

THE AESTHETIC WAY

(by Assagioli's Archives in Florence)

The spiritual awakening happens to be often produced and promoted by Beauty, which expresses itself on some phenomenon of nature, as, for instance, the one described by Rabindranath Tagore.

He says :

“One day, on the late afternoon, I walked up and down on the balcony of our house .The wonder of the sunset joined the gloom in the twilight, so that the approaching evening was getting particularly glamour on me. Even the walls of the house close to mine seemed to purchase a new beauty.

I wondered if the disappearing of the usual common aspect of things could be connected with some magic effect created by the turning up of the evening.

No, absolutely no!

In the meantime I suddenly perceived that it was the effect of the upcoming of the evening inside my soul: my ordinary Self had been effaced by shadows. Until it had been clear in the full daylight, all what I perceived was influenced and concealed by it. Now it was apart, so I could watch the world on its real aspect. And this aspect is absolutely not obvious or banal, it is full of a real Beauty and wrapped in Joy.

After this experience, I tried many times to intentionally suppress my Self in order to watch the world as a simple witness: always I got back a wonderful sense of Delight.

Later on I purchased a wider field of vision and from then on I never lost it.

One morning on the veranda in our house the sun was rising up and appearing through the leaves of trees in front of me.

Suddenly, while observing this sight, I felt as if a veil

had disappeared out of my eyes and I could see a world full of a radiant brightness, while waves of Beauty and Joy rose above me from everywhere.

Swiftly the radiance penetrated through the heaps of Sadness and Depression, which lied heavy on my heart, and it filled it with Universal Light. That very day the lyric poem “The awakening of the waterfall” sprang out of my soul, flowing quick like a real waterfall.

The melody ended, but the veil didn't fall down any more on the joyful aspect of the Universe.

Since then no other thing or person in the world happened to appear uninteresting or unpleasant to me”. Let us try to read and explain these experiences. Why to appreciate Beauty in objects evokes the Spiritual Conscience in man?

The deepest answer took place by Platone. He told that the most beautiful displays are the expression of a wonderful, eternal and absolute Beauty, or of a Beautiful Being. He described in a punctual shape the ascent to the Aesthetic Way and the sequence of the different stages.

The real order -he says- lies in using the Beauty of the earth as steps we climb thanks to the love for the other Beauty, proceeding from one to another, and from that one to all the beautiful forms and actions, from beautiful actions to beautiful actions, until man can perceive the conception of the Absolute Beauty, and from then on he knows what the Ascent to Beauty is.

In different ways the Spiritual Revelation is obtained by the Magnificence of Order and Harmony. To this type of Revelation belong the insight of Pythagoras (the Harmony of the spheres) and the divine law of proportion in architecture (by Vitruvius) and in human body (by Leonardo).

In all these examples the Ascetical Way is connected, or leads to the Illumination Way.

It can be described as a vision or a lighting through the Beauty.

There is also a deeper result a more or less whole unification and harmony on our Conscience between a subject and an object, between the Personal Self and the Universal Reality.

William Mc Dougall, a psychologist who in a clear and moderate way didn't hesitate to empathize the existence and the inner value of Soul and Spirit, writes :

During moments of contemplation of Beauty, limits of our personality happen to fly somehow beyond. We approach the Universal Spirit , which -weakly or strongly- lights inside ourselves, so we can find ourselves reabsorbed by it.

As for the Ways all, even the Aesthetic Way may show disadvantages and dangers, the first lying on the attachment to the form, the exterior aspect. It leads to a one-sided accentuation by the aesthete, who searches for pleasures coming from the perception of beautiful things and gets satisfied with it.

The difference between the aesthete and those who attain to the spiritual fulfilment through Beauty resides in the fact that the first one stops at the first step of the Platonic range, and he refuses or is not able to go on further.

The same function revealing Beauty in Nature is accomplished by Beauty in Art, in all its sides.

We must anyway clarify that, while Art can have - or it has- this aspect, not the whole Art practises it! Sometimes it can even produce the opposite reaction, that's because the psychological level and the maturity of artists can be unlike.

Even instincts and causes which are below an artistic creation can be different.

Notice the big difference on spiritual level between Leonardo and Beato Angelico on one side, and Picasso and Salvador Dali on the other.

Human nature appears many-sided. Multi-faceted is also the psychological structure of artists and poets- they can perceive and express images and "voices" originated by the lighting level of the Superconscious or from the abysses of the instinctive and passionnal Inconscious. So, the same creator can create works producing different or opposite psychological effects.

This is the affair of great and noble artists, such as Goethe and Wagner.

THE PATH OF REGENERATION THROUGH ETHICS

(by Assagioli's Archives in Florence)

Despite some different aspects, two Paths are examined through an appropriate combination as they have an important common characteristic. They are the first and the second stages of the same process.

The stress is put on the moral purification as a primary condition to reach a spiritual consciousness which is also the Christian expression of God's Grace. The first step on this Path is transcending the ordinary level to wake up with a consciousness about a superior reality as well as with an acute realization of one's own imperfections - "sins" - and the determination to expel them.

In a number of examples quoted by William James and others, it is the prevalent element but later the stress has been put on the purification through a detachment from the world's attractions, through discipline of the personality and in some cases through an ascetic practice. This Path was mostly followed in the past than nowadays as the prevalent religious conceptions used to emphasize the ungodliness of men and thus used to nourish the fear of God's punishment on them.

Despite the different aspects of the moral purification, we can gather them into two general stages called active purification and passive purification. The first one encompasses all those moral practices that aim to increase the control on instincts, passions and imagination and they end in the awakening and the preparation of the Will. This process can be defined by the modern physiologic terminology as the control of the conscious part of personality upon the unconscious one. On the other hand, the passive purification is an act of abandonment and detachment under which the personality undergoes a superior spiritual influence that, according to one's