

DISCIPLINE MON AMOUR

Translation by Luisa Bertolatti

What is discipline if not love itself?

Why write an article on discipline? Because I have a deep reverence for this quality and hope that perhaps someone out there reading this may discover that discipline is indeed a quality to be loved and embraced.

I have a small confession to make – I am half British, half Italian. Someone reading this may think “A-ha, that’s why you love discipline so much!”, because if you know British culture at all, you know that us Brits are quite enamoured with order and discipline – we like being punctual and we love queueing - even at the bus stop (I say *we* even if I am half Italian, not to negate my Italian side, but because I do really feel I am *both* British and Italian). Discipline and a somewhat polite nature are built into our DNA. We even apologise when someone else does us wrong, for instance if someone accidentally bumps into us, or steps on our feet, or even much worse.

I was born in the UK and moved to Italy later on in life, so that British nature was, and still is, a part of my day-to-day life. Initially, my love for discipline didn’t make my life easy once I moved to Italy. Queues in Italy are, to put it politely, “*creative*”, if not downright chaotic or non-existent. I have vivid memories of times of acute stress caused by a lack of discipline that could have been very straightforward and easy, had discipline been applied. In those kinds of situations, everyone would benefit from discipline, and this is what I love about this quality: it’s a way of existing together in respect and harmony.

Here’s a simple example: I was once waiting outside a private healthcare building because I needed to have some blood tests done. When I arrived (early), there were already a couple of people waiting outside, but they

weren’t queueing, they were just standing around more or less close to the entrance door. I asked them, “Excuse me, who is the last in line?”, because I wanted to know what order we were at least *supposed* to be queueing in. Once I had that information, I tried to position myself so that a queue could somehow form behind me, trying to create order in a disorderly situation. When the doors finally opened (late), there was a sudden rush of people behind me, all trying to get in before each other, almost tripping over each other to get the little number at the door, to be *first*. I was absolutely shocked, appalled, frustrated, and was so indignant that people actually managed to push past me.

But the question is, is forming an orderly queue restrictive? Does it invade anyone’s freedom? Does it create chaos or disorder? I believe that the answer is simply, no. So how can it be perceived as being something negative, or as an imposition?

During the awful time of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was proud of us Italians - despite the dramatic and extremely difficult situation, I found there was a lot of beauty in the order, patience and discipline that many people showed and applied during that time (people were finally queueing!); that imposed moment of discipline, which did undoubtedly create a lot of anxiety for many, ultimately had a positive result, protecting many people at risk, creating new organizational and work systems, new ways of booking appointments, and much more... in other words, it was a time that led to order and harmony, even if brought about by a terrible occurrence – but I see that many good situations created during that time have stuck and have been adopted as the “new norm” (for example, home-working was almost unheard of before the pandemic), because order and discipline bring balance and harmony, which had been desperately lacking for a long time before Covid-19.

Of course, if discipline is used badly, it does not elevate – for example, parents who are control freaks when it comes to their children, or bosses who micromanage their employees, or much worse case scenarios of authoritarianism in the name of “discipline”. Discipline is often associated with authority, perhaps because the

method and objective of that kind of discipline is not benevolent. Some people feel terror, anger, frustration, coldness or rebellion when they hear the word discipline. But not me: when I think of discipline my heart fills with warm love, peace and harmony – I feel I can breathe. Some of you reading this must think that I must be authoritative, cold, aloof, because discipline is perceived as being negative, confining, imprisoning, limiting. Not so! If used for good, discipline gives freedom, it elevates us, it allows us to live in harmony, to really see each other, to listen, to enjoy life fully. If I think of an orderly situation, it makes me breathe and relax. This “breath of freedom” to me is the beauty of discipline.

92

Some might believe that discipline is the antithesis of creativity. But the greatest artists, musicians, writers, architects or designers had to apply themselves to their art form with consistency, determination and discipline in order to be truly great. This does not mean that they didn't have their bad days, moments of laziness or frustration – of course they did, just like anyone. But it's discipline that leads us back on the path, it takes us by the hand like a loving friend and says, “Come on, you can do it this time too, come with me, and with each step you'll get closer to reaching your goal”. It's positive control on our existence, which would otherwise be shapeless, directionless, with no room or space, rambling and chaotic.

I have fond memories of a 3rd year Liceo (high school) class I taught English to some years ago in a Liceo Artistico (art high school), where I taught kids in the figurative arts section. I gave them a task to complete, which was to create a piece of artwork that represented one of the English Literature excerpts we had studied in class, which they would then have to present to the class in English with a time limit of 5-7 minutes. I remember telling them that they had complete freedom on the art they could create, that they could even present a sheet of white paper, as long as they could demonstrate and present it in perfect English. Suffice to say, no one presented a blank sheet of paper. The entire class made a huge effort and created wonderful masterpieces, and the vast majority of the students presented these with

an admirable level of English. I was very touched and moved by that. It taught me that giving total freedom within a “framework”, which is discipline, can create astounding beauty.

Here's another example: for some time now, I have been getting up at dawn a few times a week to exercise. To be fit and healthy is very important to me, so that I can enjoy my life and enjoy time with others; it's important for my body, but it also helps me to manage emotions, thoughts, and enriches my spirit, too. In other words, I love doing it. My life is very busy during the week and in the past, I found it increasingly difficult to find time to exercise. One day I said to myself, “When is the only time during the day that I can exercise with no distractions, no interruptions, no excuses, no guilt?” the answer was simple: early in the morning, before my family wakes up. So I began, tentatively at first, 15 minutes, then 20, now 30 – I get up at 5:45am to exercise – but those 30 minutes of sporty solitude are essential to me. Sure, there are days when the alarm goes off and I say, “Oh no, is it that time already?!” but then my friend discipline comes along and says, “Come on, you know you'll feel great afterwards, you can never regret a workout”. So, I get up and go. In the end, what are 15 minutes more or less sleep, compared to feeling great and enjoying life and time with others? It's a “sacrifice” I'm willing to make, because I have my trusty friend discipline by my side, always, and so I find balance and harmony.

Despite all this, I wouldn't consider myself to be “sporty”, in other words I could never do races, I just exercise for my health and personal well-being – but true athletes who do sport for a living, or for love, know that discipline is their best friend. An athlete who wants to compete at the Olympics, be a professional athlete, or simply run a marathon, knows that they have to train with consistency, balance, perseverance and discipline, with a large dose of patience, self-compassion and self-love on the side, too.

I love this quote by Assagioli: “Discipline... never violates free will because it stems from the free adherence to fulfil the plan of the Self and, when applied

to individual consciences, transforms a sense of duty into will”. When I started exercising at dawn, yes, I forced myself to do it – it wasn’t easy getting up so early, in the cold and dark, to then have to make an effort – but with discipline it has become something I want to do. I love how Assagioli talks of “individual consciences”, because yes, discipline is a personal quality, and should be applied personally, with personal conviction and will, to then create moments of harmonious sharing and communion with others.

Assagioli says that discipline, “...stems from the free adherence to fulfil the plan of the Self”. Our Self wants good things for us, that is certain. Any benevolent pathway towards fulfilling the Self can only be positive. It’s a voluntary path, not a compulsory one – discipline is put into action through will. As I have already mentioned, discipline is that friend who loves us and accompanies us towards our Self, fed by will. A friend is by definition a person who cares about us (Old English *frēond*, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *vriend* and German *Freund*, from an Indo-European root meaning ‘to love’), a friend wants the best for us, a friend is loving. Therefore, how can a true friend be hated? If we think about discipline as a friend, a loving energy, or even a form of love, then we can only feel the same way towards discipline itself. We can take each other by the hand, elevating towards our Self, and say, “Come on, let’s go... together!”.

THE ORACLE OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

Translation by Achille Cattaneo / Gordon Leonard Symons

Second part

Even Psychosynthesis has its own oracle

I’ve always thought that there is nothing more intimate, or nearly so, than reading a book, essay, narrative or poetic work. The intimate relationship is established with the author, with his style of thought and essentially with his peculiar internal world. Deciding to pick up a work or even an original essay, I have often said to myself: “Here, now I am ‘listening’ to this author, with his very personal and unmistakable style ... it’s as if he were sitting next to me and talking to me”.

This naturally also happened with the works of R. Assagioli and with those of his main students, those who continued his school, developed his thought, each with certain nuances.

There is a work by R. Assagioli, to tell the truth, posthumously created by another author – M. Macchia Girelli, who recently passed away and who was Director of the Center for Psychosynthesis in Rome and curator of the the translation if the ‘Act of Will’ by R. Assagioli.- : Guide to the reading of psychosynthetic terms i, which over time I have learned to appreciate and consult more and more.

The author, inspired by a great love for the work and thought of R. Assagioli, has compiled this guide to psychosynthetic terms with particular care and psychosynthetic expertise. It is a glossary of just under 140 pages, yet there is no Assagioli term or concept that has been omitted or even overlooked. In the blink of an eye we have available, for any use (very useful, especially for Centers and Group Leaders !) key concepts and terms of psychosynthesis, with relative sources and references to the works of R. Assagioli, diligently