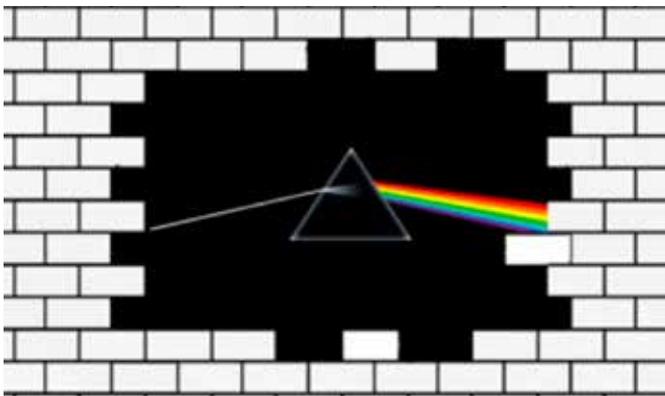


**“WE MUST BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY  
AND SPIRITUALLY POLYGLOT,  
WE MUST LEARN TO BE TRANSLATORS...”**

**R. ASSAGIOLI**

## **THE WALL OF SILENCE AS CREATOR OF BRIDGES**

*Translation by Greta Bianchi*

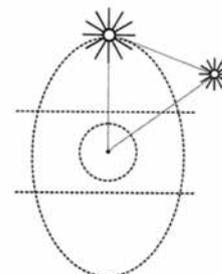


REFLECTION: A few weeks ago I read the article by Piero Ferrucci “On the threshold of mystery” and what was later published by Marina Bernardi, “Reflections on Psychosynthesis today”. One of the main topics addressed in these two writings was the relationship between Psychosynthesis both as a conception and a psychological, educational and (self)-formative practice and the other fields of human knowledge related to spiritual, philosophical, esoteric, religious etc. beliefs and systems. More specifically, the two writings reasoned on the “wall of silence” that Roberto Assagioli desired between Psychosynthesis and these other fields. I have wondered about this topic quite a lot and I will share here some ideas that perhaps will allow us to look at the “famous” wall as a possibility of building bridges. I do not know if these ideas can contribute to the current debate and find some practical application, but I hope so. Assagioli was deeply convinced of the many misunderstandings and “serious difficulties” raised by the use of language when talking about psychological realities, especially the transpersonal or superconscious ones, and he used to clearly affirm it. More specifically, he identified three clear orders of impediments, offering specific solutions or antidotes for each of them.

1. The first difficulty concerns the use by the human language of metaphors and symbols based on material things to designate realities that are not material at all (e.g. the word “soul” in Italian - anima - derives from the Greek “anemos”, which means “wind”, while “to think” -pensare- comes from the verb pesare -to weigh- understood in a material sense, and so on). The antidote identified by Assagioli to this first difficulty involves the commitment by the Psychosynthesis practitioner (but not only) to “recognize and always keep in mind the symbolic nature of every expression, verbal and of any other forms.” The words are therefore symbols and must be considered as such. The invitation to recognize the symbolic, metaphorical nature of words and language leads us to the other two obstacles identified by Assagioli concerning precisely specific characteristics of symbols:

- their being unilateral
- their dual and contrasting nature.

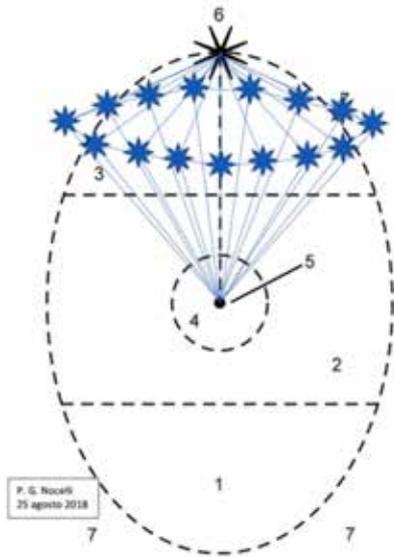
2. When we refer to the “dual and contrasting” nature of symbols we mean that they can reveal reality, they can be a link, an intermediary that facilitates contact with the truth that they indicate. On the other hand, they can veil it, thus becoming a trap that drives us “out of ourselves”. In fact, Assagioli reminds us that “the man who takes them [symbols] literally, who does not reach reality passing through the symbol, but halt at it, does not reach the truth”. As a Buddhist saying that I love very much goes: “When a wise man points at the moon, the fool looks at the finger”. The Psychosynthesis practitioner is therefore responsible for committing himself to distinguish the finger (the symbol, the word, the belief, the doctrine and so on) from the moon (the indicated reality / truth) and then to focus his attention on the latter.



3. Finally, with the expression “unilaterality of symbols”, we want to indicate that they are able to express solely “one aspect, one modality, one partial conception of a given reality”. The Psychosynthesis practitioner is requested to overcome this difficulty by using “different symbols to indicate the same truth” and by synthesizing the different symbols that he uses. In short, he must be a polyglot (knowing and speaking various languages) and a skilled translator (being able to express the same idea using different symbolic reference systems, skillfully switching from one to another). Then the use of language, oriented by the desire to build right human relations, becomes functional to mutual understanding.

function of the kitchen is different from the function of the bathroom and that of the bedroom. Even in a wonderful open-space (“Casa Assagioli”?) you would carry on cooking on the stove, sleeping in the bed and washing in the shower. However these reflections of mine still revolved around a disappointing representation of the wall as a “thick barrier of bricks”.

At some point, however, my attention shifted from the defined and heavy idea-image of the “wall” (the finger?) to the other idea-image left in the background, more blurred and distant, of “silence” (the moon?). And it was as if suddenly I saw this wall for the first time. The “wall” which Assagioli wanted for delimiting the space of Psychosynthesis can actually be something dif-



#### SYMBOLS OF TRANSPERSONAL EXPERIENCE\*

- Symbols of introversion, of interiorization
- Symbols of deepening, going to the depths of our being
- Symbols of elevation, of ascent
- Symbols of expansion of broadening our consciousness
- Symbols of awakening
- Symbols of light, of illumination
- Symbols of fire
- Symbols of evolution, of development
- Symbols of empowerment, of intensification
- Symbols of love
- Symbols of the way, the path, the pilgrimage
- Symbols of transmutation
- Symbols of regeneration, of re-birth
- Symbols of liberation
- Symbols of resurrection, of return

\*R. Assagioli – *Lo Sviluppo transpersonale*

A few weeks ago, while walking along the shoreline of the Ligurian Sea observing the gentle and transparent toing and froing of the backwash, I meditated upon the image of the “wall of silence”, its meanings and its functions. Some notions which are already clear came to my mind: walls (such as the Berlin one) are used to prevent, divide and separate something from something else; walls are also necessary to delimit and distinguish different spaces, defining respective functions. No one would ever dream of denying that, in a building, the

ferent from the wall of Berlin, which is, an insurmountable barrier of bricks. It can instead be transparent and light. Potentially, it has always been. As a matter of fact, it is a wall made of a very special material with specific properties: THE SILENCE.

At first, this image of a delimited Psychosynthesis, surrounded by transparency and peace of silence, may appear very romantic, but nothing more. In truth, it has interesting implications that can clearly indicate the type

of mental functioning that the Psychosynthesis practitioner is requested to cultivate when he approaches different systems of beliefs, doctrines and metaphors.

As we all know, in Psychosynthesis the silence has very precise meanings and functions, much deeper and evocative than the simple absence of words or the lack of communication. The regular and daily practice of silence has the function of developing the ability to maintain a “zone of disidentification”, of recollection, in the midst of the noises of everyday life.

The inner silence is also, above all, the necessary condition for the development of intuition, the psychological function through which we can truly enter into a relationship with the transpersonal dimension within us and begin to dialogue with it (and thus, also, to open up and authentically dialogue with others as “We are the Self, that Self are We”). Moreover, according to Psychosynthesis, the possibility of an experiential contact with the superconscious sphere is precisely a function of the degree of inner silence that we are able to achieve.

So here it is that, understood in this way, the “wall” wanted by Assagioli becomes a boundary that does not much defines different fields of knowledge and their contents, but different modes of mental functioning. And the material which it is constituted of, silence, becomes the substance that builds that bridge that leads us “beyond”: beyond the language that separates and divides, beyond the mind that categorizes and judges and, above all, beyond the literalization of multiple metaphors (whether they concern the fields of spirituality, esotericism, philosophy, religion and even science) that men choose from time to time to plaster and color the same archetypal existential experiences, the same perennial truths, the same immediate data of the consciousness that are presented to us again and again, universal in every time and culture. I mean the well-known internal illuminations, to aesthetic experiences and artistic creation, to scientific intuitions, to the impetus to heroic action, to the ethical and humanitarian impulse, to the courage to go towards the novelty beyond the limits of the known, to profound vision, to inventive genius, to ecstasy, to the pursuit of freedom and happiness, to the

game, to self-transcendence, to beauty, to conversion to Love, to higher feelings, to solidarity, to brotherhood. It would be nice to complete the list. Silence leads us “beyond”. It brings us (back) home, in that place that is source and spring, from which every word, metaphor and symbol draws its origin.

Silence allows the trained Psychosynthesis practitioner to observe transparently the different belief systems, the different doctrinal formulations and the various languages. The “wall of silence” becomes then a filter capable of distilling, extracting and merging into Psychosynthesis what, in different systems, indicates a universal, common dimension, distinguishing it from what is particular, an expression of the specificity given by the constraints of time, space and temperament to which the individuals and human groups that have shaped those beliefs, languages and doctrines have been and are subjected to. Disidentification. Perhaps this very universal dimension of human experience is the most proper object of study of Psychosynthesis, as it is especially interested in what is potentially able to unite all human beings, as many as possible.

Assagioli expressly, programmatically wanted that anyone could recognize himself in the psychosynthetic approach: people started off on a more or less defined path of spiritual research, as well as the agnostics and atheists; the artists and politicians, the mystics and the doctors, the yogis and the scientists, the sportsmen and the therapists. He wanted that Psychosynthesis could be accessible to everyone without pushing anyone to give up his particular language and metaphors already adopted and to convert to other languages and metaphors, hence changing the cover but not the book.

To achieve this goal Assagioli chose as official language what he considered to be the most suitable to support this universal vocation of Psychosynthesis: the empirical, concrete, pragmatic language of science. And it does not seem to me that in the present historical moment we have a more functional reference system, able to create a common ground of understanding that allows dialogue beyond particularisms and personal beliefs of individuals or groups. While itself remaining a symbol!

Let me give an example of the concrete application of what has just been said which, in my view, illustrates clearly this tension. Psychosynthesis considers the hypothesis that the transpersonal Self is a psychic reality that can be experienced. On the basis of this hypothesis, some exercises propose the imagined encounter and the inner dialogue with the Self. Assagioli recommends that these exercises are preceded by a psychogogic moment in which the concept is presented in the following way: the Psychosynthesis practitioner adapts his own language to the mentality and beliefs of each another and does not expect the opposite to happen, that is, he does not expect the other to change his beliefs to adapt them to his. It is not at all a matter of instructing, or worse, converting people by presenting them with new concepts or beliefs. It is simply a matter of using the language (always bearing in mind that words are symbols) to introduce an experience that, by definition, is beyond all words and which can only be grasped intuitively. To do it in the best way - that is, so that people can seriously consider this hypothesis worthy of being verified through an experiential path that involves an inner training - it is necessary to adapt the words to individuals or groups. For example, religious people can be told that the expression "Transpersonal Self" is an objective term, used in psychology, to indicate the soul; to agnostics, we can lay before the hypothesis that there is a higher center in every man and say that there is a considerable number of human beings who have had the experience; to atheists, we can illustrate the idea of potentials existing at the unconscious level not yet implemented, which can show us precious guidelines in our lives, and that represent the expression of a deeper authenticity. And so on. This example concerns the concept of transpersonal self, but the principle that it illustrates can be transposed to the other basic concepts of Psychosynthesis.

CONCLUSIONS: The "wall of silence" desired by Assagioli undoubtedly wanted to separate different fields of interest and study (the scientific, empirical one of Psychosynthesis from that of spirituality, philosophy, esotericism and religion), to distinguish spaces and to designate functions. However, nowadays, we can perhaps try to look at this wall differently, focusing our atten-

tion on the material it is made of: SILENCE. This means shifting the accent from the contents that should be on this side or that side of the wall, to the kind of inner attitude, of mental functioning that silence invites us to cultivate towards every content. In other words, to move the accent on the container.

Here then the "wall of silence" can become a very precious tool to emancipate the Psychosynthesis practitioner and psychosynthesis from the literal thought and a powerful antidote against its ever-present corollaries: fanaticism, fundamentalism, separativeness, incommunicability and conflict. It is in a mind trained to silence that those skills that make a Psychosynthesis practitioner a good practitioner can sprout: being a polyglot and a skilled translator. This is how Assagioli expressed his opinion on this matter:

*"Truth is One - but its presentation is different and different levels, according to the kind of people to whom we address ourselves. One has to talk to each other in their language. We have to be polyglots psychologically and spiritually, learn to be translators (...)"*

R. Assagioli

*"In the silent mind there are the roots of intelligence and love"*

C. Pensa