

within the attractive energy of our center of consciousness reflecting the Principle of Universal Love – unchanging, instinctively projected into ongoing action and full manifestation.

In order to experience and enjoy such a reflection of the Higher Self in the center of consciousness (at least in one of its many possible forms), it is necessary to recognize the function of *external unifying centers*. These help to keep alive the spark of desire and, along with it, the possibility that any event bring to life new meaning, purpose and design.

More precisely, as Roberto Assagioli indicates, the external unifying center is “*an indirect but strong link, a point of connection, between the person and the Higher Self, which is reflected and represented in that object...*” (Firman, Gila, 2004).

Without the spark of desire the will is not ignited, and without the will dreams remain sidereal ghosts (*desideris*). They remain mere idealized aspirations, a synthesis conceived only “in the mind of Zeus,” but not *in-spired*, not brought down to earth and incarnated in the human personal experience. As such, these are useless in the construction of any life project that is based in the constant research for actions willed by a *living I*.

The sense of what our life experience may become, the fullness of meaning that can be achieved, can also provide hope for the new generations, hungry as they are for new perspectives, projects and purpose. In this sense, we can become models that might restore the sense of *being present*, *being* “despite all odds,” opened to the new with creativity; *being present* in the world with our wounds, losses and discomfort; facing suffering with courage, trust and love.

PAIN AND JOY

(Translation by Kylie Drew)

“Transform pain”: this phrase was pronounced by an elderly lady during a condivision following a lesson on Panikkar; for me it was the beginning of a long process that allowed me to arrive at a realization and a desire to share it with others.

The lady was referring to her mother-in-law who’s life had been a succession of mournful events, to which she reacted by moving them to a higher level of conscience that permitted her to overcome the trials to which she was periodically subjected. “My mother-in-law was able to transform pain” she said, seriously absorbed, and at a certain point, convinced, as though she wanted to steal a secret from another person that she had never really understood in depth.

I would have wanted to hear more, to know how a woman born at the beginning of 1900, without the possibility of analytical or psychosynthetic studies, was able to pass through pain attributing to it a sense, or transcending it in some way; but then the speaker changed argument and I remained suspended and incapable of listening to what the others were saying. “An elderly lady probably without instruction, without having done therapy, was able to live fully despite various incidents”. It has always been like that, I said to myself, that simplicity, wisdom and an uncommon vitality allow some people to become stronger than others. As usual all of this produced in me amazement and enchantment.

During the evening, the phrase stuck in my brain, like a seed blown in the wind and planted in the soil waiting to manifest itself.

The following day I remembered what I had studied on resiliency motivated by the necessity to fortify the spirit in the light of certain personal events.

Today there is much more discussion about resiliency. What is it? The word derives from latin “resilire”- to jump, bounce back. Adapted to physics, the word

indicates a material that resists to knocks without breaking.

By transposition, in psychology resilience means the capacity of an individual to face negative and traumatic events and, without giving in, to re-organize positively one's life.

The word resilience is used in many fields: in data processing it is the quality of a system that can function correctly despite breakdowns; in ecology it expresses the aptitude of an ecosystem to recover rapidly (more or less) after a cataclysm e.g. reconstruction of a forest after a fire. One can also speak of biological, sport, geriatric and company resiliency.

Boris Cyrulnik is one of the major experts on this argument. He analyzed the 3 factors that contributed to determining it: 1) temperament on the individual side 2) attribution of significance on the social-cultural side 3) social support on the relationship side.

The first factor consists of intellectual capacity, communication, optimism, sense of humour, and auto effectiveness.

The second factor consists of the human capacity to know how to attribute significance to events. Significance is an act, a job that transforms, via the brain, information taken from real events and the affective sphere, and deeply influences personal convictions and consequently changes the quality of life.

The third factor includes a good network of social relationships e.g. an important adult outside of the family, and/or a supporting community capable of offering efficient services like schools, parishes, libraries etc.

Other psychologists have tried to define which protective factors consent a person to sustain with vigour various types of adversities. They have called them: resilient tutors.

A tutor is one who guides and guarantees for a person, resilient tutors are those factors that by coming into play,

they will guarantee that a person will act efficiently and hold out against knocks.

Here is a non-exhaustive list: "good attachment to parents in early stages of life; characterial and personal traits that can foresee positive evolutions ; consolidated sentiments; having values; respecting oneself; capacity to postpone rewards; sense of humour; sense of belonging; optimism; capacity to collaborate; faith; keeping things in prospective; inserting stressful events in a broad aspect and adopting a long period prospect; knowing how to respond to life rather than asking continuously; good social relationships; knowing how to transform painful experiences in lessons; in moments of maximum crisis to be able to open up to a broader view so that one is not obsessed but inspired".

The building up of resilience is possible even if by nature or culture one starts disadvantaged, one's childhood is not one's destiny.

How? Sprucing up our sense of identity , increasing faith in ourselves and our resources, but also looking at ways resilient people have been able to rebuild themselves after various traumas.

Another method consists in learning how to have a constructive attitude and orient oneself towards inner growth .

All of this is not dissimilar to humanistic psychology in general, but a glance at courage, the numerous examples of those who remained on their feet after stressful events, the vision that takes note not only of the individual but also one's culture, the social-sanitary, educational-scholastic, political and economical institutions to which one can refer in moments of crisis, make for a rather interesting field of study.

I personally gained benefit from some textbooks and I also held courses on this particular argument. On the other hand, what interests me in life is to contribute to finding ways to live better.

What instruments are needed to handle strong emotions,

to navigate in the sea of life, to suffer less, to love more and then enjoy all of this? To reply to this question is what interests me most in life. One can become a better human being, which for me means becoming more capable of knowing oneself better, to respect oneself lovingly, to empathize by relating to oneself, to listen by listening to oneself, to understand oneself and others better, by living all of this.

This is what interests me most in life.

Strongly motivated by questions of this kind, after the courses on resilience, I realized that I could do more by studying the birth of a capacity to resist adversity and the consequent pain that is inflicted on us.

So I came back to psychosynthesis which I had never really forgotten, it is my point of reference, to which I can easily refer, when sounding out new ideas. This is possible because psychosynthesis has a full comprehensive vision of man at all levels biological-physiological-psychical-spiritual that one can rapport to other theories without diminishing either of them. Naturally in the case of orientated visions towards well-being and personal development, they draw near to them a richness that supports what Roberto Assagioli affirms. It is a little like looking at a human being by changing one's point of observation, the perspective is absolutely beneficial, indispensable in order not to crystallize oneself.

Roberto Assagioli, in his studies and in his personal life, has repeated that in front of various hardships -sufferance, illness, death etc.- he has continuously re-affirmed that man is able to assume the correct mental disposition that helps himself support whatever destiny offers without surrendering. "Collaborate with the inevitable" is his invitation; but each person will find their own personal mental attitude that will illuminate "how to suffer" rather than "why suffer", and how he will be personally responsible in regard to what he is facing, and by adopting this attitude, he becomes a protagonist and not a victim. As such he can draw on extra energies in respect to the tragedy he is facing, which will not be

blocked but passed through knowingly, and by doing so, investing in his future life, never forgetting his passions, desires, interests - even when it isn't possible to physically obtain something, one can always use one's imagination and creativity.

Disidentification is another pillar of psychosynthesis, it consists in detaching oneself from events in one's life, to look at them as though one is looking at a film without judging but with love and comprehension.

But... sometimes in front of emotional tempests, many of us feel frustrated because we feel we cannot disidentify ourselves, all is clear theoretically but in the middle of a hurricane everything is much more difficult. In what are we strongly identified? And how can we find the answer? What emotions are involved, which is the main one, how much space in our conscience does it occupy? Can I give a name to these emotions and visualize the invasion and draw and write about it. Then, maybe, slowly, you receive a little relief, but not all, only the amount you need to breathe easier and live well and even be happy. To be happy is the biggest rivendication that we have in front of life.

Sometimes we act like mad moths, we search for a remedy, an immediate relief that stops the pain, then how many of us have done a personal growth course and remembered that this is exactly what one must not do, that one has to accept the pain, wait to see what lesson it reveals, what it hides inside.

We try but when there are chronically difficult situations, we lose our patience and the happy moment of serenity disappears. "STOP" is the scream that flows onto our internal path, causing only damage.

At the Psychosynthesis Centre of Milan a group of psychologists gather together with me every 15 days to study in depth the CdA themes, they are arguments that touch us deeply and that stimulate us to talk amongst ourselves, simply and genuinely; we know that no one will judge us and that each of us will feel resonance with the interior world of the other, and in this way, produce

an amplification of one's sentiments, emotions, images that induce in each of us an expansion of one's conscience and, occasionally, insights.

I remember that once we faced the problem of too strong or recurring emotions and we decided that in order to manage them, we needed to make space inside - space is correlated to love, compassion - so that we could have a big enough container, and a well-centred "I" that could not be invaded.

A short time later while I was reading a textbook of a Buddhist monk, I found an anecdote that made me understand better the importance of the container: "if we throw a teaspoon of salt into a very small glass of water, it will cause big repercussions because of the reduced dimensions of the container: but if we throw a teaspoon of salt into, say, a lake, it will not have the same intense effect because of the vastness of the recipient. Although the salt remains the same, the space inside the container changes everything..."

Wonderful ! I thought, but what can I do to create an even larger container?

At the same time another question continued to obsess me: how can I transform pain? I was going through a difficult period and I was looking for solutions.

Continuing to read the Buddhist text, I came upon a revelation of Buddha that indicates four states of the mind - loving kindness, compassion, sharing joy, impartiality - calling them divine houses and inviting human beings to cultivate them and so arrive at the liberation of the heart.

I remain fascinated by certain metaphors, this particular one conquered me, like an enticing mermaid who attracts me by twisting my thoughts, making my eyes smile, my heart happy. I feel that, there, there is a profound truth, those mental states that raise us from blind habits and by taking a quantic jump, they transport us into the reign of the transpersonal. Besides these mental states expand, extend, satisfy, gratify, while mental states like rage, fear, attachment produce contraction, separation, narrow mindedness.

It was not long before I put this together with the four divine houses and the necessity to make space for pain, when one evening I had a small illumination: the container, our interior space - which our conscience governs - can be enlarged if we frequent the four divine houses i.e. loving kindness, compassion, joy and impartiality, and these will determine our attitudes and habits in the form of smiles, genteel gestures, benedictions, actions that will help all, and all of this will expand our conscience, which will regale us with a luminous and benevolent sensation of being interconnected, interdependent, participating in the continual evolutionary path of our species.

In other words in moments of crisis one must do something significant despite how one feels; the situation that makes us suffer comes from a certain sphere (family, work, study), and will need time to be cured, in the meantime the world awaits us and wants us to be sincere, open, transparent, to be able to direct our attention where we want it because a fluctuating attention allows us to be free.

If in the middle of critical situations instead of being ground down, we don't forget to be loving, to anticipate the needs or wishes of those around us and help them and satisfy them, to be happy for the happiness of others, to live following our own profound values and not give in to pain and identify oneself with it; we will obtain sufficient strength to put ourselves "in front of pain", not in a subordinate position, but with dignity, efficiently, empathically, lovingly, face to face.

If we leave space to an exuberant spirit and therefore to the qualities listed above and all the others that Roberto Assagioli mentions, we will receive from our interlocutors continuous reflections in the form of a thanks, a smile, an affectionate gesture, in fact to kindness one replies with kindness, to love with love, goodness with goodness. This continuous bouncing back and forth of what goes out and returns is what makes us richer and produces an expansion of our conscience - and here the circle closes - that inside will grow the capacity to face events and contain them.

In a conscience where the highest human qualities with capacity of renewal inhabit, afflictions will be engulfed like a teaspoon of salt in a lake, they won't have the power to overwhelm us. The pain will be transformed because, re-dimensioned, it will lose its aggressive hold; it will be the counterbalance to our research for significance.

The dizzy abundance that is the Self, the greatness of life makes us relate to the unpleasantness of things that happen to us. Other awaits us and expects to be realized.