

# THE WORDS OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

*Translation by Damiano Pagani / Gordon Leonard Symons*

1. In the clear sky of theory

## Introduction

In our Centre in Ancona we have decided that the path of Psychosynthesis can be traced, and also followed, by varying the starting points and representing these points with a series of letters, which can serve as points of observation and study.

We took Piero Ferrucci's text "A new will" as a model and chose some of the words that are quoted and examined there, working freely, even with the now canonized technique of the association of ideas, to follow the intuitions and suggestions born from, and aimed at the semantic area symbolized by the words. It is, on closer inspection, a different use of the method, suggested by Assagioli, of the "evocative words", maximizing the area evoked by each single word.

To this attempt, voluntarily accepted and implemented by some members of the Centre, I felt that a kind of general premise should be introduced, which would give an account of the reasons and needs that prompted us to challenge ourselves once again in the possible development of Psychosynthesis.

Therefore, at this point in the study, it seemed to me necessary to choose, to begin with, a term, a word, which possessed an undeniable initiatory value, which could recall the famous example of the seed and the plant enclosed within the seed.

This word came to my mind overwhelmingly, almost immediately, and it is **Love**. My reflection begins with this word, but also the whole set of messages that other members will send to readers and listeners, continuing on the path opened by those who preceded them, paving the way for other "explorers". The map made up of all these traces will seem to be a confused drawing, at

first reading, but following it with greater attention, the reciprocal links will be understood, inscribed in a circularity that is not only suggestive, but also peculiar and, in the end, not easy to interpret, but highly satisfying.

## L for Love.

The thought of Love, in me, immediately connects with a series of recalls, which I will try to clarify one by one. One cannot fail to begin with Dante's famous expression, in Canto V of the Inferno, that of Paolo and Francesca, "Amor ch'a nulla amato amar perdona" (canto V, v.103), (*Love, that to no loved heart remits love's score*) which comes immediately after the other definition "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprendi" (ibid, v. 100). (*Love, that so soon takes hold in the gentle breast*). However, it is not possible to stop at these words of Francesca, which highlight, as peculiar characteristics of love, its irresistible strength, and, at the same time, its tendency, which is also invincible, to translate itself into a psychological dimension first, and finally a physical one ("il cor gentile" (the gentle heart), ("la bocca mi basciò") ("kissed my mouth"). But, despite Dante's breadth of meaning, it does not exhaust all the extensions of the term, which also often recurs in the "Commedia"; to fully grasp the meaning of this statement, it is enough to recall the verse, also unforgettable, with which Alighieri's immense poetic effort closes. And in fact, there is no need for many explanations to understand, at first reading, the great difference in meaning between the love mentioned by Francesca da Rimini and which bound her to Paolo to the point of leading them both to their deaths, and "L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" "Love that moves sun and other stars", TN), the last line of the poem. That this love should be written with a capital letter, being a periphrasis of the divinity, with a reference to the Scholasticism of St. Thomas - as is written in many comments - or that it is more simply a representation of sacred love, in opposition to the profane one of the lustful in Hell - a wonderfully painted representation by Titian - however there can be no doubt about the diversity of meaning of the same term "Love". Thus, we approach that magnum

sea which flows under the same word and which, time after time, can cradle or shake us. This kind of “confusion” comes from the uniqueness of the word in our language. In other languages, however, there is a structural difference between the diversity of words, so that one corresponds to one meaning and the other a different meaning. Let’s take an example, not by chance: in ancient Greek there were two words that covered the whole scope of our “love”, *philia* and *eros*, the second indicating the “*physical, carnal*” (“erotic”, let’s say, with an etymological derivation from *eros*), and the first which escaped this, and did not fall within *eros*. Both terms presuppose a bond, a “*relationship*”, which can also be non-material, that is, not existing between different subjects. See the beginning of the treatment-definition of the theme of *love* by Assagioli, which begins by delving into a special type of love, love of oneself “The first love is love of oneself” (Assagioli, *The act of will*, chap. 8, second paragraph “*Types of love*”). A. realizes the peculiarity of his statement, in contrast with the common feeling, which qualifies this type of love as a pathological state of egotism or narcissism; but he continues on this track, proceeding, according to his style, to an analytical and identifying classification. Leaving aside, for now, further insights - but we will come back to the subject - I would like attention to focus on a further affirmation by the author, a little further on in the same text. Assagioli writes «Love for another human being is qualified by its ‘*object*’» (ibid, italics by A.), and, after having examined maternal and paternal love, he stops to discuss the love between a man and a woman. Having finished examining the types of love between people of the opposite sex, he quickly reviews fraternal, altruistic and humanitarian love, ending with the love of God, however you want to call the object of this love, which reaches its highest form in mystical subjects, “*who realize the lived experience of union through love*” (ibid, at the end of the paragraph).

This long *excursus* doesn’t convince me much. And I really would like to start where “L” left off, the nature of “*mystical*” love. One of the most famous examples is that of the Ecstasy of Santa Teresa d’Avila, a work in marble and gilded bronze, placed in Rome, in the

Cornaro chapel, of the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, at the end of via XX Settembre. In this authentic masterpiece of Baroque art, Bernini is inspired by the autobiography of the Saint, who describes ecstasy as the feeling inspired by the angel, who thrusts a dart into her belly, then extracting it and leaving the Saint in a “*fire of love*”, as expressed in her Life.

The representation as a whole, the details of the face, of the dress, of the body have prompted several authors, especially French, to use the term “*sacred eroticism*” to fix the character and message of the work, examined from a psychoanalytic angle. The genius of Bernini, therefore, was able to acutely grasp an event and a moment in which the very object of love was dressed in “stage clothes” so to speak, coming from *profane love*, but passed into the hands of *sacred love*.

An analogous phenomenon is represented by the ambiguity of Assagioli’s text, where we want to ascribe every type of meeting between people of different sexes into the category of “*physical*” love, completely forgetting the numerous cases in which that relationship never has anything physical, - and therefore we catalog it in the category of friendship - or those life trajectories that pass from one type to another, in a completely random order. The banal fact of total absence, in Assagioli’s catalogues, of the case of an “erotic” love between people of the same sex deserves no particular mention, if indeed the importance of the love object is annulled, looking elsewhere for a satisfactory key to interpretation (apart from the perhaps necessary attribution to the context of the era in which certain subjects were not even talked about, or even written about).

If, therefore, the object of love cannot become the litmus test to distinguish the different types of love (to use Assagioli’s expression), and if not even the focus on the subject helps us, we must look elsewhere. Then, in the foreground, a different element advances, which is worth referring to.

However, before proceeding, I would go even further back, to understand, or at least guess, the importance

of the theme. A “prompt” (a television term, now entered into speech), can be given by resorting to that precious “**Guide to the reading of psychosynthetic terms**”, which Maria Luisa Macchia Girelli has left us; therefore, we read, under the heading Love, in the first two lines “*A yearning for completion, for uniting, for merging with something, with someone different from oneself. It has cosmic origin, nature and functions.*” Transporting ourselves, then, to the Assagioli source, we see that the thought of psychosynthesis projects us, in a certain sense, into another science, *PHYSICS, and, more particularly, into ASTROPHYSICS*. In fact, when we read that love has a close, albeit partly mysterious, relationship with the cosmos, and that after the passage from what we could call, with the classical term of Physics, the Big Bang, and therefore after the passage from primordial Unity to duality, what Assagioli writes remains fully understandable and shareable “*there is, in various ways, to varying degrees in creatures, the vague sense of common origin and an unconscious, but powerful nostalgia to return home*”, revealing the secret of the nature and function of love (Assagioli, *Transpersonal development*, pp. 218-219). This intuition finally guides us towards the fundamental discovery of the **importance of relationship**.

It is to the relationship, then, that we must pay the utmost attention if we want to get closer not only to understanding love, but also to the irreversible discovery of its importance in people’s lives.

By holding this goal in place, and starting from it, much is clarified, and much is revealed not of its irrelevance, but of diminished importance.

## 2. Some traces

So as not to keep the topic just hanging and suspended in the air.

**Some scattered notes follow. Obviously, they do not claim to exhaust the list, but rather to give an example of mnemonic exploration.**

### **Love between a woman and a man. Tragic**

There are many episodes of love between two people of different sexes that ended tragically. Starting with the story of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, narrated to Dante by Francesca herself in canto V of the *Inferno*, and already mentioned at the beginning of this reflection. But perhaps the most famous scene, which has remained and remains in our collective memory, is that of a film, *Roma Città Aperta*, an absolute masterpiece by director Roberto Rossellini and an extremely significant symbol of Italian cinematic neo-realism. One of the last scenes is the one in which a splendid Anna Magnani, Pina in the film, runs after the German truck in which the captured partisans had been crammed, in Rome, to greet her husband one last time and is killed by the machine gun discharge of one of the German escorts. The ruinous fall of the woman, in front of her little son and a priest, Don Pietro (A memorable Aldo Fabrizi), the shooting of whom closes the film, becomes a dramatic knot that, in a certain sense, embraces all the feeling that bound the woman to her man.

Another episode, which the centuries have brought to the admiration of spectators, is the very famous one of *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare. Here the height of the feeling of love is not concentrated in a single scene, but is prolonged in a series of scenes which, behind a constant peak of love, proceeds inexorably towards the tragic end, with the suicide of the two lovers. Some famous phrases will help the reader, and the spectator, to recreate the pathos of the work, starting from Juliet’s invocation *to* and *about* Romeo, the very famous song “O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?”. But I really like this other expression: “Love, you must be tired, because all day you walk inside my head.”

### **Love of a woman for a man. Lyrical**

Antonia Pozzi, a great little-known poet, who died young, perhaps committing suicide for love, has left a suggestive and extensive collection of poems. Among these:

#### **Modesty**

*If any of my poor words  
you like  
and you tell me*

even if only with your eyes  
I open up  
in blissful laughter  
but tremble  
like a little young mother  
who blushes even  
if a passerby tells her  
that her child is beautiful.

#### **Love between women. Lyrical**

*Among the poems of Sappho, the mythical Greek poetess, in love with women - and in fact the adjective "Saffic" has remained to indicate this kind of love - perhaps the most beautiful one always resonates with me, Ode 31:*

He is like the gods to me  
who near you, such sweet sound hears  
when you speak  
and laugh so lovingly.  
Right away in me  
my heart flutters in my breast  
and as soon as I see you, my voice  
gets lost on my inert tongue."

#### **Love and friendship between women. Epic**

Not just words, but also stories.

The last scene of the film "Thelma and Louise", with the red car in which the two protagonists travel, friends and perhaps something more, which plunges into the void of a canyon, remains imprinted in the eyes, to summarize the whole story of this meeting between the two, playful at the beginning, eventful in what follows, tragically epic in the end.

#### **Patriotic love. Typically singular**

If we open a history book, of our history [Italian history], examples of leaps towards the homeland abound, yet I had no difficulty in choosing: perhaps a secondary, but representative story is spinning in my head on the subject: Amatore Sciesa, an upholsterer, born in Milan, openly patriotic, was arrested while posting revolutionary leaflets and sentenced to death. According to popular tradition, a gendarme who, while directing him to the place of execution, had led him in front

of his house, urging him to reveal the names of other revolutionaries in exchange for freedom, he would have replied in Milanese dialect: "Tiremm innanz!" ["Shoot me first!", TN]

Heroic with conscious humility, the scene of this worker who, with a single word in his language, makes the choice between family and homeland, responding, with a touch of contempt, to the temptation of the "gendarme" who led him to be shot.

#### **Love for culture. Heroic.**

*In mid-July 2015, the archaeologist **Khaled al-As'ad**, director of the archaeological site of Palmyra for 40 years, was kidnapped by IS militants and tortured.*

*On August 18, 2015 al-As'ad was killed on the square in front of the Museum of the new city of Palmyra (now Tadmur). Later his decapitated body was exposed to the public hanging from a column.*

No words are needed on this. They would cloud the figure of those who sacrificed their lives, knowing full well the futility of his gesture.

#### **Love for humanity. Without rhetoric.**

Many examples and episodes. For me, two of them:

#### **1. Salvo D'Acquisto. Gold Medal for Military Valor.**

From the Carabinieri's website:

*"After 8 September 1943, a German SS unit had set up in the area of Torrimpietra Station, occupying an abandoned barracks of the Guardia di Finanza and located in the "Torre di Palidoro" village adjacent to Torrimpietra, and close to Rome. In this barracks ... some German soldiers ... caused the explosion of a hand grenade, which killed a soldier and seriously injured ... two others .... The fortuitous episode was interpreted by the Germans as an attack. The German officer decided on retaliation. Shortly after, Torrimpietra was completely surrounded and 22 helpless and innocent citizens were rounded up, loaded onto a truck and transported to the foot of the Tower...*

*Deputy Brigadier Salvo D'Acquisto, aware of the tragic situation impending for the hostages, accused himself of being responsible for the attack and asked for the release of the hostages, which took place just before the moment in which he offered his chest to the discharge of the Nazi firing squad."*

## **2. St. Maximilian Kolbe.**

Excerpt from

[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massimiliano_Maria_Kolbe#La_morte_ad_Auschwitz)

[Massimiliano\\_Maria\\_Kolbe#La\\_morte\\_ad\\_Auschwitz](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massimiliano_Maria_Kolbe#La_morte_ad_Auschwitz)

*On May 28, 1941 Kolbe arrived in the Auschwitz concentration camp .... He was beaten several times, but he did not give up showing solidarity with his fellow prisoners. Kolbe secretly celebrated mass twice ... The escape of one of the prisoners caused a retaliation by the Nazis, who selected ten people to die in the so-called hunger bunker.*

*When one of the ten convicts, Franciszek Gajowniczek, burst into tears saying he had family at home waiting for him, Kolbe stepped out of the ranks of prisoners and offered to die in his place.*

*He was then locked up in the bunker of Block 11. After two weeks of agony without water or food, most of the condemned had died of starvation, but four of them, including Kolbe, were still alive, and were therefore killed on August 14, 1941 ... with an injection of carbolic acid ... Father Kolbe said to Hans Bock, the common criminal in charge of carrying out the fatal injection: "... hate is useless ... Only love creates!"*

### **Friendship. Tale of a tragedy.**

Reunion (book by Fred Ulhan, and film of the same name)

A real hymn to friendship, which blossomed in 1932, on the eve of Hitler's election as German Chancellor, between two sixteen-year-olds, Hans, son of a Jewish doctor, and Konradin, of a noble and famous family. The birth and growth of the friendship between the two is intertwined with the darkening of a context, the triumph of Nazism, which ends up dividing Hans - welcomed by his American grandparents and becoming a successful lawyer, while in Germany his parents escaped racial persecution by suicide - from his friend, of nascent Nazi sympathies, like his mother... In the end, in the very long list of students who fell victims of Nazism, Hans also finds the name of Konradin, involved in an attempt against the regime and executed. A book, and later also a film, poetic and dramatic, from which I like to quote a sentence, the initial one.

*"He came into my life in February 1932 and never left it again."*

### **Limitless love.**

Three are undoubtedly the most fascinating female figures of the last century, Simone Weil, Edith Stein, Etty Hillesum, (and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, on a different level) all three symbolizing the highest capacity to love, without adjectives. Weil and Stein are too well known for it to be enough to quote a couple of expressions to outline their entire image.

### **Weil**

"By love of neighbour we imitate the divine love which created us and all our fellow creatures. With the love of the order of creation we imitate the divine love that created the universe of which we are a part" ("Waiting for God", pp.119-120).

### **Stein**

In her latest work, which remained unfinished and was published posthumously because the Nazis arrived earlier, Edith Stein, born Jewish, converted to Catholicism, became a Carmelite nun assuming the name of Sister Teresa Benedetta della Croce, immerses herself totally in the study of the figure of the "Father of the Carmelites", as Saint Teresa Benedetta calls him, St. John of the Cross, a profoundly mystical spirit. The commentator's intellectual acuity and coherence between culture and life lead her to delve ever deeper into the study of the soul, up to mystical union with God: "The believer knows ... that there is One whose gaze is not limited by any horizon ... Whoever lives in the certainty of this faith feels in conscience that ... he must necessarily strive to know what is right in the eyes of God" ("Scientia Crucis, p. 186)

### **Etty**

She was a passionate companion to me and my wife Giuliana, for Giuliana in the last years of her life, for me it still lasts now.

A member of a wealthy and cultured Dutch Jewish family, Etty left us a literary monument, 11 diary notebooks, written during her stay in the Westerbork camp, the "deposit" for the Jews of Holland, in which the Germans made all the Jews identified in the country stop, before sending them, aboard murderous and

terrible sealed railway carriages, to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. (Edith Stein was also imprisoned in that camp, with her sister Rosa, also converted, before being transported to Auschwitz, where she found the gas chamber and the crematorium waiting for her). This beautiful girl, young, cultured, casual in her bonds and in her relationships, slowly “flourishes” in love, an ever wider and more welcoming love, first within the limits of the Westerbork field and then without borders, which could limit it. Etty remains to help in the administration of the terrible camp, and, with the last Jews “on their way” to Auschwitz, she lets herself be locked in one of the carriages, from whose loophole, the only contact with the world, she drops a greeting card along the journey. Her diary notebooks were later found and published, in two instalments, many years after the end of the war.

To outline the character, the values, the life choices, the coherence of this young woman, a few quotations suffice for me, even if, in any case, an idea can be formed only after having sailed through the entire ocean of her Diary, and having totally ignored all the cloying controversy between the Dutch Christians and Jews on Etty’s spiritual heritage (it seems that in Holland it happens, if one remembers the equally long and miserable controversy between the same contenders regarding an equally fascinating figure, Edith Stein, born Jewish a, became a cloistered nun, killed in Auschwitz and proclaimed a saint).

**Beauty:** “Once upon a time, if I liked a flower, I would have wanted...even to eat it. But that evening... I reacted differently: I joyfully accepted the beauty of this world of God. I no longer wanted to “own” it.

**Wisdom** “Knowledge is power, but only wisdom is freedom”

**Compassion: hate** “I don’t think we can improve... the outside world, without first having done our part within ourselves. It is the only lesson of this war”. “The great hatred for the Germans that poisons our souls is a current problem... even if only one decent German were left... thanks to him one would not have the right to pour one’s hatred on an entire people. This does not mean that

one is indulgent...but that undifferentiated hatred is...a disease of the soul.”

**Love.** “I am full of gratitude for this life... I realize my mistakes... but I also know my possibilities. And then I love, I love so much even those for whom I don’t spontaneously feel any liking.”

**The thinking heart.** “*To be the thinking heart of the shack ... the thinking heart of an entire concentration camp*”, this is Etty’s desire, her showing “compassion” towards the whole world. She intuitively feels that a thinking heart in the midst of a dehumanized and dehumanizing reality has the mysterious but real power to save the human being.

**God.** For Etty, God is our most intimate place, which in fact, she writes to “call it God”; Etty’s religiosity is not linked to a concretely structured religion but «*My life is an uninterrupted «listen inside» myself, others, God*». A God who must also be helped. Faced with the “absolute hell” of the Holocaust, Etty in fact said: «*When tomorrow God is no longer able to help us, we will have to help God*», keeping traces of Him in the human heart. “We came out of Westerbork singing”: This is how Etty’s Diary closes.

### **Conclusion (which does not conclude).**

Here ends my reflection.

However, I would like to leave a starting point, a reflection.

Everyone, if they wish, can seek and find, within themselves, innumerable traces of examples of love. Therefore, everyone can continue the path just mentioned in these lines on their own. With the intimations of Psychosynthesis, which help more than a little...