

**Psychosynthesis and Buddhism:
"OF THIS I AM UNABLE TO SPEAK ... for HERE LIES NOBODY"**

(Roberto Assagioli and Huston Smith)

***May the precious mind of enlightenment
Arise in those in whom it has not arisen.
Where it has arisen, may it not wane
But increase further and further.***

Traditional Chant

*My mother died September 10, 2007. My first teacher has gone from this relative level.
I can no longer kiss her face nor receive her hugs - the truth of impermanence.*

INTRODUCTION

Impermanence notwithstanding, on this third major, and determinedly final rewrite, I intend to compare and simplify Buddhism and Psychosynthesis without losing the essential meaning of either. I use the voice of first person to write this article since direct experience is basic to the study and practice of both psychosynthesis and Buddhism - there is no substitute. The Buddha challenged people by insisting, "Be ye lamps unto yourselves". And the same in the words of Assagioli, "It is a direct experience such as that of a colour, a sound or a feeling, ... joy or pain: for those who experience such things they are a psychological reality." Both paths hold a "gradual development", (Assagioli, 1991, p.23; p.285) view of the relative aspects of life while not disallowing "sudden realization" of the "Great Perfection", or the absolute nature of existence. I am uncomfortably aware that writing about these two great systems in one article is the height of arrogance but having been asked, I am joyfully challenged to persevere.

I am assuming here that the majority of the readers of this article are those familiar with psychosynthesis theory and practice so I will not elaborate on psychosynthesis principles, but will use as a guiding reference point the Assagioli paper on, "Training" (1974), in which he states that the *sine qua non* of psychosynthesis training includes seven core concepts: 1) Disidentification; 2) (The) personal self; 3) (The) will; 4) (The) ideal model; 5) Synthesis; 6) (The) superconscious; 7) (The) (transpersonal) Self. (The parentheses are my own to call attention to the danger of conceptual reification). If you have not yet read, please do read the excellent recent article by Firman & Gila (2007) titled, "Assagioli's Seven Core Concepts for Psychosynthesis Training". The order of presentation of these concepts will follow what I directly experienced in my life.

I will also refer to the developmental pattern clearly articulated by Roberto Assagioli as, "discovery of will", and show a parallel in Shambhala Buddhism. This developmental view also seems to correspond with the "Ideal Model" of a "gradual" developmental view of buddhists paths, found in the three "yanas", or "ways": First Turning (Hinayana), Second Turning (Mahayana) and Third Turning (Vajrayana). It is not that the hinayana, the "narrow path" is seen to be lower than the mahayana, the "broad path", rather the hinayana becomes the foundation for the mahayana and the vajrayana, the indestructible way

I also introduce the Shambhala organizing principle of ground, path, and fruition: Ground provides the basis; path is that which describes the actions, inner and outer; and fruition is the result; or the beginning, the middle and the end.

GROUND

Growing up, like any other life, there were moments of awe, magic, and tears, but most of it was about learning what was going on, waking-up to the relative world. I was being reared by secular humanists in the intellectual atmosphere of college campuses, general semantics conferences, and on-going discussions about words, life, politics, art, and perception. This was our life and this was what seemed real to me. My mother frequently stated, "The only rule we have around here is the Golden Rule", (which they usually followed). My parents were actively working for equality and relief of suffering through the civil rights movement in the south, in spite of death threats.

"...we need to know the true nature, meaning, and function of suffering. We need to discover the best attitude to adopt towards it. Above all we need to learn how to transform it and make it into a source of spiritual blessing." (Assagioli, 1991, p.173)

"Whether these views, (eternalism, etc.) or their opposites are held, there is still rebirth, there is old age, there is death, and lamentation, suffering, sorrow, and despair... I have not spoken to these views because they do not conduce to absence of passion, tranquility, and Nirvana. And what have I explained? Suffering, have I explained, the cause of suffering, the destruction of suffering have I explained. For this is useful." (The Buddha, as quoted in Smith, 1986, p.143)

The ground of psychosynthesis arose with Roberto Marco Grego who was born in Venice on February 27th, 1888, to a well-to-do Jewish family. Two years later his father suddenly died and Roberto became so ill he was hospitalized. During this time, his mother met Dr. Emanuele Assagioli whom she married in 1891. Early in his tender young life, he experienced grief and loss, but he continued to thrive and enrolled in medical school in Florence in 1904 at the age of 16. During these studious, youthful years he met with Florentine intellectuals and contributed his writings to various journals. He was in correspondence with Sigmund Freud and others who were engaged in the study of psychology and psychiatry. By 1909 the essentials of psychosynthesis were conceived as evidenced in his writing. He became one of the most active supporters of psychoanalysis. By 1912, Freud contributed to Assagioli's own journal, "Psiche".

World War I found Assagioli serving as a lieutenant-doctor in 1917. Subsequently, he married Nella Ciapetti, in 1922, and they gave birth to his son, Ilario in 1923. He had friendships with others who shared his interests in medicine, psychiatry, psychology and spirituality, such as Tagore, Alice Bailey, Jung, and Keyserling. By 1926 he had founded the Istituto di Cultura e Terapia Psichica subsequently renamed in 1933, the Istituto di Psicointesi.

He visited America to speak in 1934 and in 1937, but, returning home to Italy, was jailed in 1940 for his pacifist activities. His son died a premature death in 1951 following the trials of escape from Nazi persecution, but again Assagioli persevered to form the Italian Union for Progressive Judaism with Martin Buber in the early fifties. By 1957, the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation was founded in the U.S.A. This Jewish mystic who studied the Kabbalah and other mystical traditions continued to aspire to find scientific methods of helping guide people on the path to transform suffering and to awaken to the larger realities of such spiritual qualities of gratitude, silence, humor, and joy. He peacefully died in 1974 at his home in the Italian countryside.

During the sixties, Assagioli often collaborated with Abraham Maslow, and thus, "participated in two great revolutions in psychology: first psychoanalysis, and later humanistic and transpersonal psychology." He was one-pointed, and intentional in his work and remained in dialogue with others of similar pilgrimage such as Lama Govinda. He continued to study spiritual awakening and how to make that possibility a practical reality. "What Aurobindo called yoga, what Abe Maslow called self-actualization, what Fritz Perls called organismic integrity, Assagioli called psychosynthesis. All these share basically the same idea – that there is a natural tendency

toward evolution, toward unfoldment, that pervades the universe as well as the human sphere, and that our job now is to get behind that and make it conscious. " (Ferrucci et al, 1988, p.44-45)

Buddhism arose in India about 2,500 years ago in response to the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. This young prince was born to a life of wealth and a luxurious, protected upbringing. In his twenties, he glimpsed passing sights of people who were old, diseased, and dead. Then he saw a wandering monk and learned about the possibility of withdrawal from the world. In order to find a way to overcome these horrible sufferings, he decided to leave his palace to study *raja* yoga with two Hindu masters, and then joined a band of ascetics to master his body. In the final phase of his search, he used the "middle way" to combine "rigorous thought and mystic concentration" (Smith, 1986, p.126) as he sat under the bodhi tree to attain the Great Awakening.

At first he refused to try to teach the profundity of his understanding believing it to be beyond his ability, "How could one show "what can only be found, teach what can only be learned?" Then he eventually realized there were some who would understand so for nearly a half century he taught unflaggingly. "... his public hours were long, but three times a day he withdrew that through meditation he might restore his center of gravity to its sacred inner pivot." At the age of 80 in 480 BC, he died of accidental food poisoning. (Smith, 1986, p.128-129)

To discuss the study of Buddhism involves first recognizing that there are as many different streams of Buddhist understanding and practice as there are in Christianity. What makes Buddhism unique, shared by the different streams of Buddhism, is an acceptance of the Four Seals: All compounded things are impermanent; All emotions are pain; All things have no inherent existence; and Nirvana is beyond concepts. This way of stating these concepts is deliberately provocative. For a humorous, readable commentary on the Four Seals, I refer you to the book, What Makes You not a Buddhist, by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, (2007). But, be warned, reading it may lead you to another deeper/higher understanding of buddhism.

Additionally, common to all the streams of buddhism, is the act, formal or not, of "taking refuge", focusing ones mind on the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This simply means directing one's trust, attention, and practice to the example set by the teacher, the buddha; hearing, contemplating, and meditating on the teachings, the dharma; and being open to the guidance offered by other companions walking the path, the sangha. When I speak of the teachings, I will be primarily referencing Shambhala Buddhism, which is a Tibetan Buddhist vajrayana tradition related to the Ri-me school, the path I have been practicing and studying since 1985. From this point, I will simply refer to the vajrayana view and practice as Shambhala, a socially active path concerned with helping to create enlightened society. (Yoemans, 1992)

The concerns of the Ri-me (pronounced, ree'-may) school is primarily concerned with what spiritual implications exist for individuals. This view is non-denominational and containing, "sensibilities of mutual appreciation, commitment to contemplative practice, and respect for differences." (Kyabgon, in Ed. Midal, 2005, p.171) More simply, in the words of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of Shambhala Buddhism in America, "We are talking in terms of needing to develop a personal connection with one's body and one's mind." (Simmer-Brown in Ed. Midal, 2005, p.79)

Here we find clear similarities of Shambhala and psychosynthesis. Fundamentally, the emphasis of both is on the mind-body connection, spiritual awakening, and embodying the teachings in everyday life. Early in Assagioli's career, "...the bio-psychospiritual reality of (humans) came to him (Assagioli) in its entirety", and he later stated, "The proper name of psychosynthesis should really be 'biopsychosynthesis'." Assagioli describes the importance of two aspects of psychical process or moments which are inseparable and yet distinct; first, consciousness and understanding, and second, the application of these two. (Assagioli, 1991) Similarly, Shambhala describes this view as Basic Goodness, and the action as "joining heaven and earth": the limitless, luminous possibilities of heaven, (consciousness and understanding), accommodate

and inspire, (joining), the limiting, penetrating practicalities of earth, (application). In this way, we may embody the teachings in everyday life. (Trungpa, 1985)

PATH

Life got serious when I got married because I was marrying for love against my parents wishes, thinking I knew better than they did what I really needed, and because I took my wedding vow to heart, "for better or for worse till death do us part." In 1965, the year we married, life started to get very hard. My husband was emotionally and physically abusive and I responded with fear and anger. I began to learn more about suffering, all the time thinking that I could change things to be more positive if only I could really learn how to love, (but secretly wishing him dead): Identification and the truth of suffering – concepts and words I didn't know at the time. I had no awareness of will, personal or transpersonal, but was determined to, "stay with it". The pain of this time led me to begin a search for a way out of being completely stuck, identified, and immersed.

Personal self or "I"

"The field of consciousness...is used to designate that part of our personality of which we are directly aware...(but) the "I" of conscious self, the point of pure self-awareness is...quite different from it...(different from) the changing contents of our consciousness...and can be compared to that existing between the white lighted area on a screen and the various pictures which are projected upon it." (Assagioli, 2000,p.16)

Assagioli saw "I" as, "the most elementary and distinctive part of our being – in other words, its core", distinct but not separate from any contents of experience or elements of personality, which "can act as a unifying center, directing those elements and bringing them into unity of organic wholeness" (Ferrucci, 1982, p.61) "He conceived "I" or personal self as awareness, and intentionality, or will." (Brown, 2004,p.14) This pure space of "I" is easily confused with various subpersonality identifications so we begin by first recognizing the differences between our "survival personalities" and various expressions of "I"- energy. (Firman & Gila, 2002)

Similarly, in Shambhala, the understanding of "I" is of prime importance and is related to two overall organizing principles arising from the basic ground, distinct but not separate, the feminine space of awareness, and the dynamic, active masculine principle expressing form and luminosity. In essence, "I" is understood to be the same as the basic ground of being. Most of us, however, do not recognize who we are in essence so, in the early stages of training, the conventional use of "I" references identification with "ego", (or subpersonalities).

Basically, it is our confusion about the true meaning of "I" which is the root cause of our suffering. Since we don't recognize our conditioning and various "ego" identifications we cling to this notion of "I" as something we need to protect, giving rise to defenses since we do not yet understand the indestructible nature of our true essence.

The Buddha presented the first turning of the wheel of dharma at Deer Park, and the content was the four noble truths, karma, and selflessness of the person. The first noble truth is all ordinary existence is suffering; second, this suffering results from our own karma, and this karma is created through the defilement of our own mind which comes from our clinging to a belief in a truly existent, permanent individual self or ego; third, it is possible to free ourselves from suffering; and fourth, he described the way beyond suffering by attaining nirvana which requires practicing the path, counteracting the clinging to ego or self through the Noble Eight-fold path.

With the second noble truth, the cause of suffering, the Buddha taught that our suffering relates to our unwillingness to accept the truth of impermanence and it originates in our false belief in a truly existent, separate, permanent self, or ego with all the conditioning learned by that individual. Why is suffering the nature of existence? Everything that exists or can be experienced on the level of

relative reality is composite in nature and is therefore impermanent and subject to birth and death. This is a reality which, through our ego-clinging, we continually resist or deny. This fixation is the basis for the arising of the mental afflictions or destructive emotions, the three root poisons, passion, aggression, and ignorance. These poisons result from ego-clinging and result in all of our suffering.

In the view of Shambhala, these various identifications, all of which we call "I", are constructed and conditioned to have certain sets of thoughts, feelings, and actions. If we continue through life grasping after whatever we think will relieve our pain, that grasping only accelerates the speed with which we are searching for material acquisitions and psychological comforts, identifying with this or that aspect of our ego, or in psychosynthesis terms, identifying with this or that subpersonality. Through the practice of sitting meditation, the solidity of ego gradually begins to become more transparently unreal.

Psychosynthesis views the "I" to be a reflection of the Self, whether Transpersonal or Universal. In Shambhala, "I" eventually is viewed as being That, ultimate Ground of Being, empty and luminous, deluded through natural processes and conditioning into thinking of "myself" as a separate self. It is therefore important to discriminate levels of reality so that absolute and relative levels of reality are recognized as distinct but not separate and are increasingly experienced simultaneously. Source of (my) being is not different in essence than "I". It appears that the view of psychosynthesis practitioners is evolving to receive Assagioli's recognition that there are not two selves but only one: "The Self is one". How long have we psychosynthesists been drawing the big "S" all the way through the egg diagram and beyond?

So it was courage, loyalty, the devotion of wanting to honor my vow, pride, and fear that conspired to keep me married through the birth of our first child in 1970. We lived in a neighborhood of young parents and I became friends with some Christian mothers who were learning to honor their husbands and be good mothers. I wanted more than anything to be a good wife and a good mother, but was sure I had not even a grain of faith, so my inner search began in earnest. I was being "led" in the direction of Love by the love I saw in my neighbors. Unwittingly and unintentionally, I had created an ideal model peopled by my Christian neighbors who personified love and faith in action. I knew that I wanted to be more like them in my mothering and in my "wifeliness", but deep down I believed I was not as good or worthy as they.

Ideal Model

"The intermediate stages imply new identifications. The men and women who cannot picture their true Self in its pure essence can create a picture and an ideal of perfected personality ... for others, that of the good father or mother."

"A genuine "ideal model" has a dynamic creative power; it facilitates the task by eliminating uncertainties and mistakes; it concentrates the energies and utilizes the great and suggestive power of images." (Assagioli, 2000, p.22-23)

Psychosynthesis practitioners can help people who come to them through a search for ideal models that already exist within the individual. These models can be articulated to help guide both parties through 'creating an idea and then deciding an ideal of a plan of action, to formulate the 'inner program' for creating ideal models of who we can *become*. Ideal models or images can be divided into two groups: first, images representing harmonious development or spiritual perfection; and second, models representing specialized efficiency. Once ideals are created, they can be vivified through utilization of available energies, through development of the personality, and the creation of a firm reorganization of the personality through coordination and subordination of the various energies and functions. (Assaioli, 2000,p.23-25)

In Shambhala, the fundamental ideal model is the Buddha, the human representative of attainable spiritual perfection. Ideal models, as recognized by the lineage, are given and received,

not spontaneously manifested through the imagination as they are in psychosynthesis. At first though, the preceptor, or meditation instructor represents a living model of the practitioner of Shambhala through modeling and giving oral instructions as to the way of practice.

Later along the path, various ideal models, representing specialized functions are given through visualization practices, mantras, and a variety of other practices that utilize the involvement of body, speech and mind. The qualities that we seek to cultivate and nurture are contained within the image or visualization, the sound or *mantra*, and the movement, or *mudra*. These qualities are not seen to be developed per se but disclosed, or uncovered, and are given to help form new habit patterns.

The most basic ideal model as taught by the Buddha is that we are each already a Buddha and it is only through sudden or causal factors that obscurations occur which cause us to lose sight of our authentic being. So even though the methods that are taught are uniform, the results allow the emergence of the most unique individuality possible for each person. "This is because we can experience the universal only as an individual. Individuality is therefore as important as universality."(Govinda, 1991, p.163) (Yoemans, 1992)

My life was consumed with taking care of my children and with introspection. In desperation and encouraged by my friends, I stepped through the door to the world of possibilities again. I began to hope - hope that there was another way for life to open, if only I could find the key. The Third Noble Truth, there is a way to move beyond suffering, was dawning. In spite of my doubtful, questioning, skeptical mind, I began to experience synchronicities, (or in Shambhala, "auspicious coincidence"). I had no idea about the existence of Psychosynthesis or Shambhala, but "The Hound of Heaven" was hot on my trail.

Higher Unconscious or Superconscious

"The superconscious, or higher unconscious, as described by Assagioli, is the realm of our unconscious that holds our intuitions and inspirations before they dawn in consciousness. It is the source of feelings, motives, and ideas that move us toward harmony, cooperation, beauty, and service." (Brown, 2004, p. 136)

"Often these are spontaneous, unexpected occurrences, but sometimes they may come in response to an appeal or an earnest wish for an answer ..." (Assagioli, 1991, p.24)

As described by Assagioli, (2000), Brown, (2004), and Firman & Gila, (2007) these motivations and inspirations arise from the Higher Unconscious where they may have been repressed, "repression of the sublime". Then we begin to make conscious contact with aspects of ourselves that have lain dormant. (Firman/Gila, 2007 p. 28) These new awakenings may require changes throughout the daily life and these energies may begin to alter ways of understanding and thinking that may have been established patterns for much of life. "If superconscious experiences are a fact, they must of course lend themselves to scientific inquiry, as do all other types of facts." (Assagioli, 1991, p.24).

The teachings of Shambhala likewise carry the message of wholeness. The view is that even emotions and actions that create suffering for self and others have within them the seed of wisdom and the energy of compassion. The process of learning to slow down our minds and settle in a place of peace allows us to begin to open more fully and accept more responsibility for the ways that we participate in creating our lives. As our awareness opens to accommodate more insight, we have the opportunity to discriminate what we choose to bring more fully into our lives and that from which we choose to refrain and desist. Awareness begins to open to more consciousness of what had previously been held unconsciously.

Eight different levels of consciousness are identified through experience and defined by concepts, including the following: the five sense consciousnesses - the eye consciousness, and likewise,

the ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousnesses. The sixth is the mind consciousness. All of these six are concept-free, and become means by which we become more aware and expand consciousness.

The seventh consciousness, which has the nature of ignorance, cloudiness, confusion and runs right through the six sense consciousnesses, is known as the creator of duality, starting with "I" and "other". It has an absence of precision and is very blind." (Trungpa, 2005, p.95) It is this consciousness that adds the idea of "me" and "mine" onto our experience.

The eighth consciousness is known as the alaya, the storehouse consciousness where karmic seeds that have been created are stored, and is the unconscious ground of all the others seven. The seventh and eighth consciousnesses are what could be compared with what western psychology refers to as the unconscious. The different levels of consciousness are not considered to be "higher" or "lower" but distinct from each other.

In contrast to the eight consciousnesses, the all-pervading Basic Ground "does not depend on relative situations at all. It is natural being which just is. Energies appear out of this basic ground and those energies are the source of the development of relative situations... So the basic ground is the source of confusion and also the source of liberation." (Trungpa, 2001, p. 9-10)

In order to begin to discriminate these consciousnesses more precisely, the meditation practice is, "identifying yourself with sounds, touchable objects, feelings, breathing, and so on...so the whole idea is to relate to non-duality on a practical level". (Trungpa, 2005, p.98)

I began to be very disciplined with every aspect of my life, diet, exercise, speech, patience, and praying without knowing I was praying always to be able to learn how to love. Christianity was the mental and emotional model guiding me. I only wanted to be able to love and to know what was true. I continued through a clear decision to stay in the marriage and have another child in 1974. Every time I nursed my second child I continued to examine love and life. The Vietnam war was a horror on TV every day and my personal life was becoming utterly hopeless as every change I made was to no avail in improving the quality of my marriage. Will and purification became my practices without knowing those words and without a clue of where it might lead but I was recognizing a tiny sense of control/confidence within myself as the inner examination unfolded.

Will

"Let us realize thoroughly the full meaning and immense value of the discovery of the will. In whatever way it happens, either spontaneously or through conscious action, in a crisis or in the quiet of inner recollection, it constitutes a most important and decisive event in our lives." (Assagioli, 2002, p.9)

Will describes the dynamic aspect of our being, and is the most direct expression of the Self. "Transpersonal Will is, "the will to transcend personality limitations through union with someone or something greater and higher ... the union of will and love." (Assagioli, 2002, p.116) The drawing forward of will requires surrender to an increased process of growth. There is a higher, deeper, wider organizing principle that Assagioli calls the (Higher) Self. The active element, Will, magnetizes the personality to new and more integrated ways of being/becoming.

In Shambhala, working with will is described as ""discipline" and "renunciation". The teachings on karma, (the natural relationship of cause and effect; mental actions which lead to bodily action), instruct students to diligently practice ethical conduct and renunciation through the precepts, (moral and behavioral guidelines for living, especially rigorous for the monastic life).

We begin to recognize how mental actions lead to bodily action and how acting out of ego can easily create harm, so precise attention to our motivations is paramount. "This (karma) is as certain as the fact of planting the seed of a chili will lead to the result of a chili plant". Thus, here

is a further similarity with psychosynthesis, in that progress along the path requires the recognition of the necessity and importance of purification. Assagioli has given us the Psychological Laws as practical aids in working with this process.

In Shambhala, the beginning of the path starts with the hinayana which is small or narrow in the sense that the strict discipline of meditation narrows down, or tames, the speed and confusion of mind, allowing the mind to rest in its own place. We begin to realize that whatever we experience - whether good or bad, positive or negative - is workable, tamable. We begin by dealing with our own mind, first by recognizing how wild and out-of-control it is.

The first way to learn to manage our mind is through contemplating the Four Noble Truths. The four noble truths are causes and effect: the first two are the cause and effect of samsara (a state of existence characterized by suffering); and the second two are the cause and effect of nirvana, (enlightenment, where all delusion and mental affliction is overcome and the mind is unconditionally liberated).

Speaking of Nirvana, Assagioli states, "Here all desires, all personal yearnings are consumed, every attachment is severed and every fear dissolved. Thus released, the spirit acquires an acute, formidable power: it is capable of wuwei, action without action, which nothing can resist." (Assagioli, 2002, p.21) The suffering described by samsara is an all-pervasive feature of our experience because of our desire to resist or deny the existence of our pain.

Trungpa argues this resistance is not something we can eliminate through an act of will, and we only create more pain by trying to do so. We cannot eliminate pain nor have automatic happiness through its absence. The Buddha's teaching is that happiness is obtained through working with pain rather than trying to make it go away. The truth is the sadness of life never goes, and our attitude towards pain and sadness largely determine whether we will predominantly have a happier life or an unhappy one. (Kyabgon, 2005, p.171)

A review of the qualities of will as defined by Assagioli include energy, discipline, concentration, and patience, among other similar qualities. These sound much like the development of what in Shambhala is called the *Six Paramitas*. These are qualities that we aspire to cultivate in order to be of greater service to others. These paramitas include generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditative concentration, and transcendental knowledge, or wisdom. It is through practice and meditation that we gain the wisdom to see reality clearly and choose to surrender our struggle.

Meditative concentration allows us to see thoughts as they begin to emerge, exist, and decay. It is easy to see that the house we build will eventually decay, but this is true at a more subtle level and we can find the same truth. If we look closely, we see the impermanence inherent in continuity itself. Each moment arises, abides, and ceases. When we see the momentary nature of all of our experience, we see how much we are rendered helpless in matters of choice. We have no choice but to let go of each moment, so learning to consider the "domain of choice" becomes important in determining what we can change and what we cannot change.

In Shambhala, choice is always available, even in situations that are choiceless. The recognition of choice and choicelessness is seen to be a function of wisdom, or a discriminating intelligence that is able to perceive limitations and possibilities

There was a very clear point where I realized that I had a choice to believe in God or not. After taking logic to the limits of which I was capable, I recognized that the logical next step to determining what was true about the universe, God or not, required a leap of faith. It was happily evident that with God in life there was meaning and without God there was nothing but despair. ("But just because I can believe in God, that doesn't mean I have to believe in Jesus!") I realized my inherent freedom to choose, (I have a will), and with that act of will I decided to choose God and to trust Him with my life and the lives of my children. Now there was an empathetic, loving,

powerful, wise Being to guide me. I had opened to an aspect of my being that I had only seen "out there" in other people, rediscovering imagery, the realm of imagination, the power of prayer, the truth of love, and in short, opening to that part of me so long forgotten. .

Disidentification

"We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we disidentify ourselves." (Assagioli, 2000, p.19)

"In this principle lies the secret of our enslavement or of our liberty. Every time we "identify" ourselves with a weakness, a fault, or a any personal emotion or drive, we limit and paralyze our selves. ... our vigilant self ... can objectively and critically survey those impulses ... and is never really conquered." With the ability to step back, objectify, critically analyze, and discriminate, we are learning how to disidentify, and how to redirect our energy into "constructive channels." (Assagioli, 2000, p.20)

Learning to use this process, we move our awareness from "limited patterns of feeling thought and behavior" (Brown, 2004, p.15), and then to move to a multi-perspective, contentless, open space of awareness. Mindfully and intentionally moving awareness from one state of identification (subpersonality) to another state of identification and/or then to that contentless state of disidentification, (which may or may not be peaceful), increases the sense of freedom and the ability to make choices about our actions. Learning disidentification is also learning how to "center" in "I", in contrast with subpersonality identification.

The notion of learning how to be "centered" does create a reference point for "introspective gravity" to rest. It is a useful construct especially in the "strengthening" of "I", and in helping to create a frame of reference for awareness to stabilize. Through this practice, the field of consciousness expands and the experience of "having will" grows stronger.

Learning to take this position of the Witness is a natural process, "when individual(s) realize that mind and body can be perceived objectively, (they) spontaneously realize that they cannot constitute a real subjective self. This ... state of Witnessing is the foundation of all beginning Buddhist practice (mindfulness) [and] of Psychosynthesis (disidentification...)" (Wilber, 1993)

In psychosynthesis, we begin to work more directly with these fixations through learning the process of disidentification, and beginning to make the distinctions between various states of ego-fixation, or subpersonalities. We also begin to experience and discriminate being "centered", that contentless aware state of being which stands above the multiplicity of its contents. We begin to recognize "I" as a point of reference which is "movable" in terms of content, but stable in terms of function. With this greater sense of choice we can direct our energy in the world with purpose.

In Shambhala, this process is taught, though not so directly, through presentation of the view of Basic Goodness and the practice of meditation. The basic meditation instruction is to simply recognize thoughts as they arise and to label them, "thinking", while not judging any thought as either "good" or "bad". Eventually, and ideally, we are able to rest our minds in that open space of awareness continuing to focus on the object of our meditation, and not being distracted by stray thoughts. The method is different, but the process is the same of learning how to move beyond suffering and limited perspective so we can actually be helpful in the world.

Shambhala trains in the reference point of awareness connecting with the body/breath. Although the Buddha taught the non-existence of a permanent, solid, separate self, with a little "s", so does psychosynthesis when it teaches about subpersonalities. Through teaching disidentification psychosynthesis is teaching about the five aggregates, "heaps", or *skandhas*, (form, feeling, perception, concept, and consciousness. ("I have a body, and I am more than just my body"; "I have feelings, and I am more than just my feelings", etc.) In both Shambhala and psychosynthesis, there is the process of being aware and "letting go".

If we begin to pay close attention, we realize neither our suffering nor our liberation is a random occurrence. We find we already have a basic nature of sanity within ourselves, and that we can direct the course of our actions toward the result we wish to obtain. This discovery can stop our struggle. "We begin to realize that there is a sane, awake quality within us. In fact this quality manifests itself only in the absence of struggle. So we discover the third noble truth, the truth of the goal that is non-striving. We need only drop the effort to secure and solidify ourselves and the awakened state is present." We must surrender. "We surrender to the raw, rugged, clumsy qualities of one's own ego, acknowledging them, and surrendering them as well... it is disappointing to realize that we have to give up our expectations rather than build on a the basis of our preconceptions." (Trungpa, p.173, in Ed. Midal, 2005)

With this surrender, the fourth noble truth, (the way to move towards the sanity in ourselves and the way beyond suffering), manifests and we become more and more willing to follow the noble eightfold path. The branches of this path consists in the perfecting of our training in the three areas of shila, (discipline), samadhi, (meditation), and prajna, (wisdom). There are many "skillful means" for training in these three areas. In a similar way, psychosynthesis teaches us about discipline primarily through learning to work with will; we learn about meditation through the practices Assagioli presented when teaching the various forms and uses of meditation and guided imagery; and we learn about wisdom through the direct experiences of our own "guidance" through many various ways such as dialogue, journaling, imagery, and symbols.

It was around this time that I had the most amazing experience of my life. In the words of Roberto, "Of this I am unable to speak ...". There is no way words can describe the experience, so beyond words, yet it is the most "real" experience of my life: the sudden vision and realization of the profound perfection, beauty, love, joy, and power that is "the universe, God, Self", and the undeniable fact of experience was/is I am not separate from That. The only word I could find at the time to try to describe the experience to myself was, "Grace", and it is still a word that opens my heart. This revelation turned my life and my beliefs around 180 degrees. This was not only a moment of a peak experience, though it was that, but rather a profound shift in perspective that completely altered my life.

Self (Transpersonal)

"...At times Self seems to approach awareness directly as if demanding to be recognized as the true center of the individual's life. The individual feels asked to make a significant change and nothing seems to suffice until he or she makes the change." (Brown, p.136)
"After the solemn, pivotal experience in which the soul is awakened, it truly begins a new life: it is now driven by an intense benevolence, feeling the need to come into complete harmony with the universal life and obeying in all things the divine will. The results of this long, hard work are of great value: a new and deeper enlightenment and greater revelations are the reward of the purified soul." (Assagioli, 2002, p.153)

Assagioli clarifies the meaning of Self when he says, "The real distinguishing factor between the little self and the higher Self is that the little self is acutely aware of itself as distinct separate individual ... In contrast, the sense of the spiritual Self is a sense of freedom, of expansion, of communication with other Selves and with reality, and there is a sense of Universality. It feels itself at the same time individual and universal." (Assagioli, 2000, p. 77) In the words of Yoemans, "Here the experience is one of "interbeing" with all beings, with all creation, so that through contact with the Self the unity of all Life, of which each being is a part, is realized." (Yoemans, 1992, p.11 - 12); (Wilber, 2007)

In Shambhala, the panoramic awareness that develops with insight meditation is related to the concept of *prajna*. Prajna, or intellect, is intuitive as well as intellectually precise. The training of these mental powers gives rise to two-fold egolessness, the recognition of the insubstantiality of

both what we call "self" and the phenomenal world. This leads to two distinct, yet paradoxically related, revelations: the recognition of our fundamental aloneness, and a tremendous feeling of connectedness with our fellow creatures and the world." Trungpa Rinpoche is emphatic in declaring that egolessness does not equate with nonexistence, but rather with a manner that is more spacious, "without solid reference points".

It is egolessness that lays the foundation for compassion. When the Buddha turned the wheel of dharma for the second time, on Vulture Peak Mountain, several of his monks were said to have died of heart attacks when they understood the implications of his teaching. It was here in this Second Turning that he presented the complete view of emptiness. Not only is the individual empty of inherent existence, but all phenomena as well, the totality of our experience, both subjective and objective, are empty of independent, truly existent being.

The emptiness teachings of the Second Turning is called the prajnaparamita because it refers to the complete realization of emptiness, as taught in the Heart Sutra, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is also form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness." In addition to teachings on emptiness, the Buddha also gave teachings on bodhichitta., or "awakened heart."

Giving rise to bodhichitta requires both a good heart and good intelligence. Our hearts generate the warmth to lead to compassionate action, but we need appreciative discrimination to determine which actions will be truly beneficial and which are actions that serve our own self-interests or misconstrue others needs. While bodhichitta is innate, it requires nurturing and training to fully materialize in our mind and actions. Developing bodhichitta is viewed as the key to the Mahayana path. We can likely spend the remainder of our lives in cultivating love and will to fulfill this highest aspiration of the bodhisattva. (Guenther & Kuwamura, 1975)

As we begin to practice these virtuous actions, we naturally begin to long, not only for our own salvation, and for all the world to be happy, peaceful, and free. The decision to work for this aspiration defines the entry into the Mahayana, or great way - training of love and will *par excellence!*

FRUITION

What followed that amazing experience was a temporary improvement in relationship with my husband, a major move from the city to the country, building our own home with our own hands, planting a garden, starting an independent architectural practice, giving birth again for the third and last time, and helping to found a local Montessori school. I had found Jesus to be my ideal model - a wise, compassionate inner teacher and counselor. Whenever possible I was reading anything I could find that seemed to have any relationship to understanding my inner transformative experience. Could indulging in wishful thinking produce such a profound vision and subsequent change? My independent study was completely concentrated on understanding, "What? was that!"

After several years of reading and practicing prayer I realized that I had a deep need to understand more about how to really discern, "What is the will of God for me, and how can I know that it is God's will and not my own?" Not long after this, when picking my children up from the Montessori School, I noticed their teacher holding a paperback book titled, "The Act of Will"! My eyes riveted, I asked her about it and, for the first time, heard about psychosynthesis! Finally, the word, "grounding", came into my life. The path of descent, the gradual developmental phase, began in earnest and it took a lot of hard work!

In 1981 I started Psychosynthesis Training with the Kentucky Center and by 1983 had returned to study psychology in graduate school for the purpose of eventually doing psychosynthesis

therapy and teaching. Additionally, inspired by learning about meditation in our Center and then taking Transcendental Meditation training, I knew meditation was something I wanted to learn more deeply, so in 1985, Shambhala arrived in my life. I had found a life path to deepen everything that psychosynthesis had led me to embrace – both systems became my companions on a lifelong path of love and will – a willingness to learn to be love and will.

Synthesis

Psychosynthesis “is first and foremost a dynamic, even a dramatic conception of our psychological life, which it portrays as a constant interplay and conflict between many different and contrasting forces and a unifying center that ever tends to control, harmonize and use them.” (Assagioli, 2000, p.26)

We begin with personal psychosynthesis, a natural process of growth leading to the integration of the personality around “I” – a center of awareness and will. Synthesis, a fundamental process of all of life, is a way of working with the tension and conflict of polarities. The resolution, often not so easy to obtain, is found in recognizing the polarities and learning to disidentify in order to take a larger and more compassionate, comprehensive view of both poles. Awareness of the value of each pole may automatically create a synthesis of the two, higher and more balanced.

The work of spiritual psychosynthesis is resolving the natural tension of dualism and working with the alignment of “I” and the personality with Self. The dynamic tension of the polarities of the personality and the larger reality forms a creative cauldron. “The chief quality is the experience of synthesis or the realization of individuality and universality.” (Assagioli, 2000, p. 77)

And what about this question of “being will”? Firman and Gila have beautifully described the discovery of will, “Just as “I” does not technically “develop”, but rather emerges, so will does not technically develop but instead emerges. As with “I”, it is more a matter of working with the identifications that obscure and limit will... and methods for developing will are in fact ways to develop qualities and habits that can aid the expression of will, rather than developing will per se.” (Firman & Gila, 2007, p.13) At that advanced stage, the discovery of will is *being* will.

The Buddha appears to have addressed this definitely in the discourses on the Third Turning of the wheel of dharma with his teachings on the ultimate nature of mind. He taught that the true nature of mind is not merely emptiness, rather, “our fundamental nature of mind is a luminous expanse of awareness that is beyond all concepts and is completely free from the movement of thoughts. It is the union of emptiness and clarity, of space and radiant awareness that is endowed with supreme and immeasurable qualities. From this basic nature everything arises and manifests”, (including our wisdom and our neuroses, (or confusion about our basic nature). Thus, the Buddha introduced the view of buddhanature, or the notion of *tathagatagarbha*. This “declares that the fundamental nature of mind is utterly pure and primordially in the state of buddhahood. It is the absolute buddha. It has never changed since beginningless time. Its essence is wisdom and compassion that is inconceivably profound and vast. *Tathagata* refers to one who has “gone beyond” the ordinary world to the state of perfect enlightenment. *Garbha* is sometimes translated as “womb” or “seed”. Thus, *tathagatagarbha* points to the enlightenment potential that is inherent within all sentient beings, whether they exist as humans, animals, gods, or even demons.” (Dzogchen Rinpoche, 2006)

This experience lies beyond the reaches of language. Poetry, implication, metaphor, and imagery are used to convey the insights of love, wisdom, and power that exist in a reality beyond the ordinary perceptions of this relative level of existence, and seek to proclaim the absolute level of truth. Shambhala gives great emphasis to the arts in recognition of the “beyond” of this level.

This potential is covered over by temporary obscurations, “sudden or causal”, in the same way the sun may be temporarily obscured by clouds. Instead we see what is perceptible to dualistic consciousness: a stream of sense perceptions, mental constructs, thoughts and emotions that arise and dissolve ceaselessly. It is the appearance of relative phenomena that obscure the direct

recognition of open, brilliant, dynamic reality. It is the radiance of this reality that has led Huston Smith to state the aspiration for his epithet, "Here lies nobody". (Smith, 2006)

At the third turning, the Buddha distinguished his various statements dividing them into statements with "indicative meaning", those statements that indicate the path to awakening without being a direct or definitive statement on the final nature of awakening. The indicative statements lead us in the right direction in a manner that is appropriate to our particular concerns at that time. In contrast, statements with "definitive meaning" pertain directly to the absolute truth and do not require interpretation. Included in this category are the teachings on two fold emptiness of self and the world, bodhichitta, the causes of final awakening, and buddhanature. (Dzogchen Rinpoche, 2006)

Remember, the Buddha taught to liberate beings from their sufferings, not to establish a theory or philosophical system. He didn't offer a single statement of truth but a progression of teachings appropriate to people's differing needs, capabilities, and places on the spiritual path. And always he enjoined his followers to not just take him at his word, but to put the teachings to the test of individual experience since that is the only real way we learn anything.

Similarly, when Assagioli states, "the self-awareness of the conscious 'I' is but a poor reflection of the enduring, immortal essence of the spiritual 'I', the Self", it is only through direct, personal experience that we can know this to be true". And only through this direct experience can we avoid the trap of becoming entangled in words and concepts. "It is here that one comes into contact with Mystery, with the supreme Reality. Of this I am unable to speak; it is outside the confines of science and psychology. However, psychosynthesis can help us to approach it and to reach the very threshold. And that is no small achievement." (Assagioli, 1991, p.31)

SUMMARY

So now, all these many years later, my heart is completely broken following the traumatic head injuries of my first son and subsequent divorce. Yet, struggling with the difficulty of various egoic interests, some of my greatest joy has come through teaching both these noble paths. The learning that comes through encountering internal and external obstacles continues to lead to humility: recognition of our complete insignificance in the larger picture and simultaneously the importance of our efforts to never give up on our willingness to take the mantle of responsibility that it is up to us to teach healing and peace, to ourselves and others, one and the same.

Similar, Different, and Inseparable

"Kindness and compassion are among the principal things that make our lives meaningful. They are a source of lasting happiness and joy. They are a foundation of a good heart. Through kindness, and thus through affection, honesty, truth, and justice toward everyone else, we assure our own benefit. This is a matter of common sense. Consideration for others is worthwhile because our happiness is inextricably bound up with the happiness of others." (H.H. The Dalai Lama, in Ferrucci, 2006, p. x)

After many years of study and practice in psychosynthesis and Shambhala, I find their view to be so similar that dissecting differences of view are largely philosophical. At the same time, they are completely compatible from a pragmatic perspective. Psychosynthesis offers many "skillful means" that have proven to be of immense value for long-time Shambhalian meditators, while the vast volume and more highly articulated teachings from Shambhala can enhance and illuminate psychosynthesists.

Both paths are empirical and phenomenological. (Assagioli, 2000, p.4) Direct personal experience is "the final test for truth", and both paths are scientific, "aimed at uncovering the cause and effect relationships that order existence." Both paths are pragmatic providing practical,

therapeutic, psychological methods starting from within, directed to individuals to recognize and access the higher, deeper parts of ourselves, identity, so that the process of growth happens according to “inner wisdom”. (Smith, 1986, p.146) This inner guidance is called Self in psychosynthesis, or the luminosity of buddhanature in Shambhala. Both have the view of variable identity, of no “fixed self”, that this “I”/self is contentless, and recognize that conditioned, habitual patterns, known as “subpersonalities” in psychosynthesis, and “cocoon” in Shambhala, can predominate in a random, unreflective life.

The goal of both is initially to create a stronger “observer”, or “I”, to become more awake, with more awareness and will. This allows a way of more intentional living through the practice of discipline. There is also the recognition of external unifying centers in Shambhala through the process of projection. Both ways recognize the vital importance of “view” so that instruction can lead to understanding, first theoretically but then and most importantly, experientially. Both ways rely on the practice of meditation, contemplation, and the development of wisdom through conscious cultivation of qualities for a multitude of various purposes including pursuits of science, beauty, and service. (Wilber, 2007)

The differences between the two systems are largely methodological, for example, imagery in psychosynthesis is spontaneous, not structured as in Buddhism, and there is not a systematic set of advanced practices in psychosynthesis. However, more importantly, there is a question about the possibility of a difference in view.

Shambhala teaches the truth of non-Self, (Self in this case viewed as a permanent, separate entity), and holds the non-dual view of the essence of the person as being of the same essence as that universal awareness of which we all partake to a greater or lesser degree. Assagioli does not articulate the deep understanding of “emptiness” which is a foundation of understanding in Shambhala.

It is not clear if Assagioli holds the more common Hindu perspective, more dualistic, of individual persons being a reflection of the great One, or if he holds a non-dual view common to both Vedanta Hinduism and Buddhism. In Assagioli’s words, “There are not really two selves, two independent and separate entities. The Self is one; it manifests in different degrees of awareness and self-realization...not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source.” (Assagioli, 2000, p.17) This view may also be related to the understanding of consciousness that is different in the two systems.

In psychosynthesis, there is an emphasis on creating a personality that can embody spirit, whereas the non-dual view of Shambhala is that we are fundamentally enlightened already and primarily need to discover the basic essence of who we really are. Additionally, Assagioli reiterated that psychosynthesis is not a spiritual discipline, but is a “scientific conception” without attempting to give an “explanation of the great Mystery – it leads to the door, but stops there.” (Assagioli, 2000, p.5)

Though both of these paths arise from traditional wisdom teachings they are vitally alive and changing to adapt to current conditions without losing their pith core. Most importantly is the profound and vast view of life they hold in common. “Without realizing the nature of mind correctly, we have no way to free ourselves from samsara. This is why the correct view is so important: to go beyond conceptual understanding to the direct realization of the absolute, awakened state.” (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 2006, p.103) “From this place there is no separation from other people, animals, plants, earth, but rather a total union that at the same time affirms and strengthens all the differences and the individual identity of a person, group, organization, culture, or nation.” (Yoemans, 1992, p. 12)

"Dedication of merit

***By this merit, may all obtain omniscience,
May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing,
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death.
From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.***

***By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east
May the lotus gardens of the Rigden's wisdom bloom,
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled,
May all beings enjoy profound, brilliant glory."***

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