

TOWARD A PSYCHOSYNTHETIC APPROACH TO THE GROUP

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"For where two or three are gathered together
in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

—Matthew 18:20

What is it that distinguishes the psychosynthetic approach to group work from other kinds of approaches? This is the question which we have set in this paper—a question which it would be premature to attempt to answer in a definitive way, but toward which we can begin to make some preliminary probes, if only to stimulate discussion. Our tactic will be to analyze certain fundamental principles and premises of such a group rather than to concentrate on the description of specific techniques, though some of the latter will be referred to for purposes of illustration.

Dr. Assagioli himself has never fully elaborated this aspect of psychosynthetic theory, though he has always been deeply interested in groups and in human interrelatedness. By temperament he is more inclined toward the quiet and meditative intimacy of the one-to-one relationship than toward work in a group setting. The historical fact that group psychotherapy and growth groups are primarily a North American phenomenon—still not widespread in Europe—is probably a further factor in his lack of emphasis on group methods. Assagioli's framework is, however, sufficiently open and comprehensive that one can at least begin to derive a point of view for group work from his basic principles and orientation.

In the book, *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (Assagioli, 1965), some techniques designed specifically for a group setting are described. These include the Exercise on the Legend of the Grail and the Exercise on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the group members focus on the symbolism in these works, attempting to identify with the symbols, to penetrate their deeper meanings, and to relate them to their daily lives. The description of the Grail Exercise hints at several important aspects of group psychosynthesis in the *community* of knights who work together to build the Castle and the Temple, who share a place of communion with the spirit in the Temple, and who perform cooperatively their duties in the world. The concept of community implies the need for interindividual psychosynthesis (the synergic interplay of diverse psychological types). The community's common search for inspiration to guide outward action suggests the transpersonal Source a psychosynthetic group can seek to contact—a point which will be discussed more fully below. And, finally, the emphasis on service in the world evolving from this inward search—the outpouring "horizontally" of the energies received from "above" (which is necessary to keep the channels flowing and even to maintain psychological balance) is a point with important implications for the development of psychosynthetic group theory. This is a chapter which can be better written at a future time, however, as few groups with a service aspect beyond the personal development of the members have as yet emerged (the Synecetics groups might be one such prototype—Gordon, 1961).

In the *Divine Comedy* and Grail Exercises, the group members write down any experiences they have had in connection with the symbol and bring them to the discussion at the next group meeting. In addition to these exercises intended primarily for use in groups, Assagioli mentions that some of his other exercises are appropriate for use either with individuals or with groups. For example, he mentions that the Exercise in Disidentification and Self-identification may be used in a group setting, and that the reciprocal stimulation and encouragement the group members give each other may be of great value. In fact, though the Manual does not specifically mention it, most of the exercises given can be profitably used in a group setting—possibly more

effectively than by individuals alone. Several practitioners in North America are using the exercises in this way, as are a number of European centres such as the Istituto di Psicopsintesi in Florence, the Centre de Recherches et Rencontres in Paris, and the "Bleu-Leman" School in Villeneuve, Switzerland.

Particularly in the beginning of conscious work on oneself, as de Ropp points out (de Ropp, 1969, p. 25), it is most valuable for people to have the support of a group. Students benefit from the experiences others have had in using the exercises and may be unwilling to try something which seems difficult or pointless to them until some other group member has reported success with the method. Further, as most people derive satisfaction and stimulation from sharing their learnings with others, this gives them an added incentive to work with the exercises. Once the techniques have "caught hold," with the person firmly established on a path of inner growth and experiencing its rewards, the group becomes less necessary. And this is another advantage of the psychosynthesis group—that there seems to be less tendency for people to become "addicted" to it than to certain other kinds of groups. With techniques they can use on their own outside of the group setting, people are more inclined to feel they can help themselves to grow even without the support of the group.

A general format of weekly meetings in which group members are introduced to a particular technique or exercise and asked to make their own observations in a notebook as they work with it during the week, is most effective. It is also a format which is convenient to apply in educational or other institutional settings.

But let us return to our original question of what distinguishes a psychosynthesis group from other kinds of groups. How could we recognize a psychosynthesis group if we stumbled upon one—particularly in view of the fact that practitioners have different styles and may be using techniques developed in another context? It has been said that "anything that works is psychosynthesis" —and I must admit the notion is seductive—but the statement requires elaboration if it is to be of any use in answering our question. Further, there is a real danger that psychosynthesis—because of its flexibility and capacity to assimilate diverse approaches—be regarded as an eclectic system without any definite point of view of its own and without any clear criteria for selecting from other approaches.

When we say something "works," the idea is implicit that it does so in relation to a particular goal. One can employ techniques to achieve all sorts of ends—from improving the state of mankind to killing others more effectively or inducing people to buy an unnecessary new car. So first of all we must examine our aims and objectives in relation to which something may be said to work. One sense in which the word "work" is used which is particularly suggestive for our purposes, is the sense which the alchemists intended when they spoke of the "Great Work"—the transmutation of lower into higher substances and the finding of the "philosopher's stone" (the Self). This is the work with which psychosynthesis is essentially concerned—the transmuting, harmonizing, and integrating of the various physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energies in the process of synthesis and Self-realization. So perhaps we could say that anything that "works" in this sense—that anything which contributes to the "Great Work"—is psychosynthesis. And, as a corollary, that a group in which things work in this way is a psychosynthesis group. If we can, for the moment, find some guidelines here for a general perspective, let us turn now to the delineation of more specific objectives which lie along the way and attempt to assign some sort of priority to these objectives.

Perhaps the most important distinguishing feature of psychosynthesis is its emphasis on the self—on that center of consciousness and will which is above and beyond the vehicles (body, emotions, and mind) through which it expresses. The self can be experienced at two levels—the personal and the transpersonal—though there are many gradations in between. The personal self (the "I" or center of our normal field of consciousness) is considered in psychosynthetic theory to be a projection in the field of the personality of the transpersonal Self which is supraordinate to it. The transpersonal Self is in the supraconscious realm—that which is "above" our usual level of consciousness. Though beyond the categories of time and space, the Self is able to act within the

world of time and space, and it is through the bridge or channel created by alignment with the transpersonal Self that expanded states of consciousness are experienced and supraconscious energies are transmitted to the personality.

Through the self, which is able to "witness" the stream of consciousness and external behavior from a detached and objective viewpoint, it is possible to take hold of one's own evolution in an active and conscious way. The self is like the leverage point from which Work—in the sense we have described—can be done. Without a point of leverage, one is rather like the proverbial person trying to pull himself up by his own bootstraps. As Archimedes said, one could lift the whole world if one but had something to stand on. So the first thing we need, if we intend to raise ourselves, is a point on which to stand—and this point is the self.

One of the outstanding characteristics, then, of a psychosynthesis group, will be a concern with awakening the sense of self and a respect for the manifestations of this self. In this sense, psychosynthesis is close to those existentialist approaches which likewise stress authenticity of being and the need to develop the sense of self as a free and responsible agent. Although the stated goals of a number of other approaches would probably include these values, certain practices common in the group culture today, as we shall discuss later, tend to be inimical to the goals of psychosynthesis. In particular, various types of manipulation, the tremendous and often subtle pressures toward conformity with group norms, and the tendency toward uncontrolled emotional expression of a lower level, may cause an individual to lose contact with his own center or true self.

There are a great number of techniques for awakening the sense of self—many of which are described in Assagioli's manual. These include the Exercise in Dis-identification and Self-identification, the exercises for training the will, various meditative and imagery techniques, the use of a notebook, and the techniques for the transformation and sublimation of energy. The important factor is not so much the employment of a particular technique, but rather the attitude of respect for the self in each person on the part of the leader and the other group members. Although encounter groups have contributed a great deal in terms of helping people to make contact with themselves and others, and our debt to the pioneers in this field must be acknowledged, there seems to be a tendency in certain such groups toward emotional conformity.

This is perhaps a contemporary version of the "tyranny of the majority" which de Tocqueville pointed out well over a century ago as characterizing the egalitarian democracy of America—an observation which struck him so strongly he was able to say, "I know no country in which there is so little true independence of mind and freedom of discussion as in America." (de Tocqueville, 1845). It is interesting to speculate on the extent to which the forms taken by the contemporary group movement may be a reflection of our national character, and it is probably not by accident that it sprang up on native soil. Many observers since de Tocqueville's time have commented on the other-directedness of the American character, the comment by D. H. Lawrence being one of the most eloquent:

'The land of the free! This the land of the free! Why, if I say anything that displeases them, the free mob will lynch me, and that's my freedom. Free? Why, I have never been in any country where the individual has such an abject fear of his countrymen. Because, as I say, they are free to lynch him the moment he shows he is not one of them.'
(Lawrence, quoted in Rapson, 1967).

As conformity and other-directedness are antithetical to the goals of the psychosynthesis group, it must be concerned—both through the tone it sets and the methods it employs—to counteract the almost inevitable pull in this direction whenever a group of people get together. Perhaps the most useful technique for this purpose in my own work has been the psychological workbook or journal. Having the group members keep such a journal provides them with a point of focus for their developing awareness and helps them learn to value, to pay

attention to, and to accept responsibility for, their own experience. Further, by emphasizing the value of intrapersonal work and by helping to balance a possible overemphasis on interpersonal awareness, a notebook reminds one of the fact that communication with oneself can lead to increasingly meaningful communication with others. Use of the journal to record their experience with the exercises introduced in the group and other significant events in their lives seems to help people to maintain greater self-awareness and gives them a tool to help in working through the problems they encounter during the week. Habits of self-reliance are formed which help prevent dependence on the group or a feeling that one cannot progress alone.

The journal is also a useful adjunct to the group sessions themselves, providing an opportunity for inner focusing and periodic retreat to the eye (I) within the hurricane when the person feels himself pulled off center or in need of solitude or clarification. Ira Progoff uses a psychological notebook in this way in his "Intensive Journal" workshops which, in fact, like some of the other neo-Jungian approaches (Martin, 1955; Progoff, 1963) have much in common with certain aspects of psychosynthesis groups. Use of the journal during group sessions also provides an opportunity for training in the technique of keeping such a journal—without which many people become discouraged with the task because of its unfamiliar nature and confusion as to what constitutes a useful entry. Most people seem to require some practice in introspection—in paying attention to their inner worlds, as well as in recording their experiences. This is greatly facilitated by the group situation in which members share their recorded experiences, providing examples for those who have difficulty with the task and giving support to all by valuing the uniqueness of each person's awareness.

Use of the notebook during group sessions has the further advantage of helping to assimilate experience as one goes along, alleviating some of the psychic indigestion to which we too often fall prey in these days of experience bombardment and information overload. We need to slow down our pace enough to benefit from the nourishment in the experiences we have had, rather than to spend so much energy in the quest for ever new sensations. Unassimilated experience, just like unassimilated food, leaves toxins in our system, for which the best cure is sometimes a good fast from further external input and a turning inward. Only when we have taken the time to taste and digest our experience in this gradual and meditative way, can we begin to discriminate those experiences which are nourishing and growth-promoting from those which are poisonous and growth-inhibiting. And only on the basis of such discrimination are we in a position to consciously and wisely choose those experiences to which we wish to expose ourselves—and this is a vital, in fact a quantum step on the path to enlightenment. Perhaps the best discussion of this point is de Ropp's, in his section on "Awareness and impressions" in *The Master Game* (de Ropp, 1969, pp. 79-82). He states that,

"As far as impressions are concerned, man's instincts seem to give him little guidance. A cow or horse grazing in a meadow is generally warned by instinct to avoid poisonous plants, but a man, whose impressions are just as much a food as his bread, shows no such discrimination. On the contrary, he will often deliberately seek poisonous impressions, compelled by some perverse impulse to degrade his own inner life, already sufficiently polluted without that...Accept or reject—this is the basis of the inner work that leads to the genesis of a truly free being...man in the third state of consciousness suffers from a state of chronic malnutrition in one part of his being not because he is deprived of impressions, like the subjects in Hcbb's and Lilly's experiments, but because he does not properly metabolize the impressions he receives."

This digression on the use of a notebook was not intended to imply that only groups in which participants keep such a notebook can rightfully be considered psychosynthesis groups. It was simply by way of illustration of one approach which tends to develop awareness of the self and to help people live from that level. There are numerous other ways of doing this, some of which have already been developed and many more of which will surely emerge as therapists, educators, and others in the helping professions, become sensitized to the key role of the self. There is a further aspect of awakening the sense of self within a group to which I would like to

devote some attention, and this is the use of the will. A conscious act of will is one of the most powerful ways of experiencing oneself as a center of self-directing energy, a free and responsible agent. Yet an act of will can only be experienced consciously when one is not swept up in a state of identification with powerful drives, impulses, attachments, and emotions. We can consciously exercise true will only when we are in a state of what Assagioli would call Self-identification—when we are moved from the center rather than activated by some temporary identification or some partial aspect of ourselves.

The concept of the will is intimately linked with moral and ethical questions. Psychosynthesis recognizes several aspects and stages in the development of the will, including values, purpose, decision, planning and execution. It holds that one of man's most precious assets—indeed, one of the features which sets him apart from life forms lower on the scale of evolution—is the capacity for rational judgment and planning, which is linked with the ability to articulate values and to conduct one's life on the basis of some sort of ethical principles. "Man's intentionality is the basis on which he builds his identity, and it distinguishes him from other species." (Bugental, 1964),

In a different context from Bugental's Existentialism, Miller, Galanter, and Pribram have demonstrated the importance of "plans" in human behavior ("A Plan is any hierarchical process in the organism that can control the order in which a sequence of operations is performed—"Miller, Galanter, and Pribram, 1960), and they postulate this construct as the key mediating variable in that elusive theoretical problem of the relationship between knowledge and action. It would form the topic of a separate paper to go into this question in depth, but I would like to draw attention in passing to the need for research and theory in this vital area of the role of inner programs and conscious thoughts in the life of man. As Maltz has pointed out,

"There is a widely accepted fallacy that rational, logical, conscious thinking has no power over unconscious processes or mechanisms, and that to change negative beliefs, feelings, or behavior, it is necessary to dig down and dredge up material from the 'unconscious' ... Yet it is conscious thinking which is the 'control knob' of your unconscious machine." (Maltz, 1960).

In the creative process generally—and this includes that highest form of creativity which is involved in the Way of Liberation as well—the dynamic and well balanced interaction of conscious and unconscious elements seems to be of prime importance. A conscious program or working hypothesis is not necessarily inhibiting, as the Dionysian thesis would have it, but it can and ought to be used to stimulate a creative response from the unconscious.

When psychosynthesis speaks of the need for values and principles as a guide to action, it is understood that these do not need to be overly rigid, but rather are to be continuously revised by the individual in the light of his own experience and evolving consciousness. The experience gained through feedback from the outer world, the compensatory processes of the unconscious which help correct our conscious values, and experience gained in the inner worlds through meditation and the activity of the Self, are all means by which it is possible to continually develop and refine our goals and values. Though these may change, it is nevertheless often valuable to set conscious goals for oneself and to attempt to live in accordance with the highest principles one can conceive at any particular time. One's guidelines for action may include the employment of "suprarational" or intuitive modes of cognition, as well as general principles which experience has shown to be more satisfactory in the long run than simply acting on the impulse of the moment, without regard to the level from which the impulse originates.

A most interesting analysis of the counter-culture of the 1960's written by an anthropologist, attempts to draw some parallels between the values of certain New Left groups and those of the encounter movement. He draws attention to similarities between the anarchic, irrational, and irresponsible action for its own sake of Jerry

Rubin's "Do it" ethic (Rubin, 1970) and attitudes prevalent in certain group circles. The a-historicism of this generation, with its emphasis on what the American historian, Warren Susman, has called—in speaking of the Beat Generation of the 1950's—the "ritual burning of the past, preferring the immediate sensation, the experience of the moment" (Susman, 1964), was particularly striking to him. He concludes that "There is the contradiction between the spontaneous immediacy of 'directly expressed feelings' and the deliberation necessary to formulate the concepts of a counter-cultural revolution." (Klein, 1971). One might add that there would also seem to be a conflict between unfettered acting out of impulse and the deliberation necessary to formulate a sound program of personal growth or a revolution in consciousness.

The doctrine of the Here and Now has reigned unquestioned in many group circles, and one would certainly not wish to dispute the great value of being fully present to each moment. Yet one must not forget that man is also a time-binding animal, as Korzybski said. ("I define humanity to be the time-binding class of life"—Korzybski, 1950). To deny this is to deprive ourselves of an important evolutionary conquest and a tool which can be used to liberate if one does not become its slave. As Assagioli points out, in speaking of the technique of critical analysis and the need for impersonal observation,

"to act on the spur of an impulse, a drive, or an intense emotion, can...produce undesirable effects which one afterwards regrets," and one must learn "to 'insert' between impulse and action, a stage of reflection, of mental consideration of a situation, and of critical analysis of his impulse, trying to realize its origin, its source." (Assagioli, 1965, p. 107).

And such a stage of reflection requires reference to experience and principles which go beyond the immediacy of the moment.

It might be nice if we were all sufficiently enlightened to be able to follow St. Augustine's maxim, "Love God and do as you wish," but to "love God" in this sense implies a level of development which most of us have not yet attained. Confucius himself said that it took him fifty years of hard discipline before he could throw away the rulebook and "spontaneously" do the right thing. True spontaneity—in the higher sense of living in accord with the Tao—is something acquired by hard work and is not to be confused with impulsiveness. When you have climbed the ladder, says the Zen story, then you can throw the ladder away. If we try to dispense prematurely with the ladder of discipline, we may find ourselves turning in circles on the ground floor, unable to rise. To pick up another ladder metaphor, the first two rungs of the ladder of Raja Yoga as codified by Patanjali (in what might be called the first programmed text) involve moral discipline: the practice of the abstentions (yamas) and the observances (niyamas), making clear that moral purification goes hand in hand with higher development. In its emphasis on this point, psychosynthesis follows in the line of all the great religious traditions, East and West, providing a rationale from the psychological viewpoint and some practical methods of work.

What conclusions for group work can be drawn from these considerations? If they are valid, it would suggest that the optimal group climate is one in which members assume a responsible attitude toward that which they express, bearing in mind the probable consequences for themselves and others. An uncritical acceptance of the dogma of "free expression" is found in certain group circles which—as understood by many of its proponents—has little to do with freedom in the true sense, and is frequently but a manifestation of driven, impulse-ridden behavior. There is a dangerous assumption that simply giving vent to whatever tensions or emotions one may happen to be in the grip of, and in whatever manner one feels inclined to do so, is necessarily healthy and desirable—particularly when these emotions happen to be of a violent and destructive nature. It seems unlikely that even the attacker emerges unscathed from such encounters, for he must bear the burden of guilt (even if the guilt remains unconscious) for his actions, and—rather than having grown—he may have diminished himself by yielding to an ignoble impulse.

There is good reason to believe that the sources of hostility and destructiveness are not eliminated simply by externalization. On the contrary, it may be true that past a certain point, the more they are acted out, the more deeply these response tendencies become programmed into our nervous and endocrine systems. A principle which a wise friend once called "feeding the cat" seems to apply here. If a stray cat comes to the door and receives food, he will in all likelihood return for another meal. If, however, we do not provide reinforcement for his visit, he will go elsewhere and leave us alone. Similarly, if we feed our negative emotions, they will wax fat and return to trouble us again and again. If, on the other hand, we refuse to yield to them, we will strengthen ourselves and they will eventually disappear. The too little known research of Sorokin at the Harvard Center for Creative Altruism summed it up as follows:

"Enmity begets enmity, conspicuous egoism generates egoism, and aggressiveness breeds aggressiveness...kindness begets kindness, friendship generates friendship, unselfish help produces unselfish response...The most effective technique for two or more parties becoming friendly is the technique of friendly or good deeds, for becoming inimical is the technique of aggressive, unkindly actions, done by one party to the others." (Sorokin, 1954, p. 345).

The implications of these findings for the transformations of energy involved in psychosynthesis merit profound reflection. They are, in fact, but a modern experimental verification of the ancient wisdom found in the immortal opening lines of the *Dhammapada*:

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves him.

'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me'—in those who harbor such thoughts hatred will never cease.

'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me'—in those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred will cease.

For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love—this is an eternal law." (in Burt, 1955).

One should not conclude from these considerations that there is no place for the expression of negative affect in a psychosynthesis group, or that this necessarily has to be a destructive experience. Some people seem to carry such a heavy charge of emotion that if not given an opportunity to discharge it, they are psychologically paralyzed, tense, unable to concentrate on anything else, and blocked from moving forward in a more positive direction. Assagioli does recognize a legitimate place for the technique of "catharsis," though he does not view it as an end in itself or a quasi-religious apotheosis, but rather as a safety valve and a means of eliminating noxious poisons from the system so that they do not contaminate or cripple the real work. In his discussion of catharsis and, in particular, the technique of muscular discharge, Assagioli makes some crucial points: that the person should perform his cathartic activities consciously and deliberately—as an exercise—that he should maintain the attitude of a detached witness as he does so, avoiding identification with the emotions expressed, and that he should attempt to cultivate a sense of humor and perspective at the same time. (Assagioli, 1965, pp.

105-106). His approach to catharsis has much in common with some of the Tantric techniques for transformation of energy, as described by Blofeld—in particular, the technique of "yielding." "Yielding means either observing the act, its causes and results in such a way that lessons can be drawn that will henceforth diminish the desire's appeal, or else employing a technique that will render it harmless." (Blofeld, 1970). Assagioli cites the case of a patient who was subject to uncontrollable and destructive fits of rage who contrived the exercise of ripping up old telephone directories to discharge his anger in a controlled manner, gradually learning to see the humorous and self-defeating side of his destructive bouts. By disidentifying from the feelings of anger, the patient was enabled to regain control over himself, following a basic axiom of psychosynthesis that "We are dominated by everything with which our self is identified" and "we can dominate and control everything from which we disidentify ourselves." (Assagioli, 1965, p. 22).

If these principles were applied to a group situation, aggressive feelings could be viewed as something the individual brings with him from the past—which are in origin directed towards people in the person's past and are not appropriate to the here and now of the group situation. If they cannot be left at the door or transformed into positive energy by suitable techniques, and if they are persistent enough to prevent constructive work, they can be permitted expression in some harmless way which does not victimize an innocent bystander, create undesirable rifts within the group, or cause the person concerned to lose his center of identity. Assagioli's principle that a stage of reflection should be inserted between impulse and action can be applied here. People can be helped to consider in advance the likely consequences of acting out and whether or not anything of value can be expected of it. As Berlyne says in a different context, "biological adaptation is not a matter of maximum information transmission between external environment and response but of maximum information transmission between optimal response and actual response." (Berlyne, 1965). It is, of course, true that one can learn something from any experience, but the price of certain kinds of learnings is unnecessarily high. It is conceivable that one could gain new awareness and manifest a certain kind of perverted existential freedom—like Camus' hero in *The Stranger*—by a gratuitous act of murder, but one must ask whether such an experience is worth the price, whether it is truly a nourishing and liberating experience, or whether it will have consequences which will boomerang (as in the Eastern concept of karma) upon the actor. Though, admittedly, the acting out of aggression in most group situations does not go to such extremes, the basic principle applies, and the "karmic" consequences of what goes on in some groups has not perhaps been sufficiently weighed. In this respect, the consequences of the acting out of sexual impulses may be borne in mind as well.

A word of clarification is due here, for these reflections are not intended to suggest in any way that impulses such as sex and aggression should be repressed or condemned. The point is, rather, that they can be expressed in appropriate ways—ways that lead to integration more effectively than when they are acted out indiscriminately. If one is fundamentally angry with a parent, it seems healthier to acknowledge this directly and to work it out in some suitable manner rather than to saddle another group member with the projection, thereby preventing an I-Thou contact with the actual person and introducing divisive feelings into the group. Similarly, if sexual impulses—which may not be more than skin deep—are aroused within the group situation, the most integrative thing to do is probably to refrain from stimulating these feelings—particularly if one is committed to a sexual relationship with another person. In some encounter groups, however, people are encouraged to foster and express such feelings, being accused of cowardice and dishonesty if they are not, regardless of what the consequences may be for an ongoing and possibly much sounder relationship. Casual sex is something which has been proscribed in all the great religious traditions, for reasons which go far beyond the repressive morality of social convention. For the deepest longings of the human spirit to be fulfilled, sex energy must be rightly oriented and integrated with mating on the higher levels of man's being. The promiscuity with which so many people are experimenting today may have its roots in rebellion against tyrannical Puritanism, but it can be equally blind and enslaving in its own way.

The ageless wisdom, East and West, has generally taught that each plane of manifestation can ultimately be regulated from the plane above it. Through the advances of psychosomatic medicine, the crucial role of the emotions in bodily function has come to be quite generally accepted. Less well known, but perhaps equally important, is the role of the mind in governing and regulating the emotions. And above and beyond this is the role of the transpersonal Self in directing and harmonizing the activities of all aspects of the human being. So, in a well integrated person, the flow tends to be from above downwards—or outward from the Source within—depending on the metaphor one prefers. "Para vidya" or transcendent knowledge comes from the realms beyond the senses. When people are overstimulated from the sensory or emotional levels, they tend to become controlled by and identified with these levels and to lose their true center.

This leads us to consider the role of the emotions generally in a psychosynthesis group. Someone once suggested that the psychosynthetic group might be described as one which strives to function from the level of the heart center, while often—but of course not always—encounter groups might be said to function at the solar plexus and lower levels. This analogy, which is based on the Eastern concept of the psychic centers or "chakras" in the energy body, has a certain intuitive fit, if one considers the functions traditionally ascribed to these centers. At the solar plexus level, anything goes; all emotions, including the most primitive ones, may be given expression. At the level of the heart center, the feelings are of a more refined nature, having been raised to a transpersonal plane. A most interesting description of the types of affectivity operative in these regions—based on the testimony of the Fathers of the Greek Church—is given by an outstanding archbishop-contemplative in this tradition, and is worth quoting. Speaking of the heart center, he says:

"Sentiment is vital, fervent, supremely pure, divested of all emotion and all passion. It is ardent, incomprehensible, ineffable peace. It is also power, by its exactions and its impact in the practical sphere, and light. Far from clouding and obscuring thought, as the emotions do, it clears it completely. Intelligence remains fully, intensely conscious and free—for the soul emancipated from its turning in upon itself and from enslavement is never passive, never impelled by an alien force." (Bloom, 1954, p. 101).

Of the quality of affectivity in the lower centers, he has this to say:

"Passing over the distinctive shadings of divers 'secondary points' in this vast region, one may safely say that fixation of attention upon any of this zone's centers induces a progressive obscuration of lucid thought and consciousness, ending in their complete eclipse. This gives rise to more or less stable and more or less permanent "crepuscular states," exacerbation of kinesthetic perceptions; and finally the appearance of uncontrolled passionate manifestations both bodily and mental. Feeding, free and lucid, is replaced by emotion—somatopsychic, passive. Peace, the soul's powers in active repose, is replaced by the turbulent fury of irrational desire and appetites. The body's silence is replaced by the tumult of anarchic passions and impulses; self-mastery by a more or less complete errancy of thought and feeling, which thus become incapable of governing the nerves and ruling the body. The whole frequently leads to mental alienation and physiological disorders." (Bloom, 1954, p. 103).

Needless to say, it would be a gross exaggeration to maintain that everything that happens in the average encounter group can be characterized by this description of activity in the lower centers, just as it would be a naive idealization to imagine that people in a psychosynthesis group always function at the plane described for the heart center. Nevertheless, the metaphor is suggestive and we might take the heart center group as an ideal model—to use Assagioli's term—for a psychosynthesis group.

One might say that the psychosynthesis group employs an alchemical model, in which the grosser substances are released and worked upon in manageable doses, with the goal of refining their nature and transmuting the

undesirable forces into useful ones. Whereas in some encounter groups, members are urged to take the path of least resistance and freely express whatever they may "feel," the members of a psychosynthesis group are encouraged to take an active and responsible stance vis-à-vis their emotions, choosing in the light of their own highest principles whether they wish to express negative feelings in a harmless and disciplined way or whether they wish to seek to transmute and transform these energies through the many techniques available for this purpose (e.g. substitution or replacement of a feeling by its opposite, sublimation, transcendence). In psychosynthesis, a person is encouraged to view a negative feeling as a challenge and an opportunity for growth. Assagioli likes to speak of the "blessing of obstacles," pointing out the function of obstacles to draw out the latent will and to permit us to develop our spiritual muscles by overcoming resistance. Sometimes more growth can take place through resisting an impulse than by yielding to it, and this type of growth is of the most important kind as it involves the "essential" levels of being. In the words of William James,

"The normal opener of deeper and deeper levels of energy is the will. The difficulty is to use it, to make the effort which the word volition implies...It is notorious that a single successful effort of moral volition, such as saying 'no' to some habitual temptation, or performing some courageous act, will launch a man on a higher level of energy for days and weeks, will give him a new range of power." (James, 1916).

The will, then, is the indispensable tool of inner growth, and a psychosynthesis group will seek to foster its harmonious development. An important factor in so doing is the conservation and focusing of the psychic energy which is required for work on oneself. This can be achieved both by direct methods of energy-building such as the various techniques of concentration and meditation and certain psycho-physical techniques, and by the avoidance of habits which tend to dissipate this energy. One of the ways in which most energy is spent in the life of the average person is the expression of lower-level affect. Groups which are focussed on this level tend to expend tremendous amounts of energy which might be better employed in the work of transforming these primitive emotions into higher forms of feeling and awareness. Christmas Humphreys, writing on the culture of the emotions, expresses a Buddhist view of the alchemical philosophy:

"it must never be forgotten that force is one, manifesting in innumerable forms, and as all but the most advanced students are constantly generating emotion, it is only right that such force should be utilized or sublimated into higher forms. As mind development proceeds through the higher ranges of meditation, less and less force will be wasted in emotion. Meanwhile, let such of the life-force as does so manifest be harnessed without delay to spiritual purposes." (Humphreys, 1935).

The psychosynthesis group, then, generally tends to apply the alchemical model in dealing with emotions. It also tends to be less emotionally polarized than other types of groups, and to place a more balanced emphasis on the cognitive and affective domains. There was an historically understandable reaction in Humanistic Psychology against the verbal-rational straightjacket of our traditional academic values, which brought about a pendulum swing toward cultivation of the neglected aspects of human experience—the sensory and emotional domains in particular. Thoughts or ideas of any kind were suspect and tended to be regarded as intellectualization. "Experimental" was the magic word to set man free from an overdeveloped rationality. Today it is possible to see that experimental learning can take place in the cognitive domain as well and that conceptualization does not have to be a barrier to direct experience. The tide seems to be turning again, now that many people have had ample opportunity for sensory and emotional experience and have been able to realize some of their benefits as well as some of their limitations. One can begin to discern another swing of the pendulum back to a more "classical" approach—though at a higher level of synthesis which incorporates the insights of the "romantic" period. The fact that the Humanistic Psychology Association requested at its 1970 meeting that a theoretical rationale be provided for the experiential sessions, the development of "confluent

education" concerned with the confluence of the cognitive and affective domains (Brown, 1971), and the increasing interest in psychosynthesis, are some of the manifestations of this shift in direction.

If the 1970's, as many predict, are to be the decade of Transpersonal Psychology, it seems inevitable that this trend will continue to manifest in a variety of ways. It is not possible to live from the transpersonal level if one is driven by and identified with uncontrolled impulses and emotions, if one loses the capacity for objective self-observation. A necessary tool in dis-identifying from the non-self is—for many people—mental analysis and discrimination (that wonderful word "viveka" in Sanskrit). Interpretation, utilized in the right way, becomes a valuable means of facilitating—rather than a barrier to—experience. Without a theoretical background which enables people to fit what they are experiencing into some sort of acceptable framework, it frequently happens that experiences which are disjunctive to belief are repressed or pushed aside as illusory or insignificant. This is particularly true in the realm of transpersonal psychology where people frequently have experiences which are impossible to understand in the context of what they have been taught about the world at home and in school. In extreme cases, such experiences may even lead them to doubt their reason or at least their normality. I continuously meet people in my work who express immense relief when the principles of psychosynthesis are explained to them, which typically takes a form such as "You mean I am not crazy after all!" It is a great tragedy that so many people in our society who have had supraconscious experiences live with this fear and are reticent to discuss their experiences lest they be "found out" and locked away. Repression of the supraconscious, as Assagioli points out, is a phenomenon as widespread as repression of the lower unconscious, and just as dangerous. Much can be done to alleviate "repression of the sublime" (Haronian, 1971), at least that part of it which is based on insufficient knowledge, by clear exposition of fundamental principles. So a psychosynthesis group will be concerned with giving participants an adequate cognitive foundation to help them in interpreting their spontaneous experience and to provide a theoretical rationale for the experiences it seeks to induce.

There is another aspect of the integration of the cognitive and affective domains in psychosynthesis on which I would like to touch, and that is the great potential of the psychosynthesis group for developing intuition and creative imagination, in which both the cognitive and affective are necessary elements. The group setting can be used for common exploration of fundamental or archetypal concepts in areas such as philosophy or transpersonal psychology, though one can choose to focus on more personal matters as well. In this method, the group seeks to draw inspiration or illumination from the intuitive levels, using techniques of receptive meditation (Eastcott, 1969), external meditation (White, 1969), or mental imagery (Crampton, 1969). The group member may be asked to concentrate on a particular concept or symbol (e.g. the yin-yang symbol, the cross, the eye in the pyramid, freedom, the will, etc.) seeking to penetrate its meaning and implications for their own lives, and sharing afterwards what they were able to "pull down" from the supraconscious levels. These intuitions are usually clothed in some symbolic form such as visual imagery, spontaneous movement or drawing, words or sound, physical sensations or impulses to action. People can learn to value and to pay attention to such experiences, thus tapping an important source of creativity within themselves.

Use of this method in a group helps to set an atmosphere in which the participants feel they are drawing on a transpersonal source which belongs to all yet from which each one can pick up different aspects because of his particular attunements. The approach seems to help people learn to respect the inner self and the creative potential within others as well as within themselves, and it is a useful corrective for those who are inclined to believe that they alone have a direct pipeline to truth. The complementary and partial nature of all visions of Reality becomes very evident, so that one learns to value the unique contribution that his particular perspective can make as well as the contributions of others. One also becomes sensitized in this way to the ongoing creative process involved in the search for truth; realizing that no single view can be regarded as absolute and final, one becomes more willing to accept the tentative, approximative, in-process nature of all formulations, and learns to utilize them without being restricted or "trapped" by them.

A group climate with harmonious and cooperative relationships among the members seems to be most favorable to this type of work—a group which is linked at the transpersonal level and in which whatever conflicts may exist at the personality level are not allowed to interfere with the common goal. It is also possible to deal with interpersonal relationships in a group of this kind, provided the individuals concerned maintain their objectivity and spirit of authentic search for mutual understanding, and avoid becoming identified with the emotions involved to the point of losing their own deeper center and the real self of the other person. An "I-Thou" conflict is something very different from the mutually diminishing conflicts in which people lose control and often hide from themselves and from each other.

There is a Sufi concept known as "halka" which refers to the blessing which can be received by a group in contrast to an individual. It seems that this "halka" comes most readily to a group which does not permit its energies to become divided and dispersed by interpersonal conflicts. A group which aspires to serve as a channel for supraconscious energies will do this more effectively if it is an unbroken channel—united on the subtle levels of thought and feeling as well as in overt action. Another important variable in the creation of a transpersonal group climate seems to be the ability of the members to achieve alignment with the Self and so to contact their own heights/depths. As Progoff says, in speaking of his own groups, "When individuals work intensely in their own personal psyche, they come, in the course of their intense effort, to a depth within themselves that is deeper than personal." (Progoff, 1970). When the condition of mutual harmony and individual alignment hold, the psychic energies of the group tend to combine synergistically or like batteries connected in series to generate more power for the common search rather than canceling each other out through conflict.

A word should be said before we finish about the social context in which psychosynthesis groups can be used. It is evident that the focus and emphasis of a therapy group would be somewhat different from that of a growth group or a group in an educational or other non-clinical setting. When people are unable to function because of incapacitating emotional problems, they clearly need more guidance on the interpersonal and personality levels. They will require more opportunities for defusing explosive charges with techniques of catharsis and analysis, and they will probably require smaller groups in which to do it. But the basic principles of a psychosynthesis group still apply, and the dividing line between a patient and a non-patient—if it can be said to exist at all—is, at the least, arbitrary.

One sphere in which psychosynthesis groups are likely to find wide application is that of growth groups and in the field of education generally—both within and without schools. Because it recognizes the higher levels of human functioning, psychosynthesis is an approach that appeals to people who have already achieved the conventional goals of life adjustment and who are motivated toward greater self-actualization. And with its emphasis on the teaching of specific concepts and techniques, it lends itself very readily to use in educational settings. One of the projects we will be involved in next year in our Educational Technology program, is the development of multi-media curriculum materials for "integrative education," which is a broadly interpreted concept of education for self-knowledge. The integration it implies is of several kinds: integration of the various aspects of the individual (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) around the unifying center or self; integration of the individual and his environment or ecologies (interpersonal, social, natural, and cosmic); and integration of the fragmented curriculum, as students learn to experience their relatedness to the various disciplines and to recognize general patterns and laws which recur in the arts and sciences, as well as in society and in human life. We hope these materials will find a place in humanities programs, in humanistic and transpersonal psychology courses, and in that much abused and sadly neglected area of moral and spiritual education.

There is a great need for development of a wide variety of techniques and approaches. One man's meat is another man's poison, as the old adage has it, and though we all pay lip service to the idea of individualizing instruction, we do not yet know enough about psychological types and personal learning styles to be able to translate our principles into action very effectively. The experimental attitude seems to be the most fruitful one, both in the development of concepts and materials and in work on oneself. To discover one's own yoga or path of inner growth requires attentive study of one's evolving modes of learning and growing, and experimentation with a wide variety of approaches in the laboratory of one's life. Without becoming eclectic to the point where we no longer have a point of view of our own, it is possible within the comprehensive approach of psychosynthesis to develop methods appropriate to the diverse paths and to respond to the multi-dimensional challenge of seeking to further human evolution.

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