

Roberto Assagioli: A Multifaceted Life¹
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Synthesizing Relationships with Others

Assagioli always carefully delineated his scientific work from his personal and spiritual life. According to Assagioli's niece, Donatella Ciapetti Assagioli, "esotericism formed his basis [for psychosynthesis], but he always separated his interests in esotericism from his scientific work, because he did not want to be misunderstood" (Giovetti, 1995, p. 103). He was also discrete concerning his personal life; for example, in *Freedom in Jail*, he writes about his reticence to publish his prison experiences (Assagioli, 2016). Susanne Nouvion, French socialist and founder of the French Institute of Psychosynthesis (*l'Institut Français de Psychosynthèse*), noted that Assagioli never wanted personal power, often repeating: "The personal 'I' must diminish, the Higher Self must grow" (Giovetti, 1995, p. 103).² Further evidence of his longing to dis-identify himself as a person from his psychological insights is noted in the fact that he chose not to attach his name to his vision. Unlike Freudian or Jungian psychology, the surname Assagioli remains distinctly separate from 'psychosynthesis.'

While Assagioli remained a private individual, he was, nevertheless, deeply devoted to establishing authentic relationships with others. Inter-personal synthesis is a process that begins with the harmonization and cooperation of the couple and family, then moving outward to include a synthesis of nationals, internationals, and all planetary life. According to Assagioli, synthesis of the couple is fundamental to achieving the psychosynthesis of humanity. He wrote: "When talking about the consciousness of a group, talk above all about the human couple: ... their synthesis, and about their central importance as a fundamental basis and model of inter-psychics at its most vast and complex" (Assagioli, n.d.e). He noted that a couple can take different forms, including: doctor-patient, teacher-pupil, master-disciple, author-reader, and coauthors of a work of art such as a book, music, or opera (Assagioli, n.d.d, n.d.f).

Assagioli stated that individuals should not "lose" themselves completely when in a couple, which he then extended to the process of inter-individual groups. He wrote we need to "resist the tendency to throw ourselves completely into the group, as it may be a form of evasion from individual responsibility to one's Soul" (Assagioli, n.d.a). Once again, we return to the triangle depicting the synthesis of polar opposites. This time, each individual in the couple is positioned at the polar points at the bottom of the triangle. Assagioli insisted that the mid-way point between two opposites is not static inside us, but is rather in "a state of continuous oscillation." This back and forth can create a lot of tension! Consequently, persons in relationship must learn to balance the principles of "distance" and "tension" between themselves and the other in order to maintain an equilibrium in the relationship. The goal is to achieve a synthesis of each separate individual into a third entity that holds "a higher unity endowed with the qualities which transcend those of either" (Assagioli, 2002, p. 101).

¹ Excerpt from *The Call of the Self*, edited by Dorothy Firman. Amherst Massachusetts: Synthesis Center Press, 2018, pp. 399-417.

² This quote actually derives from the Gospel of John 3:30 (NIV): "He must become greater; I must become less."

Assagioli's entire life was devoted to intra-personal psychosynthesis. As a good friend of the family, Luisa Lunelli knew the Assagiolis for many years, and wrote about them as a couple: "Their relationship was the best. They were different, but they complemented each other and communication between them was easy and continual. Indeed, you could see their understanding and love only increase every day" (Lunelli, 1991). They had one son, Francesco Ilario, who at the age of 15 became ill with pulmonary tuberculosis, which would cause his death 12 years later. During these years, Assagioli sought help from the best specialists in Italy and Switzerland along with the latest curative medicines and methods. At the same time, Assagioli encouraged Ilario to read the great works of philosophers, writers, and poets, "standing beside him with his affectionate presence, serene, available, helping him to quietly feel his love" (Giovetti, 1995, pp. 52-53). Throughout this great suffering, Assagioli helped his son to accept and spiritually prepare for his imminent death. A few days after his son's funeral, Assagioli said, "His eyes now see a more glorious Sun!" (Lunelli, 1991).

Assagioli had many devoted students whose testimonies verify his astute educational skills, profound humility, constant goodwill, and deep spirituality when forming relationships. Through his mere presence, he was able to convey deep personal and spiritual wisdom. Assagioli was a "gentle synthesizer who left things open" (Rosselli, 2012). As his niece, Donatella Ciapetti Assagioli, said:

He gave much and did not judge others. No matter what happened, he always remained serene... He taught his students without words, without imposing his ideas, only by personal example. He used humor to spread his important seeds... He was very wise and profoundly good. (Giovetti, 1995, p. 73)

Sergio Bartoli recounted one occasion when he adamantly defended Assagioli's writings before their psychology and psychoanalytic colleagues. The next day, Assagioli slipped "one of his famous notes" into Bartoli's pocket that said, "Correct your impulsiveness!" (Giovetti, 1995, p. 78). Another student, Andrea Bocconi, recalled an instance that particularly revealed Assagioli's character. Assagioli was leading a meditation when a knock came at the door and a tailor entered to ask what material Assagioli wanted his pajamas made of. Assagioli selected a sample, thanked the man who then left, and then, completely unperturbed, closed his eyes and returned to the meditation. Meanwhile, Bocconi had experienced the tailor's entrance as a frustrating interruption. "I never saw him angry or irritated," said Bocconi. "He was stable, very serene, ... free of his emotions... We knew when we were with him that we had an authentic and true gift!" (Giovetti, 1995, p. 96). It was Assagioli who suggested that Piero Ferrucci, one of his students, assistants, and co-workers, write about psychosynthesis, a process that would ultimately become fundamental to Ferrucci's life. He said, "Assagioli gave me a profound sense of love, joy, [and] will" (Giovetti, 1995, p. 87).

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