

FROM HELL TO PARADISE, WITH PARKING IN PURGATORY

The events that are happening at this moment in history, where we live situations of veritable “hell”, “purgatory” of all types and “paradises” – except of fiscal ones - are now lost, recall to my minds the exercise on “Dante’s Divine Comedy” described by Roberto Assagioli, taking some starting points for observations.

The combination of the pilgrimage of Dante in the dark wood, as a metaphor of psychotherapeutic path, can easily guess: “In the middle of the journey of our life ...”; recognizable, even the existential crisis typical of a certain age, where begin the first questions about the meaning of our life. Thus, as the figure of Virgil, psychotherapist / guide, who accompanies him to the discovery of his inner demons, chained in Hell (lower unconscious), in Freudian memory. Then the standing, in Purgatory, to purify ourselves from the toxins of the personality, where we found the symbolic figures be joined to the Ego, the “false accounting” of our soul. Here we can also see sub-personalities, psychic sisters, often responsible for the “internal feud” against ourselves. Paradise, finally, not only as the ideal to work for, but “wonderful promise of what we can become,” as Roberto Assagioli remembers.

But let’s come back to the symbolism of the Divine Comedy and the inner journey of awareness: “You were not made to live like brutes but to follow virtue and knowledge ...” Because path of awareness, and I have not repeated the term, psychotherapy; for the sake of clarity, the latter, at least as understood in psychosynthetic view, does not involve a focalization on morbid, pathologic aspects which the person manifests. Rather, in the psychotherapeutic relationship, we research and evoke what has remained healthy (which is often a lot more than one might think), taking away attention, and therefore energy, to the morbid part, restoring the broken circuits. After an earthquake, even in the midst of the rubble, remain intact and integral objects, so as to restore hope and arouse the desire for rebuilding. It is a kind of rebirth, as in the path of self-knowledge, by being born again to ourselves, finding our own original project, often lost, distorted, (as the “straight path”), removing the debris of personality and the dust of the mental clouding.

Erich Fromm said: “The purpose of life is to be fully born, although the tragedy lies in the fact that most of us dies before being able to be born.” The Psychosynthesis legitimate the right of each individual to promote its own rebirth in the sense of a new individual, reborn.

How? Searching (even with the aid of active techniques) the internal force necessary to free ourselves from the fears that dominate and paralyze us. Forcing, almost, to give the best of us, cultivating the benevolent aspects of our actions, outside the logic of separation of selfishness, accepting our limits and recognizing our shortcomings so that we can accommodate those of others, freeing us from prejudices. In fact, it happens that the sense of guilt of our imperfections is projected on others, causing them to become enemies. Guilt, then, in turn, feeds the anger. This leads us to act with little wisdom, choosing wrong relational strategies, fueling false images of us, giving rise to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. A game of mirrors, of endless returnings, which eventually destroy not only the initial image, but distort the reality of things. With these three words, strength, benevolence and wisdom, I remembered aspects of the psychosynthetic will that erases the old impositive idea, the “sense of duty” usually approached to the “will”, replacing it with the “pleasure of acting” according to our own authentic feel.

In the reading of the ‘exercise of Roberto Assagioli 1) we read: “Coming back to the Divine Comedy and the exercise based on it, it is to be borne in mind that it must be used only with persons who have sufficient cultural preparation and a spiritual aspiration ...”

This exercise can be found in the chapter of the introduction to the transpersonal psychosynthesis, as well as the “Exercise of the blossoming of the Rose”, widely used in various psychosynthetic contexts. However, I think that anyone who is genuinely interested in embarking on a path of self-awareness, can approach to its understanding. Sufficient cultural background, to me means being able to grasp some symbolic aspects and place them in connection with our own personal path. As the spiritual aspiration, it refers to the tendency inherent in every human soul, to transcend ourselves and go beyond (trans) the ordinary aspects of personality.

The theme of the interior pilgrimage begins with understanding the various components of the personality, unfolds towards a process of transformation and realizes a sort of psychic alchemy, in which some elements, first in conflict with each other, slowly converge in a syn-

thesis. However, often these are momentary and partial synthesis. We close one door and open hundred. The search continues. The psychic sea, the ocean of energies flowing within us, is infinite. It is difficult probing all these regions of the human soul. It is a trend, a search, but it has a threshold. This threshold by Assagioli is called "Personal Psychosynthesis," and concerns the regions close to our psychic regions where usually harbour conflicts of our personalities. It is possible to achieve a good degree of integration among all these interior instances. This is already a great goal: to live in peace with ourselves and the others. For some people, however, just when certain goals have been achieved, we could say at a horizontal level, here emerge, and not without suffering, inner deeper calls, a sense of dissatisfaction, a different search for meaning, a desire for union with the higher aspects of the psyche, not only as individuals, but Universal too, Cosmic: this is the "Transpersonal Psychosynthesis".

The Psychosynthesis admits, rather affirms, the Reality of the spiritual experience, the existence of higher values, the "noetic" dimension as called by Viktor Frankl, and proposes a path of self-realization, which may lead everyone to the threshold of mysteries of the Soul, depending on our own level of evolution, without neglecting our personal psychosynthesis. I like to say that the trans-personal experience is for many, though not for everyone.

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The "map" offered by the Divine Comedy leads us to contact the regions of our inferior unconscious, to stay in our consciousness, to purge the toxic elements of personality, but with an eye to "the sun and the other stars" of the spiritual regions, which are always present in each of us, the transpersonal unconscious is the part to which everybody can tap into the resources useful to improve the quality of their life.

Many people, during the course of their lives, bear torments, trials, both physical and moral, through true "hells". Even in the phraseology, we say, it was a "hellish situation", or that report was a "real hell." What kind of images, usually the hell evokes ?

Dante displaces us in this regard. Depicts with ice and not with flames the deepest circle of hell. The coldness of the heart, is the anesthesia of feelings. Often we confuse emotions with feelings, and feeling with sentiments. We are prey to strong emotions, search them, especially young people ... as a sort of heart stimulator, adrenalin, and why? Because feelings are anesthetic. Do you remember Fromm: we are dead in life, even before birth. The law of the heart and the feelings force us to be strong, but of an internal moral strength. The style of our life is eroding more and more our best energies. So even more than the fire of passions, what kills is the coldness of feelings, the absence of heat, of human contact.

And even before the Hell what do we find? The slothfuls, those who do not even have "proven", have not accep-

ted the appeal of Life and are not even worthy of being called sinners. In fact, for many people the fear of living keeps them on the edge of their own existence; somebody develop pathologies of cover, take distance from their core project of soul: apathy and boredom become their alibi. On the contrary, sin may be a way of redemption and awareness. In this function resides Purgatory, making sense of our sins. Here an interesting passage of André Louf, a Trappist abbot:

"...even the most excellent gifts of God, if they are not accompanied by some temptations ... are a ruin for those who receive them ..." and also "If the temptation would lead to a fall, this does not mean that any failure of generosity occurred, but because humility failed. And the sin in itself if the sinner pays attention to the grace which does not cease to work in himself, almost to the shoulders of sin, could be the opportunity to finally find the narrow gate - and especially low, very low! - Which, alone, gives access to the kingdom "2) (I like to grasp this aspect of sin because it is very close to psychosynthetic optics, on the principle of the using, of building up. Assagioli was used to repeat: "When something happens to us, we should ask to ourselves: What I can build up with this? ". Building up, and not destroying us with pity or self mercilessly. Understanding our acting, according to the law of cause and effect, and not on the bad luck, the atonement, punishment or guilt. Being responsible for ourselves, without self-deception.

But the words of the abbot Louf are useful to reflect, also on the theme of "humility," fundamental prerequisite to tackle the journey of our personal purification, the crossing of our inner Purgatory.

In fact, the humility is the quality that Dante must have in order to continue its journey to Purgatory. Virgil surrounds it, at the suggestion of Cato, with a reed, symbol of humility precisely. The reed is a very flexible plant and teaches us that some of our mental rigidities, such as pride and prejudice, not only affect the physical side (muscle stiffness, stiff neck, low back pain), but especially the psychic level.

The true humility is the ideal synthesis between the role of the humiliated, of which we are afflicted, and that

of the “humiliator”, of which we are often not aware. Who has been hurt, hurts. Humility is the recovery of his own humanity, it means to be rooted in our humus, soil, no more leaks or alibi. Standing with our feet on the ground rather than surrender to the Pindaric flights of the obsessions or illusions or regrets, carriers often of disappointments.

We have said that often we face real circles of hell during our lives, sorrows, pains, both for the spirit and the body. After those follow long periods of purification by anger and pain. After these tests, what sense does the search of Paradise?

Some time ago, I heard a joke about it: “Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die!”

Interesting, provocative and ironic. It brings to our mind the story of our Ego; during the phases of our evolutionary development we build it up, chisel. Then somebody comes and tells us: give up your Ego. The Ego must die to the Self. Death is not part of the biophilia of life, reminds us of Fromm. I will not dwell on the difference between Ego (false self-image, despot of our true Being), and the Self, unifying centre of the elements of personality, inner witness of our psychic life. But I break a lance in favour of those who desperately clings to the old identity (Ego), because the void, the nothingness, the surrendering to the “shipwreck is sweet to me in this sea”, for some it is a terrible and fearful experience. Perhaps that is why, doing a trip to hell and back, a stop in Purgatory, with the ideal aim of Paradise, is not an easy task, and it takes or a unifying inner centre, solid, or an ideal model, a unifying external centre, that is an aid in such arduous path.

Then, the search for Paradise? We must be careful, because such aspiration can become a dangerous trap, a delay that indefinitely removes the goal, without enjoying the “here and now”, the presence of the moment, the joy for the infinity of the moment; or, it may be a mirage, an escape upwards, hiding the “junk” of the personality under the carpet of the spiritual quest.

I believe that each of us has tried the “torments” but also the “ecstasy” in the course of our existence. It is difficult to describe with words what I am going to write, but I try to conclude these my reflections. There are some moments in life, where suddenly, in the most unexpected situations, everything is perfect, in harmony, there is nothing to add or remove. It is simply and clearly quite real, a timeless moment, which manifests itself in the everyday of our lives. I believe that this type of experiences are fragments of Paradise ... that perhaps, like the Kingdom of God, are already in us, even before that in mind, in our heart.

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THE STARRY HEAVENS ABOVE... THE MORAL LAW WITHIN

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within. I have not to search for them and conjecture them as though they were veiled in darkness or were in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them directly with the consciousness of my existence. The former begins from the place I occupy in the external world of sense, and enlarges my connection therein to an unbounded extent with worlds upon worlds and systems of systems, and moreover into limitless times of their periodic motion, its beginning and continuance. The second begins from my invisible self, my personality, and exhibits me in a world which has true infinity, but which is traceable only by the understanding, and with which I discern that I am not in a merely contingent but in a universal and necessary connection, as I am also thereby with all those visible worlds. The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates as it were my importance as an animal creature, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital power, one knows not how, must again give back the matter of which it was formed to the planet it inhabits (a mere speck in the universe). The second, on the contrary, infinitely elevates my worth as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world, at least so far as may be inferred from the destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination not restricted to conditions and limits of this life, but reaching into the infinite ...”

The above quotation, taken from the Critique of Practical Reason by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, results as the most admirable reflection on the profound connection between beauty and ethics, to the point that Königsberg thinker wanted it as his epitaph.