

“Many of us feel nostalgia...”

Reflections on the Soul, Healing, and Assagioli’s last hours on earth

A Conversation with Massimo Rosselli

Recalled by Catherine Ann Lombard

Last year, on a balmy mid-September afternoon in Florence, 35 psychosynthesis enthusiasts gathered to sit in a circle on the terrace of *Casa Assagioli* and welcome Massimo Rosselli, MD, psychologist, clinical psychologist, and psychosynthesis psychotherapist. The group was particularly interested in hearing more about his time with Roberto Assagioli, with whom he trained, collaborated and practiced. Rosselli met Assagioli in 1966 when he was a medical student. While we all eagerly welcomed him, Rosselli, in turn, invited us all into his heart as he flashed a radiant smile. As part of the International Conference in September 2017 at Casa Assagioli, *Gruppo alle Fonti* and the Istituto di Psicointegrazione had invited us to freely and spontaneously ask Rosselli any questions we liked in the hour we would spend together.



The author (front, left) with but participants of the international meeting in September 2017 at Casa Assagioli.

A former professor at the University of Florence and international psychosynthesis speaker, Rosselli is the author and editor of numerous publications, including articles for *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*. Past president of the Italian Society of Psychosynthesis Psychotherapists, he is president of the European Federation of Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy. Naturally, what interested us most was his time with and insights into Roberto Assagioli, the visionary founder of psychosynthesis.

The group of English and Italian speakers had traveled from ten countries and boasted a vast array of expertise—from psychosynthesis psychotherapists to nurses, educators, writers, and shamanic healers. Rosselli spoke fluently in both English and Italian, with *Gruppo alle Fonti* providing translations back and forth so all could understand. By chance, I found myself sitting next to him, his long arms and hands occasionally flying above me (*à la* Italian style) whenever he wished to emphasize a point. Meanwhile, I did my best to take notes of some of the questions and answers that we shared during our hour together. (My apologies for any unintentional errors, oversights, and/or omissions.)

At one point, I asked him for further details about Assagioli dying naked. “I don’t mean to belabor this point,” I said, “but I feel that it’s important.” Looking directly into my eyes, Rosselli peered inside me to a profound depth. “You’re right,” he said and preceded to relate his experience of Assagioli’s death.

But we begin at the beginning, with the first question of the hour...

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Q: Did Assagioli ever talk about the impact his father’s death might have had on him? And his subsequent adoption?

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A: You touch on a core point of how he would speak about himself. I always called him “Dr. Assagioli,” and he would often indirectly touch upon certain points about his life. Concerning this question, the way he spoke to me about losing one’s father in general and the father-son connection was his way of speaking about his very early loss. Of course, when Assagioli was growing up, his adopted father held the presence for him of the male figure. But, I will say that his feeling for the maternal side was stronger. He was rewarded and sustained by the feminine maternal side.

But he never really directly spoke about this. This was more in connection to my own personal story. I didn’t actually lose my own father so early in my life, but I did feel the loss of a connection. And so, this was his didactic way, to transmit his teachings and experience through one’s own personal story. This was his direct way to address the soul—the spirit—you would feel the vibration of the personality—the soul, the spirit, the Self. The level of interaction between us was so deep that we were also connected at the personal and soul level. He was a master. *A maestro.*

Q: What exactly was his connection to Alice Bailey and the Tibetan? And how did he translate the seven rays into his personality types?

A: I was expecting this very question! [All around laughter] This opening of the “Wall of Silence” is quite widespread nowadays. One aspect of it is dealing with the truth of certain things. Silence was requested by Roberto Assagioli in order not to confuse his being a psychologist with his being a leader of a movement. He very much wanted to create a science of psychology.

One source of his teaching was esoteric, and esoteric teaching is a religion of religions. Discernment was one of his qualities. A quality of the Self. When considering his “Wall of Silence,” one must consider that boundaries are not the same as limits. Boundaries do not separate. They simply distinguish between what starts here and what stops there.

Actually Roberto Assagioli never properly wrote a book about human types. These writings were collected after his death. Yes, the essence of the rays are in the text of the types especially when he talks about how every type (that is, “ray”) has a “key note.” He translated this idea in such a way that it might be used in the psychological world. But these personality types really need to be developed and completed more fully with the information and understanding of the rays.

Q: What was he like as a person?

A: He was joyful, rich with humor. He always had a wonderful smile, with eyes that came from far away, from infinity. He was warm, radiant and always serene. What I remember about him with particular emotion was the way he knew how to welcome us young people, how to encourage us, to stimulate us. He was hard of hearing. I had to write things down for him to understand. But sometimes he understood everything without my writing down anything! His voice was like his hearing. Later in his life, his voice became a bit high-pitched, feminine. But this goes to the core. Something else comes from the Self. There is a sound inside the sound. The breath inside the breath. When the soul passes through the physical vehicle. To me he was the most embodied person I ever met. He was fragile—but not energetically! The force of his spirit was embodied.

Q: Did he ever practice yoga or do any physical exercises?

A: He did breathing exercises and gentle movements, but all for short periods of time.

Q: Did he ever give any indication of how he reconciled being one of the first to promote psychodynamic healing with his not being able to help his own son?

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A: After the death of his son Ilario, I know he felt deep pain. When someone told him that they were sorry to hear about Ilario's death, he said "Oh, now my son has really seen the bright light." He never denied this deep pain, but he was able to reconcile himself to it with the understanding of, "Yes, I am powerless. There is nothing we can do. We are powerless when facing deadly illness. But I can redeem this deep pain into the larger perspective of life." After all, healing is not necessary for everything. This failure to heal allows us to stay with the vulnerability of being fully human. Assagioli created psychosynthesis to bring this understanding outside of the realm of esoteric thought.

Q: Can you explain the difference between what Assagioli meant by "soul," "spirit," and "Self"?

A: The soul is the human face of the spirit on Earth. The Self has two faces—one face is turned towards infinity and the all-pervading spirit. But the same ontological being has the other face that looks to the embodiment of the presence of the person and at that level of the soul. Self is an ontological being which holds the borderline between individuality of spirit and infinity.

Q: What is your last memory of Assagioli?

A: I was with him and the other students when he died. At one point, he didn't speak anymore. But his eyes were very present. He was following the process, including what we were doing. At the end he had a little stroke. His left part was paralyzed. He picked up his left arm and let it drop. I remember his eyes looking at us and then he turned his head away. He died completely naked. Right at the end, he tried to take off his clothes and he nearly did it all by himself. At the end, I saw in his eyes a heartfelt infinity. I don't want to forget the heart. He was cremated and interred next to his mother at the Trespiano Cemetary in Florence. Near the end of his life, Assagioli said, "Psychosynthesis is still a child."

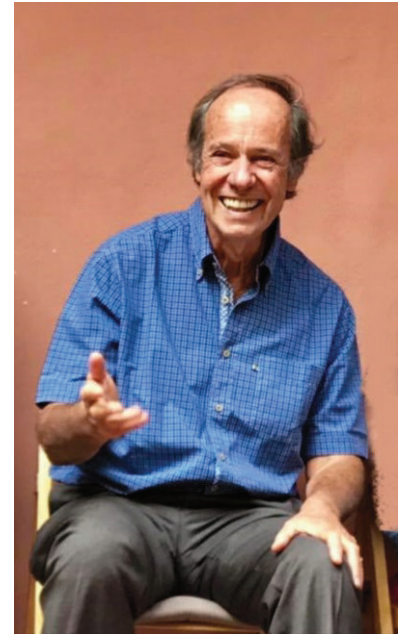
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Rosselli ended by reading in Italian and then English a short passage written by Assagioli. The poetic words swirled around us like a prayer as we sat together in deep gratitude for our time together in "the house rising up in Central Italy where people of diverse beliefs may meet in good will." The passage Rosselli read is as follows:

Molti di noi...

Molti di noi sentono la nostalgia del raccoglimento,
di potere anche per un breve periodo,
in una piccola stanza da cui l'occhio
spazi liberamente sulla natura,
cercare di ritrovare in sé stessi
l'armonia e la propria verità,
onde ritornare alla vita attiva
con restaurata e riposata energia.

Many of us feel the nostalgia for gathering
our thoughts into concentrated energy,
of being able, even for a moment,
in a small room where the eye
can glide freely over nature,
to try again to find within ourselves
harmony and our personal truth,
then to return to an active life
with restored and reposed energy.



Massimo Rosselli

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La casa sorgerà nell'Italia Centrale,
su un'altura che domina i dintorni,
è pensata quale chiostro moderno,
ove uomini di varia confessione
possano benevolmente incontrarsi
e ognuno per sé, senza lotta né disputa,
cercare nella tranquilla contemplazione
di riconquistare il proprio equilibrio,
la fede nelle proprie forze e nella vita.

Roberto Assagioli



The house will rise up in Central Italy,
on a height that reigns over its surroundings,
conceived as a modern cloister,
where people of diverse beliefs
may meet in good will,
and each one for themselves,
without struggle or dispute,
may seek in quiet contemplation
to regain balance and faith
in their own strength and in life.



This picture is what the view from this house might have been like.
See *The Stone of Villa Serena* by Isabelle Küng on page 52 of this issue —
about a memento of Roberto Assagioli's dream of such a house, which did in fact exist for a time.