

# PSYCHOSYNTHETIC EXPERIENCES WITH PEOPLE RELEASED FROM PRISON AND SEEKING A NEW FUTURE.

*Translated by Greta Bianchi/ Gordon Leonard Symons*

Between October and November 2023, the A.P.A.S. (Provincial Association for Social Assistance for Inmates, for those discharged from correctional facilities, and their families) met in Trento to seek collaboration in designing and conducting a 4-session program, each lasting 3 hours. The proposal is directed towards a small group of individuals released from the Trento correctional facility, entering into a new phase in their lives. They are individuals of various nationalities, with complex and painful pasts, having spent a considerable time in prison and are now, with the support of A.P.A.S., seeking a fresh start.

*“What should we propose?” “Would Psychosynthesis be useful and effective?” “How can we translate concepts like disidentification into concrete and usable actions in the lives of these individuals?”*

Numerous doubts and questions arise in mine and Francesca Valdini’s minds. However, Trust in the human spirit and Courage prevail, and we decide to embrace the request as an opportunity to engage in the social sphere, one that may be far removed from our daily lives but remains part of our shared reality. And here’s what has emerged!

## **“I know what i feel”**

### **Recognizing and giving identity makes us free.**

We sit in a circle and listen to the words of Amin, Osas, Said, Schik and Bardi. Five stories of different colors: fears and struggles, mistrust and caution, curiosity and a desire to start anew... A multitude of emotions circulate within the circle, thus begins a short yet intense journey to ‘feel’ what stirs within and learn how to manage their emotions to foster positive relationships with others.

The body is the primary vessel for expressing emotions, and thus, a game begins using a soccer ball: ‘Who are you, and how do you feel now, here?’ Every response is valid - there is no right or wrong emotional expression, only pleasant or unpleasant emotions.

*“You’re tormenting me...” “How amusing,” “Lightness,” “I feel obliged to be here,” “Annoyed,”*

*“I’m sad,” “It makes me laugh,” “I feel connected to the group”...*

Here they are, our emotions - different colors intertwining yet embraced in a vibrant puzzle. And further: *“What do I feel when I remember my home country? Let’s introduce ourselves through our country, our roots: let’s build a collage that evokes our land: Senegal, rich in unspoiled nature; Somalia, the most fabulous place to be; Albania, a land resembling Trentino; Tunisia, colors and scents of essences; Nigeria, cultivating fields.” “I feel good; the images of my country open me up” ... “I cry for what I left behind,” “Melancholy and strength...” “I carry its colors with me”... “In the fields. With my parents F. Breathed the future and now?”*

Evocative images speaking of roots, of a fertile moment in personal life, of emotional bonds and hopes. Still feeling a part of a place left behind, sharing the beauty of a part of life. The journey continues, delving deeper into feelings, using a tool that taps into olfactory memory: scents. In the circle, seven essences are presented, each with its distinct note. The scents traverse the group: *“What does the fragrance evoke in you? Close your eyes and let yourself wander...Is it a pleasant or unpleasant sensation? Use a color to describe it...”*

Delving into sensitivity of feeling, refining each sense - memories and emotions emerge. Olfactory memory takes us afar: *“The taste of ginger tea as made back home,” “How comforting the sandalwood is,” “Ah, it’s lavender; we also use it,” “I don’t like sage,” “It reminds me of the massages my mother used to give”...*

Just as emotions, here are the scents: a myriad of shades constantly coursing through us, sometimes known, sometimes unknown - we feel only their impact on the body, at times pleasant and light, at other times heavy and burdensome, obstructing our interactions with others.

*“So much weariness, a tangle of red that doesn’t unravel,” “Tension, concern in a thousand recurring thoughts, yet relaxation when I see nature,” “Fear but also hope,” “So much anger for a destiny I’ve crafted,” “Sadness for the son I’m yet to meet: what will he think of me?”...*



Two very different realities, almost opposing, coexist on the same page: how to bring them together? What to do after seeing them? What if weariness lingers? If anger remains? If sadness becomes a black hole? If beauty fails to enter even a sliver of the day?

We work with clay: through manipulation, by doing, the unpleasant emotion is released, anger, sadness, pain, fear are transformed, and observed. In the silence brought by the work, there are sounds of pounding, crumpling, breaking, mixing, cutting, crushing...almost emotions in becoming, finding expressive space in the material.

Thus, the unpleasant emotions reside in the grey matter of the clay, embraced and cradled by the earth: each expressing freely what they feel. Everything is welcome, nothing discarded - the group allows it, becoming an emotional melting pot.

Now there is a timid desire, a distant yet emerging wish for some of them to create an object, to give shape to the earth: their shape.

Slowly, objects emerge, strange and unidentified shapes, bridges and worlds, mosques and spirals. The unpleasant emotion has loosened its grip, not entirely overwhelming, it has been observed and is transforming: it now bears a different name and represents what one is in this moment or aspires to be, beyond the part that erred and failed in life.

An object of 'earth' that has opened a simple space of acceptance for what one feels: we color it, give it life, and name it. "Slowness," "Nature," "My mosque," "Passages," "World"... Each presenting it to others, sharing a bit about themselves and their future in a light and smiling atmosphere.

In the group, there are smiling eyes, relaxed faces, almost a tremor of freedom!!

And in conclusion, faced with food emanating scents and aromas from distant lands, many questions resurface: "And in everyday life?" "Perhaps I can redo some exercises: I'll get clay," "How nice to feel like everyone else, not ex-convicts but simple people like you," "I was afraid to speak of my sadness, but here, I found no judges but friends," "I feel lighter even though I know demanding days await me."

From their words, a measured joy emerges, having been able to share their pain, anger, imprisonment without

being judged or interpreted. Feeling seen, being reflected for who they are and not for what they have done, has opened up cracks through which possibilities seep in. The emotions expressed, recognized, narrated, listened to, played with, and transformed allowed them to feel alive, vital, and aware of what traverses them every day: "I know what I feel" are the first steps towards a new inner freedom.

Thanks to Amin, Osas, Said, Schik and Bardi for sharing a piece of their story with us.

Thanks to Roberto Assagioli, whose profound vision of the human being reminds us that the path to freedom is available to everyone.

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