

The Psychology of Woman And her Psychosynthesis

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1 - Introduction

Before entering upon the specific subject, let us - for the sake of those who are not yet acquainted with psychosynthesis - touch upon the theme in a general way.

Why is psychosynthesis necessary? Because all of us have within ourselves different and contrasting psychological elements which alternate and collide. They often reach such a degree of forcefulness as to form separate personalities or subpersonalities which struggle for supremacy within us. This results in a number of contradictions, conflicts, turmoils and upheavals, which may produce serious nervous difficulties, and often gives the individual a painful and growing sensation of dissatisfaction, instability and disharmony.

But this "human condition" is by no means fatal and inevitable; we can change and remedy it if we are willing to examine ourselves thoroughly and if we apply the methods that are necessary in order to combine the dissociated and contrasting elements and transform them into a rich and harmonious synthesis.

Synthesis is an organizing and unifying principle which acts in all the kingdoms of nature. We find manifestations of it in inorganic matter in the form of chemical combinations. It acts in a more evident and complicated way in organic life as the power of self-regulation of living bodies, as the delicate and admirable balance between the wear and tear and the rebuilding of tissues.

In the psychological life, the principle of synthesis finds its application in different ways: by unifying opposite vital interests and activities in regard to the outer as well as the inner world of the individual (extraversion and introversion); by synthesizing thought and feeling and other psychological elements around a unifying centre in the psychosynthesis of the personality.

Then there is the problem of spiritual psychosynthesis, that between the personality and the Self or soul, which constitutes the high aim and aspiration of all individuals who cannot be satisfied with terrestrial values only.

Another aspect of synthesis is that which unites and individual in numerous relations of integration with other individuals. There is, first of all, the psychosynthesis of the human couple, the eternal problem of the relation between the sexes, about which we shall have

¹ The author wishes to express his grateful appreciation to Dr. Frank Haronian, for his helpful suggestions and generous cooperation in the preparation of this article for publication.

more to say further on. Then comes the synthesis of the family group, of social groups, national groups and, at the very last - as the final ideal - the psychosynthesis of all mankind.

II - Psychological Differences between Men and Women

The first question which calls for our consideration in this context concerns the functions and duties which a woman can and must discharge, the particular types of psychosynthesis which she can bring about in accordance with her particular psychological constitution, and the many problems which arise from woman's own psyche or in her relation with man. Situations and problems of this nature arise in every woman's life and it is necessary that she face them in a way that is most satisfying to herself and to the other people concerned.

The most natural thing and frequent role for woman is that of being man's companion, his wife. An Italian author, Lucio d'Ambra, wrote two novels entitled respectively *The Occupation of the Husband* and *The Profession of the Wife*. In these different designations an important psychological truth is alluded to, namely that while man's principal functions are his activities *outside the family* and are of a social character, woman's most important activity, her "profession", is generally *in and with the family*. To use a less modern but gentle and apt expression: woman is, or should be, "the queen of the home".

Unfortunately, this kingdom of the home is often troubled by silent or noisy disharmonies and conflicts which sometimes shake it to its very foundations and can even dismember it. If we search for the causes of these discords, we discover that there are mainly two: selfishness and lack of understanding. The corresponding remedies can, therefore, be reduced to two principal ones:

The first one is goodness and a spirit of sacrifice. These are hard to develop, but are high qualities which everybody should cultivate because their fruits are most rewarding.

The second remedy consists of an intelligent, intuitive, willing psychological and spiritual understanding. This understanding is not easy to acquire because the psychological constitutions of man and woman are deeply different, much more so than we generally realize. One could almost say that they belong to two different species. It therefore seems useful to pause and examine somewhat the differing characteristics of male and female psychology. In speaking frankly, I may at times seem rude to both sexes.

Typically, although by no means universally, there exists between a husband and his wife polarities of psychological functions. The man tends to excel in certain vital operations while the woman manifests others. For example, in dealing with the physical world, man has active, manipulative and creative functions while woman, as wife and mother is primarily concerned with maintaining and preserving the life and resources of the family. On the other hand, in the sphere of the emotions and of the imagination, it is the woman who is usually the better developed, more positive and productive of the two. In this area, the husband is apt to be relatively naive and easily confused. So there is an apparent inversion of dominance functions that man and woman need to appreciate, and therefore collaborate with each other in order to form an effective team.

There is a similar inverted polarity between man and woman in the intellectual sphere. Man tends to be the more rational, logical, and active. He is consciously oriented toward facts, their relationships and their implications. By contrast woman's mental functions are less developed, but balanced by her superiority in another sphere, that of the intuition. This is the capacity for attaining understanding in non-rational and unconscious ways which are fully as valid as man's thoughtful rationality.

These different polarities define some important qualitative distinctions between man and woman. These differences can explain many psychological conflicts and disorders.

Speaking of man in general, the average so-called normal man develops qualities and functions such as aggressiveness, mental activity, and efficiency. These he manifests to a marked degree, whereas qualities of a feminine type such as sensitivity, feeling, imagination, and intuition remain in an undeveloped and, at times, almost atrophied conditions. Because these latter functions do not keep pace with the rest of his growth, it therefore often happens that the average man remains relatively primitive and sometimes even barbaric. His imagination, generally repressed in the unconscious, is disordered when it does rise to the surface, and often expresses itself in fancies of which he himself is ashamed. His feeling nature tends to remain primitive; he has neither delicacy nor plasticity. He can pass from outbursts of almost savage passion to hardness and insensitivity, and vice versa, or he can pass from insensibility to almost childish weakness and sentimentality. His intuition is generally rudimentary, almost non-existent. He endeavors to solve all problems, whether practical or abstract, through mental processes only, and because he does not take into consideration the more subtle and imponderable elements, he is often mistaken. In the various events of life, his cleverly formulated plans and programs often come to naught, and instead of finding the faults that lie within himself and his own shortcomings, he blames other people and events for his failures.

The psychological processes of the large majority of women are the very opposite. The average woman's opinions are usually nothing more than prejudices and superstitions to which she clings obstinately, even in the face of factual evidence to the contrary. Of course, her opinions are sometimes correct, especially when based on good intuition, but only too often they are erroneous outcomes of personal emotions, of imaginings of various kinds, or of blindly accepted traditions. It is typical of many women (particularly of those who do not work in the professions or hold executive positions in public life) that they do not consider the true nature of the problems with which they are faced. Their mental activity consists of examining things in an unanalytical, diffuse, and inconclusive manner, with arguments that are often of a personal rather than objective character.

It should therefore be apparent that the one-sided psychological development of the average man or woman engenders deficiencies that result in serious problems. Most men and women are in themselves incomplete, almost psychologically maimed beings. They can find the solution of their problems only through mutual integration, i.e., by combining their qualities so as to constitute together a complete human being.

Man, insofar as his feminine functions are rudimentary, cannot understand and appreciate woman. He feels himself attracted towards her, sometimes irresistibly; vaguely he is aware that she possesses traits he needs, but he does not know how to approach her psychologically. She appears to him as a strange, elusive, chameleon-like creature. The acuity and changeability of her sensitivity, the wealth and plasticity of her imagination disconcert and confound him; her intuition impresses him, but he cannot understand its nature and origin; it perplexes him, and generally he is skeptical concerning it.

The average woman, in her turn, is unable to get out of her subjectivity and personal approach to things, lacks understanding of masculine activities and qualities, and often does not even try to understand them. She loves man, but with a personal, possessive, jealous affection. But although she loves him, she neither understands nor appreciates his world, his interests, his ideals. She is inclined to regard him as a savage who holds a delicate butterfly with a rough hand, who ruthlessly destroys perfumed and many-coloured flowers, as a naughty boy who is inclined to fight with others, as one who foolishly risks his life in darling enterprises, who plays with his complicated machines, and who neglects those who love him in order to chase after ancient ruins or rare manuscripts or to construct difficult and useless theories and systems.

I have purposely exaggerated my description of extreme cases in order to drive home my point with greater clarity. Fortunately, things are not as bad as all that, generally. Mutual understanding is growing; modern life provides instructive experiences and encourages adaptation. The painful shocks to which people are exposed often force them to think, and this happens in social relations as well as with married couples. In this way, much has already been accomplished, but more can be done. Decisive steps are needed in regard to our own psychosynthesis, our internal unification. We shall then recognize that the qualities that we observe in the opposite sex are external manifestations, projections, so to speak, of some of the faculties which we also possess but which have remained latent, rudimentary and below the threshold of our own consciousness.

In observing, understanding and appreciating women, man can develop his own latent and rudimentary femininity, and a woman can do likewise as far as masculine qualities are concerned. In this way, each can become, psychologically, a complete human being. Naturally, each should always retain a preponderance of the psychological characteristics pertaining to his or her own sex, but enough of the traits of the opposite sex can and should be developed to produce the much-needed balance and integration. In building the "psychological bridge" between the two sexes we shall arrive at a mutual understanding and an adequate appreciation of each other. We can thereby eliminate painful misunderstandings and artificial and unnecessary contrasts, and in their place produce a happy and fruitful collaboration, the psychosynthesis of man and woman, the miracle of true love.

III. Woman's Maternal Functions

Let us now consider another womanly function, one that is just as important and perhaps even more fundamental than the wifely one, namely, the maternal function. These two functions complement each other in the whole woman, and each woman should aim at

achieving this psychosynthesis within herself. While some women are more inclined to fulfill primarily the function of being man's companion, others become absorbed in motherhood.

But apart from constitutional tendencies toward these different vocations, the circumstances of life induce and often oblige a woman to centre her interests and activities in one or the other of these two functions. The woman that has a husband but no child has a greater opportunity to devote herself to spiritual communion, intellectual rapport, and practical collaboration with her husband. She can even make something more of the relationship by being also "maternal" toward her husband. And this protective, kindly and generous behavior can add a new note that makes the union of the two souls and personalities richer and more harmonious.

On the other hand, the woman who has lost her husband or who, for some reason, cannot live in harmonious communion with him, may adopt motherhood as her central aim. She then seeks the reason, the meaning and the value of her life in that role.

Motherhood, considered in its broadest and deepest sense, was a cosmic principle before it was a human function. Matter, the substance which received the creative impulse of Spirit and then elaborates it and expresses it in myriads of beings, is the Universal Mother. It - or she - makes the existence of the manifested universe possible. In our planet, this Universal Motherhood, is called Nature, the terrestrial mother, which moulds and nourishes all creatures. This has been understood and deeply felt by all people from the earliest times. In ancient Egypt, the worship of Isis, and in Greece, that of Demeter and Cybele were expressions of this belief. Then, in Christianity, we have the worship of Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Savior, who joins the son in His redemptive mission.

If, from the examination of these forms of worship and from the direct observation of motherhood, we try to define its fundamental characteristics, we discover that they are fecundity, creativity, the giving of life and generous love infused with sacrifice, devotion, and protectiveness. These functions are not exclusively human; they are also expressed in the animal kingdom. As is known, the brooding hen will deprive herself of nourishment, if necessary, in order to feed her chicks. But there are still more dramatic examples. Among insects, the pine-bombyx takes the down off her breast to make her nest and expires after this act of abnegation. Some cochineals so place themselves before dying that their dead bodies tend to protect their offspring from inclement weather. Among quadrupeds, mothers often defend their young even to the point of sacrificing their own lives.

For primitive woman, motherhood is the highest expression of being. In some savage tribes, woman is considered to be endowed with a soul only after having had a child. As a mother, she attains a degree of dignity that she did not have as a mere wife. In all civilizations, the moral function of the mother has been great. In addition to responsibility for physical care, the mother is charged with the duty of educating her children's feelings and imagination and of instilling them with the foundations of moral and religious beliefs. Other specifically maternal functions are to evoke a sense of beauty and to train the child to selflessness, compassion, and devotion.

If I appear to lay emphasis on those well-known facets of maternal behavior, it is because I think it necessary to provide a counter-balance to a negative view of motherhood. The mistake, unfortunately, all too common in the exercise of the maternal function, is what can be called a materialistic one. The essential physical care given to children during their first years is necessary and basic. But physical care is not the only necessary care; and when it predominates over other aspects of maternal care, a materialistic limitation of the maternal function occurs which may be very harmful. If we compare the care that many mothers give to their children's bodies, to their children's preparation for careers, and for external success in life with the care given to their children's souls and with the degree of intellectual and spiritual communion achieved with their children, we see the scale going down heavily in favor of material values. As a consequence, many children are well taken care of, well protected, and well directed into professional studies, but lack sensitivity to spiritual realities and responsiveness to moral values.

Another mistake is to manifest an excess of maternal love. This is expressed by the words "attachment", "identification", and "possessiveness". This mistake is more human and forgivable, but it may be just as harmful as the first. It is understandable that the more you put of yourself into somebody else and the more sacrifices you make for that person, the more you may bind yourself to him, identify yourself with him, and attach yourself to him. But sooner or later, there comes the moment in the life of children when detachment from the mother is necessary. There comes the moment when the son or daughter must obtain freedom and autonomy to conduct his or her own life. This is such a natural event that we find it expressed by animals instinctively. In them, where many human complications are absent, detachment occurs in a simple way and at the right moment. A typical example is that of birds that push their young ones out of the nest so that they have to learn to use their own wings. (This, incidentally, is an expression which has a high symbolic meaning). Among primitive people, a similar event takes place. In their well-organized societies there are rites of initiation and puberty. The moment of separation from the mother, which coincides with puberty, is acknowledged as a crucial point in the life of the young. It is the moment at which adolescents become really conscious of themselves as responsible individuals.

But often the "civilized" mother has neither the understanding nor the wisdom necessary to make this supreme and most subtle of all sacrifices, the one which costs her the most and which might be paradoxically called "the sacrifice of the preceding sacrifices". To sacrifice one's own attachment to one's children, to be able to "retire", is very difficult because it is contrary to all one has wanted to do until then. And yet, life is full of these changes and transitions in which what was good and right at a certain time becomes excessive, untimely, and harmful at another. And so, very often the mother does not see, and cannot make this sacrifice. She tries to bind her children to herself in every way, not perceiving and even encouraging their defects. The worst part of it is that she thinks, or wants to deceive herself and others into thinking, that it is for their good.

Children who accept this easy state of protection, a kind of padding against harshness of life, without rebelling and sometimes with complacency, enter life unprepared for its struggles and snares. From such lack of psychological and spiritual preparation arise dangers

to their health and to their future position in society and among their fellow men. They often remain weak, timid and ineffectual. But in many other cases, the contrary happens. When a child has a more manly and energetic temperament, he is inclined to escape from the tyranny of the family. The ties with mother, which had been prolonged unnaturally, are broken violently; and the rebel is accused of ingratitude and of lack of love. Mother does not understand him, so painful quarrels ensue. An abyss is dug between mother and child, and it is the mother who suffers the most from it. So, she loses both her relationship to her child and his appreciation of her sacrifices because she has forced him to assert his independence. But because her over-protectiveness had prevented him from developing his own judgement, and because he is still quite a dependent person underneath his rebelliousness, he is especially prone to fall under evil and harmful influences.

This crisis in the life of a woman also explains a fact we joke about but which causes serious harm and deep suffering: "the mother-in-law problem". The crisis of a mother whose daughter gets married is often dangerous. Whereas an adolescent son usually detaches himself gradually from his mother, a daughter's marriage sometimes creates a sudden and painful separation. Right up to the moment of marriage, a daughter may be very close to her mother. But suddenly there is a newcomer who meddles with their intimacy and interrupts it. This is a dangerous moment for the mother. If she cannot overcome it with wisdom and courage, she may become a "mother-in-law" in the pejorative sense of the word. She feels hostile and shows jealousy towards the man who appears to have deprived her of her daughter and companion. Naturally, her unjust reaction evokes a resentful response from her son-in-law, and sometimes from the daughter, too. The well-known complications and conflicts ensue.

In recent times, this situation has become less frequent because girls, especially in large cities, are increasingly emulating the independence of boys, thereby detaching themselves from their mothers at an earlier age. But this fact makes it even more necessary for mothers to keep up-to-date psychologically with their daughters. To maintain a meaningful relationship with a rapidly changing adolescent takes a real effort toward understanding on the part of the mother.

There is one basic preventive for these problems: we must not let ourselves be absorbed exclusively by any one human function, whatever it may be, even the most noble and finest. Woman, in order to be a mother in the best and most effective way, must not fall into the trap of being *exclusively* a mother. Instead, she must be a human being who is *also* a mother and who exercises the functions of a mother with all the love it requires. But, I repeat, she must not be merely a mother. It is necessary that she realizes that there coexists within woman (and, I would say, *above* the mother role) a human soul that is aware of itself, that also has other interests and activities, and that is involved in social affairs and in the life of the spirit. This does not make the woman less a mother, but a better mother.

In the first place, the woman who is interested in social problems and who participates in the life of her time, her community, and her country can better understand the world in which her children are growing up. If, when her children are small, she deprives them of some attention in order to keep up with the issues of her time, to read significant books,

and to take an interest in problems which transcend the little sphere of her family, then, when her children are adolescent, she will be able to follow and understand them, to be their friend and companion. Therefore, in the interest of the maternal function itself, it is wise for the mother not to be exclusively a mother. When the moment of separation comes, she will have another series of human and spiritual interests ready to which she can devote her energy and time.

I would like to illustrate this point with an example of an American woman faced with the necessity of going to live with her married daughter and son-in-law. In order to avoid becoming the typical "mother-in-law", at the age of fifty, she returned to college and studied for a degree. As she used to say, "You see, coming back in the evening for dinner I had something better to occupy myself with than the quarrels between my daughter and son-in-law. I was thinking of Plato and the Egyptians".

Actually, when a woman has wider and richer interests, she can look at the petty everyday family disputes, the conflicts, and the problems of adjustment which may occur in the conjugal life of her daughter with much greater serenity. Because of this detachment, instead of being an obstacle and complication, she may be of real help to her daughter. That same American woman used to say of her son-in-law, who had an unpleasant personality and who used to get upset about everything, "He deserves our pity; we can ignore his unpleasantness, but he can never escape from himself".

Naturally, this is an exceptional case. It is difficult at the age of fifty to shift abruptly from domestic duties to the life of a student. Therefore, one should prepare oneself gradually for the transition by combining broader intellectual, social and spiritual interests with one's maternal functions. Whereas in the first years of married life, the woman had often to sacrifice to some extent her wider interests to her domestic duties, now she can satisfy her postponed thirst for cultural and spiritual activities. This will make her new way of life much easier.

IV - Psychological-Maternal Roles

a. Teaching

This leads us to a consideration of those women who are not mothers in actual fact. For these women the essence of motherhood is in no way precluded. On the contrary, they can manifest its broader and socially more useful aspects; they can embody spiritual motherhood. This can be achieved in many ways, depending upon different abilities and circumstances. One of the first and more important is that of education. The elementary school teacher is often called upon to substitute for those mothers who do not know how or are unable to educate their children properly. Therefore she should always consider her function to be partly maternal. By doing so, she puts her relationship with her pupils in a properly human light, and she avoids many of the mistakes that are frequent in education. She effectively supplements the barren and over-intellectualized aspects of the educational curriculum with a humanizing quality. Through her effect on her students, she can indirectly

perform a valuable function by spreading light and harmony among them and indirectly among their parents.

The high school teacher also has a partially-maternal task. This is harder, more complicated and more delicate than that of the elementary school teacher, just as it is harder and more complicated for a mother to guide her adolescent children. The teacher must be able to guide rapidly changing personalities, both morally and intellectually at the most critical period of their development. Therefore, she must be mature, knowledgeable, and disciplined. She needs much inner preparation, psychological insight, tact, and discretion. In compensation, she will obtain results and satisfactions that are deep and gratifying. She should really be able to awaken and to reveal people to themselves, and to rescue confused and deluded young people from mistakes and faults. But to do this effectively, a teacher must be more like an understanding and loving mother than like a formal instructor. In other words, although she must demand from her pupils the necessary mental work, she should not adhere to a sterile intellectualism, nor should she seek to impart a cold and often useless mass of information to her students. Instead, she should deal with pupils as individuals, win their confidence, and offer them parental interest and support.

b. Nursing

The maternal vocation of woman, the need of the feminine heart to devote itself to the protection and care of others, finds one of its noblest expressions in the succor of the sick and suffering. The nursing profession, provided it is taken up with humanitarian and compassionate motives and feelings, may become a mission in the real sense of the word, as in the case of Florence Nightingale, the pioneer of the great modern nursing movement.

c. Social Work

Another vocation in which women can do much good work while exercising a maternal function is social work. In talking with some of these women who are employed by European industries, I have been impressed by how much they can do for the families of workers in all their social difficulties, in their relations with the authorities, in questions of health, etc. Through this kind of work, many women may bring spiritual light and moral education to thousands of working families. In the United States, social work takes many different forms that are equally as influential for the promotion of physical welfare, psychological health, and spiritual well-being. The advocacy of the needs of the poor, the underprivileged, the sick, and the emotionally disturbed is a calling of high spiritual value. It is especially suited to the expression of feminine qualities.

Although we have so far spoken in terms of specific roles, all the functions of those roles - or at least some of them - can be developed and utilized by woman irrespective of her situation; for instance, by an unmarried career woman in her many contacts and relationships with her fellow human beings.

V - The Woman as a Source of Inspiration

Still another feminine function remains to be mentioned. It is one of the noblest and highest callings for a woman to inspire others. In this spiritual activity, woman makes use of the highest feminine power, her intuition. The woman whose intuition is active and who is neither troubled by personal emotions nor too involved in intellectual work may arise to the luminous sphere of the superconscious from which she is able to perceive durable values and essential truths. Sometimes, she is actually able to foretell the future by intuiting trends which are preparing to become manifest in the visible world.

In ancient civilizations these superior sensibilities of woman were acknowledged, appreciated and utilized. They were used by the priestesses of the Druids and by the Sibyls. Authoritative and wise men like Numa Pompilius did not hesitate to avail themselves of their wisdom. Later on, women were the inspirers of poets and artists. A fine psychological study of the relationship between women and poets is found in the books by Edouard Schuré, *Femmes Inspiratrices et Poètes Annonceurs* and *Prophètes de la Renaissance*. And surely Goethe was referring to this superior aspect of femininity when he finished *Faust* with the words "Alles Vergänglichliches ist nur ein sinn Gleichnis. Das Ewige-Weibliche zieht uns hinan". (Every transient thing is but a symbol, the eternal feminine draws onward).

In the present world, we either neglect this spiritual function of woman or we try to exploit the inferior aspects of her psychic sensibility out of curiosity and self-interest. It is therefore hoped that either through the scientific study of parapsychological faculties or through a spiritual awakening (of which there are clear signs even in the midst of the world's prevailing materialism) woman will recover consciousness of her superior psycho-spiritual gifts, and that man will appreciate them and make use of them again for the sake of their mutual spiritual growth.

VI - Conclusion

Woman, therefore, can make good use of her femininity in every field of human life. This is particularly necessary in our times when our civilization is based too much upon masculine qualities. The masculine aspect has much in its favor; it is dynamic, constructive, and progressive. Let us acknowledge these good points, but let us also recognize its excesses and defects. The tendency towards self-assertion, the thirst for dominion and power, and the impetuosity of the combative energies produce hardness and cruelty, wars and destruction. On the contrary, the special function of woman is that of preservation. She defends life, maintains it, and transmits it.

Therefore, in human society, we need a proper balance between the adventuresome and creative push of man and the safeguarding compassionate protectiveness, of woman. Woman then, has an important social function to perform, and she can fulfill it best without any commitment to "feminism". Rather, to be a feminist would be to abandon her true nature and to make her a poor imitation of man. It is true that she should develop some of the better masculine qualities to some degree, that she should thus enrich and complete her own personality; but she can do this while remaining essentially feminine in the highest meaning of the word. Besides being a good wife and mother, she can gradually evolve out of the

limited domestic sphere and demonstrate within society her "spiritual motherhood". In this way she can bring comforting love, compassionate tenderness, and a healing protectiveness to her fellow men.

The more woman becomes conscious of this vaster mission of hers, the better will she fulfill it, and the nearer shall we all approach the true "psychosynthesis of mankind", that integration which will make possible more serene and more satisfying ways of living, more warmth of cultural expression, and higher spiritual possibilities.

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A Higher View of the Man-Woman Problem

Roberto Assagioli and Claude Servan-Schreiber

The first time that I saw Roberto Assagioli, was about two years ago, at his home, in Florence, in the old house where a large part of his life has unfolded. He showed us into his office, cluttered with books and papers to such a point that he had to move a pile over so that my husband and I could be seated.

For a long moment we looked at each other, all three of us, without speaking. Assagioli smiling, his eyes, astonishingly vital within a face lined by great age, moving over us, going from one to the other. Was he submitting us to an examination? It was instead the opposite. He was allowing us to discover him leisurely, to establish a connection with him, without us even realizing that was happening. It was a climate of communication where words find their place later, while something like a current was developing between us. His face was shining with an extraordinary, radiant inner joy, such as I have never encountered in an octogenarian, and rarely in men much younger. This message of joy, perceived immediately, communicated immediately, is the finest memory which I keep of the numerous meetings which we later had with him. "All is possible and accessible *to you*: joy, serenity, I offer them to you as a gift".

I did not expect to find in Roberto Assagioli the echo of my own concern in a particular, specific area: the psychology of women within a world in which their roles, their functions, leads them to undergo first a conditioning, then an oppression which often they do not yet recognize. In the eyes of the feminist that I am, the father of psychosynthesis has therefore an additional merit: an amazing capacity to adapt to changing attitudes, which come to him from his will to understand others and from his love of scientific truth, even if different from past beliefs. On the subject of women, he had in the past been limited; and he knows it and frankly admits it. He had been influenced by cultural prejudices denoting as

"feminine nature" that which is largely the product of a social system. But later he freed himself, in this respect, from the weight of his upbringing, his environment, his age. He quickly became interested in the new existential research into the nature of women which is our liberation movement. At his age, and for an Italian, this is a double achievement! Especially if one judges according to his conclusions.

There is not, and there cannot be a general psychosynthesis of women or, for that matter, of men. There is only, for each individual, of either sex, a personal, unique journey, toward the development of all his emotional, mental and spiritual faculties. "The human being", he said, "today is no longer defined by any of his roles. I believe in the primacy of the human being not conditioned by his sex". Can there be a more beautiful message? Here, more fully, is what he said to me on the subject:

Assagioli:

"We cannot accurately speak of women and men *in general*. Each one of us is a human being before being 'man' or 'woman'. And each one of us, man or woman, has roles and functions to fulfill, individually, inter-individually and socially. Here is where the differences begin. These are most emphatically not *differences in value, only differences in function*. The human being is never defined by any of these roles. Women, as human beings, can accept or not accept the role of wife or of mother. She can choose another vocation. It is not a 'must', a necessity. It is a free choice.

"Woman therefore is right in demanding that she be treated as a human being and not as a 'mere woman', as simply a woman and only that. She is right for refusing to be identified with a certain image of woman. She is a living being, with all the dignity and the potential of a whole human being. All attitudes which limit the possibilities of woman are mistaken. Women have the right to demand respect and parity with men. And the same, of course, is true for men.

"Each of us can equally choose to play different roles. For instance, a woman can decide to play the role of spouse or of mother, or both. She can carry on a creative, social or business activity. She can choose one role, or she can alternate several of them, perhaps during the same day, perhaps over longer periods of time. This is the free choice of a human being. I believe in the primacy of the human being unconditioned by his or her sex.

"The differences between men and women are clearly found reflected in our environment - in the family and in society - and it is here that we must work to eliminate their unfair and harmful crystallization into rigid stereotypes and prejudices.

"But it is important to realize that these differences exist also *within* our psyche, in the depths of our unconscious, and, just as much, in the collective unconscious of humanity, where they appear through some of the most powerful archetypes. So there are universal masculine and feminine principles, which manifest themselves in quite diverse ways through different individuals. In other words, while masculine and feminine principles do exist in the universe, different people experience them and describe them in different ways - as is

equally the case with beauty, truth, harmony, goodness, justice or any of the other universal principles.

"The point is not to try to define what these principles are, but to distinguish, in our consciousness and in our relations with others, 'masculine' and 'feminine' from 'man' and 'woman'. We need to recognize that *both* the masculine and feminine principles exist in their own rights, and that they are present - although in unique forms and different proportions - in every man and in every woman.

Within each human being is a percentage of psychological masculinity and a percentage of psychological femininity, completely independent of the sex of the individual. Each person is a unique combination of these energies. When we look at women *on the whole*, we find that they are more attuned to the feminine principle, have greater access to it and have a greater percentage of it in their psychological make-up. And similarly, men are more attuned to the masculine principle. Of course this is a generality. People are unique. Some men are psychologically more feminine than many women, for instance.

"Take the example of the French novelist George Sand (the pen name of Madame DuDevant) and Chopin. They were lovers, and he, physically, had the 'man' role and she the 'woman' role. But psychologically he was feminine and she was masculine. She ----- like a man, wrote in a vigorous style - and smoke cigars! In her personality, masculinity predominated, while Chopin was imaginative, sensitive.

"There is therefore a difference between physical sex and psychological characteristics. Over the years, I have met many who feared - or even believed - themselves to be homosexuals just because they did not recognize this distinction.

"Only by accepting both the masculine and feminine principles, bringing them together, and harmonizing them within ourselves, we will be able to transcend the conditioning of our roles, and to express the whole range of our latent potential.

"As this is true for the individual, so it is true for society. From the social standpoint, there is a great need in present society for the expression of the feminine principles. Society needs women to contribute the higher aspects of their femininity - altruistic love, compassion, the sense of and respect for life - with which they are usually more familiar and which they can often express with greater facility than men. It is therefore desirable for women to be involved in social and political life. If they choose, they can do this while they continue to play traditional feminine roles in the family, or they can give themselves completely over to activities such as social service, renouncing the traditional family roles. They have the full right to do it. Society must respect and appreciate their valuable contribution.

"The fact that a woman may dedicate herself much of the time to certain roles must not prevent her from considering herself equal to men. It is not at all a question of superiority or inferiority. Masculine and feminine psychological characteristics, even though dissimilar, are of the same value. This is a statement of fact.

"Women are right to protest and to rise against the long-standing prejudicial attitudes of society. But in the protest one can lose perspective. One can be destructive and not constructive. Psychologically and historically, conflicts and exaggerations can be understood. The ideal would be for them to remain within boundaries that are constructive as well as just.

"For example, some women go to the opposite extreme of current social stereotypes. Rather than balancing and integrating their feminine energies with their masculine energies, they may virtually deny the feminine in themselves. A woman may reject traditional feminine roles in order to prove to men that she can play masculine roles. Here exists the danger of the masculinization of women. Ironically, this attitude can proceed from the unconscious evaluation of the masculine principle and masculine roles as inherently superior to the feminine. But there is no such inherent superiority. What is needed is an honoring and valuing of the feminine principle, and the ways and roles through which this energy can be expressed by both men and women. Masculine roles are neither better nor worse than feminine roles. They are both needed and are of equal value.

"A controversial question is whether the fact that women frequently have certain functions better developed and men others is the product of nature, or of education, or of social pressure. In my opinion all three factors are present, in different proportions, in each individual.

"While this is an important *social* problem, fortunately, from the *individual's* standpoint it can be largely sidestepped. He or she need only consider how he or she is *right now*, and how he or she *can improve*.

"For example, if a woman has had fewer opportunities or incentives to express her ideas, her thoughts, it does not seem to me to be necessary to spend much time and energy to search to understand why, who is responsible for this, and so forth. Quite simply, if this function is insufficiently developed, *she can develop it*. And the same is true for a man who has not developed his feelings, or his intuition. (Needless to say, there are men who need to develop their intellect, and women to need to get in touch with their feelings and cultivate their intuition). The point is to recognize the strong qualities and the deficiencies- and to bring them into a condition of harmony and balance. This is what I call a psychologically and spiritually practical approach.

"Let us come now to the couple. A couple founded on a basis of fundamental equality, respect, reciprocal appreciation as human beings, can work out the psychosynthesis of their particular couple together. Each one can work on his own psychosynthesis, and each one can also collaborate in the psychosynthesis of the other, helping the other to achieve his own psychosynthesis by helping him strengthen his less developed functions. Then once they have done this to a certain point, they can truly act as a couple by combining and complementing their qualities and functions in all situations: in their marriage, their role as parents, and in their social activities.

"For each function to be developed training is needed - often including specific exercises. The process is analogous to the training of muscles: if one wants to play a certain sport, he finds someone who is competent, gets trained and afterwards continues to train himself. If a man recognizes that his emotional and imaginative sides have been neglected, he can cultivate them. If a woman finds that her mind is not as active as she would like, she can train it. One has to 'cultivate one's garden' by planting different flowers. A woman or a man can do it alone, but it is often more effective, much easier and more enjoyable to do it together as two people.

"When we come to particular problems, many difficulties may emerge, and in each specific case we can apply a therapy. I speak of 'therapy' here in the broadest sense of the word, because none of us is one hundred per cent healthy in the higher psychosynthetic sense. In difficult situations a benevolent and wise therapist or counselor can be of great assistance: someone impartial, kindly, comprehensive, who helps the two members of the couple to become more aware, who explains the situation, who indicates possible solutions and helps to choose the means to attain them.

"For each couple the situation is different. Each human being is unique. Thus unique multiplied by unique gives unique squared; this is a fundamental principle of psychosynthesis. Each case is unique, each situation is unique. Each couple is unique. Each family is unique. We need to focus on the unique existential problem of a certain situation, rather than on generalities, and afterwards to choose techniques which are most adequate for resolving the problems of that particular case. This eliminates the fictitious, inauthentic problems. It may be called the psychoanalytical phase: the discovery of the obstacles to constructive work. And the obstacles are for the most part those which we spoke about before: erroneous attitudes of men and women. I believe therefore in the equality of value, and in the differentiation of functions *up to a certain point*. Collaboration, integration on a base of equality.

"In education, the child needs a maternal environment and a paternal environment. Much harm is done in education when the paternal influence is missing. But if for some reason there is no father, the woman can take the paternal role also. It is difficult, but she can do it, if she wants to. And the same for the man. If the woman is not there, the father can take on the maternal role also. We can perform any role that life requires of us or that we decide to play. The same is true for work. In a large variety of situations, there is always in the human being the latent possibility to do anything within reasonable limits, to choose freely, to deliver himself from social pressures, prejudices, obstacles in order to reach his higher goals.

"We are now in a period of crisis and profound changes. I believe that woman is evolving perhaps more rapidly than man. For him, the task is to discover the real human being beneath masculine limitations - to be not only a 'masculine-man', but a *human being*, who plays masculine roles, and if he chooses, feminine ones. We know that historically there were matriarchal civilizations and patriarchal civilizations; the ideal would be a new synthetic civilization, that is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, but one that is

psychosynthetic, that is to say, a civilization in which the highest and best qualities of each are manifested.

"This would be something new. In all historical civilizations and cultures there has been a preponderance of one or the other element. But in this new civilization and the emerging global culture, for the first time humanity is sufficiently developed to make a planetary, global pattern, incorporating the very best of all men and women. I think that this planetary psychosynthesis, this psychosynthesis of humanity is possible and needed. Each particular problem will then have its frame of reference in the greater whole, and conflict can be replaced by harmonious integration and cooperation. All of this is within our reach - for not only is it very beautiful - it is very *human*.