

PSYKOSYNTES I FOKUS

Giel Luichjes



Psykosyntes i Fokus (Psychosynthesis in Focus)

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Conversation with Giel Luichjes

Giel Luichjes (GL)

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<https://youtu.be/68ByHQEsLQU>

AML: Welcome Giel Luichjes to this library that we are sitting in at the PsykosyntesAkademin. You are one of our much appreciated teachers here and you teach existential themes and you teach sexuality and gender and how that connects with the work we do in Psychosynthesis. I know you know a lot about that, so if I ask you an open question 'how does Psychosynthesis and the existential themes connect and how does the... what shall I say... the energy, the life-force, that we are all longing for, the Eros, how does that come into your work? Tell me more about that.

GL: I think an image that always talks to people a lot is when you look at the little baby that is just born and that is just sparkling with life, there's nothing hindering the expression of energy and the connection with life. It's full of life. Even when it is in discomfort, it still expresses itself completely freely.

And when we grow older and when we become aware of the world around us and also the way we need to fit into that world and we hear the messages from the world on how we should be, what is appropriate and what is not appropriate then we start limiting our energy, we start blocking the life-energy.

And there might also be existential moments in life, which can be the loss of a job, turning ill, loss of a partner or a friend, either from loss of a relationship or even from dying, facing our own death. Which really creates this blockage of our own life-energy. We turn into some kind of survival mode to go through this period, which is fine for a moment, but if we don't wake up afterwards and say 'hey I'm still here, I'm still alive' this actually reduces our potential of who we are and who we can be.

If we look at gender and sexuality particularly as long as you are in the big herd and you feel accepted and included there are not so many questions you ask yourself but if you start looking at differences in sexuality but also in gender, in gender differences, it might be you feel a fear of not fitting in, of not belonging to the herd, of not being included.

Which actually might bring us to a place where we start hiding parts of ourselves, of not expressing parts of ourselves, where we might even become very unhappy doing that but still, we are willing to pay the price as long as we stay included and we are not being excluded. But, doing that, the price is that we withdraw our life-energy. We disconnect from the Eros, as we call it in Psychosynthesis.

And in Psychosynthesis we look at the whole, so we try to be including ourselves in our every aspect and we identify with that and then we say 'this is me'. But if we block parts of ourselves, we still identify, but we are not whole as a being, which means that we, sometimes for good reasons, understandable reasons, but we also lose the contact with our energy and with our potential to

express that energy – and to be a happy person but also feeling, being part of it means expressing ourselves, contributing something, being acknowledged to contribute something, and that is what the journey is about when you look at Psychosynthesis.

To face the parts that we are not so familiar with or that we forgot about for a long time because as soon as the baby starts to learn and starts to fit in, it has to give up little parts of its expression and its uniqueness as well, because we all want to fit in and we need to fit in. The baby learns at a very young age, we really need the other person to survive, that's our system as mammals, as sensing beings.

We sense very clearly and very precisely when we do it right and when we do it not right and then we adjust our behaviour. And that adjustment is necessary, so it's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's also a limiting thing and that's why we in the journey Psychosynthesis kind of reconnects to 'where is my origin, what is the essence of who I am, really, and which parts have I left out'. And sometimes it might be for good reasons and still it's good to contain them and keep them to yourselves, but in many ways and in many instances it could actually be a good thing to connect to your more original self and to connect to that life-energy.

AML: So Roberto Assagioli was quite early in understanding the potential of Bio-Psychoanalysis, that modern research is now beginning to find proof for. That there is not just the social connection, but that things go on in our brains that guide the way we express ourselves in life. And that can be... it's wired and it can be re-wired if we build awareness around this. How do you get that into your work, that aspect also of modern research?

GL: Yes, it's very fascinating to read a lot about it and to actually see that we know things, which is also, by the way, part of Psychosynthesis, we sometimes know things but we don't have the evidence yet, so we tend not to believe ourselves because 'what is the evidence of this'? And that's the example you're giving, right, so I think Roberto Assagioli already saw that we need to revisit our early childhood because that's where the programming started, that's where the wiring started. And we now know how that works in the brain including that we can actually rewire.

And the model, the Bio-psychological model teaches us things about trauma, which is very important to know about, because we can work with trauma in Psychosynthesis, including the healing, which again reconnects to the energy and taking away the blockage that we needed to protect ourselves. Because if we don't have the empathy in looking at ourselves and understanding how did we get to this place where we needed this protection and we build around the pressures and the vulnerable humans, that we are, this layer of protection, and if we don't empathise with this part and say 'ok we really needed to get through this difficult situation which is why I needed to protect myself'. 'But where I am now (which is from trauma theory) we are not in that dangerous or unsafe situation any more' – but if we don't watch out we are repeating it.

And that is what we learn from trauma theory, like the work that Bessel van der Kolk writes about and talks about a lot, and to really understand how we re-experience things in our lives from the past.

So what Psychosynthesis does, we revisit the old parts and we really acknowledge what happens and we try to bring in as much love and empathy to ourselves to understand that we have really been through rough times, sometimes, in our lives, and it's in the past now and we need to move on. And we *can* move on. But to be able to move on, we need to also acknowledge and embrace all the other parts of ourselves, the qualities that we have available to us that can support us on this journey.

And if you're in this place of survival, you lose the sight of your qualities, of the talents you might have, because you can use them in the time that you were in that difficult situation that you had to survive. It could be in childhood, but it could also be in a later phase in life, like the existential moments of life when you think 'I don't know how to get through this any more'.

Another concept that Assagioli talks a lot about is the illusion of being alone, the illusion of being lonely. Although that might be a very real and true experience for people to feel very lonely, but there is an illusion to it because we are so interconnected with each other. I can't survive one day without all those people who make sure there's a heating working in my house, that I can buy food in a shop, that I meet my friends.

So there are many, many ways, even though we are in a very lonely place, we almost forget how interconnected we are. And this, sometimes, is not personal but still, it is a sense of being part of a bigger whole.

I think Assagioli really tried to lift our sense of aloneness by looking at the bigger picture, that we are part of a bigger thing which many people can have many words for but that *connectedness* is what the essential part is in that, that we are connected and that we can reach out and that even in our lonely moments, we are still of value to people in just our being present.

AML: It's beautiful that... So, if we move on a little bit to another area which is of particular importance, I think, in this time and age, the present time... the 'naming the shame' - I am thinking partly of the 'me-too' movement but also about the way we can communicate quickly with the new technology (not so new anymore but it is in the history of all of us), it is very, very new to people to connect instantaneously all around the world.

Things can be put out there. It's Greta with the environment and ecology –there is a lot of shame, she is telling all these world leaders “you know but you don't do anything, the house is on

fire but you don't do anything". And then there is the 'me-too', which has, in a way, started the liberation from past experiences for a lot of people.

So, tell us a little bit more... tell us your thoughts on this... finding authenticity, finding your will, manifesting who you are, and standing up for something even though there is shame.

GL: We can go many ways there, so we need to choose...

AML: I'm glad you can do that, Giel... 🙏

GL: To start with *shame* and 'me-too', because I think it's quite amazing how particularly women but also men have stood up and said 'I'm not going to carry around this secret with myself any more, I'm going to tell my story, which means I'm freeing myself from my isolated place' – which relates back to what we were talking about the connectivity – so it's kind of saying 'I'm stepping back in, I want to be free again'.

And it's not so easy just to say it and then it's done, of course it's not that easy, but it is the necessary first step. And it takes a lot of courage. It's not only the shame you have to face yourself, but it's also (and we have many ugly examples of that) that the environment shames you, which we call 'victim-shaming'. 'Why were you there in that moment, weren't you part of it', so it's really very courageous if you dare to step into that. And it's only the first step, but it's the necessary step.

And I could not find a clearer example of expression of will. So expressing your will and saying 'I'm going to be in charge of my own life again and I'm going to *not* let somebody else shut my mouth... I am going to speak what I have to say... and I'm not only doing it for myself, I am saying it for many people who have experienced the same thing'.

So besides the side-effect of this risk of people shaming you for doing it, particularly the first people who have done it and even other women doing it to other women and saying... whatever they were saying... it has opened up a movement of people finding their courage and finding their words to speak out and to move on with their lives. Which is really... looking at it from the personal journey... 'I've had this experience, it really shocked me, it froze me, it blocked me, but I want to move on, which means I am taking things in my control again'.

So, the power of will is immense. It's very big, if you take this energy into your own hands again.

AML: And finding the authentic self, the authentic place within yourself, or consciousness, where the will is in your service. So it's not just having a strong will but having your own authentic expression, manifesting who you are in a way.

GL: Yes, and it's really interesting... we talked about the Bio-psychological model and the trauma theory, that we now know of because we do a lot of brain research and we know how the brain works, and one of the things that stands out is if you are able to *do* something, the effect of a trauma is already much less than when you freeze or when you are not able to do anything.

So by stepping up and by expressing and by taking things in control, you are actually taking care of your own trauma as well at the same time. Which is something we know now from scientific research, and perhaps sometimes it's to *not* be nice for a moment and to *not* think of the consequences and use a strong will, because it is really needed.

If you haven't got a very large experience of expressing will, sometimes, as I always say to my clients as well, 'the first attempts of expressing your own will might be a bit clumsy and that's ok because you are experimenting, but at least you're doing something'.

And getting out of this stuck place where the energy, the life-energy is frozen, is the first steps to melt it down. And that is being authentic. It is really stating your truth, and the truth is always very subjective, we know that from existential thinkers as well, but it is very important to speak out. Even if the other person doesn't want to hear it, can't hear it, it still needs to be said. You need to do right to yourself to say 'this is what I have to say because it is really important to me.

AML: And it's so central to all our Psychosynthesis work, finding that authentic place and expressing...

GL: Yes, and this is the surface, because underneath we get to the depths of many, many layers that are relevant around this which is about gender roles, and about expectations we have ourselves or we have of other people, about sexual roles, about expectations of sexuality.

So there are many myths around sexuality and gender that we need to face to understand that... well a very simple concept that came out after 'me-too' when are we consensual about what is happening?

So if I invite you to a cup of tea in my house that means you say yes to a cup of tea in my house, that doesn't mean that because you accept to come to my house, I can just fill in whatever I want what comes next and say 'well, you were consensual because you would come to my house for a cup of tea, right' – and we know that if you, as a woman say yes to a cup of tea that means... bla bla bla... So that's what we have to deconstruct, all the myths, because we swallow them in, we internalise them (which is another concept we use in Psychosynthesis) and that means we have to face ourselves as well in terms of what we have made normal but it might not be so normal and it might not even be acceptable.

So, that means that it is not only the perpetrator who needs to look into 'from which place have I actually done what I've done'. For example, I might be very needy of contact and the only way to express it is by crossing boundaries. Which does not make it good but it is kind of a start of journey for someone to start looking at 'how have I come to do this'? And the other side is to really acknowledge... 'ok, I really need to be communicating my boundaries, because that's necessary, I need to be authentic, and that's also about what I really want'.

That doesn't mean that the responsibility is with someone who has had their boundaries crossed *only* but *also*, because otherwise we get into a split like there's good guy and there's bad guy, and that's too simple. We really need to rethink the way, particularly how men and women interact, but this happens in other relationships as well. And what is the expectation we have on ourselves, for example if you are woman, it doesn't mean because you are in a relationship or you're even married to a person, then you have to have sex. You can have sex when you feel like having sex, when there has been the courtship-making to get you into the right mood to have sex. And that is something else than, 'ok I am a partner and my partner has a need for sex so I just have to go along'.

That's one of the things that we need to re-address and it makes, even in 2019, it is still essential that we communicate about this and to be very careful of our compliant parts, the parts that want to make the other person happy, because that is what we learnt. 'If my partner is happy then I'm happy'. Yes of course, it adds on to it. But where is your boundary, where is your longing. What is you longing, what would you long for if you designed your ideal relationship? What would it look like?

AML: This is so interesting and I think we could go on forever, but we have also... if we take all this and bring in also a perspective of the stories that we are telling ourselves and the myths and the stories we're a part of. It can be our own personal assumptions, of relationships or how we should be, but it can also be in society or in the greater system, what is your take on that?

GL: Wow, let's take another hour then... 🙏 If we start again at the start, which I think is the best thing that learns from minute number one that I need you. I'm fully depending on you. This means that the parents become their Gods, they are the example of everything. Which is a good thing, by the way, because you are raised by, let's hope, loving parents who want the best for you, so that's a good start.

And the other side to the good start is that even the parents, they are not aware of their constructs, they are not aware of their beliefs, the stories they've been told and that they've accepted as being normal or being the way it should be. Which means that even from a loving perspective and from a loving position, they pass on what they say is the way you should do it.

And society of course, plays a very large part in that, because if we look at the way we are dressed and the way we identify, we probably identify the way we are assigned genders like male and female, and there's little aspects to it, that we kind of express our genders... like wearing a bit of make-up, making yourself a little bit more beautiful than you are by yourself, and for me, for example, just dressing in the clothes that I found in the men's department in the store.

We are re-performing a gender, and to our children and our grandchildren we are showing again 'this is a male gender and this is a female gender'. Society as a whole, kind of reaffirms us over and over again in various subtle ways, and sometimes in less subtle ways by the way, when sexuality for example is used in advertising and very scarcely dressed people, very beautifully sculptured bodies of course to kind of say... this is a real man, this is a real woman. It's kind of reinforcing our gender stereotypes. And all the kids are just absorbing, they have no chance to say no to an image yet, that comes much later, which means they take it for granted and they are even influenced by it. We can't *not* have them influenced by it.

So, the awareness you were mentioning before is that we need to re-investigate... including transgender people, who really do not fit into the gender that was assigned to them at birth, but also everyone who is gender and who needs to kind of understand 'the way I am performing my gender is the way I have been taught to do so, it is not necessarily *me*. So, I need to look into... perhaps some shadow parts in me that I have not looked into. And the bigger whole, society as a whole has shadow parts as well and sometimes the shadows act it out.

For example, if someone is bullying somebody who is perhaps non-gendered or even transgendered, then the bullying that takes part is 'you're distorting my system and I want to maintain my system, I want to stay in my view of the world which means we have men and women... and if you can transition from a man to a woman or from a woman to a man, you are distorting my world-view... because you are actually forcing me to think about my own gender... what does it mean for me if you can transition'...

So instead of looking into that part, I act out aggression or try to exclude you or even try to make you fit into the thing we expect from you, because you were born female so you're female and don't try to do differently. It's a way of the society trying to maintain itself, which in itself is understandable and not bad, but it's excluding people or it's forcing people to swallow parts of themselves which are very essential for *them* to be themselves and for *them* to express and to stay connected to their life-energy.

AML: Living a false identity...

GL: Yes, we need that false identity to fit in, to be included, or at least we are under the illusion that that's needed and of course people have gone through a whole process of coming out for whatever reasons, be it for gender, be it for sexual orientation, be it for 'I am a woman but I am not a female expression of a woman in *your* view, but this is what I feel comfortable with, I like to wear a suit, that's makes me feel comfortable'.

You have to look at the context in which that takes place. So, if you come in a banking environment I think a woman wearing a suit might be more accepted than in day-care for example, where the kids go to day-care because that's a bit like 'why are you wearing a suit', it's not practical. Well, perhaps because it's you.

No I mean society restricts certain behaviour, like if I'm angry and I start hitting people in the street that I don't know or even those that I do know, society is kind of restricting our behaviour and saying; 'well, violence is a boundary that we don't cross' and so we don't do that like 'we don't have sex with children'. It's a very useful and very important boundary.

So the difficulty with this topic is, when is it ready for change and when is it still many people kind of being not educated to understand actually what the implication is of lifting a boundary or shifting a boundary.

AML: That leads me to a final perspective here, of what goes on in our societies, in the systems we are a part of, our country, our nation, more and more countries are legalising, opening up for same sex marriage for instance... How can Psychosynthesis be a part of this journey towards, what I hope, is a more open, authentic and accepting society? Small question...

GL: Yes, I think there is hope and yes, small question... Potentially there is hope. Because if we just look at gender and sexuality the way we look at it in these days is completely from 50 years ago, is completely different from 100 years ago and is entirely different again from 1000 years ago. So it's not a constant, it is changing.

The fact that love is not politicised and that if somebody loves somebody, regardless of the gender or even don't identify with the gender, can go into a partnership, if that is acknowledged, that is kind of hopeful I think, because we say it is about love and about people expressing that love, even officially leaving their house to their partner if they should die. So just accepting and understanding that love is not gendered.

You see that with younger kids, the younger generations, as I work with young persons in my practise, more and more people are saying that 'at this moment I don't quite know, so I am non-gendered, so I am non-binary or I am bisexual' and they might be bisexual for the rest of their life

if that's the identity they choose or it might be they change over life, because our sexuality is not fixed over time either, nor our gender.

But the idea that people are seeing those people that say 'yes' to each other in a wedding ceremony or that say 'yes' to another gender because that's what they really feel like and that we have television programmes showing the lives of them and showing them that they are just normal people as we are, or anyone is really, is kind of creating a base for more acceptance and more understanding. Which doesn't mean that some forces aren't at work as well, particularly when there's fear around, when there's uncertainty so people wish to stick to what they know and everything that changes what they know feels like a threat.

Now this is actually a personal quest, I would say, for anyone to face that, and say 'actually I am scared and I want things to remain the same' and that is kind of denying that the world is ever changing - and it always *has* been. I always ask my clients 'just look back 10 years ago, what were you like then, and then look back 10 years again just to realise that you are in a constant process of change, and that's fine. You can manage it, you can relate to it. But if you don't have that self-confidence that you can relate to it, if you become uncertain, there might be a tendency to cling on to old things you know, not want things to change because then at least you won't have to worry so much about your own concerns.

But the Psychosynthesis journey is actually the completely opposite. We look at what ideally could you be if you were free of all those constraints that you have taken on-board? What possibly could happen and what would be the smallest step, the first smallest step you could make to be a little bit closer to that?

Which is a very workable model as well if you work with clients but also in life. You can make a difference. You as an individual create that society with all the people together. The society doesn't exist, it's just a bunch of people. They are the society. So if you change your thinking and your feeling just that little bit, you might infect somebody else who changes their thinking and feeling and that's the way the message and the change gets spread. But we do need to have confidence in ourselves and in other people. That's really necessary. And why wouldn't we?

AML: And why wouldn't we? Yes, that's beautiful... Thank you very much Giel for sharing your thoughts with us today.

GL: Most welcome. Thank you.

