

## PURPOSE IN LIFE: HOW ASSAGIOLI TAUGHT ME A FIRST STEP

I had just turned 19. My mother decided to send me to Florence to learn Psychosynthesis with its founder, Dr. Roberto Assagioli, and to audit the unparalleled classes in history of art at the University of Florence.

Besides hoping someone would finally give me some attention, kind attention, I was not really interested in Psychosynthesis as such. I wanted to become a photographer. I had failed the examination to enter the then very best photography school of Vevey, Switzerland, which was just half an hour from Institut Bleu-Léman, the Swiss private boarding school for girls that my mother, Dorette Faillettaz, had founded in 1954 and was running. I hadn't yet found my path in life, so my mother was deciding for me what was best for me to do . . . and become. For my mom, it may have been convenient to push me around all the time, though I must admit I discovered it could turn out to be for my good. And she did need a "Miss-do-everything," as regarded work for her school. I could fill gaps between problems, serve as bridge. And sometimes I was the scapegoat, an excuse when missing links showed up in the organization. Generally speaking, however, she felt that I was learning to be an administrator, whether for her or for a boarding school. But was that what I wanted?

Indeed, for me this situation did not really help me find *my* way, discover *my* motives. I needed to define a scale of values that would serve me as a pointer—toward possible aims I could consider reaching. I needed to develop my Will and its qualities, to become a meaningful person. When I was being tossed around too much, photography and art were a real safety belt for me—which I needed, because emotionally I was fast becoming a reservoir of self-pity, which is a poison most noxious to personal development! Still, under my mom's regime I had learned to be flexible. Unfortunately, it was not a flexibility of a will that endures with patience, but a flexibility of lack of will, and therefore I often over-

compensated with moments of intense rebellion and self-assertion!

So after all, the best thing happened to me that could have: my mother found that Psychosynthesis was *the* method to teach to the 15- to 22-year-old students at her school. They would be able to manage their emotions and desires and develop their character as autonomous young women. She herself had no time to learn the ABCs of Psychosynthesis, and Assagioli had politely declined her invitation to teach it to her VIP students himself. (Yes, VIP: the majority were the precious offspring of quite influential parents.) Thus, she came to realize that I could do it—if Assagioli agreed to put me through a didactic training. Assagioli cautiously suggested that I first put the method into practice on myself: I could follow the special Psychosynthesis classes he had just organized for "young gifted adults." Well! The prospect of attending a class for "gifted" young adults sure sounded attractive to me!

This is how I ended up in Florence for six months as Assagioli's client and student, while taking a lot of pictures, visiting all museums, and assiduously attending university art classes.

As you may have gathered above, developing my will was my number one problem. Being tossed around both geographically and psychologically had not helped me build a personal identity. My survival instinct had surged up as an emergency measure in the form of an assertive attitude. By the time I was 19, it had become a well-established defense mechanism. I had a habit I believed was my true self.

Well! How did Assagioli use this insidious obstacle to help me become truer to my Self? After all, the experience of the will and the self leads to Self. He had to facilitate that without me noticing it, otherwise my defense mechanisms would bar the door to receptivity. He chose the indirect way: the use of symbols.

So already at our second session Assagioli told me to draw a circle on an ordinary sheet of paper. He looked carefully at how I was doing it. Then he said, "Draw a point at the center." This method as he presented it to me is one he described in his *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (1965, p. 183). If you have a more recent edition, page numbering is different:

*Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings* (2000, p. 162). You can see Assagioli's list of procedures and categories of symbols (1965, pp. 180-183 or 2000, pp. 159-162).

Too simple a thing? Was it a game? Was it a joke?

Never before had I produced this particular masterpiece, a point within a circle. (It is, by the way, a very pleasant thing to do. Could that be precisely because it does help one to gather and calm thoughts and emotions?) He explained that I had drawn a symbol of the greatest importance, and without loading my head with preconceived ideas as to what the importance could be, he instructed me, firmly, to visualize this circle with a point every day and report on my results. He did add one thing: this symbol would help me concentrate more easily—keep my “thoughts” a little more still for a second so I could see what was happening on the screen of my inner cinema. I thought they were thoughts, but in fact they were emotions running wild, taking off, and sometimes erupting in my field of consciousness. Well, the first thing I found was the many things happening on my inner screen: some were thoughts, some emotions, some desires, some just idle imaginings. And so much more happened for me, as a result of just visualizing (and occasionally drawing) that symbol. Try it!

And in his public Sunday conferences and Saturday classes, Assagioli would explain the theory behind the technique of using symbols.

Would you like to know more about this? Then you can read his subchapter “Technique of Symbol Utilization” (1965, pp. 177-191 or 2000, 156-169). Let me just quote a passage from it. As a result, you may feel like reading Assagioli's *Psychosynthesis*:

The rationale of the use of symbols is based on their nature and on their function, or rather functions. . . .

Their primitive and basic dynamic function [once we internalize them] is that of being accumulators, in the electrical sense, as containers and preservers of a dynamic psychological charge or voltage. Their second function, a most important one, is that of transformers of psychological energies. A third function is that of conductors or channels of psychological energies.

And experience shows that all these introjected symbols serve to construct or reconstruct our personality. It is the will that with its psychological functions picks up and introjects the symbols. These psychological functions preside over all our psychological processes in a way similar to the body's metabolism (catabolism, anabolism). Another way to say this is with the reminder that, as every marketing manager knows, any time will and imagination are in a competition, imagination is the winner. And that is because in our times we have been allowing imagination to become one of the leading psychological functions, while thought, desire, and sensation just follow its “signals,” intuition is pushed aside, and the true will is regarded with defiance. Yet, adequately devel-

ped, the psychological functions actualize us. They make us a functioning whole and (re)build the bridge to our essential Self.

A big difference between our body's functions and our psychological functions is that fortunately for us the body's functions work correctly without having to depend on us. However, they do get disturbed in their normal working according to how much we mess around with stressful thoughts, wild imaginings, and hot tempers, and how much we indulge in our fears. As regards the psychological functions, it mostly goes without saying that they too work smoothly to build the personality. But in the course of time unhealthy thinking habits sneak in in the form of obsolete traditions, creeds, fashions, and whims—mostly caused by selfishness, attachment, and greed that we should have, as humans, had the opportunity to grow out of long ago. This is a vast subject, but what is of interest here is to recognize that today human beings must tailor their personality themselves, create habits of thinking that are correctly selfish, not demandingly selfish. We must not, however, renounce the self. In this respect Assagioli clearly encourages us, once we have conquered awareness of the higher, unifying or in fact source Self, to apply this energy to putting our house in order, so to speak. In his words, “the realization of the spiritual Self is not for the purpose of withdrawal but for the purpose of being able to perform more effective service [I call this cooperation] in the world of men” (1965, p. 210), (2000, p. 186). And what is service/cooperation? It is action! And what is action? It is purpose based on motivation! And what is purpose based on motivation? It is an act of will! And what is an act of will? It is life in expression, life in manifestation!

And this is where we humans *urgently* need to learn to play our part. In nature, all kingdoms do their part. It's we, the kings of creation (so we would like to think) that still need to learn to use our psychological competencies to participate constructively, appropriately in the same unfoldment of life. We need to be more grateful to all the forms of life that participate in all the life on this beautiful planet. And our inner psychological worlds are also forms of life that we need to recognize and be grateful to for the vital role they play in our personal expression. In this inner partnership also right relations are

fundamental. Assagioli shows this in *Psychosynthesis* (1965, 2000) and *The Act of Will* (1999).

A huge task? Oh yes! Huge indeed, but it begins with a first step. I took such a step when I began learning to use my innate competencies by drawing and then visualizing a circle with a point at the center.

Might this simple symbol also represent the process of psychosynthesis of life itself? The self at the center radiates toward the periphery, just as the sun does toward the solar system and just as the nucleus of every atom does toward its electrons. Is it that the energy between center and periphery is electromagnetic, or does my visualizing it make it feel so? If you try it, you will surely feel it!

So with a most simple geometrical form, a point in a circle, we have an illustration of the most fundamental process at work in all forms and all dimensions: Will-to-be. For psychosynthesis is the very process of life itself. It is not a trademark, and I remember animated discussions he and his secretary had, yes, in front of me, on this subject! And to me Assagioli confirmed that he simply threw his heart into describing it—so we could enhance our own life more efficiently! And he added that others of course also did so, showing that synthesis is a life process manifesting in all fields of expression.

Starting in the following year, I began my formal didactic training and felt more than motivated to teach the students how to make that life process work—and how to feel the joy in making it work!

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## POWER OF LIFE DISCOVERING THE MYSTERY OF BEING

*Third part - Psychosynthesis n°31, n°32*

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We continue the work begun in the last issue of the magazine, which we refer to, about the Seven Types of Assagioli's Psychosynthesis.

### 6 - Devotional/Idealist Type

In order to outline the idealistic typology, we'll avail ourselves of the personality of Thomas More, author of the famous book "*Utopia*" (1516), in which he describes an imaginary island-kingdom inhabited by an ideal society.

This term, Utopia, immediately suggests a perfect world, or place, distinguished by all the positive characteristics that we would like our present world to possess.

More derived the term from ancient Greek, with a word pun between *outopos* (i.e. nonplace) and *eutopos* (happy place); utopia is therefore literally a "*non-existent happy place*".

In the intention of More, Utopia has been able to overcome its social contrasts thanks to an innovative system of political organization: private property has been abolished, goods are in common, trade is almost useless because people are busy working the land about six hours a day, providing the island with all the necessary goods, while the rest of the time is dedicated to study and rest. The government is entrusted to magistrates elected by the representatives of each family, while there is in force (revolutionary for the time) the principle of freedom of speech and thought and above all of religious tolerance, which is however shown only towards believers: atheists are not punished but are excluded from public offices and surrounded by the contempt of the inhabitants of Utopia. Everyone has the right to a peaceful life, whose aim is well-being.