

CONVERSATION WITH ROBERTO ASSAGIOLI

By Diane Freund, source *Psychosynthesis Digest*,
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Introduction

In March 1973, I went to Italy to study with Roberto Assagioli.

This article is excerpted from the book I have written about that journey. The book originally evolved from wanting to share my experiences with some friends and interested others, using the transcriptions I had made from the tapes of my sessions with R.A. It reads as though he and I were talking to each other but actually, since Roberto was almost completely deaf, I wrote all my comments and questions to him and except for an occasional Grazie or Bene from me, only his voice is heard recorded. In preparing the transcriptions, therefore, to be read by others, I had to insert my written words to make sense of his answers. Then, expanding, I included who I was and how I was using my time in Florence in between our sessions.

Here, then, are excerpts from the first and seventh sessions. I have preserved his words as he spoke them, making only small changes for clarity. I believe it is important to note that the following are my very personal impressions, not meant to be an objective description at all. Roberto's words, reproduced here, were meant to address my issues and not as messages for the general public. Recognizing this, I hope these selections will

give a flavor of him and of the way he worked—at least the way he worked with me.

It had been the previous November when I'd finished a training program at the Psychosynthesis Institute in California and thought of going to Italy to meet Dr. Assagioli. I had been warned that he was old, about 85, and ill, saw few people, and was busy with important writing of his own. I was further told that it would be months, anyway, before I even got a reply rejecting me, the Italian mails being what they were and Roberto himself being not too prompt and so very busy. It felt daring to write to him but I was also feeling the strength of my own professional background and the quality of the work I was doing.

I put everything in my letter that I thought he would care about, the training I'd had, the workshops I'd given, the work I was doing with clients using psychosynthesis. I told him how that work felt and about my experiences with psychosynthesis for my own self-exploration and growth. The surprising result was a prompt reply telling me when he would have time to see me. He sounded so accessible and welcoming that I immediately made plans to go.

Session I-March 20, 1973

My first day in Florence I got settled in the Pensione Monna Lisa (correctly spelled with two "n's"), and the second day I called the Istituto di Psicopsintesi. They were expecting me. I spoke to Ida Palombi, Dr. Assagioli's second in command, and she set up an appointment for that afternoon.

I took a bus to Via San Domenico, a twenty minute ride. At number 16, I rang the old fashioned push bell next to a brass plate which read "R. Assagioli" and waited for the answering buzz to let me in. Upstairs, the Assagioli's servant, a plump lady looking to be in her sixties, opened the door and showed me into a parlor.

Dr. Assagioli lived in what to my American eyes seemed a most European-looking apartment. It was situated on

the third floor of a fairly old building in a well-to-do neighbourhood; this building looking like most of its neighbours. The first floor was occupied by the Istituto, the third floor by Roberto, his wife, and their one servant, and the fourth floor by Ida. I never met the occupants of the apartment on the second floor or learned whether they were connected to the Istituto.

Roberto's apartment was Italian dark, with subdued lighting, the colours faded, the furniture old. Mixed in with heavy Italian upholstered pieces were ones that looked oriental including an intricately carved chair, a small upright desk and Chinese rug. Hanging on the walls or standing on table tops were framed photographs of family and friends.

I waited only a few minutes when the servant returned and indicated Il Dottore was ready to see me in his study. The study was small, high ceilinged, and marvelously cluttered with books, papers, writing materials, and small rectangular signs- evocative billboards he called them, and there were words written on them like **Calma** or **Pazienza**. There were figurines of china or brass standing on his desk and on book shelves; there were pots with pencils. He displayed mementoes from former patients and from co-workers. I wondered if he would ever display anything of mine.

When I entered, he rose from behind his desk and extended his hand to greet me. There was much smiling and bowing and nodding as I sat down in the closest chair facing him.

At first glance, he might have been an elderly doctor/ scholar with a pedantic, quiet life and a small limited practice. As I got to know him, I found that, far from being isolated, he was in correspondence with people all over the world. There was a continuous flow of material coming to the apartment on Via San Domenico. Whatever piece of new thought came out in his field of psychology and in related fields of science, literature or world events, he immediately heard about and had books, articles from journals, magazines and all sorts of periodicals being sent to him. He kept himself well informed.

That first day he was dressed in a maroon velvet smoking jacket with matching satin trim, an ascot at his neck. How old fashioned and formal it looked, yet he was friendly and easy right from the beginning. He was a man of slight build, small and wiry, and with his pointed goatee and full penetrating eyes, he was an elf grown up - a pixie with a giant intellect and soul. I've heard him described as high and as light - both seem accurate. He spoke English with a pleasant Italian accent, in his thin, yet resonant voice. His speech was lyrical-he made his words sing.

I had been told in advance that it would be advisable to tape our sessions so I'd brought my Sony cassette recorder. Since Roberto was almost totally deaf, my questions and comments were written, each one, on a separate sheet of paper, prepared in advance, and I used a long yellow tablet to write remarks on as we went along.

"Can you hear me," he began, "because I have not much voice? I have spoken too much in my life and my throat rebels." Then, "Are you recording? Do you think it's enough voice?"

"Yes, I'm sure it is," I responded on my tablet.

He took out a large handkerchief and held it to his mouth while he cleared phlegm from his chest. Then he said, "I don't think you need the real didactic training in psychosynthesis; you have had a lot of it, almost too much."

"Wait until you read all of my questions," I wrote, "then you'll see how much I don't know." Feeling shy, I became self-deprecating.

"Well," he responded, "maybe not too much, but anyhow I think it better to focus on a few basic problems or tasks, rather."

"Good, yes," I said nodding so he could see I agreed, and realizing how hard it was not to talk. In fact, I had responded without thought. (Why did he think I had had almost too much training? Were there negative implications to that? Did almost too much mean this was the time to stop didactic work and go on to the broader

based, spiritual work; focusing on a few basic issues, he called it?)

I doubted my good preparation. All he had to go on was what I had told him and although I hadn't lied, I also had not had to prove what I'd learned - I'd only said what I'd studied. Well, I'd trust his opinion for now.

As he'd requested, I'd put into writing what I hoped to get from our sessions: a positive sense of self; a correct understanding of my worth; experience with meditation; the right use of will-especially with anger and impatience; recognition, assimilation, and utilization of higher energies; activation of superconscious functions; also to overcome my difficulty in saying no, and my need to perform.

"I would give priority to this," he said, pointing to meditation on my list, "because it is the central technique which helps apply effectively all the other techniques. You understand?"

"Yes," I said and again nodded.

"So, we may start with that. Meditation in a broad sense. Second, I think what you would like to have is a better relationship with your Transpersonal Self." He interrupted himself to ask, "You understand this language, of course?". To which I nodded "yes." This concern with spiritual language - I was to learn - was an important issue for Roberto. He wanted to be sure that the words we used were precise and did not shock or repel, and that the concepts with which we dealt were scientific.

He continued, "The Self was called the Spiritual Self, but now it is better called the Transpersonal Self; that is a more non-committal, neutral, scientific term ... And the Transpersonal is included in the higher act of meditation."

"And I want to work on my impatience and intolerance," I wrote, exhibiting the impatience I was requesting help with.

"Meditation," he said, "will help you to work on that, as a by-product."

"I would also like a positive image of myself and a correct understanding of my self-worth." I was making sure he wouldn't forget anything I had put on my list.

"This will come later. It is better not to make, at the outset, an image, because through new realization and growth, the image will change. It is better not to fix it at first. You agree to this?" he asked, "to leave the self-image as a result of all the rest? We can take it up specifically, but later."

"Yes," I agreed.

"Now, about meditation. Have you seen the little booklets of the Meditation Group for the New Age?" I shook my

head, No. "I'll give them to you then, to read, as a first thing. More than read, study slowly and comment. I cannot give them to you to keep but you can get your own copies in the states" (from MGNA Publications, P.O. Box 566, Ojai, CA 93023).

"The booklets will save much time because of the many things which I won't have to tell you, you'll find them there. Then we will practice what it says.

"The Meditation Group for the New Age is a group that has spread very much. There are thousands who belong to it. It is called a group, but has no commitment to any school, any society. It is a group for inner action and not for theory. So you will see there is no doctrine only practice."

Dr. Assagioli handed me six little booklets, paper bound in yellow, and asked me to read the titles. When I showed interest in the one about the will, he told me that he had just written a book on the will and offered to let me read some chapters.

"I can give you, already, something for your impatience," he began, when I had put the yellow booklets down. "It will be easier here to be patient because there is not the rush of the collective unconscious like in America. In America there is that haste and rush and tension."

"And not here?" I questioned, after having witnessed the bustle and commotion of downtown Florence. At that very moment, coming through the window were sounds of horns blaring and motorcycles backfiring in the street outside, which he, of course, did not hear. Or, was he alluding to some special Italian peace aside from the external cacophony, I wondered. Did he mean simplicity? He'd said haste and rush and tension, which to me had meant noise.

"Many here do go to the other extreme, but in general, ... " he gestured with his hand and I guessed that to mean the underlying pace, "here is quieter."

In the weeks I was there, I didn't easily experience that

but the technique of substitution. It has been called *the expulsive power of a wider interest*. So, in a sense, the attitude is completely different from other methods and techniques. We don't focus at all on the problem, on the thing to be eliminated; we focus on the positive side and on the wider context.

"Without dwelling on impatience," he said, "cultivate the opposite, the calm and peace of the eternal. It is creating an atmosphere, or, if you want to call it, a magnetic field in which these things," pointing to the words *impatience* and *intolerance* on my paper, "cannot exist. They filter away. That is fundamental in psychosynthesis; with everybody, but with you especially. You know so many of all the other techniques. This is a quite different approach. Problems are not solved, they are liquidated. I mean just what I said. You needn't solve problems, you get rid of them working from a higher level, from a vantage point. Do you know my pamphlet, 'Synthesis of the Opposites'?"

"Yes, with the triangles."

"Well, synthesizing opposites by going higher is a general consistent attitude to ignore difficulties and work at a broader level - substitute. And it is a joyous thing. To be in tune with the infinite, with the universal, is something joyous, expanding." He almost sang the words. "And, the effects will come by themselves. Some will be immediate but not lasting, but with repeated practice they will become gradually ingrained; a transformation takes place without direct effort. It is not an act of the will in the ordinary sense at all, it is in tune with the Taoistic attitude but applied specifically as a technique."

To ignore difficulties! I never ignored difficulties. I was so afraid to let anything go, I obsessed over every problem. If I let it go, it might get away-unpunished or not resolved and I would find myself, later, in a bad circumstance because of it. Doing as Roberto suggested, I could take a broader view, see an overall direction, or focus on a major issue of my life, and let my problems resolve themselves in the natural flow of that. As he said, create an atmosphere in which they could not have impact.

"Then it is important for me to go with my flow; listen to my inner voice?"

"Let me be sure that you understand, because it is important that you not be too passive." Seeing my face filled with the incredulity of ever being considered passive, he laughed and said, "No danger of you being too passive? Well, participate in the universe and the rhythm. There is a basic difference between the flow of manifestation, the great working out of the cosmic plan,

Italian peace of which he spoke because my own inner commotion was almost always so active.

"Now," Roberto was saying, "you know the exercise for disidentification and self-identification?"

"Yes, it's very difficult for me," I wrote on my note pad and showed to him.

"Be consoled," he chuckled, "it's difficult for everybody, because to do it really effectively means to identify with the Transpersonal Self. But that is a natural inner growth process, not magical or special."

I was accustomed to using the exercise for disidentification as described in his book, and an easy mantra for that was:

*I have a body
And I am more than my physical form I have emotions
And I am more than my feeling nature I have an intellect
And I am more than my thinking mind
I am a center of pure self-awareness, capable of
mastering and directing all of my energies - physical,
emotional, mental, and spiritual.*

But Roberto was describing another way: "There are some techniques which can help with disidentification. The first and most effective is the realization of infinity, eternity and universality. And that's completely scientific. The universe is practically infinite. The universe has no end and no beginning; perhaps, in millions and millions of years, but that's, for us, practically eternal. And then it's universal because all, everything, acts and reacts on everything. So, if you meditate, or just think, and try to realize this fact of infinity, eternity and universality, that will create an atmosphere of peace, of serenity, in which impatience cannot exist." He brought out a book called *The Universe* by Rohr, which was a series of photographs of the stars and galaxies taken by an electronic camera. "That is vivid, a factual visualization. I can lend it to you for a few days. Read it and just sink into it. This is one of the chief policies of psychosynthesis, not frontal attacks against anything we want to get rid of,

and the Transcendent. The Transcendent doesn't flow - the core, the inner jewel, the real center - does not flow, it radiates.

"For instance, considering only the solar system which is a small thing, the sun is at the center and radiates on all the planets. It is the planets which move in orbit circles around the sun. For them, the sun is static. Of course, the sun is moving and rushing in the wider universe, but within the context of the solar system, the sun can be considered a center of radiation and the planets moving around. And so it is the same with the - with the Self.

"That is a fact," and his voice rose in that way he had, "our Self is life and the personality is in the flow. The qualities of the personality should go with the flow, but not the Self. The great thing, difficult but possible, is to live at the same time in the eternal and in the temporal."

"The self radiates?" I wrote on my pad. Before answering, he leaned over and tapping the word self with his finger, he said, "Capital 'S,' please." Then,

"Of course, the Self radiates. It radiates downward to the personality, horizontally to other living beings, and vertically to the One Self. That will be one of the themes of your meditation. Recognizing it does give you a few basic concepts."

We spent a few minutes discussing business - my address and phone number in Firenze, which he carefully wrote down in a leather-bound book.

"So you can stay in Florence for a certain time?" "Six weeks," I wrote.

"Six weeks. That will be plenty of time."

Dr. Assagioli suggested we work together twice a week for the time I would be there. I was delighted that he would see me so often and that I was not to be turned over to a co-worker as he'd originally said in his letter to me. In my mind I immediately cancelled a proposed side trip to Switzerland. I would stay in Florence. Whatever amount of time I could have with him, I wanted.

"Well," he said, "I think that's enough for tonight. Bring always written comments for the reasons stated on this paper." He handed me a sheet entitled, «Procedure for Communications and Questions Addressed to Dr. R.A.» I read it on the bus chugging home.

The paper asked that all communication to him be written in advance of our sessions, for several reasons other than his difficulty in hearing. Writing obliged one to reflect and to formulate clearly, and often just in the act of writing, an answer came. Written questions and reports gave Roberto time to reflect and gave the unconscious, and "let us hope the superconscious," the opportunity of working out the problem better. Writing saved time - the paper called this a practical reason. Roberto loved to call his work practical - and, with its many directed exercises and procedures, it was. In addition, writing would produce a record for further interviews or later communication. For this I was asked to make two copies. I was amused by the parentheses: "(of course, if there is something intimate or private which you would not like kept, please say so and it will be immediately destroyed.)" It seemed such a dramatic statement. I expected that much of what I would say would certainly be of a personal nature and just naturally trusted that it would be held confidential.

I was further requested to take notes of Roberto's words, because, "though we have the illusion that something vivid will always remembered, it is not so. It may be crowded out by the flux of other impression or from resistance, and the sly trick of the unconscious is to make us forget. Let us always keep that in mind." In my case, I did not take notes, I had brought my tape recorder to do that for me.

The instructions were signed simply, "R.A."

Between Sessions

Those were significant days between our first and second sessions.

I was exploring two worlds, inner and outer, and somehow I had to integrate them. I took on the yellow meditation pamphlets as a first priority since meditation and the Transpersonal Self were Roberto's main interests for me. And, I was dreaming every night and again in the early mornings, a torrent of images, tumbling one upon the other. But as it turned out, Roberto was not very interested in the dreams:

"One can get quite lost in a maze of symbols and things," he said. Instead we worked with drawings.

I had described to him discovering Botticelli in the Uffizi Gallery and Fra Angelico in the Museum of San Marco. I'd been so overwhelmed by it all, especially

Fra Angelico - "The Annunciation at the top of the monastery stairs," I exclaimed, "and the busy little scenes painted on those free standing screens, and the frescoes on the walls of the cells. I'd like to go back and meditate in one of those cells."

"You see, often pictures and drawings ... ," he'd started to say, then left that sentence unfinished and instead asked, "Have you been doing free drawing?"

"No," I shook my head. "You don't like it?"

"I like it, yes, but I haven't been doing it here."

"Well then do some and bring them next time because they are messages to me - to yourself, and to me."

I purchased paper, bound together with the impressive label across the front, Carta Bianca per Schizzi (White Paper for Drawing), the 14 x 18 inch sheets seeming sufficiently and effectively large; and with a box of pastels, proceeded to produce what Roberto called, "pictures of my psychological condition."

As our time progressed, he would say to me, over and over, amidst all of my doubting, "You're here for a spiritual psychosynthesis. You know that very well. You're ripe for it."

At the end of the second session we began the practice of meditating together before I left. Roberto would ask, "Will you light up the universe?" and I would press the switch to light the globe of the universe, with planets, stars, solar systems and galaxies, which he used as our focus. After a quiet time of ten minutes, he would give me a kiss on each cheek to send me off properly, and I would leave feeling peaceful and exhilarated, an enjoyable combination of emotions.

Sometimes Roberto would offer a subject for our meditation: "The great process of evolution, of return, enriched and powerful to the source, with joy." Or, radiating energies to all quarters of the earth - Love, Compassion, Joy, Serenity, "to all beings, north, south, east, west, above, below; And so let it be, And help us to do our part."

Once, when I complained of feeling lonely, he said, "Excuse me, its nonsense. One cannot be alone in the universe. It's a delusion, a basic delusion of separateness, one cannot be alone. That's a great conquest, to rise above the sense of loneliness and separateness ... Hundreds of thousands of millions of suns and all related with each other. They are not lonely. No. The radiation from the most distant reach here. There is an enormous interplay of current, not psychic. What appears to us as immense distances, don't count. The cosmic rays arrive from more distant regions. These, the stars, are only the

bodies. There are billions of entities living in the cosmic rays in constant interplay, and probably, sometimes," I saw a smile begin, "fight, too."

"Well, now we have realized the immensity of the physical level, let us reach up to the other level of reality, and go to the Self."

In the night-darkened room, with only our globe of the universe lit, both of us sat, eyes lowered, bodies relaxed and comfortable, to meditate, Roberto began, speaking slowly: "More radiant than the sun. (I comment on that: that means that the spiritual radiance, the radiance of the higher plane is greater than the enormous radiance of the physical sun. Do you realize what that means, more radiant than the sun?)

"Purer than the snow. (That means completely disidentified with all lower contents. The Self is disidentified from the purest things we can conceive, like the snow.)

"And subtler than the ether (because a being in that high plane, the vibrations, are thinner and more powerful) is the Self, the spirit within us. (But we are in spirit, and in truth, and so we are from eternity.) I am that Self, that Self am I. (Only realizing the Self, for each of us, is part of the one Universal Self, because at that level there are no separations, no loneliness, no distances.)

"Now you realize better the meaning of this. So let us meditate on it and realize " Very slowly he intoned,

*"More Radiant than the sun
Purer than the snow
Subtler than the ether
Is the Self, the Spirit within us. We are that Self
That Self are we."*

It was early April and I'd been in Florence almost three weeks, had had six sessions with Dr. Assagioli and felt quite established in my lovely home away from home at the Pensione Monna Lisa. I saw him twice a week and spent the rest of my time drawing and writing, visiting

the galleries and cafes and having an extracurricular indulgence with a local playboy. My daughter had come over with me but was at present travelling. I was meeting people from all over the world at the Pensione and I was also spending long hours reading the material R. A. would give me. In addition, transcribing the tapes of our sessions as we went along was becoming a powerful tool for deepening the experience of our work.

The issues we dealt with in the sessions were woven into the rest of my life in Florence and I was experiencing the pull toward balance, integration and synthesis that psychosynthesis teaches. Florence turned out to be a perfect metaphor for my inner conflicts, spiritual and worldly, concerned with the present and the eternal, an outer manifestation of the contrasts inside of me.

Session 7 – April 9, 1973

I was admitted to Dr. Assagioli's study promptly at 6. I had the same impression as when I first saw him, and as always, it startled me; that here was a very old man, struggling with a congestion in his throat and chest, and that perhaps I was disturbing his rest. But as we worked, as the session went on, and as he talked, his eyes, always intense, would begin to sparkle with humor and joyousness. His face came alive and he took on the appearance of a much younger man. It was his aliveness that so impressed me.

"Buon giorno," I said, "Good evening," and handed him my drawings.

"Did you feel relieved while doing them?" he asked. "That's one of the points of doing them. Just one of the points, but useful. Put always dates on them," he added, and then he asked me if they were interpreted? "I generally ask the person who draws to interpret."

"No," I shook my head. They were not interpreted.

He looked at my pictures one-by-one, making comments like, "Oh, that's fine, good, yes fine that." Then shuffling back to one overflowing with many black spirals, he said, "How do you interpret this? Will you write your interpretation?"

Writing furiously, "I was very upset when I drew that. Little angry swirls"

"I think that's what came out. And good that it came out."

"I didn't like it at all and at the last moment I unconsciously put in a cross."

"It is an important symbol, personal, planetary, cosmic, the whole manifestation." He picked up another sheet, "And this, how did you do this? What were your impressions?"

"I didn't like that one, although I enjoyed doing it. I enjoyed doing all of them. But that one is not pretty."

"Well, you see, for psychological purposes, prettiness is not important. It is the meaning which counts. Nothing else comes?"

"That's the sun," I answered pointing to a large orange and golden shape in the center.

"All energies surging through and concentrated there," Roberto said.

"Every time I started to get out my anger, those black squiggles, I would at once feel good again and make large sweeping lines."

We looked at the last two, side-by-side, and I remembered drawing them - the first on Friday, the other on Sunday, both done sitting at the game table in the sun-filled garden room. Those were quiet moments when I listened to my inner voice and gave it expression. I enjoyed using the oil pastels, thick crayon-like sticks that went on the paper with a chalky consistency. With pastels I could make sharp edges or smear a color with my finger to blend and coat.

Regarding a peaceful center of growing ivy leaves representing the inner youth of my unconscious, Roberto had written, "psychological wealth from an inner store, eager to be developed" (in "The Structure of the Subconscious").

When I pointed out dark brown areas I had drawn, he would say, "Oh, that doesn't count, just left over rubbish from the past. Often there is a period of frustration before getting something. It is all a part of the game. Don't identify with passing moods, just a momentary winter mood ... that's a point." The positive and the Self, that was his point.

"What a lot of different energies," he would say of my pictures, "there are so many energies in you, throbbing and active." Often he said my feelings got it better than

my mind and the pictures showed that. “You see how the unconscious is cute.” We used drawing instead of dreams. I was too glib, too experienced with dream interpretation, “Often drawings are more meaningful than dreams!” I wasn’t sure about that but I did see that drawing was expanding my soul in a new direction.

After a few moments, Roberto laid the picture aside and said, “Let me see what you have written.” I handed him my comments for this session.

“If the self is a reflection of the Higher Self,” I wrote, “then I should behave and feel more elevated as I get more in contact with my Higher Self and realize it. Yet, you said, as an example, that if I met Fra Angelico, I might not like him personally, that his best might very likely be in his paintings. Why does not our personal life reflect our best? I want my personal life to reflect all the beauty in me. You seem to be living the ideals you write about.”

“You go at the core of things,” Roberto responded with his twinkly smile. “Why does not our personal life reflect our best? Because there are so many things in between. Between the personal self and the Higher Self there are all sorts of things - opaque, not transparent - that prevent the light, or refract it; all sorts of obstacles. But we are here for that, to eliminate obstacles; and a big joy!”

Yes, I thought, so many things in between my personal self and my Higher Self: my need to achieve professionally, my social need to be popular, to be loved, to be cared about, valued. “You seem to be living the things you write about, though,” I repeated.

He laughed, “No, not completely. Certainly not perfectly, but I work on it. For your consolation, I tell you that I don’t. Yet, when you’ll have my age It’s a good measure?”

Measure my growth at my age against his growth at his age? Is that what he was asking me to do?

“No really,” he continued, “one’s personal self reflecting

one’s Higher Self, clearly, is not something stable and permanent. Some of the time, and up and down, we reach up, through the obstacles, and then we cannot stay there and we tumble down and then again up and then down. And then, sometimes, when we are at one level, an inner rush comes, for some reason, I cannot say. It’s very complicated, you see, and often we cannot trace the causes. But, we know what we have to do.”

What do I have to do, I thought. That is my eternal question. What am I supposed to do with this uplifting energy that descends upon me? Listen to it, and let it lead me. I am one of those people who is directed by an inner pull, or is that push, more than by external circumstances?

“Now you understand,” he continued and I had a start as if he had been reading my thoughts. “It is normal, the personal ego is only a pale reflection of the Transpersonal Self. You are quite normal. Of course, we don’t want to remain normal, in the ordinary sense. But you have to start somewhere.”

I had spent the past few days reading papers he had written, some published, others not. Now I commented from that reading. “You say there are ways to release from the painful conditions in life, on the one hand, or there are ways to merely escape them on the other. Release comes from fostering individuality and from positive realization of Self. Escape can come in other ways: from burying yourself in a relationship, taking on a discipline with rules and regulations so you don’t have to think for yourself, or sliding into an all-consuming neurosis.” (To myself I wondered, “Am I using social activities, even here in Florence, my relationship with Ottavio, as an escape from life’s painful conditions, and keeping myself ego-bound with less time for inner growth and Self realization?”)

“Well, this is quite right,” Roberto said, “inner growth, individuality and a positive realization of the Self, and then I would add the communion of the Transpersonal Self with other Selves and with the Universal Self. And it is quite right that there is escape in relationships, in disciplines, and in neurosis. You see, the personal self tries, all the time, to escape. But now you are no more fooled by it. Well, it shows that you are aware.”

“And I fight that awareness.”

“Of course,” he laughed, “of course that’s part of the game. But the important thing is to not be deluded. That you know better, even if you are involved for a short time in one of these things, you are aware of it. That’s the important thing, awareness. Not success and triumph, that will come, but the presence, the observer, the knower.”

Sometimes you can formulate your own invocation. One I suggest to one who is sceptical and a doubter, say - *Ok, God, if you exist, help me, if you can. That you could accept?*"

I laughed and nodded my head yes.

"Well, there is a chance that He exists and a chance that He can help. That is more or less a joke. Anyhow, it is an adventure, one doesn't have to believe first, doesn't have to be sure beforehand. You call, you invoke, and then something will happen and you'll see."

"I have also been reading the booklets, 'Meditation for the New Age.' Am I working on invocation now without realizing it? If not, how would you suggest I do it? Could you say something about invocation?"

"I'm very glad that you put the question because that shows that you are ripe for it. I would have suggested it, gently, sooner or later, but it's much better that it came from you. You see that it answers a spontaneous, authentic need you feel, one of the higher needs of the human race. Invocation is the royal road. Invocation clears the channel. That thread between the personal self and the Transpersonal Self is really a channel, a channel of communication. And the most effective method is invocation.

"There are two chief ways for clearing that channel - one is to rise through techniques and discipline, upward. The personal self aspires and rises upward toward the Transpersonal Self and sometimes reaches the superconscious level and then it can have peak experiences and broadening of consciousness and illumination. The other method is to attract the down pouring, what religious people call grace, but it isn't grace, it is scientific; it is an answer to an appeal. And that attracting can be done, perhaps even more effectively, when the personal self is in trouble. You know the saying - man's extremity, God's opportunity. Translated in scientific terms: In a psychological crisis the appeal of the personal self for help gives an opportunity for the Transpersonal Self to pour down its energy or its light or its love. You see that?"

Roberto interrupted himself to say that, of course, the two ways, coming from a harmonious condition or coming from one of anguish, were not actually separate. The channel they each cleared was the same, only the approach might be different. "Often the personal self tries to raise itself up to a certain point and succeeds, but it cannot go further - at that point, it invokes."

"How do I invoke?" I asked. "I feel like such a doubter."

"Now I come to that. There are various ways of it.

There were suggestions for invocations in the yellow booklets.

Roberto asked me if they were too general, too impersonal. "Tell me truthfully," he asked, "you don't feel them much?"

"Well, I'm not using them, they don't seem relevant for me." "You still feel doubts in your personal self? You still feel doubts?" he kept on.

"Yes, sometimes I doubt that I will ever connect with my Higher Self or my inner intelligence." I was touched by his concern and sincere interest in my process. He was not disgusted with me, not judgmental about what I saw as my lack of progress.

"Receptive meditation is easier for me than reflective," I wrote.

"It's easier for me to allow to come in what will, than to keep my attention on that which I wish to bring in."

"Yes," he said, "receptive meditation comes immediately after the invocation. First you invoke and then you put yourself in a receptive attitude."

"I attend to myself and then I wait to receive."

"What do you mean, I attend to myself? Will you explain?" "I mean I listen inside."

"Yes, but if you invoke, it will happen better. I think for you, with your concrete mind, it will be better for you to have specific invocation for what you feel you need at the moment."

Just then there was a commotion outside of the door and the servant entered with some papers. Minutes before I had heard the door bell ring, and someone calling down the stairs. Shouting - probably her customary way of communicating with Roberto - and completely disturbing the mood for me, she placed the papers on his desk, exclaiming, "Firma, firma." He signed them and she left and I wondered what had been so important that she could interrupt our session. Probably anything, I decided,

and Roberto, unruffled - his world was silent - went on with examples of specific invocations I could use.

“May the light of the Self enlighten me. “May the love of the Soul pervade me. “May the peace of the Spirit enfold me.

“I think these three cover the chief personal needs, or if others come to our mind of the same kind, a short direct appeal to meet the present need.”

“I can feel the light and the love, but when I’m worried I can’t feel peace,” I summed up.

“It is not a question of feeling them, at the moment you may not be conscious of a response, it will come later. Don’t look for immediate results. If they come, so much the better, but that is not the most important thing. Have confidence that the response will come. You see?”

“Yes,” I answered nodding my head.

“After the invocation, have the receptive meditation, the silence, and in that silence something happens; even if it doesn’t reach the level of the conscious self, things are put in operation. You accept that?”

“Yes,” I said, “thank you.”

“What?” he asked. He had seen me speak but had not heard what I’d said.

“Grazie” I repeated, this time very loudly. He smiled then. He’d heard.

“Yes,” I wrote, “it does come. In my meditations, I send love to my son and today I received a letter from him full of his good feelings about himself.”

“Then, another day we will speak of radiation. As you have sent love to your son, you know that you can radiate and that is an action of spiritual service and also disposes of the excess of energies in the personality. I think that you can be a very effective radiator.”

“I am,” I say shouting again so he would hear me and I wouldn’t have to write.

He heard me and responded, “You like that?” “Yes,” I answered more softly.

“You see one of those little pamphlets on the second shelf? There is a paper on radiation. Would you like to see it?” Roberto turned in his chair and said, “I’ll see if I can find it.” Shuffling through some papers he produced a thin, paperbound publication, entitled “The Science and Service of Blessing.” I took the pamphlet and Roberto went on:

“The chief problem with you is not with the

superconscious. It is apparent that your superconscious is active through the results you have with others and also your own inner experiences. The problem is to eliminate the resistance of your personality. So we can, let us, work a little on that, if you like, because then the superconscious will take care of itself. I’ll give some suggestions and then you’ll think about them and react.

“The general resistance among many is that the personal self is attached to personal experience - attached to the joys and all that, and is afraid to lose them. That is based on religious misunderstanding that you have to lose, get rid of, renounce, kill something. It is strictly negative. Well, that’s not the reality. What has to be given up is the fear of losing the attachment or sometimes a temporary putting aside. Then one can have it again but in freer ways. You see, the attachment puts a limitation on. Some things that are good and considered good at the personality level are obstacles because they are escapes when one is too much engrossed in them, too much satisfied.

“The great difference - one is not giving up the thing, it’s a freeing oneself inwardly. That’s the fundamental difference. You see the point? A fear to lose something. One doesn’t lose anything. One can have to put it aside temporarily but then we can have it again in freedom and in joy, in its proper place. We are not dominated by it.”

I wrote quickly, “I see that there are activities, focuses, one could take on and attach to - sports, food, mothering, fathering, doctoring, lawyering, yogaing, meditating, even love making.”

He nodded, “The whole trouble is that we are obsessed by certain things and then we are prisoners, just by habit, of the past. Some very fine idealists are obsessed by their ideals. They are imprisoned by them. They see only that and they can make no sacrifice of that. They are not free and they have not the real higher experience. It is a question of freedom, of being in control, of being master and not slave, a process of liberation which entails putting aside at will and resuming at will. You see that?”

All these fears of the personal self are a mistake. It is the old moralistic, dualistic, religious language and attitude. And that has provoked a reaction at the other extreme; but that is also slavery.”

“I know. The old attitude says, you have to give up everything to achieve spirituality, so the reaction at the other extreme says, then I don’t want anything spiritual or religious.”

“So, you can say to your personal self - Keep quiet, you’ll lose nothing, just let me do the work. The outcome will be the joyous re-union with the Transpersonal Self. You have everything to gain. Try to realize this more and more. Not only intellectually but in your whole being.

“A really simple example is about food. Some people who enjoy, so much, food, become gluttons and are obsessed by food. Then there are the food fadists who sometimes make a great restriction because they believe in a certain diet. They are obsessed by that. Instead, food is a perfectly natural, necessary thing. But not to be given special importance. You can enjoy it, your food, taste it, praise a good fruit or anything, but just at this little place. After a meal forget it and pass to something other. You see that? Food is natural and good, until it acquires an exaggerated importance. And see how many people spoil their health and shorten their life for stupidly indulging in the pleasure of taste. The fault is not of the food and not even of the enjoyment of the food; it is the attachment to the enjoyment of the food, the craving. I think I have put it quite clearly so remind that to your personality. It is all right at its proper place, proper proportion.

“The key is wisdom. Not so much will or enforcing but wisdom, a sense of having the right proportions, all the beauty - beauty is right proportions. You make your life a work of art, a work of beauty, if you have the right proportion of everything.

“I have a card here which I sent for the New Year. Did you see that?”

He handed me a folded card, cream colored, and of rough texture.

On the outside were three rings interlocking and consecutive with the words: Love and Will on the outer rings, the word Wisdom on the center one. Inside the inscription read: “May Love and Will expressed through Wisdom be demonstrated by each and all in the New Year cycle - and forever. With all good wishes and blessings.” It was signed “Roberto Assagioli.”

“You can have it,” he said as I started to return the card to him.

“Thank you,” I said and then louder, “Grazie” which he saw and acknowledged.

“And that really settles on the great problem, individual and social.

So many people have much love but no sense of proportion and no will to balance it. And that’s all the key - wisdom. So wisdom enables you to have all. Meditate on that.

“Go on working and not paying attention to your emotions. Not suppress them, let them express, especially with your drawing or in beating the bed or ... , but don’t take them too seriously. They are passing moods. A sense of proportion. Be happy, genuinely, even if they are there. Remember the sea, the waves come and go but deep down the ocean remains unmoved.”

Roberto motioned for me to light up the universe globe, which I did, and when I had returned to my chair, quieted myself and closed my eyes, he said, “Now let us have a meditation on the Eternal and the moment. Bathe in that.

“The moment is here and now. You are here, I am here. There is an interplay. That’s the moment and let us make the best of it. Dismiss everything else and just live this, with joy, with appreciation. Let happen something. It is a moment related to all your past and my past; we have converged here and now. And then, when you go away it continues. You see the definite application of it? You are here with all your past. I am here with all my past. And then we’ll proceed into our futures. But our souls, our Selves, there we are one, in the other sense. See how it applies to actual life?

“And then in the look there is something, you know. The eyes are relating. They are not merely an organ of perception, they are also an organ of projection.” His eyes were both laughing and intense, and one time they did send out a strong and powerful connection to me. “Well, another time, I’ll speak of that, Now let us .. ,” and he intoned, slowly, sonorously, “From the Eternal, in the present, for the future.”