

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT INSPIRING A PSYCHOSYNTHETIC INTERPRETATION CONCERNING HEALTH, ILLNESS AND THE THERAPIST-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

*Translation by Annalisa Gasperi*

Food for thought inspiring a psychosynthetic interpretation concerning health, illness and the therapist-patient relationship

There has always been in every person, as a background to his/her being and acting in the world, an interpretive model of existence that deeply influences his/her progress in life.

Such a model could be:

- conscious or unconscious
- influenced by formative elements – personality – family – culture – religion – society
- a result of contemplation – intuition – a conscious choice

It steadily functions in all of us and determines the way we interpret and act in relation to life events.

Therefore, the answers to the following questions depend on our type of model:

- Who am I, who are you?
- What is Soul?
- What is Personality?
- What is meant by health ?
- What is meant by illness ?
- What do we mean by therapy and healing?

Let us synthetically illustrate the Psychosynthetic Model

## **Key Words**

Evolution  
I/Self (Soul)  
Personality  
Subpersonality  
Integration  
Self-awareness  
Levels of self-awareness  
The process of the Self  
Identification/Dis-identification/Identity  
Will

In Psychosynthesis, evolution means a process of growing, progress, a transition from being potential to being actual, which functions on every level and in each aspect of its manifestation.

Although it is not entirely perfect, the whole uni-verse is evolving (towards one) and all beings, from the tiniest to the biggest, take part in this process of perfection that reveals itself as a complete manifestation of the Essence in the Form.

Such an evolving tension reflects a deep reality, a primary Law of life, that functions both in the natural process and in the human being in which two supporting pillars are progressively built up: the Self (the Essence) and the Personality (the Form).

The approach, the union, the integration, the synthesis between the Self and the Personality, gradually occur at interpenetrating levels, by promoting, stage by stage, the path of growth and development of self-consciousness (self-awareness) and

thus helping the emergence of more progressively inclusive levels of life and action and a more distinct ever-growing awareness of the meaning to be given to the self in the world and to the events that distinguish it.

According to the psychosynthesis model a person is a bio-psycho-spiritual unity which has various parts and levels that can be separately illustrated and evaluated. However, they are actually connected to each other and each of them mutually influences and is influenced at the

same time. Therefore, the interpretation of health and illness is seen as a consequence of the dynamic, functional or dysfunctional interaction between all of these aspects. We can very briefly assert that life generates such an evolution by providing situations in which, once they have been gone through, progressive identifications (experiences), dis-identifications (detachment-elaboration) and self-identifications (self-awareness-identity) inevitably occur.

A person slowly becomes aware of him/herself and becomes familiar with his/her own deep dynamic strength: the will.

Such a process is not to be completed once and for all but it continuously re-occurs, similarly to a spiral, by generating prevailing identifications on the most advanced stages of consciousness until an enduring identification with the Self has been manifested, thoroughly and clearly, through the means of an integrated personality that is able to act in the world.

As a result of the assertion above, every human being is involved in:

- an incessant process of change that entails a capability of detachment and choice
- an incessant need for balance between diverse elements, which are often unconscious and conflicting and have to be accepted, recognized and transformed
- an incessant need for improving insufficient and immature aspects while maintaining the developmental direction

All of this produces in him a deep travail, crisis, to which he can and must respond with the baggage he has, psychological and physical, and this involves the inevitable confrontation with suffering, (as part of the evolution).

So what do we mean by health?

Health is a dynamic condition in which physical, emotional, mental and transpersonal aspects function in a harmonious way and all of them play an important role in the individual's unity, as they consciously or unconsciously take part in its evolution, so that the soul's ex-

istence can freely flow with no obstacles in the organic group that composes the form. Therefore, it is not about either physical health or psychic health, neither can we simply consider health as a static condition in the course of our evolution in which temporary critical moments come in succession from one balancing level to another that hence generates suffering. However, suffering is not illness.

In fact, we can affirm that suffering is part of existence – it is not illness – and it is related to the process of evolution. The consequences of avoiding suffering are staleness, regression or illness as chronic suffering, as a denial of suffering due to life's experiences of transformation.

According to what has been claimed above, illness at any level of manifestation and at any level of apparent cause (physical disease, emotional imbalance, psychic distress, moral conflicts, transition crisis, etc.) displays a transitional dis-function of the entire individual and the way it should be coped with.

We can distinguish two essential attitudes towards illness and distress:

- Identification that may entail various reactions such as: fear, denial, trivialization, anger, defiance, atonement, helplessness, desperation, resignation, depression, vital blockage...
- Dis-identification – Self-identification which fosters: relativization, acceptance, accountability, elaboration, learning, growing, existential healing.

A person's philosophy of life inspires, fosters or keeps him/her attached to one of these two attitudes.

What does illness generally cause? Some elements are:

- Rigid identifications
- Non-acceptance and resistance to change
- Static condition
- Attachment
- Inappropriate use of psychic functions
- One part of the Self dominating another one
- Experiencing loneliness while suffering
- Absence
- Loss
- Abuses
- Avoiding existential suffering
- Ignoring how the bio-psycho-spiritual unity functions
- Illusory thoughts about life
- Negative interpretative models of life
- Friction due to divergence of direction between the Self and parts of the personality or between the Self and the integrated personality in toto...

In order to start following a path toward real healing, it is important to acknowledge the signal aspect at the emergence of the disease as well as the need of realignment, the chance to redirect one's own way of living and his/her opportunity for learning and becoming aware of his/herself, and the way s/he deals with the process of

internal growing by deeply considering the existence of a healthy part – the Self as identification and means for healing. It is essential to take full responsibility of the evolutionary step to be completed.

However, a constructive attitude toward illness is not always possible. Everyone of us passes through stages of identification and developmental phases of consciousness that confer opportunities and limits and different grades of internal freedom, on which the approach to suffering, illness and health depend, and which become obvious during the therapeutic relation as well as in the search for solutions, prevention, healing and recovery. All of this is true for both for the therapist and the patient.

According to the psychosynthesis map, we can synthetically divide the process of evolution of the human consciousness in four essential phases:

- 1) **Pre-personal**
- 2) **Personal**
- 3) **Existential crisis**
- 4) **Transpersonal**

The approach to suffering, illness, therapy, health, recovery as well as the relationship between therapist and patient depend on both the therapist and the patient's phase of evolution of consciousness and the aspects of transference, roles, humanity and souls.

### **Pre-personal Phase:**

#### **Features**

Prevailing unconscious identification with fragmented content of consciousness or with a subpersonality

Prevailing unconscious conditions and needs that shape one's behaviour

Immaturity

Egocentricity

Separateness

Barely aware I

Paralyzed will

Passiveness

Defense mechanisms

Dis-accountability

Patient: Identification as illness – Non-acceptance or uncritical acceptance – Expectations for recovery, also magic one – Mistrust or passive commitment – Suffering is endured without giving it a meaning – A search for healing without learning – Poor possibility for an actual therapeutic union – Poor possibility for an actual healing.

Therapist: identification as a need or subpersonality, acted through the therapeutic role – Patient's identification with illness – Egocentricity – Self-affirmation – Rigidity – Refusal for listening – Unrecognized human relations – Therapy as a routine practice without renewal nor uniqueness – Recovery as elimination of symptoms.

### **Personal Phase:**

#### **Features:**

A prevailing identification as a conscious and self-fulfilling Personal I.

Personal, still egocentric motives: satisfying one's own needs, achieving one's own well-being at all levels, displaying one's own skills – developing one's specific personal potentiality, achieving one's own goals

Individualism

Egocentric altruism

Personal will

Success

Independence

Satisfaction

Mechanisms for adjustment

The personality undergoes a phase of integration, the individual constructs and efficiently plays his/her various roles. S/he faces and prevents possible conflicts and diseases, s/he is independent and is capable of providing for and taking care of him/herself. His/her attitude to life is dynamic.

Possible physical or psychic disease is faced with intelligence and with a capability of collaborating and recognizing mutual roles and duties. A healthy state prevails until the crystallization of this state of evolution collides with the willingness to acquire new states of evolution.

Therapist and patient: during this phase they make a good therapeutic union which is grounded on the mutual recognizing of their roles and their relating personalities. Correct information, competence, in-depth analysis, decision and organization are available.

There is a prevailing scientific approach to the disease with its obvious aspects that are possibly correlated to the patient's personal way of life and the unrecognized value of other therapeutic approaches that are based on the existence of more subtle reality, more or less unconscious blindness regarding the bio-psycho-spiritual relation or simply the psychophysical one.

### **Existential Crisis Phase:**

#### **Features:**

But life is constantly changing ... therefore, without there being necessarily an apparent cause, you can start to feel a sense of dissatisfaction .. of lack .. life begins to

appear empty, arid ... what had value starts to fade into the background .. new problems arise, internal questions begin to resonate that become increasingly pressing:

- Questioning the up-to-now acquired identity in the search of a deeper one in the push of inner needs. Searching for existential meanings.
- A moment of weakness that highly enables the emergence of diseases, especially psychic but also physical ones and somatizations. Losing certainties and up-to-now reference points
- A need for: Courage – Patience – Ability to proceed without asking for certainties – Ability to tolerate frustration at various levels – Trust – Discrimination – Common sense

This is the beginning of a long inner search, a search for interpretations, knowledge, meanings, teaching, encounters, Teachers, maps, models, techniques, adventures into the exploration of inner worlds.

The official medical science is no longer enough.

The individual wants to know what is happening to him/her and starts searching for answers because s/he cannot be passive.

S/he is looking for that therapist who is able to listen to and help him/her by deeply resonating with each other, by sharing the same affinity of approach to life...

The person is not simply looking for technical expertise but mostly for existential one as s/he does not feel like being the subject of a preconceived record and s/he is willing to collaborate for his/her own healing by playing an active role in it.

The disease turns out to be an opportunity for him/her to come in closer contact with him/herself and with his/her own inner world as well as to broaden his/her horizon from being an individual to being human, so as to achieve a significant expansion of his/her self-awareness. This is valuable, for both the patient and the therapist, establishing a relationship of a mutual growth, while respecting their own positions that are supported by a common human matrix and a shared elaboration of experiences regarding suffering and illness.

## Transpersonal Phase:

### Features

The process of evolution continues...

Moments of bliss interchange with moments of discouragement... Light and shadow...

The contents of the superconscious flow into the consciousness by providing new understanding... the intuition sharpens... there is a need for changes in life, some of them are painful for the personality... for every achievement there is something to renounce, the personal I and its demands fades into the background... but sometimes it revolts...

The individual's motives undergo a transformation along with the expansion of his/her consciousness, that indeed becomes more and more altruistic...

The Inner Path has been opened – one for all but different for each of us...

In the stillness of the moments of inner contact the voice of the Self starts resounding: “I am the Self, the center of pure self-consciousness and will – creative and dynamic energy – this is the center of real identity from which I can observe, direct, harmonize all psychological processes as well as my physical body”

Prevailing identification with the Self that reveals itself to the personality

Authenticity

Uniqueness

Individuality

The intellect of the heart

Harmony

Fullness

Wisdom

Knowledge about and respect for the laws of life

The distinction between patient and therapist blurs

The Human-Therapist emerges: He is Apollo – Asclepius – Chiron

### Conclusion

**Blessed be the crises that lead us into a new world**