person to re-experience and to understand painful feelings that were repressed in the past, which liberates their controlling influence.

Negative childhood experiences do not sit quietly in the basement of our psyche. Repression, suppression or denial of feelings creates emotional stress. The unconscious is not a bin of static past experience but rather a dynamic process of psychological activities of which we are unaware. Every psychological problem has its own historical background, which often remains unconscious and distorts behaviour. The psychosynthesis counsellor works extensively to help the client release the grip of the past and learn to express real but buried feelings in the present. When a natural capacity for expression of feelings is redeemed, emotional health can be re-established.

Perception is also conditioned and coloured by past experiences. From these experiences, defence mechanisms are formed, which preserve the stability of the personality but do so at the expense of distorting reality. They reduce anxiety in order to maintain a stable level of functioning. So initially these defences serve the person well but later they restrict growth. Ghosts from the past must be liberated and repressed psychological energy freed if their destructive impact on adult life is not to lead to pain and inhibited functioning.

Psychosynthesis contends that the past may have an even deeper function in determining the *quality* of adult life. A person's inner life may be incongruent with their outer life, contributing to a sense of inauthenticity. As a result the integrity of feeling at home in the world may be lacking. On a mental level, too, our history influences our attitudes, beliefs and philosophies about life, which further affects the quality of our life today. We may for example believe that: 'People cannot be trusted'; 'I have to fight for what I want'; 'Life is all pain and suffering'. These basic but often unconscious attitudes condition our image and experience of reality.

To consciously and deeply understand our psychological history can liberate a sense of meaning – of life being more than merely a disordered existence. Although neurotic behaviour patterns which are not of our own making manifest in all of us, they need not be permanent, inevitable or irrevocable. It is within our capacity to change them.

The Present

Assagioli considered it wise for counselling work to move from the known to the unknown. The counsellor will start with an assessment of known components of the personality, not in a vague and passive way, but with depth and conscious understanding. The stronger the integration of the personality, the more readily are unconscious elements assimilated and the more fruitful a redemption of the past will be.

Those seeking counselling do so because they find difficulty in their present everyday lives which causes them stress and inhibits their well-being. They have *symptoms*, behaviour patterns and ways of relating which are distorted and restrictive. A psychosynthesis counsellor will help the client to formulate, clarify and define the issues that are troubling her.

In psychosynthesis counselling the *presenting issue* is not taken simply at face value. The counsellor will intend to explore the breadth and depth of its impact on the client's current life in the following areas:

- the manifestations of the presenting issue in the client's life;
- the situations which evoke the problem: when and how they do this;
- the interpersonal relationships involved and the roles they play in the client's life;
- the physical sensations accompanying the presenting issue;
- the predominant emotions that are involved;
- the beliefs, attitudes and opinions that it stimulates;
- the values which are hidden and implicit.

The counsellor frames areas of pain and difficulty as *signals* that the client is not heading in the right direction and, as well, as *pointers* to the way forward. Problems are not simply pathological states to be eliminated but rather indicators of a hidden thrust towards integration. When the counsellor collaborates with the inevitable by perceiving the presenting issue as a progressive way forward, this revolutionizes the context of counselling. By confronting pathology with this attitude, the client can discover a more meaningful context for living. Paradoxically, in facing death, depression, anxiety and pain the client may discover meaning and a deeper identity.

In Assagioli's differentiation of the unconscious the present corresponds to the 'middle unconscious', which is formed of psychological elements similar to our waking consciousness, containing the memories, thoughts and feelings of which our everyday life is woven. This awareness is readily accessible to us merely by choosing to remember. The middle unconscious contains recent or near-present experiences or occurrences. It points not to what we have been or to what we could be, but to the evolutionary state we have actually reached. Assagioli notes that in this region our various experiences are assimilated with the ordinary mental and imaginative activities which are being elaborated and developed in a sort of psychological gestation, immediately before their birth into the light of consciousness.

The Future

Obstacles may point towards the recognition of a limited identity which the client is unconsciously ready to shed. As a snake sheds its skin, the client outgrows the old behaviour patterns contained within a problem. She will experience pain and the need for change in precisely those areas where a new identity is trying to emerge – the next level

of integration. The more the counsellor and client consciously collaborate, the greater the progress possible. Alternatively, if the client blindly repeats old patterns, increased pain and crystallization will result. Much suffering is generated through the perpetuation of old identities and resistance to change.

In psychosynthesis counselling, the future is seen as the realm of potential – what we may be, and indeed what we are becoming. Our potential symbolizes our next developmental step forward, not yet actualized. It contains our hidden resources, our latent possibilities for creativity and our positive strengths and qualities. In psychosynthesis the ‘superconscious’ is a level of the unconscious which is qualitatively higher than the lower unconscious in an evolutionary rather than a moral sense. This ‘higher unconscious’ is the home of our broader aspirations, intuitions and transpersonal energies. It is the seat of artistic, philosophical, scientific and ethical revelations and impulses to humanitarian action. Assagioli described this realm as the source of higher feelings such as altruistic love, of creative intelligence and of states of contemplation, illumination and ecstasy. The superconscious also functions as a higher organizing field which oversees the evolution of the individual.

On occasion most of us have had a superconscious experience, of varying degrees of intensity, when for a moment we touched our essential nature, or our true Self. Maslow (1954: 164) defined such superconscious experiences as ‘peak experiences’, in which:

there were feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space, with finally, the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences.

Peak experiences are accorded much value in psychosynthesis and are framed as being intimately connected with the client’s daily life and presenting problems. What this means for counselling practice is that each presenting issue contains a creative possibility and an opportunity for growth. Some potential is seeking to be born; something developmentally more advanced is trying to emerge for the client.

This idea implies that problems and obstacles at their deepest level are inherently meaningful, evolutionary, coherent and potentially transformative. The counsellor will recognize that it is no accident that various conflicts become foreground issues at particular times. Old psychological forms die (the past) in order for new ones to be born (the future). The energy of conflict is the energy of transformation. Working with potential in the process of change involves the counsellor having the capacity to perceive what is trying to be born *through* the difficulty, and that she both value and embrace creative dissonance.

The Transpersonal Dimension in Psychosynthesis Counselling

The Search for Unity

The transpersonal dimension of psychosynthesis speaks to a human longing which seems to be universal – a deep yearning for the experience of unity. Unity with ourselves: self-respect, the experience of being a worthwhile human being, is central to that yearning. Unity with others: the urge to love and be loved motivates much of our behaviour, although it is often unconscious and sometimes distorted. Unity with society: it can be said that it is the lack of this which is at the core of fear and hostility. Unity with the world: the need to feel globally interconnected with humanity and with the natural world. Without the experience of unity, life is liable to become increasingly fragmented and meaningless.

This yearning for unity can underlie many symptoms: a chronic feeling of isolation; self-destructive behaviour such as alcohol or drug consumption which dulls reality and creates a false sense of unity; suicidal impulses, which may suggest an unconscious desire to return to security and the *primal* unity of the womb; existential despair and hopelessness; dissatisfaction with a long strived for successful career. These are just a few of many similar examples taken from my experience as a counsellor.

The Experience of Rightness

Transpersonal psychosynthesis responds to an individual's search for *rightness*, the desire to know who we are and where we are going. All too often outer authorities are sought for answers to inner questions, yet we may

experience a pervasive need to come *home* to ourselves, to find a resting place within. Through transpersonal work the client may find her inner authority which has surprisingly little to do with outer validation. This inner authority implies certainty and is deeply connected with a sense of self.

Along this line, clients have discovered the ability to *know* what is best for them, what their next step in life is, and how to heal and direct their own development. For example, a client who has been told repeatedly that her experienced reality is not valid will develop a poor self-image and mistrust her own perception. The experience of *rightness* leads to a shift from environmental support to self-support. Increasingly the client may feel free to make choices that appear irrational or *not like her* but reflect enhanced self-direction. Examples of this would be a change of career at the peak of a hard-won success, a simplification of lifestyle, a rejection of previously held values, or an altruistic action which is uncomfortable.

It is not uncommon for a client to present feelings of despair and imprisonment. She is often unconsciously striving to make sense of her life and to order it into a meaningful pattern, one which potentially includes both her joy and sorrow, her fears and her dreams. The distressing content of a person's life (ageing, the death of a loved one, the loss of a cherished job) may not necessarily be changed by counselling, but *how* that content is perceived and valued and the place it occupies in the person's reality may undergo surprising alterations. As Aldous Huxley is remembered for saying: 'Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him.' An expanded, enriched sense of meaning often accompanies an exploration and subsequent awakening of the transpersonal dimension.

Social Value

Working on a transpersonal level has social value in that many clients who explore it discover a sense of interconnectedness. They begin to choose, both in thought and action, interdependence over independence and autonomy. An awareness of universality and of belonging to the larger whole of life carries deep implications for one's role and behaviour in society. Our ability to discriminate between means and ends is enhanced. It is not just *what* one does that matters, but *how* one does it. Life itself becomes the arena for creative self-expression, which is

often of social value. It is not unusual in psychosynthesis counselling, for example, for the client to re-evaluate her choice of career, or the implications of her actions upon other people, or the goals which she previously cherished.

The Self

Working transpersonally goes beyond the boundaries of a client's individuality. It is hard to define the transpersonal Self because it cannot be easily expressed in words or abstract concepts. It is a living experience for which we find metaphors in all cultures: Ulysses' *Odyssey* – a long journey whose purpose is to find a way home; Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which Dante eventually reaches heaven, but only after he experiences hell, purgatory and confronts his shadow; the Holy Grail, for which man searches to find the source of life and immortality. There are many stories and many versions of each, yet they have a single common theme: that there is a centre of life, a place where we feel whole and complete, and that this lies within ourselves. The source of being within, or Self, is not a passive presence, but capable of a profound and meaningful empathic relationship with an individual's everyday experience of life. The deeper will of the Self is felt as a *calling* or an *invitation* to a purposeful existence. The realization of this source is the heart of transpersonal work. Assagioli maintained that the ultimate purpose of psychosynthesis is to help release the experience of the Self and to recognize it as the organizing principle of life.

Conventional psychology does not acknowledge this centre of life, known in psychosynthesis as the transpersonal or spiritual Self. Humanistic psychologists, however, have sought to include it. Carl Rogers claimed to work with the organismic self; Fritz Perls termed it the 'point of creative indifference' and spoke of organismic self-regulation; Abraham Maslow stressed the need in all human beings for self-actualization; James Bugental encouraged a search for the lost sense of Being; James Hillman postulated the soul's code. Today Martin Seligman's positive psychology (2002) aims for the potential for lasting fulfilment and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow* experience (2002): the psychology of happiness is transpersonal by nature. Both Carl G. Jung and Roberto Assagioli, the fathers of transpersonal psychology, dedicated their work to bringing this *soul* into the foreground of modern psychology.

The Self can be described as a person's most authentic identity, the deepest experience of Being. It can be a conscious experience for some,

while for others it may be latent until superconscious experiences stimulate awareness of its existence. Experiences of beauty, of creative intelligence, of illumination, of insight into the purpose of life, and of altruistic imperatives can awaken the individual to this deeper identity.

For one client, moments of oneness with the beauty of nature stimulated its awakening. Another found that the creative experience of childbirth, for both herself and others present, led to an awareness of the transpersonal dimension. Inspired scientists have found transcendence through scientific discovery. One client who did volunteer work with the elderly experienced fulfilment through helping others, which evoked for her a sense of solidarity.

It is worth noting that the awakening of the Self may also be stimulated by crisis and negative experiences. For one client, the death of a loved one stimulated a search for meaning which led her to the experience of the Self; another, overwhelmed by a mid-life crisis, found relief through deep acceptance of her being which altered her priorities and life-direction. For an overstressed businessman, the loss of his valued career shocked him into a transcendent experience of his true identity far beyond his role as a businessman. These insights are often gained through the work of transpersonal counselling. In times of personal crisis, many in psychosynthesis counselling have experienced a movement towards a wider perspective and a renewed sense of proportion.

In this sense there is nothing esoteric about the Self or the transpersonal domain. It is a familiar and intimate experience, but one which we must discover for ourselves. Life itself is the journey through which we discover and realize our being. It is long and often arduous, and includes all manner of experience, dark moments as well as periods of light. It contains outer as well as inner experiences which *call* us to become increasingly conscious, and offers no short cuts and no easy answers. It is the journey T.S. Eliot speaks of in his *Four Quartets*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

No Guarantees

Transcendent states of consciousness are not by themselves a guarantee of effective psychological functioning, and when improperly handled can cause a wide variety of psychological problems. If the personality is not stable and integrated, superconscious experience can lead to mental imbalance. Those who are immature may escape into the transpersonal domain as an unconscious way of avoiding the difficulties of life. The personal ego may become inflated by glimpses of the essential Self and the divinity of life. An inner awakening can evoke an enhanced vision of potential so immense that it leads to chronic dissatisfaction with reality. In effect the transpersonal, if misused or misunderstood, can multiply neuroses.

For these important reasons psychosynthesis attempts to integrate the personal with the transpersonal and to facilitate the client's healthy expression of these psychospiritual energies. Addressing the transpersonal domain in psychosynthesis counselling is not a mystical avoidance of reality, nor does it promote transcendence of, or withdrawal from, everyday life. It aims to clear the way for an expression of Being, of values and integrity, to enable a person to use their resources in an intentional way for growth. A rich spiritual life, peak experiences, a vision of one's potential may lead only to despair unless the client is capable of translating them into everyday life. Hence, at the core of psychosynthesis counselling is both the *experience* and the *expression* of the transpersonal dimension.

Transpersonal experience emerges in different ways for different individuals, and as a consequence there is no prescribed recipe to follow. Psychosynthesis counselling is a co-operative interplay in which the course of work will be dictated by the client's motivation and unfoldment.

Having looked at the goals and levels of psychosynthesis counselling, the next chapter will explore the role of the counsellor and the counsellor as a person. Most modern theories of counselling agree that the relationship between counsellor and client is at the core of successful counselling. The counsellor's *presence* is the very heart of the training of a psychosynthesis counsellor.