

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace”

## THE SIMPLE PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS: A PSYCHOSPIRITUAL PATH TO PEACE

### Simple Prayer

**Lord, make me  
an instrument of Thy peace:  
Where there is hatred, let me sow Love,  
Where there is offense, let me bring Pardon,  
Where there is discord, Unity  
Where there is doubt, Faith,  
Where there is error, Truth  
Where there is despair, Hope;  
Where there is sadness, Joy,  
Where there is darkness, Light.**

**Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.**

**For it is:  
In giving, that we receive;  
In pardoning, that we are pardoned;  
In dying, that we are born to Eternal Life.**

This prayer is with me for many years. When I read it for the first time I have been hearing in my heart, and since then it's a part of my life.

I want to point out that I am not Catholic or have never belonged to any other religion. My approach to the spiritual dimension is purely secular, devoid of knowledge and filters due to a religious education, mainly based on personal events and experiences that I learned to interpret over the years, with the help of studies and research.

Because of this research I met psychosynthesis as a school of psychological thought that explicitly includes the spiritual dimension in its model of the human psyche and, as practice and attitude towards life, that is akin to the way I feel and I need to live and as a frame of reference for understanding my events, to give name and meaning to my experiences and guiding my actions.

In the light of the psychosynthetic model I understood prayer as a guide of a psychospiritual path that, through a succession of steps, drawn from the verse, leads to a gradual expansion of consciousness, toward Peace.

On the occasion of the International Congress in Rome, during a workshop entitled “Establishing peace, every day”, I wanted to share with the group a reading of Simple Prayer of St. Francis, and the same spirit of sharing motivates me now to give a written form to some thoughts, insights, intuitions, as a result of connection between immediate resonance to prayer and its understanding in psychosynthetic terms, with particular reference to “Reflections on Peace” by Roberto Assagioli. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace”.

With the first sentence, the prayer is aimed at a Higher Being asking to become his instrument. In psychosynthesis the idea of being an instrument is familiar to us: we intend the personality as a vehicle used by the Self to manifest itself, and seen from this perspective, the process of personal psychosynthesis, that is the progressive integration and harmonization of personality around a center called Ego, can be understood as the work done by the Ego in order to make available to the Self a tool as much as possible functional and functioning.

So in psychosynthetic terms we can say that at first the identity of the prayer is at the personal level, while his interlocutor has to be found at the transpersonal level. Even the Peace, of which the personal Ego asked to become a tool, is placed on a higher level than the Ego of one who is praying: it is a Peace that belongs to the Superior Being to whom prayer is addressed, it is “Your Peace”.

Assagioli, in his “Reflections on Peace”, emphasizes the distinction between peace on a personal level, in the “ordinary world, in our personal lives, where there is neither stability nor security”, an illusory peace then, and true peace that can only be found at a level beyond the personal one: “Peace is only when we resolutely rise to the spiritual world and can live there permanently”. How does the personal Ego can raise to get closer to that Peace?

In the following eight verse the Simple Prayer gives us any indication of what are the obstacles and what are the qualities to be cultivated by posing in front of a series of contrasts. The first of the two opposing terms, describing an experience consequent upon an identification

at a personal level, presents an obstacle to be overcome, while the second term of each pair leads to consciousness the transpersonal quality to grow in order to overcome the limits denoted by the first one. So only in appearance the two terms are opposed, while in reality between the first and the second there is a difference of level, that precisely between personal and transpersonal. (This difference in level is also indicated by transcription case: the first term of each pair is in lowercase, while the latter is presented in uppercase).

The prayer says: “Where there is hatred, let me sow Love”. We could understand this and the following verse as a desire to take on a mission of peace to be made in the outside world. But in fact the place is not specified by the “where” that can be read as “anywhere”, and then we can refer to a place outside, but also inside us.

“We all want to give peace, but in order to really make it we must first be at peace, live in great peace, become peace”. These Assagioli’s phrases show us how to understand the direction of the prayer in its true sense, that is, in terms of an inner work where the processing is carried out first in our consciousness, then it can be radiated to the outside world. “We learn to live in peace and then to give, to radiate peace around us, wherever we go”.

Prayer helps us to do this work of inner transformation: with the first term of the couple it brings to consciousness the human experience of feeling individual, which is a separate and distinct indivisible whole, of which the individual experiences are the result: hatred, offense, discord, doubt, error, despair, sadness, darkness. Prayer makes us take note of these painful effects of our unique identification at the level of personality, leads us to recognize them (“know”), to accept and load the mas limits done by our human condition (“own”), while with the second term it invites us to transcend them and to cultivate the seeds of our potential as the transpersonal qualities (“transform”): Love, Forgiveness, Union, Faith, Truth, Hope, Joy, Light.

Each of these qualities is an evocative word that invites us to a reflective meditation; in this way the chosen qualities can be fed with our awared attention, in order to gradually replace the elements that have to be atte-

nuated, overcome or eliminated - the technique of substitution. (The translations of the prayer in English and German state: “Where there is hatred let me sow love, thus emphasizing the qualities aspect as transpersonal seeds to grow in our consciousness”).

Assagioli also suggests “to meditate on solidarity of spiritual qualities, taking time to time a different one as starting point. It is a method to switch from multiplicity to unity, to synthesis”.

So the transpersonal qualities take us beyond the narrow limits of our personal identification, make us overcome the barriers of our feeling separated reminding us that, in addition to being individuals, in turn we are part of a larger whole, and growing them helps us to develop a sense of identity that includes the awareness of our connection with the whole of which we are part.

In the psychosynthetic model the center of that broader identity, the meeting point between individuality and universality is placed in the Self, situated on the highest point of the ovoid, on the boundary line between individual consciousness and collective consciousness.

In this model terms, we can say that the first line of the prayer activates a process of transformation and elevation within our consciousness, moving our identification from the Ego to the Self.

The second line, following the shape of the opposing pairs, explains this process:

Who is praying asks to identify not so much with a need for comfort, understanding, love as with his or her potentiality to comfort, to understand, to love. While recognizing our needs as human beings, just as humans we have the ability to move our identification to a higher, wider and more inclusive level of consciousness, to find in us the source of consolation, understanding, love that we seek, and identifying with it enables us to transform ourselves and our relationships, to feel with the other, to understand the other, to love the other - to want the Good for the other.

The last line leads us to go a step further: “For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned, in dying that we are born to eternal life”.

Apparently the line repeats the shape of the opposing pairs adopted in the previous verse. In fact, it was through the dual syntactic form of sentences that all duality is transcended: there is no distinction of identity between subject and object, the giver is identical to the recipient, who forgives is identical to those who are forgiven. Giving and taking is a single process, as well as forgiving and being forgiven are but two aspects of a single event. The last sentence is the final step in this process that guides the conscience from a personal identity, because of identifications at more and more high and inclusive levels, towards a gradual increasing, up to the time when, dying at each partial identification, consciousness identifies with the One Consciousness. There is no longer the initial duality between I and Thou, who is praying is Consciousness itself to which the prayer is addressed. Dying to identification with a form, with any form, we become aware that we are One with Life itself. I conclude by quoting once again the Assagioli's "Reflections on Peace":

"Perhaps never before humanity has been without peace. ... In such a world, cultivating peace is not a spiritual luxury, but a daily necessity for all those who want to maintain their internal integrity and not be overwhelmed by the collective currents of agitation, panic or violence. And cultivating peace is also, and not least, a duty to others. Those who could now being a living center of peace, who could radiate it powerfully and relentlessly around themselves, gives to poor humanity the welfare of which perhaps lacks and needs most. "

The Simple Prayer is a way to cultivate peace, every day, inside and outside of us.

To my grandfather, who did not believe in religion, and to my grandmother, who believed in God

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## THE WORLD INTO THE HEART AND THE HEART INTO THE WORLD

**"Our duty is to love the world"** *Teilhard De Chardin*

The title of my intervention is to be a witness of a long inner journey that I began to take in my early twenties, when I met the Psychosynthesis of Roberto Assagioli. A journey into the world of my thoughts, my feelings, my passions, my fears; I made many trips to various parts of the world, meeting people, mentalities, habits, different from mine; and this allowed me to compare my personal experiences with the experiences coming from the external world.

Many years ago, I was in the country, together with my parents. We rented a small portion of a farmhouse, at Tocchi, in Maremma: three houses, a church, a tavern and nothing else. The tavern was also the bar, it was the social meeting point of the village. The waitress, at the same time owner of the small business, one day told us: "My son finally found a job, a steady job; I'm so happy!" What kind of work did he find?" my father asked, and she, with satisfaction, replied: "Well, does the mender of roads!" My parents toasted with her for the good news, I toasted too, but frankly I could not understand what there was to celebrate for a job as a "Road mender"! I often think back to this episode. It's been more than thirty years ago. When I see the "Road menders" always think of that mother, so happy and proud. In her own little world, the son had found a secure job that would keep him close to family, and to his social environment. Recently I was in China, and in a road at 2500 m. above sea level, in the midst of cold and inhospitable mountain gorges, exposed to the wind and a light snowfall, I saw a road mender. He was diligently cleaning the street, with broom, dust-bin and plastic bag; proud in his State uniform, all included to make the most of his work. Who would have ever checked him? It was so necessary to clean the