

March 2019 Volume 7 Number 5

This Quarterly Theme: Awareness and Will

Contents

Assagioli's Experiments on Training the Will	4
Excerpt from <i>Thrive – The Healing of the Heart of Life</i>	10
A Normal Day	12
Practicing Presence	13
Slower Than Molasses	15
The Core of Psychosynthesis Coaching: Awareness and Will	17
Coping with Cancer through Imagery and Artistic Expression	19

The Psychosynthesis Quarterly is published by The Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis (AAP) four times a year in March, June, September and December.

The AAP provides resources for people to cultivate peace and purpose. Our mission is to advance the theory and practice of psychosynthesis to benefit individuals and society.

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The Psychosynthesis Quarterly accepts announcements, ideas, reviews of books and events, articles, poetry, art, exercises, photos, and letters. Tell us what has helped your life and work, what can help others, and examples of psychosynthesis theory in action.

Notice of events should be 1500 words or less, and articles should be 3000 words or less. We accept psychosynthesis-related advertising from members. Non-members who wish to run psychosynthesis-related advertising are requested to make a donation to AAP.

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Letter from the Guest Editor

Welcome to the March issue of the AAP Psychosynthesis Quarterly in which we explore the theme of Awareness and Will. It is an honor to be the first guest editor after Jan Kuniholm's distinguished 16-year service – an Editor's cap I couldn't don without some trepidation! Nevertheless, with the dedicated help of copyeditors Audrey McMorrow, Walter Polt, and Claire Semler along with the continual support of Marjorie Hope Gross, we have a very exciting issue for you revolving around this theme, one that readers like you voted for last year.

The issue begins at the beginning with Assagioli in his studio in Rome in 1929 performing will experiments on himself. We then jump to the 21st century and offer you Patricia Breen's guidance to help you reflect on your own will. After an interlude of poetry by Sheila Williams, we enjoy a beautiful photo essay on being present by guest writer Anna Citrino followed by one of her poems. Moving forward in time with regard to recent developments in psychosynthesis, Jon Schottland explores how psychosynthesis coaching seeks to encourage the personal self as a source of awareness and will. Finally, we end with a very exciting practical application of awareness and will by Jan Taal who introduces his Imaginary Toolbox along with specific case studies of its use with cancer patients.

This issue is dedicated to all those who have confronted a life-threatening disease.

Many thanks to all our contributors! Finally, I would like to offer you Assagioli's own definition of awareness and will:

At the center of the "I" there is an active element and a passive element, an agent or actor, and a spectator. Self-awareness implies that we act as observers or witnesses of what is happening inside or outside. In this sense, the "I" possesses no dynamics in itself, but is rather a point of observation, a spectator, and observer looking at the flow, the course of events; that is, the center of consciousness. Simultaneously, the will actively intervenes to orchestrate the various functions, forces, and energies of personality, to create commitment and to solicit action in the external world.¹

And now, please sit back and enjoy!

Catherine Ann Lombard
Umbria, Italy 2019



¹ As quoted by Petra Guggisberg Nocelli, in *The Way of Psychosynthesis* (Lugano, Switzerland, 2017), 172.

Appreciation for Jan Kuniholm's Service

Dear Jan,

Your contribution to the Steering Committee and the AAP, in terms of time, effort and heart, have been immeasurable. We are sad to be losing the input and ear we have depended on for the past sixteen years to turn to on a daily basis, but take heart in knowing that you are never far away should we need you, and of course - always in our hearts. Change is never easy, but it seems as if you've given this decision a lot of thought and are really paying attention to your Self and spirit. In the end, what better than to be guided by those? We wish you the very best in all your future ventures.

With love and appreciation, The Steering Committee and Steering Committees Emeritus

Letter from the AAP Steering Committee

In our new format for the *AAP Psychosynthesis Quarterly*, each issue will revolve around a theme and contain less content. We are also inviting guest editors (thank you Catherine Ann Lombard for editing this one!) to contribute their expertise and bring their own personal touch to each issue. Articles are a maximum of 3000 words. Promotional material, poems, photographs, personal and professional expressions are all welcome.

To optimize the submission process, our next editor, Didi Firman, has a few thoughts. The topic (voted on by our members) for the June issue is *Personal and Transpersonal (Experiences & Applications)*. Please send your materials to newsletter@aap-psychosynthesis.org by **April 15**.

Letter from Didi Firman, Guest Editor of the June Quarterly

I look forward to co-creating the next *AAP Psychosynthesis Quarterly* with those of you who contribute. Please consider this topic as pointing towards personal and transpersonal experiences of S(s)elf. For me, this theme points to experiencing Self at the kitchen sink, on the mountain top and in the dark night of the soul. Self, defined as contentless awareness and will. How and where do we know it? What supports us in accessing that experience? Who are we, most deeply?

I am particularly interested in sharing techniques and strategies (applications) that practicing psychosynthesists have come up with to support these experiences in themselves and their clients. Let's enhance the powerful techniques that have come to us through our years in psychosynthesis with those that we have created, learned or accidentally fallen into on our own. Both our articles and our applications will allow all of us to learn from each other.

Creativity opens doors in every aspect of our being. In fact, every transpersonal quality that we internalize does that. Smile. Feel love. Be kind. Honor your Self. So many more good bumper sticker reminders of the simple ways to be in deeper truth. What's yours? I invite you to send us your one-line, bumper-sticker response to the AAP and it will be enfolded into our next *Quarterly*.



Thank you. *Didi Firman*

Dorothy Firman, Ed.D., LMHC, BCC is the founder and director of the Synthesis Center and its 40 year-long training program. Her current work involves supporting the movement of psychosynthesis life coaching.

Assagioli's Experiments on Training the Will

Catherine Ann Lombard

Upon agreeing to be the guest editor of this *Quarterly* issue with its theme of Awareness and Will, I decided to search for inspiration in Assagioli's online archives. I was lucky enough to find two very interesting manuscripts. And luckier still, both of these were clearly dated, even though the tens of thousands of notes held in Florence rarely are. Rarer still are any manuscripts written before WWII, since most of Assagioli's documents were destroyed in two separate fires during this time.

In April and May of 1929, on two different occasions, Assagioli experimented with training the will. His brief observations of these experiments, which he conducted on himself, are rare insights into, not only his scientific method, but also his character. More than once, he writes about how while meditating on the word 'will' thoughts of "the stupidity of the task" would enter his awareness. With humor, he notes how he lacks "the slightest enthusiasm" for the 10-minute will exercise he has assigned himself, but nevertheless, confirms that he is determined "to carry out my resolution whether it leads to any useful result or not."

Regarding his methodology, first of all, these notes definitively show how Assagioli would practice psychosynthesis techniques on himself, something he stresses that all psychosynthesis guides do. We can also see that he clearly conducts the experiments as a disidentified Observer, using the terms "the mind," "the attention," "the personality" and "the performance" instead the first-person possessive pronoun of "my mind", "my attention," etc. For example, he laments how "the personality will not co-operate" but the next day notes how he "feels quite independent and refuses to be tyrannized by it." Lastly, we might wonder why Assagioli chose to have the notes typed (as opposed to handwritten) and in English (instead of Italian, German or French). Was this too part of his scientific methodology?

To place these unique notes in context, in 1929 Assagioli was 41 years old and living in Rome with his wife Nella Ciapetti and son Ilario, age

6. Only three years earlier he had founded *l'Istituto di Cultura e Terapia Psichica* (Institute of Psychic Culture and Therapy), which would eventually become the Institute of Psychosynthesis. (Of particular interest is the fact that the theme of the first conference ever held by the Institute was "How to educate the Will."¹) In addition, Assagioli's first publication in which he defined his concepts of psychosynthesis, *A New Method of Healing: Psychosynthesis*, had been published in English in 1927.

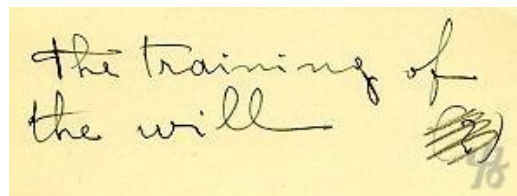
During this same time, Assagioli was active in esoteric studies. He frequented the Arcane School and was forming his relationship with Alice Bailey. In addition, he was the vice president of the Rome Group of the *Lega Teosofica Indipendente* (Independent Theosophical League). During 1928-1930, the activities of this theosophist group were becoming more concentrated in the home of the Assagiolis; they would often host conferences and celebrations such as Festival of the White Lotus (May 8) and the Festival of Wesak (which coincides with the full moon in May, roughly 21 April to 21 May).²

I find it interesting that these will experiments actually took place during the full moon of May. In his article about the Festival of Wesak (under the pseudonym of Considerator), Assagioli explains that because the Sun is in Taurus, it operates with particular intensity on Earth and "each of us receives this influx of intensity."³ Perhaps he was hoping to garner some of that energy while conducting these experiments.

Finally, it is also of interest that the same year Assagioli performed these experiments he wrote an article entitled "The Education of the Will," which was published (in Italian) in the magazine *Ultra*.⁴ In this article, Assagioli points out the dangers of man losing control of the technology he has formulated with his outer powers and the indispensable need for the development of his inner powers to ensure "the sanity and indeed the very survival of humanity." These words are precisely echoed in his "Introduction" to *The Act*

of Will, which he would write 45 years later and only after a near-death experience.⁵

And now, without further ado, I offer you the transcripts of Assagioli's "Experiments on the Will."⁶



Archivio Assagioli, Firenze © Istituto di Psicosintesi

8/4/1929. First Experiment

For several seconds I thought of nothing but the word 'will'. Then came the name of Mussolini to my mind (probably because I had been reading his autobiography). I dismissed it and tried to feel which part of my anatomy was connected with the 'will'; and I felt that it originated somewhere in the lower part of the brain (at the back of the head and extending along the spine as far as the shoulders). Then my mind turned to determination and I began to draw the distinction between the significance of the two words, when I realized that I was again wandering from my object. Then I tried to think of will as power – not as a dominating force so much as inherent energy which can be called into action when the need arises and laid aside when relaxation is possible.

Second Experiment. 9/4/1929.

I began again by thinking of the word 'will' but power persistently attached itself. Then several thoughts tried to intrude themselves – a mental

picture of Mussolini, the stupidity of the task, failure; I banished them all as they came then almost simultaneously with the suggestion of failure came the word 'achieve' to my mind. This led to the feeling of power; then the word persistence attached itself and I began to realize that without persistent effort much of the power is wasted, since it requires more energy to re-commence a thing if one lets go. Then came the thought that in order to use the will we must have desire for its direction; thus it forms the link between the thought and action. Then I asked myself what did I desire? Self-mastery. For what reason? To help the Masters through service to humanity. It was at this point that I saw the link between the desire (thought) and action.

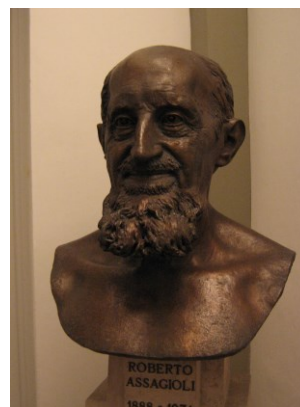
3rd Experiment. 10/4/1929.

It was more difficult to fix the mind this morning; there was a certain reluctance to commence at first but it quickly vanished when I remembered the previous results. The word persistence came promptly to my mind. Then I turned my thoughts again to the word 'will' and its many aspects as represented in resolution – steady – firm – unconquerable – impregnable – determination – perseverance – unflinching – strength – power – forte. I began to feel the power in these words, but there seemed something lacking. It did not represent to me a complete will. Finally I realized that love must be included not to diminish its power but to soften it.

4th Experiment. 11/4/29.

This was not successful. I got up feeling very tired and could not fix my attention in any direction. I began again with the words 'will power' which seemed meaningless; then came the word enthusiasm and I knew what was lacking. I tried to see the connection between strength and will and the various forms of will; to distinguish Divine Will from personal will, but these speculations led to nothing. I was too much aware of a tired brain.

Archivio Assagioli, Firenze © Istituto di Psicointesi



4th Experiment. 11/4/1929.

This was not successful. I got up feeling very tired and could not fix my attention in any direction.

I began again with the words 'will power' which seemed meaningless; then came the word enthusiasm and I knew what was lacking. I tried to see the connection between strength and will and the various forms of will; to distinguish Divine Will from personal will, but these speculations led to nothing. I was too much aware of a tired brain.

will was in harmony with the thought and the desire, thus one feels the full power of the will.

Then I told myself that everything can be achieved in the same way, without driving oneself.

I asked myself if I was that will, and I felt most emphatically that it was not actually me; only a part of me.

One thing has impressed me in these experiments and that is how quickly the time passes.

5th Experiment. 12/4/1929.

I tried a different method this time. It suddenly dawned on me that it is useless to try and understand the nature of will by thinking about it. One must 'feel' one's way to the heart of things. So I just stood still and felt that it was by [my] own will that I was doing it. Then I became aware of a sense of possession, of actual control. There was no emotion and there seemed to be nothing attached to it, therefore, will must be merely a power that can be applied or harnessed to any one part of our being.

1st May, 1929

Experiments on Will Training Contd.

For five minutes, I decided against my inclinations, to make the following exercise for 5 minutes each day for 10 days:

To stand relaxed and raise the arms sideways to the level of the shoulders in decided movements, repeating quietly 'I will do this.'

6th Experiment. 13/4/1929.

I proceeded as on the previous day by just realizing that I was standing in one place for 10 minutes; that it was "I" who willed it. It gave me a certain feeling of satisfaction especially when I realized how little effort it really entails. The

The task was irksome because I had no inclination for it. The previous task was pleasant since it suited my particular temperament to stand still and just contemplate the meaning of 'will'. As far as I know I gained no benefit from it. At first I commenced slow movements, but that seemed to be out of order with the purpose so I changed to firm and decided movements.

But I had the feeling all the same that it was stupid.

No.2 2/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I finished the exercise this morning with a sense of relief and a certain satisfaction of having kept to my resolution; but it was tedious and I began very reluctantly.

I still have the feeling that it is stupid and not worthwhile (the type of exercise is referred to).

My mind was not centered on the performance; the attention was interrupted by stupid thoughts, but at the end of the five minutes I was suddenly reminded of my meditation on 'filial dutifulness' and I at once saw a connection between the necessary obedience of the personality, (even in small things,) and that of the child in its relationship to parent, as well as in the higher sense – the relationship to God and the necessity of obedience to divine law.

No.3 3/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I began with less reluctance this morning and finished with greater satisfaction. I counted the movements to keep the mind from wandering, (I had forgotten the words that should accompany the exercise.) ending at 150; but I paused to look at the clock.

The tendency to consider some things a bore is becoming noticeably less.

No. 4 4/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

The exercise was accomplished this time very indifferently, owing partly to fatigue. Although I repeated the phrase 'I will do this' I did it more [or] less mechanically. Other thoughts kept interrupting. All the same I was conscious of a certain determination to carry out my resolution whether it leads to any useful result or not.

No. 5 5/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

The time passed quickly and did not seem tedious; but I find it much more difficult to fix the attention on the object of the exercise i.e. the use of the pure will, when movement is introduced. The former exercise was far more effective and pleasant.

But there is no weakening of the resolution.

No. 6 6/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I carried out the exercise this morning rather late and only because I am determined not to fail in my resolution. The results were nil as far as I can judge because I was too tired to think about it, and afterwards I slept heavily for over 2 hours.

No. 7 7/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I repeated the exercise this morning though still mentally tired. There is no weakening of the resolution though I cannot arouse much interest in it. I feel so strongly all the time I would rather be doing something more useful.

No. 8 8/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I repeated the exercise this morning with the same indifference. There is absolutely no cooperation on the part of the personality. It takes no interest whatever in the performance, but it does not actually object. However, I am determined to continue this experiment for a considerable time to see what will result.

No. 9 9/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I felt much more contented this morning with what I was doing, and an inner satisfaction of having carried out my resolution. But I find it much more difficult to concentrate my thoughts while carrying out physical movements.

Much of the value of the exercise is lost, I think, unless the mind is also concentrated on the task.

No. 10

10/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I felt no reluctance whatever this morning, perhaps because I knew subconsciously that it was the last performance of this particular exercise. However, I have decided to return to it later and endeavor to control the thoughts as well as the motion.

No. 11

11/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

This morning I changed the movement slightly – raising the arms forward, then above the head, from the head sideways to the level of the shoulders and then dropping to the normal position; - each movement accompanied by the same phrase ‘I will do this’.

The exercise was less tedious than the previous one, but I cannot pretend to the slightest enthusiasm over it. Nevertheless the resolution to carry on is so strong that I must, perforce, obey! I am usually rewarded by a pleasant feeling of satisfaction, which continues through the day generally.

No. 12

12/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

The exercise was carried out with more spirit and interest this morning. But stupid thoughts insisted on interrupting. – I am still of the opinion that more rapid results might be achieved in some cases by pure contemplation.

No. 13

13/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

The personality will not co-operate. I was a little late in rising and it nearly caused me to forget my task; - and betrayed a decided irritation when it was remembered.

Concentration is almost impossible in these circumstances, but I mean to carry on.

No. 14

14/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I felt rather bored by the exercise this morning and performed the whole thing in a very perfunctory manner.

The personality is trying many subtle ways of dissuading me of pursuing this experiment, but I feel quite independent and refused to be tyrannized by it.

No. 15

15/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I went through the exercise this morning as a matter of course, without feeling or any special interest in it. Deep in the subconscious persists the feeling that this method (for myself) is a waste of time. I find it still difficult to concentrate on the task. The attitude of rebellion has passed, but I ‘sense’ that the personality is only waiting its opportunity.

No. 16

16/5/29.

Exercise on Will Training.

I carried out the exercise this morning with the same disinterestedness, though with better success at concentration. Do what I will, I cannot arouse any more enthusiasm for this method, but I have no intention of giving up the resolution of developing the will.

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Firenze from the Campanile by Catherine Ann Lombard

Catherine Ann Lombard, MA, is a psychosynthesis psychologist, practitioner, and researcher. She received her MA in Psychosynthesis Psychology from the Institute of Psychosynthesis, London, affiliated with Middlesex University, London. She has had numerous scientific articles published on psychosynthesis. She and her husband offer journeys to poetic places in Italy, see poeticplaces.org. You can follow her bimonthly blog at LoveAndWill.com.

Excerpt from Thrive – the Healing of the Heart of Life

Patricia Breen

Introduction

This reflection on awareness and will is an excerpt from a much bigger project, a lifebook called *Thrive – Healing the Heart of Life*. Over a period of years, I became aware of a common request in both my group and individual client work. As we worked with the concepts of presence and pause, I heard over and over, “I wish someone would reach into my week and remind me.” So, I did. I wrote short weekly summaries, little reminders, and added brief exercises to help my clients create space for their inner worlds for a year.

The collection came together as a body of work greater than I could have imagined. We continually returned to answer the questions: “How may we live our days filled with more life-affirming personal presence?” and “How do we create an ease-filled connection with our own hearts?” And in doing so, we created a kind of holding, a form of sanctuary in which we were *welcome, valued, safe and loved* in both our inner worlds and outer lives.

This exploration of awareness and will is drawn from the idea of being “valued” which focuses on our relationship to ourselves, how we know and speak to ourselves and navigate our inner life. We live in a time when it seems as though the purpose of life is to “get it right”, as though we can, and must, grow into the perfect rose or ancient redwood. We live as if our efforts and movements, the very act of doing, is the source of our growth, our purpose, our happiness. But the source of what makes the plant or the human spirit thrive and grow lies in the roots, in the dark below the surface. There is a pure source of power and energy that creates life. As we listen, it expands and strengthens and effortlessly emerges into the light...our awareness.

As you read, think of the words and this moment as a sacred space and time, just for you. Allow

yourself to breathe and pause and know the essence of your life for just a moment.

Awareness and Will (Excerpt from *Thrive – Healing the Heart of Life*)

In actuality, the tools we have to direct and create our lives exist on a simple and limited foundation. There is what we recognize and take in from the world around us (Awareness) and what actions we take based on what we know (Will).

Awareness

We are continually bombarded by an accelerating source of information and images, but information is not awareness; without translation and filtering, it doesn’t become knowledge or wisdom. It is possible to seemingly be awake to everything but aware of nothing. I have noticed that those who have grown-up “online” have a kind of precocious freedom, a dervish of movement and fleeting connection that, at moments, I envy. But as we grow older and take on the responsibilities of an adult life, will we be able to translate through the constant movement to create the anchors and intimate connections we need to mature, translate information into meaningful direction and lead the way? As I look around today, I already wonder, “Where are the elders?”

Awareness allows and demands that we take time for our thoughts, feelings, and intuitions to mature and for the less accessible, less used, parts of ourselves to have time to speak.

What are some of the ways you listen, with and without technology, to the world around you?

What is trying to get your attention?

Will

When we hear the word “will,” most of us imagine the need for almost inhuman strength. . . the runner breaking the tape to win the race, the adrenal-driven executive working non-stop, the Herculean effort of the mother attempting to feed her children. But it is simpler than that; will is what animates us and helps us to focus the action of our lives. At its best, it is strong, skilled, and good.

Strong

Our will can be strengthened simply by using it. Each time we hear an internal cue (awareness), choose to follow it and then act, we are stronger. Each time. When we bully ourselves to be more than we are, we will often become defeated and quit - if we fail to do fifty sit-ups, we don't do one; if we don't lose twenty pounds, we stop feeding and nourishing ourselves; if we do not believe we can do something well, we do not try and learn. Pushing ourselves to act without regard for our purpose and needs is brute strength, but it does not form the resilient foundation of “muscle” we need to live freely over time. Each simple act we choose to take strengthens our mind, body and spirit, and is enough.

What are three simple things you do or will do to exercise and strengthen your will?

How do you bully yourself? What change can you make today to treat yourself with more kindness?

Skilled

More, longer, harder isn't always better. We seem to believe that if we keep moving, everything will somehow work out. That if we keep driving when we are lost, we will miraculously find our way to our destination. As we travel through our lives, we leave behind so many wonderful maps that will make the journey easier. . . our natural intuition, creative imagination, and the lushness of our senses. Let's stop for just a moment and ask ourselves: Do we have the knowledge and tools we need to act and find our way?

What skills may you build to enhance your life right now?

Good

Good will is interesting. It only exists if goodness is the choice we make through which to filter the world. It requires us to develop and exercise our “awareness” to include the words of the heart. It is in this quest, this ripening that we find wisdom. It is in this complex and inclusive process that we come to know “goodwill.”

What is your honest interest in developing good will? What does your heart say?

Final Thoughts

What of “will” when we cannot seem to move? We have lived through periods when we have had a fairly clear understanding of what the “right step” to take would be, and then something shuts us down. Our body grips and shrinks or our energy leaks away as though a force demands “do not move.” Sometimes the story isn't finished or the moment isn't right for us to act and we must let this internal experience lead the way. In a society where analysis and

action are prized, sometimes it takes great strength and skill to do nothing.

These are a few ideas that have brought me, and the people I serve, peace. I offer them to you. Our wholeness lives and grows in the relationship we have with our Self, when our words and thoughts hold our inner world in a warm embrace. Take a moment to remember this valued embrace...there you will thrive.

And remember. . .

You are *welcome*. . .

You are *valued*. . .

You are *safe*. . .

You are *loved*. . .

... *always*.



Patricia Breen is a consultant, coach, teacher and author with a rare combination of proven success as a business consultant, combined with in-depth expertise in transformational processes, transpersonal psychology and somatic methodologies. She has completed extensive study in the transpersonal psychology model Psychosynthesis, trauma and PTSD treatment strategies, relational energy healing, and somatic psychology. Patricia uses her blended expertise to guide individuals and organizations through the challenges and uncertainty that lives at the heart of complex transformation and growth.

A Normal Day

Sheila Williams

It was a normal day, like any other -
Get up, get dressed, get to school, to work.
It was a normal day, like any other -
Telephone calls, reports, print orders, lunch.
It was a normal day, like any other -
Meetings, discussions, brainstorming, 5:00.
It was a normal day, like any other -
5:15 the phone rang
It was not a normal day, not like any other.
A day that changed my life forever, the day my son died.
For months I trudged onward, just existing, holding on by a thin thread.
Crying and then not, sleeping and then not, angry and then not.
Feelings of disbelief, denial, bargaining, guilt, anger, depression,
The seven stages of grief, revisited a million times each,
Though the seventh stage eluded me, that of acceptance/hope,
On those days during those months that followed,
Which were not like a normal day, not like any other.
Then it came to me, that cold winter afternoon, walking through the streets of DC
A gentle nudge, a soft whisper, a calmness overcame me, a realization enveloped me,
Pulled me close and took me by the hand, guided me to a new normal,
An open gentle compassionate loving awareness that death was not as I had always thought,
But instead it was just a move from the body toward the spirit and a reconnection with the universe.
A place so calm, peaceful, open, vast, all knowing and all encompassing.
And that is where he is now, part of our great universe, where I also exist.
It, again, became a normal day, but not like any other from before,
But a new normal, one of acceptance and hope and a desire to move forward.

Sheila's Reflections



After the death of my 16-year-old son in a car accident, my life turned upside down and I found myself in a very dark place for many, many months. I

continued in my job, my daughter graduated from high school and went off to college, and life around me continued as it does. But that didn't mean my life got back to normal. Several months after his death, I had the awakening I wrote about in this poem. It was the beginning of my healing journey, and I consider it a gift from my son. Thirteen years after my son's death and many life changes, I began work on my Master's degree in transpersonal psychology at Sofia University, Palo Alto, CA. It was in a class during that time that I was guided by spirit to write about my experience. One thing I have learned through this and many other life challenges I have had, is that life around us always goes on; and each of us must decide if

we want to continue to sit with our pain in those dark places, or if we want to push through it and allow ourselves the opportunity to grow and find meaning and purpose with the life we have left.

Upon completion of my Master's program, I also came away with certification as a transformative life coach and certified in creativity and innovation. It was during my time at Sofia that I also was introduced to psychosynthesis. As a result, after graduation, I continued to study through the Synthesis Center under Didi Firman and became board certified as a psychosynthesis coach. I continue to learn through various channels including courses in NLP and am interested in retreat planning and facilitation. Please take a moment to visit my webpage at www.directionalgrowth.com where you will be able to learn more about me and my offerings. Thank you for your support.

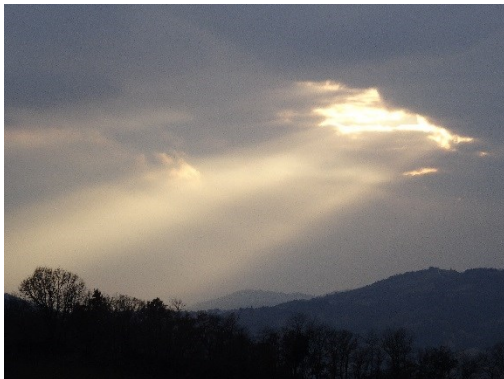


Photo by Catherine Ann Lombard

Upcoming AAP Psychosynthesis Quarterly Themes

If you are interested in helping us with copy editing or being a guest editor, please contact us at newsletter@aap-psychosynthesis.org.

Personal and Transpersonal
(Experiences & Applications)

Due April 15
for June issue

Purpose, Meaning and Values

Due July 15
for September issue

Relationships
(romantic, interpersonal, professional,
parental, educational, etc.)

Due October 15
for December issue

Practicing Presence

Photo Essay by Anna Citrino



"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace." Frederick Buechner (1)

In the work I did for three decades, I lived with strict schedules. Nearly every minute counted, and clear goals for each hour, even portions of the hour, seemed necessary. This year I'm choosing to live differently. Thoreau went to the woods to live simply and deliberately. I began a new life in California this summer and, in my experiment in living, I want to focus on living with presence. I have goals – to learn to draw, play the clarinet, learn Spanish, and write poetry. More than achieving all my goals, though, I want to open to a place of being. I want to listen to the land I live on, inhabit it physically and mentally – to take in the subtle changes as the seasons shift – the light, the color, the sounds, nurturing the awareness of its presence. Every day I want to consciously notice life for the miracle it is.

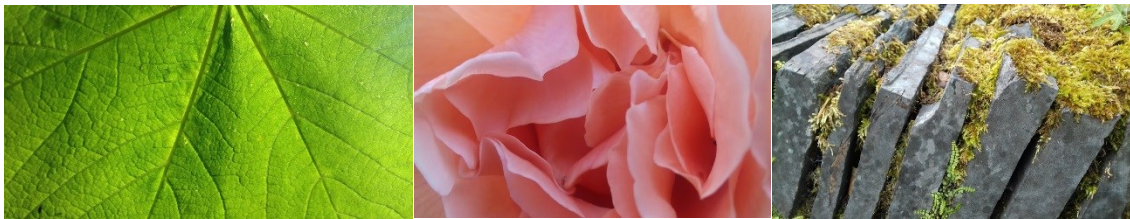
As I walk across the land where I live, I notice many things that need tending to – the poison oak that's growing up on the path, oak trees that

need trimming, and how last year's rainstorms have washed away soil on the bank. After being gone for some time, as I have been, there are numerous things I need and want to do. Perhaps these things don't matter much in the big picture of the universe. Keeping the poison oak at bay, for example, isn't going to influence what happens in India, though it will make it easier for me to walk around. The bigger lesson in caring for the trees, pulling out weeds, watering, and the various other things people do to their space when living in a rural area, is understanding how living on the land involves an interconnection and a relationship. As I give to the land and care for it, it cares for me. If I avoid behaviors that cause erosion, for example, it benefits me and benefits the earth that I live on as well. I used to not want to cut the herbs growing in front of my house, better to let them continue their natural life, I thought. Over time, I've learned that most herbs actually like to be cut back. They grow better as a result. The

plants have taught me things about themselves. And perhaps more importantly, about being present in relationship.

Learning what the land you live on wants, what it needs, and how to give that care takes time. Currently, I'm reading about what grows best and is least likely to become eaten by gophers and deer. I'm also learning by getting out and walking around each day to see how things are doing. Doing the walk is a kind of observation

ritual so I can better understand the organic processes of the land and my life in connection with it. Though it may be somebody else's job to care for the community garden or shared landscape, living in an urban landscape requires similar attention. If we want a meaningful relationship with the land we live on and use, the land needs us to understand the effect our behavior has on it. This is true of all our human relationships as well.



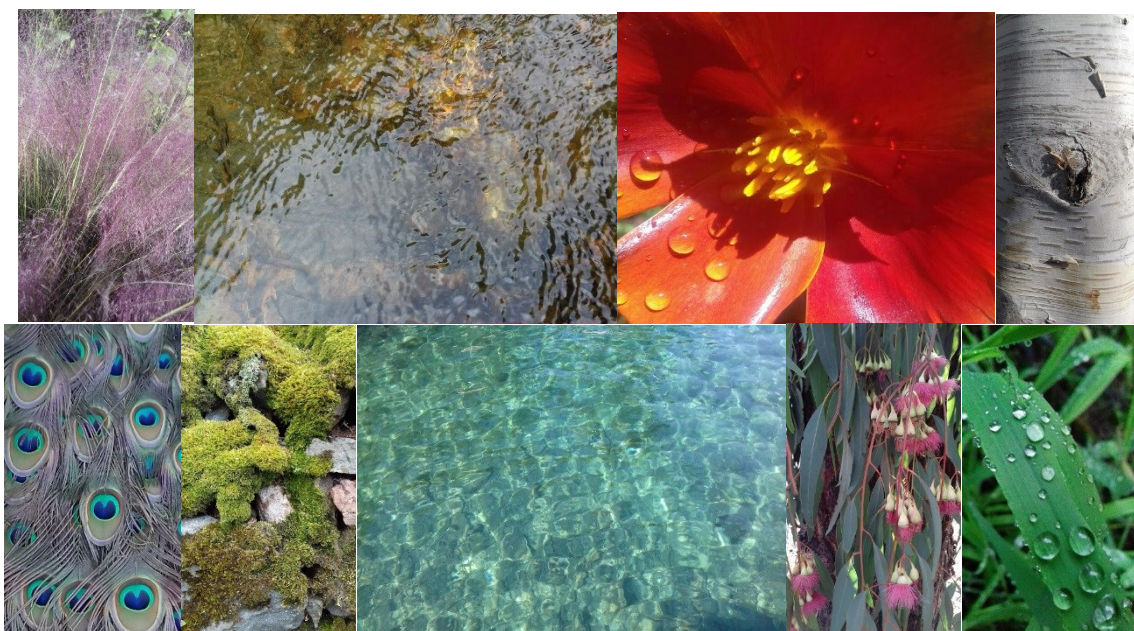
Similar to learning how to have a relationship with the land I live on, learning to draw or to write requires attending to an inner awareness of what is trying to come forth. When drawing as well as when writing, you heighten your attention to details. As the details develop, the picture of what you're focusing on is revealed. These details enable you to see more fully – not just the object, but its presence and the meaning of its presence. This requires time – time that is not measured in minutes or upon reaching a predetermined goal. Instead, we allow ourselves depth. We explore our connection to time – allow ourselves to move without measurement. Instead of skimming across the surface, we fully inhabit our actions, our thinking, our being. The German poet, Rilke, wrote about the artist's connection to the creative act in *Letters to a Young Poet*:

"In this there is no measuring with time, a year doesn't matter, and ten years are nothing. Being an artist means: not numbering and counting, but ripening like a tree, which doesn't force its sap, and stands confidently in the storms of spring, not afraid that afterward summer may not come. It does come. But it comes only to those who are patient, who are there as if eternity lay before them, so unconcernedly silent

and vast. I learn it every day of my life, learn it with pain I am grateful for: patience is everything!" Rilke (2)

It takes time to know who you are as an artist. You have to listen to your life, to what it's trying to tell you. The message is usually subtle and complex and takes practice. You don't have to be a visual artist or writer to be creative. Living is itself a creative act. We have visions of what we want to create in ourselves, and we can be patient with ourselves in the act of making our life something meaningful with beautiful character.

Observing the world enhances our ability to listen to life and to experience it more fully. This past May, while hiking around in the UK's Lake District, I looked up from the river's edge where I was standing to see a leaf backlit by the sun. Its vibrant color and intricate texture stunned me. All the leaf's veins stood out as if I was looking under a microscope. If color could shout, this leaf would certainly have been deafening. The more I keep my eyes open, the more I notice the infinite variety of colors, textures and shapes. The world comes alive, and I feel more alive as a result.



Often, I photograph textural details in the world around me. I carry my camera and my journal with me most places. I never know what amazing thing I might see. Holding a camera or a pen are ways of paying attention, of nurturing a relationship with yourself and the world. I don't know what the various images of texture I'm collecting will add up to, the thoughts that will surface as a result. They may be nothing significant in themselves. The photo itself is not the goal. The photos and drawings are but a way of seeing, a pathway. As Shelly Berc, co-director of the Creativity Workshop in her article "How Fear Chokes Creativity and What to Do About It" writes:

"We find wonder and beauty, new ideas and images everywhere when we allow our senses to experience each moment fully. When we shut down our perceptiveness and our sensitivity and only look to the finish line, our creativity has no access to the very elements that make it enriching and deep." Berc (3)

When I open the door to my house in the evening to sit on the steps, crickets croon and wind rustles the trees. Leaves fall like rain. There is an energy astir. The earth is full of wonder and alive with a kind of music in the interplay of all that is. We are more than our occupations, lists of accomplishments and goals, more than the muscle and bone of our bodies.

Taking photos and writing in a journal are mainly ways to enter a door into another way of being – one that is more awake, aware.

The natural world and trees do much more than fill a utilitarian function. In his *Book of Hours, Love Poems to God*, Rilke writes, "If we surrendered/ to earth's intelligence/ we could rise up rooted, like trees" (4). There is a wisdom in the earth that can only be understood as we allow ourselves to absorb its sounds, rhythms, textures, and colors, as we develop an intimacy with it, enter into companionship with it. Trees have roots but they also bend and move, provide a place for birds to roost, food, shade for other plants to grow and for humans to enjoy. The earth isn't just a backdrop to human existence. It is our foundation. Perhaps recording what I see is a way to develop a different kind of intelligence – one of deeper roots to all that sustains not just myself, but all of us.

The wind has blown in gusts all day. The light is soft gold. When I stood beside the redwoods this afternoon, I heard them groan. Every world region has different textures that are its own. The natural world is alive with presence. Walking in a forest, desert, beach, grassland, mountain, city park, or simply looking up into the sky and noticing it, listening to it, and then drawing or writing, photographing, or simply talking about what you are aware of draws us into the mystery of existence.

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Editor's Note: This photo essay originally appeared on Anna Citrino's blog, Anna Citrino, Poetry, Place, and Pilgrimage, Sept. 17, 2017, at annacitrino.com. Anna's bio appears after her poem Slower Than Molasses.

Slower Than Molasses

Anna Citrino



"You're slower than molasses in January,"
my mother told me as a child,

and she was right. In my fifth decade,
living in a country where clouds

blend into the grey, and objects melt
into the monsoon heat, I'm learning to draw—

buildings with wobbly black lines
faces with distorted noses, legs bent so wrong

they could never walk—each form

a suggestion of what it hopes to become

in several more years of practice,
or several more decades.

I've made plans for lessons, too, with the clarinet
I left for years on the closet shelf, but recently

pulled out, remembering the music a stranger played
once long ago under a tent in the savannah,

watery notes drifting through the grassy plains
stretching into the night. There's still time,

isn't there, to learn to bend my breath
like a reed in the wind.

I'm learning another language, too—filling my mind
and mouth with wonderful sounds.

Sentences slide across pages in stories from worlds
I've never known. Letters slip through my fingers

and speak. None of this is perfect.
Every line, note and word are wrong.

It's slow work making molasses—
all that stripping away of leaves, cutting and crushing,

but I'm ready now, January molasses in the winter of my life,
days boiling down to their essence. Sugar crystals removed.

What's left now is the flavor and the mineral,
and all of it is good.



Anna Citrino grew up in California and taught abroad in Turkey, Kuwait, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, India, and the United Kingdom, at various international schools for twenty-six years. Her current home is Soquel, California. Anna's work has appeared in a variety of literary journals including The Adirondack Review, Canary, Paterson Literary Review, phren-z, and Spillway, among other publications. Her poetry chapbook, Saudade, was published with Finishing Line Press. You can read more of Anna's writing or follow her blog at annacitrino.com

Editor's Note: Slower Than Molasses first appeared in phren-z, spring 2014, phren-z.org/Spring2014/anna_citrino.html

The Core of Psychosynthesis Coaching: Awareness and Will

Jon Schottland

"The process of personal psychosynthesis naturally progresses in a way that leads to greater self awareness, authenticity and a sense of personal empowerment. This process is made possible by an internal unifying center, the personal self, which exists within each person as a source of awareness and will (or choice). The psychosynthesis coach seeks to contact, reveal, engage with and encourage this personal self to manifest more fully and powerfully in the client's life."

Core Coaching Competency #2
Synthesis Northeast

At Synthesis Northeast, we are offering a new kind of training. One that brings together the deep transformational work of psychosynthesis, on the one hand, and the field of professional coaching on the other with its emphasis on supporting clients in identifying and achieving meaningful goals through a non-directive process of self-determination.

What we are discovering is that this approach is a natural and productive marriage or synthesis. Both psychosynthesis and coaching interact in ways that are creative and dynamic as they mutually support and reinforce each other.

A primary aim and driving force in this new work is to translate Roberto Assagioli's seven core concepts into specific coaching competencies that will help define and guide the emerging practice of psychosynthesis coaching. Coaching competencies are nothing new. They have been articulated and enumerated by professional organizations that developed the standards for the national credential of Board Certified Coach (BCC) and the International Coach Federation (ICF).

However, as more psychosynthesis trained coaches come to inform and contribute to the field of professional coaching, a new set of competencies grounded in and corresponding with Assagioli's seven core concepts offers a supportive framework to help distinguish psychosynthesis coaching from other approaches.

One of these competencies addresses the central importance of working with the personal self or "I", represented by the dot at the center of Assagioli's egg diagram or map of the psyche.

This construct of the personal self is pointing at a deeper layer of who we are beyond the personality and ever shifting content stream of our lives. The personal self is an existential experience of being aware and having the capacity to make choices. Awareness and Will.

The personal self is, of course, fundamental to the whole process of personal psychosynthesis. There can be no synthesizing of the various elements of the personality, no directing and regulating of the psychological functions, and no integration of the higher and lower unconscious material without this internal unifying center: the personal self or "I" that moves us from fragmentation towards wholeness.

Stop and consider for a moment what a person is without awareness and will. Perhaps more like a bottle floating in the ocean than a human being. Our capacity to be aware and make choices is what defines us, or perhaps better said, it is what gives our life definition, meaning and purpose. The question and challenge then for the psychosynthesis coach, as cited in the core competency at the beginning of this article, is how to *"contact, reveal, engage with and encourage this personal self to manifest more fully and powerfully in the client's life."*

Indeed how does one facilitate and support an experience of this personal self with a client or anyone else? With the help of our students in the Synthesis Northeast training program, we have started to identify some specific approaches, methods and techniques to address this competency. It should be noted that this process of engaging the personal self is not mechanical or formulaic, and no single technique or approach can be assumed as the most effective

or useful strategy for everyone. As Assagioli liked to say, it all depends on the individual and his or her situation: “For one person one thing, for another person quite the opposite.”

On that note, here are some initial ideas and suggestions:

1. Slow things down. Allowing pauses and moments of silence can help clients drop deeper into their own experience and connect with the inner self.

2. Pose simple, direct questions. For example, to elicit awareness and will, you might ask: “What are you aware of?” and “What are you choosing?” These questions can address the person’s life as a whole or be framed around more immediate and specific content. For example, “What are you aware of today?” or “What are you aware of relating to *this* particular issue?” and “What are you choosing?”

3. Work with subpersonalities and the psychological functions using the framework of identification-disidentification-self-identification. With self-identification, the person begins to recognize that this is who I am – the one who is aware, makes choices and creates meaning in life.

4. Practice “mere recognition.” Invite the client to step back and observe limiting stories and beliefs, patterns, reactions, thoughts, feelings and other content in the psyche.

5. Focus on present experience. Invite clients to move back and forth between “reporting” content and tuning into their immediate subjective experience in the moment. Ask questions like: “What is happening right now?” and “What do you notice?”

6. Help the person to identify and begin to know him or herself as a “willer.” Since the personal self is defined as awareness and will, any engagement with the will is an invitation to connect with the personal self.

7. Similarly, orient the person towards a sense of purpose, meaning and significance. What resonates for this person and what truly matters? Reference any and all stages of the act of will.

8. Encourage a distinction and relationship between the personal self and the individual’s various psychological functions and other internal states. For example, ask questions like: “What’s it like for *you* to be sad, scared, overwhelmed, etc.?”

9. Speak directly to the personal self, making it an explicit point of contact. For example: “An old habit or pattern would lead you down one path, but what do *you* know is the best choice here?”

10. Make use of meditation and guided imagery exercises to further develop an identification with the personal self.

There is one other overarching principle in addressing this competency of working with the personal self, and that is for the coach to serve as an *external* unifying center for the client. This means that we hold the intention to show up as a personal self *ourselves* with regard to the other person’s experience and whatever he or she is presenting. We sit with the client in awareness and will, holding both empathy and discernment. It is a stance that essentially says, “You are whole and no part of you needs to be rejected, excluded or pathologized.”

This technique is important because it creates a resonance that will be recognized by the client, both consciously and unconsciously. Clients will begin to sense the personal self in you, and that is like a fresh breeze awakening their own personal self. The door is flung open wide and, maybe not today or tomorrow but soon and over time, clients can intuit that they too have a personal self, that they *are* a personal self. With this realization, the dynamic process of psychosynthesis is activated within and new possibilities for living and being appear on the horizon.



Jon Schottland is the director of Synthesis Northeast (synthesiscoaching.org). To learn more about upcoming psychosynthesis training and professional coach certification courses in 2019-2020, contact jon@synthesiscoaching.org

Coping with Cancer through Imagery and Artistic Expression

Jan Taal



Imagery and artistic expression offer a 'nonverbal voice', a medium for the nonrational and the Greater Self^d, a source of our potential and creativity. Artistic expression enables us to rediscover and vitally renew ourselves. A long-term nonprofit project created by the author, The Imagery Toolbox enables the imagination to enter mainstream healthcare.

Modern healthcare has become an enterprise in Western society where less time is spent with patients while their treatments are determined by protocols and medical technology. The individual needs of patients as well as their innate self-reinforcing abilities tend to be neglected. There is a critical need for healthcare to shift from treating symptoms to focusing on people with individual needs and preferences. Indeed, current medicine is obsessed with rapidly finding diagnoses and initiating treatments, but this is at the expense of humanistic, individualized, empathetic, patient-centered care.¹

Imagery and artistic expression provide a means to remedy this neglect and to help individuals mobilize coping capacities and increase resilience. To make imagery tools, based on the principles of Psychosynthesis, easily accessible for those who are confronted with cancer, chronic diseases and crisis, I have developed the "Imagery Toolbox" for the School for Imagery in Amsterdam in collaboration with the Foundation Cancer in Images and the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

The Imagery Toolbox started with a vision almost 40 years ago. In Psychosynthesis I had discovered how the imagination is a wonderful

realm in which we can find inner wellsprings we can draw upon to discover and fortify ourselves. After many years of imagery work with persons with cancer, chronic illness and crisis, it had become very clear to me that imagery, including artistic expression, can help people significantly in coping and increasing their resilience. In many cases imagery also brought very meaningful changes regarding the person's perspective in life and spirituality. In a vision I saw how there can be a place in the mainstream of healthcare for such a Psychosynthesis-like approach: I saw 'a Chapel for Imagery in the big Cathedral of Health Care'. (JT)

In 2008 the idea of a toolbox was born, an instrument that in the long term might gain a permanent place within 'mainstream' healthcare. In 2009 the first pilot edition was produced. In 2017 the third edition, including the English version Imagery Toolbox 3.0, became available.

In this essay, I first describe how imagery and art are core functions of the psyche. I examine the benefits and pitfalls of using imagination to consciously heal illness, and I reflect on techniques needed by anyone coaching patients in the use of their imagination to confront their cancer. Finally I provide case studies of cancer patients who have used the Imagery Toolbox 3.0 and then present my conclusions.

Confronting Cancer

People who are confronted with cancer come to the realization that they are not as safe and invincible as they once believed themselves to be. Their fundamental feelings of security are threatened, and their experience of control over their lives, their autonomy, self-confidence, sense of meaning, and happiness and wellbeing are often seriously undermined. Such loss often leads them to shock, panic, grief, powerlessness, fear and anger, which are all natural responses. In addition, cancer patients face bodily impairment and chronic fatigue, scarring and other permanent physical effects of the disease and its treatment. But they are not the only ones touched. There are all kinds of consequences for family and relationships, work and future prospects.

What can greatly help in their healing process is the use of imagery and artistic expression to access and enhance inner strength and resilience. In each of us there is a continuous stream of vital, healing energy coming from the depth of our soul. Assagioli compared this depth with the trunk and roots of a tree from which branches continue to grow.² Internal imaginary experiences and expressions in any artistic form – drawing, painting, sculpting, writing, singing, playing, movement and dance – facilitate the release of this energy, revive a sense of autonomy and can activate healing sources.

Imagery and Art:

Core Functions of the Psyche

Evoking imagery and making art have always been an integral part of human behaviour and probably constitute the very oldest forms of healing. We have evidence of art and the ritual use of imagery from 160,000 years ago.³ Imagery and art are not only one of the defining characteristics of the human species, but are essential for identity and the development of mental, social and physical skills.⁴

Sheikh and Assagioli, two of the most significant writers in the field of therapeutic imagery, both name imagination as a core function of the psyche. Sheikh defines imagination as the central arena within which the personal identity is formed and also where access to deep sources of problem solving can

be found.⁵ Assagioli states that every image has in itself a motor drive that tends to produce the physical conditions and the external acts corresponding to it.⁶ Imagery offers us a powerful source of inspiration, healing and inner freedom.

In the case of illness and crisis, imagery and artistic expression can help to lead to an enhanced quality of life and a strengthened sense of meaning, to improved interpersonal communication and to reduced feelings of anxiety, fatigue, stress, pain and depression. Actively expressing our images empowers us; we transform powerlessness into a certain degree of control and inner strength. In the case of cancer, clinical evidence shows that imagery and art can help to increase resilience.⁷

Within neuropsychology the discovery of mirror neurons has confirmed the central role played by the imagination in learning processes as well as in recuperation after injury.⁸ That which we perceive, imagine, paint, model or sing is represented and activated in our brain and this stimulates corresponding behaviour. The advertising industry uses this psychological principle extensively and motor imagery is applied widely in the world of rehabilitation and sport.⁹

Using Imagery to Consciously Heal

Many studies on the placebo effect show that expectations – that is, imagining that ‘this pill helps’ – can (unconsciously) alleviate and relieve symptoms.¹⁰ These results show that humans possess an innate self-reinforcing capacity, a healing potential that works on imagination. In imagery therapy we make *conscious* use of this imaging power. In this therapeutic work, one becomes deeply familiar with the image, therefore, the image must be given sufficient roots (including solid neural patterns) to enable it to become a natural part of the person.

There are three stages to therapeutic use of imagery. In the first stage, we discover that inner images have great impact. For many people this is a great revelation. In the second stage, we discover that we can exert influence upon our images and can take action, make adjustments and even effect transformation. This is the area

in which most therapy and coaching work is done, where we learn to navigate in the arena of conscious and unconscious self-images, drives and potential talents and where true autonomy can be developed. Imagery work has many techniques to offer for this. The third stage is a well-kept secret, that we are quite possibly the creators of our own inner world and thereby of our own feelings, our own behaviour and our own lives and world. For an extended exploration of the Three Stages of Imagery, please refer to my previous article published in the *Psychosynthesis Quarterly* (March 2016).¹¹

The Pitfall of Prescribed Images

It is important to address the pitfalls of the superficial or forced use of imagery (prescribed visualizations): if you want to imagine something positive but do not really make this something of your own, it can have negative effects. A positive image may briefly evoke positive emotions, but then you may be content with this short-lived emotional experience and neglect to take further action to make the new experience your own and to give it more tangible substance in your daily life.¹²

Particularly in the case of serious illness, a dangerous pitfall is to pursue imposed, prescribed images, without sufficiently taking into account the person's psychological condition. Are the images 'owned' by the person or are they forced? If they are forced, the person can get the idea that he is not 'good enough' at doing the imagery, because his own images may be different or because a feeling of tension

arises. This may also express itself in anxiety or guilt. Relaxation and true acceptance of the spontaneous images for their value is the remedy for this. Spontaneous images always represent true qualities of the soul, even if we initially resist them.

Techniques and Attitude of the Coach

Techniques used in imagery work include: observing and merging with an image, dialoguing with it, artistic expression, insight, physical and concrete integration and application in daily life. The technique that a coach or therapist chooses depends upon the client's process. Questions to ask are: What is happening? What does this client need? What may strengthen coping capacity and resilience? The coach should make these considerations without bias.

Serious illness on the part of the client often brings up the coach's own process (i.e. countertransference), especially when it comes to questions of life, death and pain. This may result in an overemphasis on physical healing. However, I am convinced that this needs to be avoided, no matter how welcome physical healing might be. A unilateral focus on physical healing can make the coaching (or therapy) limited and cramped, whilst it is often the existential, spiritual essence of life which needs to be given attention with heart and soul. For example, when Cis Bouten (64) let go of her fight against cancer, she discovered the child in herself, and this she experienced as a great joy (see the following four illustrations).



Figures 1-4. All drawings by Cis Bouten.¹ Her reflections on each drawing appear in the box on page 25.

Figure 1. "I am fighting against cancer. A big sea of fire. But it does not seem to affect the cancer cells, they nestle themselves on the flames. Is it not better to accept that I have cancer?"

Figure 2. "Trying to accept"

Figure 3. "The two halves, acceptance and fighting, don't match, I don't feel whole. I'm a person torn in two. Then, when I put the two halves together, I feel like a tiny baby falling into a deep back hole, and yet the shafts of sunlight still penetrate through."

Figure 4: "By painting the embryo and the child's head, I am surprised to discover the child inside me. On the one hand, this is the crushed child I used to be and, on the other hand, it's the child I would so much like to have had. I feel that I need to give her attention, to spoil and pamper her."

About the Imagery Toolbox 3.0

The Imagery Toolbox contains a great variety of imagery exercises, artistic materials, detailed information and explanation to help people to mobilize their self-strengthening potential. It is comprised of: 54 symbol cards (photos with a wide variety of symbolism); 8 audio imagery exercises (CDs and mp3s); drawing, writing and modelling material; *Singing for Your Life*, a documentary on the choir; an award-winning animation film; and the comprehensive *Course Book*.

The greatest care has been taken to make the exercises and the creative material as simple and effective as possible. The exercises are designed so that anyone can do the exercises on their own. However, guidance by a coach can be particularly useful in the beginning. A register of certified, qualified Imagery Toolbox coaches has been established.

Free downloads are available from www.imagerytoolbox.com. In addition, you can watch a short video in which six patients demonstrate and explain how they worked with the Imagery Toolbox. To see the video go to: <https://vimeo.com/285560467>

Past and Future Scientific Research

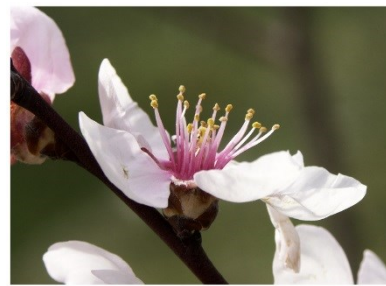
Researchers of the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht conducted a pilot study on the effects of working with the Imagery Toolbox. The results showed that the Toolbox powerfully stimulates the imagination and mobilizes the mental healing potential of the participants.¹³ A large research project on the effectiveness of the Toolbox is currently in preparation in collaboration with the Universities of Groningen

and Twente, Faculties Theology and Religious Studies, and Positive Psychology.

Case Studies of the Imagery Toolbox

The following sections provide just a few examples of how people have successfully worked with the various techniques available in the Imagery Toolbox.

Example of working with a symbol card



To meet her needs, cancer patient Maria chooses the photograph of a flower from the set of symbol cards (at left).

The *Course Book* instructs her to look at the flower carefully for a while and then to close her eyes. She is instructed to wait and see how the image evolves.



"I see it becomes a tree," she says. "It is my tree and it can grow. I myself am sitting at the bottom of the tree and I want to go upwards. It's the little rounds that rise (in the drawing). If I stay under the ground, scared, maybe I will feel safe but nothing

will happen. Standing still is no life. I can grow and blossom." Maria has hung the drawing in

her living room so that she can see it. It strengthens her to think, “This is what I’m going for, I will not stay in my fear.”

Example of ‘imagery of the good, safe place’

David (38) has just finished his treatment for bowel cancer. The treatment went well but David is full of worries and stress. He is afraid that he won’t live to see old age and that he won’t be able to take care of his family. David is full of shame and feels that he has failed. He wants to be back at work as quickly as possible so that he can follow his planned career path and can provide for his wife and children, but he feels weak.

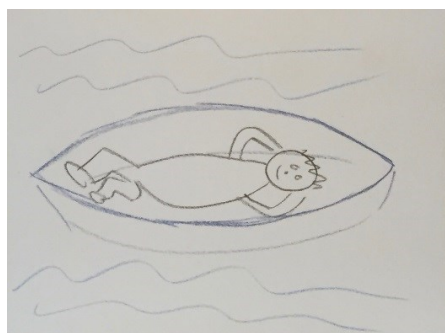
David feels a heavy pressure in his chest. The image of this pressure that comes up for him is a cog, a cog that is standing still.

As he makes contact with the cog, he heaves a deep sigh. There’s a “cog standing still” in his chest but he doesn’t understand what it has to tell him. It gives him a feeling of “nothingness,” something he experiences as extremely negative. But in the process, he starts to discover that this “standing still” also brings him rest after his disturbing period of illness and treatment, time to let go of his worries and to just breathe. In short, to take time for himself and his family and to let his career take care of itself.

When David does the audio exercise “Imagery of the good place,” he learns to relax. To his astonishment, a spontaneous image comes very easily to him. David sees himself lying in a boat on a gently flowing river. The way the river carries the boat slowly onward is a wonderful feeling. At the end of the exercise, he relates that he has never actually been in a boat on a river in his life. David finds this most extraordinary and also very comforting. Following this, David carries on practicing and receives a number of images that are very helpful to him: playing in a child’s pool of balls, stretched out on his back on an island, enjoying lying on a bed of leaves which turns into “sitting on a rubber cloud.” (See the four illustrations below.)

From all these images David chooses ‘sitting on a cloud’ as his core image. He frames this sketch and hangs it in a prominent place in his house. He also uses the image ‘lying in the boat on the river’ regularly. He lets it go through his chest and it brings him rest.

Six months later David reports that he is doing well. He is working at full capacity again, but he allows himself regular rest periods and no longer works overtime. The exercises have worked so well for him that he is now coaching colleagues.¹⁴



Singing for Your Life Choirs

In order to promote artistic expression that enables coping with cancer on a larger Dutch national scale, the Foundation Cancer in Images (*Kanker in Beeld*) was established on the initiative of the Amsterdam School for Imagery

in 1997. Since then this organization has been initiating exhibitions, ateliers, art, drama and writing courses, choirs and research throughout The Netherlands.¹⁵



Singing for Your Life Choir in The Netherlands. Photo © Billie-Jo Krul

The development of the choirs has been truly phenomenal, with 36 choirs throughout the Netherlands. In Wales and England a number of choirs also have been established, with similar levels of success. Apart from the fact that singing and music-making have of themselves a particularly healing effect,¹⁶ these choirs are also characterized by their spirit of togetherness, their solidarity and the implicit shared knowledge about “what cancer does to you.” All this seems to offer great support and empowerment to the people involved. Researchers have studied the effects of singing on the members of the choirs of Tenovus in Wales. Notable improvements were found in vitality, pain reduction, social functioning, state of mind, reduction in levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms and positive effects on components of the immune system¹⁷

In order to inspire people to become choir members and to go singing, the Imagery Toolbox 3.0 contains the documentary *Singing for Your Life*, specially made for the Toolbox with the collaboration of five choirs from the network of Singing for Your Life.

Conclusion

In an era where technology and lack of time prevail and the costs of healthcare are constantly increasing, self-reinforcing methods such as imagery and artistic expression are important additions in the

care for patients. When illness or crisis hits, we are often forced into an intimate meeting with ourselves, and both imagery and artistic expression can contribute significantly to promoting our inner and outer coping and resilience. The Imagery Toolbox is a low-cost intervention that can help cancer patients to foster autonomy and well-being. In particular, it offers patients appropriate methods for aftercare as well as for regaining their well-being and perspective. To conclude, imagery and art deserve a permanent place in mainstream healthcare.

(References appear on the next page.)



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