

## TWO WINGS

*“The only way out is the way up” (Roberto Assagioli). At first, Assagioli’s motto inspires Susan Holliday in her soul-searching. Then the horizontal perspective takes on greater appeal in the introspection that accompanies the author of this text. Horizontal as the possibility of expanding consciousness in breadth. Horizontal as the wings spread out in flight are oriented. And by analogy to the flight of birds, which need two wings to fly, humanity also needs two wings. The human journey is conditioned by the breadth of wings and the balance between them: balance between the ‘wing of reason and the wing of knowledge. The author develops the “lateral” experience of self-awareness as the unfolding of two wings of two aspects of life intersecting in the vertical ascending, the way up.*

*“Revelation occurs at the conversational edge between different modes of perception”*

In July 2023 I was honoured to be invited to offer the keynote speech at the European Psychosynthesis Association (EPA) Summer School in Sweden. Our theme for the week was ‘Roots and Wings’, a pairing of symbols which naturally suggests a transpersonal itinerary along a *vertical* axis - between earth and heaven perhaps, or from the imprisoning gravity of matter to the liberation of spirit. A perfect evocation, it seems, of Assagioli’s maxim “The only way out is the way up<sup>0</sup>”.

I began my inquiry by clearing my mind of the existing associations with the two symbols. I took myself out into nature and used my senses as well as my imagination to see what ‘roots and wings’ might have to say for themselves. Using beginners mind, this exploration unearthed an unexpected perspective. Where ‘roots and wings’ might most obviously draw us to look at our journey as spiritual beings from a vertical point of view, I found myself drawn towards a more horizontal perspective. I began to ask myself what these symbols might have to teach us about *ways of expanding our consciousness, by stretching out.*

Wings are associated with the elevation of consciousness, for of course wings *lift us up*. But birds and other flying

creatures only rise up *because their wings stretch out* (much like the trees that grow up because their roots spread out). Each wing feather is made of a complex weave of fibres that fan out in flight to create a kind of sail that rides the airwaves. This *complex spreading structure* gives wings strength to weather the storms on their long journeys from one shore to another.



Take for example the swallows that cross Europe and arrive in the UK every summer. These tiny birds travel to and from South Africa, a journey of some six thousand miles. Over the course of their epic annual migration, swallows fly over the rainforests of the Congo, the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean Sea and the mountains of the Pyrenees. When I see them come to nest under the roofline of my house, it always moves me to think of the enormous breadth of vision they bring with them. Their flight to and from South Africa weaves together two very different shores and gathers up all that lies in-between them.

The remarkable flight of birds like these rests on a simple but profound premise, which is that to fly (to leave one shore and set out for another) we need *two wings*.

Flight and the breadth of vision this brings, is the consequence of *stretching out between opposite poles*, left and right, east and west, the rising sun and the setting sun. If one wing is preferred and the other neglected, even slightly, we will only travel so far. Right now, we find ourselves at the limits of a journey which began in the seventeenth century with the Enlightenment. Since then we have enhanced the wing of reason and *knowing* (which has gifted us science and technology), but we have largely forgotten the wing of intuition and the fertile ground of mystery, which is the gift of *unknowing*. We need the spaciousness of un-knowing because it creates room for new patterns and stories to emerge. The more we cling to the certainty of preconception, the more likely we are to keep heading for a fall.

If we are to avoid a fall, we may need to turn our attention to the opposite wing, to that perspective which lies in our blind spot. Jung called this forgotten wing the ‘inferior function’<sup>0</sup> and stressed the importance, particularly at

mid-life, of bringing this lost aspect into awareness. We catch a glimpse of our lost wing in situations that throw us off balance or make us feel confused and overloaded. This seeming weak spot opens us to what is as yet unknown and un-lived. Turning to look the other way, we enlarge the span of our awareness. We see more of the larger story of Self.

The more I consider this lateral aspect, the *expansion* of Self awareness, the more it seems to me that this perspective has something important to say to us at this point in our human journey. I speak as someone well into the second half of life. What increasingly demands my attention is how to play my part in the *larger story* that will sustain my children long after I am gone. This larger story seems to be rooted in the health of community (both human and more than human). We live in fragile times. The forces of big money, big guns and big ideology pose a very serious threat to all that makes us most human. *It seems that it is no longer enough to be an individual with a good heart, we also need to learn how to connect, how to think and act together.* The revelation of Self is embedded in *conversation*, in *dialogue*, in the



*exchange of perspective*. I have no certain knowledge of where this life (personal or collective) may be heading, but I understand that insight and awareness always build *outwards*, through the quality of attention we bring to points of intersection. This is why I am so committed to the work of the European Psychosynthesis Association and to opening channels of exchange with psychosynthesis colleagues across Europe and beyond.

When we bring close attention to what feels most vital within us and *between* us, it soon becomes clear that the world is alive with clues, signs and symbols that lead us to the place where the Will of Self is crowning into view. In the sixth of his 'Ten Psychological Laws'<sup>0</sup> Assagioli identifies 'attention' as the essential precondition for the revelation of Self. The root of the English verb 'attend' derives from the Latin '*tendere*', which means 'to stretch'. *If we are to 'attend' to the emergent field of Self revelation, we may need to stretch our awareness, our concepts and our models beyond their original limits.*

In his seminal book on the complimentary working of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, 'The Master and his Emissary', Iain McGilchrist proposes that: '*The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world*'<sup>0</sup>

Now when McGilchrist says that a certain quality of attention 'actually alters the world', I think he is indicating that 'attention' is not a mere prelude to transformation, but that how we perceive the world *IS* the transformation.

*Attention, he argues, is a creative act requiring both wings of our perception - right and left hemispheres - intuition and reason, instinct and imagination, soma and psyche.* These modes of attention may seem like alternative ways of seeing, where we can indulge in preference, but these pairings of opposites are not just options for revealing the divine Will. For without somatic experience, the wings of imagination risk losing touch with the intelligence of instinct and the gravity of our embodied suffering. Conversely too strong an identification with roots and origins can leave us tied to the confines of rigid belief systems that

no longer serve us.

Revelation occurs at the 'conversational edge' between different modes of perception. Those of us who perceive through *both* a depth and breadth of vision, do not merely witness life - we are midwives to soul's emergence. *In Psychosynthesis we call this two-winged perception bi-focal vision, a quality of attention in which we become the bridge between all that is broken and all that is forever whole; between the centre and the margins of our understanding; between the drama of personality and the enduring stillness of soul.* Our hearts, bodies and minds are stretched drum-tight at the frontier between the grief of all that is lost and our witness to a creative world that is in a constant state of revelation and renewal.

Psychosynthesis is blessed with a multi-dimensional model of the nature of Self. Rooted in the non-binary principle of BOTHNESS, Self manifests as both Consciousness *and* Will; Self is active in both a Lower *and* a Higher Unconscious; Self *IS and* Self *BECOMES*; Self is both implicate 'within' the story of matter *and* an infinite mystery which lies 'beyond' matter. It is worth noting that at the heart of this dynamic nature of Self there is a sacred bridge – represented throughout this paper by the word AND. It's a small word, easily overlooked. Yet without AND we have no synthesis. We have no psychosynthesis. AND is the sacred bridge which both joins together and holds apart the different perspectives within a dynamic wholeness. In psychosynthesis we call this sacred bridge 'I'. This, our inner spiritual centre, keeps both (all) perspectives in view. By holding the creative tension at the intersection of different points of view, 'I' resists collapsing or splitting into any one perspective.

The dismembering of this sacred bridge is perhaps why the world seems so very lost at this time, lost in the polarisations of ideological extremism and tribal affiliation with its binary black and white thinking. Beyond the many present polarities, there seems to be an emergent call for us to gather and synthesise what seems irreconcilable, through connecting to the sacred bridge that holds the *creative tension* between opposites; to the unifying centre that can bear the stretch.

In his paper ‘The Balancing and Synthesis of the Opposites’<sup>0</sup>, Assagioli states that holding the tension of polarities is the ‘*central drama*’ of our human story. Holding the tension of bi-focal vision is more demanding than surrendering to any absolute truth. It requires a willingness to hold the tension of polarity, to *bear the stretch*. The choice to bear the stretch of soul’s revelation often confronts us with contradiction. Anger and compassion, despair and hope, vulnerability and strength clash together, resisting easy resolution. Where we resist the impulse to split ‘both-and’ into ‘either-or’, something entirely new can be born.

The synthesis that gives birth to something new takes place at a level far beyond personality. Assagioli defines the regulating principle as ‘wisdom’ and the unifying force as ‘Spirit in its fullness’<sup>0</sup>. English poet William Wordsworth puts this beautifully when he writes ‘*there is a dark inscrutable workmanship that reconciles discordant elements*’<sup>0</sup>. This reconciling presence resides at the sacred bridge between ‘I’ and Self, in the place where everything can be seen as a whole. In English the word ‘bridge’ refers also to that part of a ship where the captain has a clear view of the whole horizon and directs the vessel towards the far shore.

Understood from the perspective of BOTHNESS, Love and Will are perhaps the wing tips of our existence. If we are to make it to the far shore, we need to strengthen both and make sure they are working together.

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*Susan is an active member of the European Psychosynthesis Association (EPA) and founder of the EPA WRITERS group which fosters a wide range of writing from the perspective of soul. Her book *Hidden Wonders of the Human Heart*, published in 2021, explores ways of cultivating a deeper vision within the therapeutic encounter.*

### Note

1. Assagioli, R. Assagiolini notelet, archived at Casa Assagioli in Florence.
2. Jung, C.G. Collected Works Volume 7, para 85.
3. Assagioli, R. The Act of Will, Chapter 5, Penguin Arkana, 1974.
4. McGilchrist, I. The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World, p.5, Yale University Press, 2010.
5. Assagioli, R. The Balance and Synthesis of the Opposites, Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, 1972.
6. Assagioli, R. IBID
7. Wordsworth, W. The Prelude, Book 1, from ‘Selected Poems of William Wordsworth’, Methuen Publishing, 2005.