

THE PERSONAL SELF

Most of the time we are continuously involved in life events, usually involuntarily as we become caught up in the vagaries of existence. Sometimes this is due to external matters, whether family life, work, or in other ways where we can feel victims to circumstances.

This may leave us feeling on edge, not sure of our position in the world (or even our right to be in the world.) Meanwhile we are beset about internally with fantasies and the dialogues we have with ourselves about our life concerns.

Then there are the unconscious events that bind and limit us – unrecognised complexes and patterns of behaviour that depend for their being on past events, often long forgotten or, at best (or worst) dimly remembered and feared. In such conditions, it is no wonder, as Assagioli put it (1975) ‘that man is often discontented, insecure and changeable in his moods, thoughts and actions. Feeling intuitively that he is ‘one’, and yet finding that he is ‘divided unto himself’, he is bewildered and fails to understand either himself or others.’”

Such a state is decidedly uncomfortable, but worse, it leaves the person limited in their expression and experience of life, tormented by self-doubt, discouragement and despair. Assagioli continues: “No wonder that he, not knowing or understanding himself, has no self-control and is continually involved in his own mistakes and weaknesses ... No wonder that man, in his blind passionate search for liberty and satisfaction, rebels violently at times, and at times tries to still his inner torment by throwing himself headlong into a life of feverish activity, constant excitement, tempestuous emotion and reckless adventure.” Anything to avoid facing up to the inner sense of failure and fragmentation.

The small ‘star’ at the centre of the egg diagram represents the personal self, our individual ‘I’ who experien-

ces all these different states of thought, emotion and sensation. The ‘personal self’ experiences everything but, paradoxically, most of the time we are not even aware of its existence (as we are caught up instead in identifications with one or more of our subpersonalities which we will explore in depth in the next section.) But the more we work on ourselves, the more we start contacting the ‘I’ and making it a living, experienced reality and the healthier or more whole we become.

The personal self is a reflection or spark of the spiritual or transpersonal Self. It is important to realise here that although they are essentially one, there is a large difference between the personal self and transpersonal Self (which you will notice, in Psychosynthesis, is usually written with a capital ‘S’ to distinguish it from the personal self.) To become centred upon the Self is a sign of spiritual attainment, but awareness of the personal self, from where we can effectively direct the personality, is the primary goal of Psychosynthesis.

This then inevitably leads to a clearer contact with, and understanding of the Self. A useful analogy for this is of an orchestra (the subpersonalities) who need a conductor (‘I’) to direct their ‘music’ into a harmonious composition. The conductor also ensures that all the members of the orchestra get a chance to have their needs met (their turn at having their ‘instruments’ heard). The conductor also has a direct line to the composer (the Self).

In the formation of every subpersonality there is inevitably an equal ‘shadow’ part created; for instance, a subpersonality who likes intimacy will have an ‘equal and opposite’ subpersonality who prefers solitude and to hide itself away. Managing the delicate balance between these ‘light’ and ‘shadow’ parts is no easy task. Our need for intimacy and solitude is constantly changing and we have a need for both.

A good starting place for creating a balance between apparently opposing energies such as these is getting to better know the ‘conductor’, the personal self. Such self knowledge is gained through reflection, deep inquiry, and experience, and brings greater understanding of

the choices we have made and of our potential for change. We may find we know others better through knowing ourselves and, conversely, we can know ourselves better through our contact with others. Further, through deep contemplation of our relationship with self and others, we restore inner balance and can focus on the presence of the Self.

The experience of self-identification, of having an 'I', distinguishes our consciousness from that of the majority of other sentient beings on our planet. As said, this self-consciousness, however, is usually experienced, not as pure self-consciousness, but rather mixed with and veiled by the contents of consciousness, that is, everything we are sensing, feeling and/or thinking at any time. We usually live our lives identified with these contents of our consciousness, so it follows to fully experience self-consciousness we need first to learn to disidentify.

Most people tend to be generally more attached to either thoughts or emotions, and can thus be described as mentally or emotionally identified. Such identification are useful at times, even necessary, but to live a balanced life as well as being able to disidentify, we need to cultivate the spheres of experience in which we are deficient. For example, people predominantly identified with their thoughts (sometimes termed 'mentally-identified') need to increase their awareness of their feelings rather than diminish or decrease their mental awareness.

If we picture the situation as one where mind and feelings are unequally developed, and therefore of unequal size, the technique is to increase the size of the smaller so that it matches the size of the larger. This is balance through upward growth and inclusion rather than through decrease, which is both unnecessary and inefficient.

Through deliberate disidentification from the personality and identification with the personal self, we gain the power to choose either attachment to or disattachment from any aspect of our personality, according to what is most appropriate for any given situation.

We also have to remember, as Ferrucci (1982) reminds us, that the "Personal and Transpersonal Self are in fact

the same reality experienced at different levels; our true essence is beyond all masks and conditionings." Thus we may learn to master and utilize our whole personality in an inclusive and harmonious synthesis.

Will Parfitt

Bibliography

Roberto Assagioli- Psychosynthesis, Turnstone UK
 Piero Ferrucci - What We May Be, Turnstone UK