

BIO-PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY AND PSYCHOSYNTHESIS OF HUMANITY

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(first part – to be continued in issue no. 46)

“The mind is brought into harmony with spirit and includes the body, achieving an organic, harmonious unity of all aspects of a person’s being, which we might call Bio-psycho-synthesis. This is true spiritual alchemy.”

Roberto Assagioli

HUMANITY WITHOUT PEACE

I would like to begin this speech on alchemy and the psychosynthesis of humanity with a quote from Roberto Assagioli who wrote:

“It’s quite likely that humanity has never been so without peace as it is now. We need only to look around to realize how true this is.”⁽²⁾

When does this “now” refer to? It would seem that this “now,” is an “eternal now”, right? I wondered when Assagioli had written this reflection on peace. During World War I, when was he serving as a doctor in the hospital in Ancona? During the second, when he was fleeing with his son from Nazi persecution? Or later? During the protests and terrorism of the 1960s and 1970s? In truth, what really matters is that these words always seem relevant. As much then, as now. As if they belong to a timeless aspiration of the human soul. It therefore seems that we are faced with an archetypal,

universal theme that always and forever questions us. Then Assagioli continues in “his” personal complaint:

“In such a world the cultivation of peace is not much a spiritual luxury as a daily necessity (...) A person who is able to be a living center of peace in today’s world (...) will be in a position to give needy humanity the benefit it lacks the most and is in greatest need of.”

INITIAL QUESTIONS

My reflection started from these very questions - which, I am sure, I share with many of you and with many of those who choose to look at the current situation with open eyes and hearts:

- Is there an effective way to reconcile the sadness, fear, indignation we feel, with being that “living center of peace” and radiating peace, joy and love in the world?
- Is there a way to “compose” these different inner experiences that seem so distant from one another?
- How can we resist the despair of impotence on the one hand, and the delusion of omnipotence on the other, while assuming our share of responsibility, claiming and expressing our power?
- And continuing to remain open and grateful for the beauty and wonders the world offers to us every day?

This seems to be one of the main challenges that this changing world poses to us. That perhaps the ever-changing world has always posed to humanity. And of course the idea I want to explore with you is whether what we in Psychosynthesis call “inner alchemy” might be one of those “powerful & soulful pathways” that can help us “to navigate these uncertain times”.

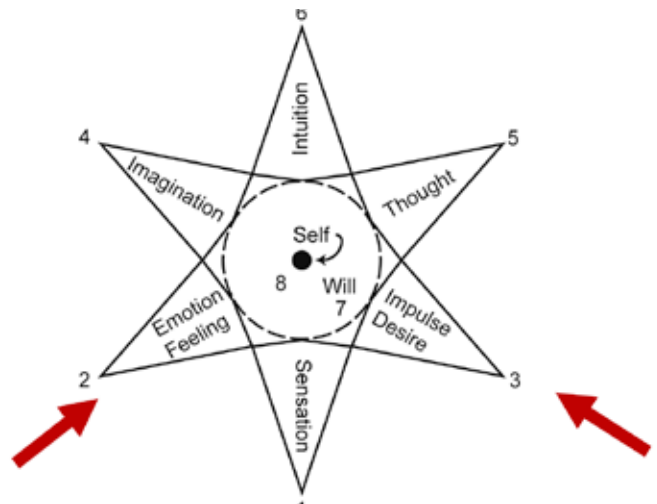
WHAT IS “BIO-PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY”? WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH THE PSYCHOSYNTHESIS OF HUMANITY?

What is “bio-psycho-spiritual alchemy”? What does it have to do with the psychosynthesis of humanity? And with the importance of synthesis in a changing world?

The term “alchemy”, going back to ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, and the East, and later to Arab and Western culture, has always referred to a mysterious science whose ultimate goal was the search for a substance (such as the philosopher’s stone) capable of curing all diseases, making one omniscient and this is obviously the property that struck the imagination of human beings the most - transforming lead into gold.



When in Psychosynthesis we speak of “bio-psycho-spiritual alchemy we are referring to a very precise process, namely the utilization, transformation and sublimation of bio-psyche energies: of aggressive and sexual impulses and desires, and of emotions and feelings.



CRUCIAL ROLE OF ALCHEMY IN THE PROCESS OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

Alchemy is given a crucial, very important role in the psychosynthetic process, but this is not always so clear. Perhaps this is because we tend to emphasize other, better known, and very important aspects, such as disidentification, will, superconscious, Self, etcetera. Yet this point is perhaps even more central also because, almost fractally, it implies all the other experiences of Psychosynthesis.

This process, as you know, is divided into three main phases, which I prefer to call “aspects,” since they are different levels of intervention that must always be synthesized in the famous motto: “know yourself, master yourself and transform yourself “

Two psychological functions that are the raw material of our alchemical work. These two functions - which we can compare to the energy of the sun, water, earth and wind (and here you already understand how evocative this metaphor could be) - are defined by Assagioli as “the elements that give energy, life”⁽³⁾; “the spontaneous tendency that moves us,” and they have specific characteristics that are important to understand:

- they are natural, vital energies
- therefore pre-moral
- they are indestructible
- they demand to be expressed
- and they are constantly being transformed: in an automatic way, impulses tend to become actions; emotions become images and thoughts....

These transformations from automatic and unconscious can be directed and regulated by the I-Self. This is a great challenge of alchemical work. That is why our psychosynthesis begins with this very first task.

ALCHEMICAL WORK ROOTS US IN WHAT IS NATURE AND NATURAL

“Inner alchemy is a natural method in the highest sense because it is in accord with our true nature and the ascending path we are destined to follow.”
Roberto Assagioli

It is of primary importance to underline how alchemical work immediately roots us in what is nature and natural. It begins precisely by recognizing those instances that we share with our animal friends. With one important difference, however. That in us human beings - who have, so to speak, eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - the vital instincts are no longer innately self-regulating.

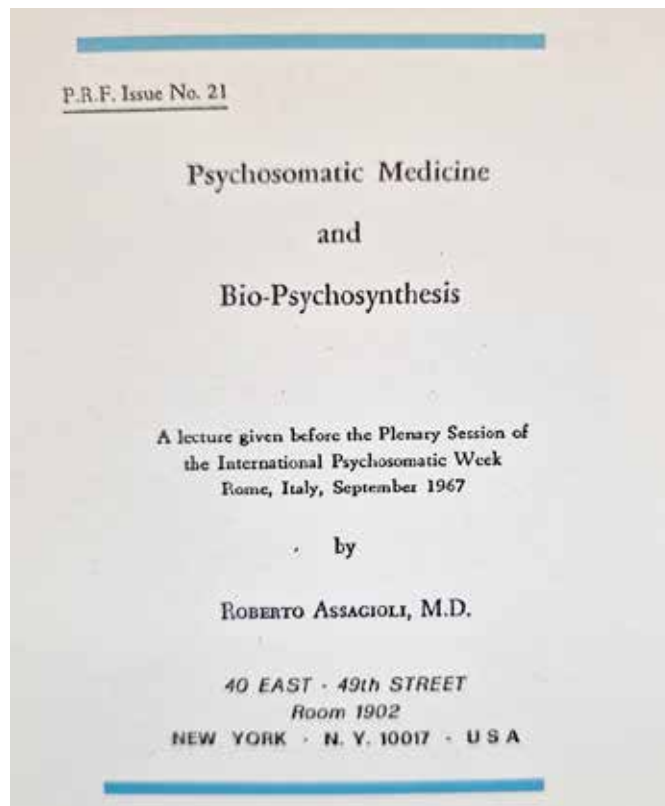
Continuing to develop the metaphor, as in, so out: even wind, water, earth and sun - while being the energies that sustain life on the planet - can bring destruction (inundations, hurricanes, earthquakes). The only option humans have is to understand and respect these forces and, as far as possible, channel them in the wisest, most ecological way.

In the same way, we are urged to have awareness and will, without which, our instincts can be perverted in the service of unnatural and inhuman logics, reaching extremes that we unfortunately know well: the excesses of pornography, consumerist delirium, humanitarian tragedies, just to name a few very sad examples.

The essence, powerful significance and extreme necessity of alchemical work lies right here.

Inner alchemy thus starts with the recognition of, and reconnection with what lies at the foundation of individual and collective life, with the “bios”, the nature within and outside.

And this should come as no surprise to us because let’s remember that the full name of Psychosynthesis is actually “Bio-psychosynthesis” and that Roberto Assagioli - besides being one of the fathers of humanistic and transpersonal psychology and an expert of many spiritual traditions - was also one of the very first Italian scholars of psychoanalysis and a pioneer of psychosomatic medicine. So much so, that he was invited as a keynote speaker to the First International Week of Psychosomatic Medicine. So, he has been dealing with this topic for a long time and from the very beginning of his studies.



THE CREATION OF A HARMONIOUS PLANETARY ORGANISM

In fact - and here I come to the second part of the title of my talk - the ultimate purpose of the transformation of these energies is no less than the creation of “a harmonious planetary organism,” of a “world synthesis.” The purpose of bio-psycho-spiritual alchemy is the psychosynthesis of humanity precisely. And the greatest obstacle to the creation of such a synthesis lies in repressed and/or unregulated drives and emotions⁽⁴⁾.

There, you see, what always manages to amaze me about Psychosynthesis, is its ability to connect, to integrate into an organic unity, levels of experience that are apparently very far apart. It succeeds in connecting really broad, planetary, even universal visions, to our daily lives and to very simple and basic aspects of our psychic dynamics, such as our impulses and emotions.

By linking the process of transformation of drives and affects to the “creation of a harmonious planetary organism,” we are in fact affirming the immense value of this process, not only for our individual well-being, which is valuable in itself, but for the entire community of living beings inhabiting planet Earth. We recognize that individual transformation and collective transformation, far from being separate, are instead closely interconnected, “entangled”, using a word that is now very popular.

By linking inner alchemy to the Psychosynthesis of humanity, we strongly point out that each individual matters much more than we imagine. That the impact of our actions, or our lack of action, is much wider than we are led to believe by narratives derived from the prevailing mechanistic-deterministic paradigm. A paradigm which, in its reductive and linear logic, represents us as essentially insignificant.

(end of the first part)

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Notes

1. R. Assagioli, *Lo sviluppo transpersonale*, Astrolabio, p. 82
2. R. Assagioli, *Lo sviluppo transpersonale*, p. 235
3. R. Assagioli, *Comprendere la Psicossintesi*, p. 51 e p. 63
4. R. Assagioli, *Trasformazione delle energie psichiche*, Istituto di Psicossintesi, 1963 e *Trasmutazione delle energie combattive*, Istituto di Psicossintesi, 1965