

defense mechanisms which tend to protect us, but which at the same time enhance the emotional reaction.

We make an assessment of what happened and on the basis of this we react.

The cortex and the limbic system that communicate with each other with a series of references are activated, the whole leads to the secretion of specific neurotransmitters which stimulate the hypothalamus which in turn secretes molecules that influence the pituitary gland, a very important gland that produces different types of hormones. It is precisely the place where “the spirit becomes flesh”. The pituitary gland directly influences the endocrine glands, especially the adrenals that produce a whole series of hormones and substances, including cortisol, which affect the target tissues, i.e. metabolism, the immune system, the circulatory system, etc.

But it doesn't end there.

The individual unconsciously predisposes himself to put himself in situations and to enact those behaviors that sooner or later will produce exactly what he feared. Like when we are afraid of an exam and we start to stutter and the mind becomes a “tabula rasa” so that we get the result we had feared, of being rejected.

Concluding this short paper on fear and its deleterious effects, what can we reasonably do to overcome it?

Certainly we can cultivate a positive thought, nurture trust in our natural defenses, contextualize the data that is communicated to us and think about what we feel.

In a word, we can cultivate a healthy and reasonable detachment from emotion and implement everything in our power to relax and calm the emotions, for example with breathing, meditation or prayer.

1) R. Assagioli, Lessons Course on: “The latent energies in us and their use in education and medicine” (1934)

WORDS HAVE PURPOSE

Edited by Walter Polt

Words are the guardians of meaning: They hide and reveal.

A word, silently and almost “without a word” leads to the goal it stands for. Otherwise said: every word has a potential power, and this potential is constituted by, and paradoxically also constitutes the very substance the Purpose is made of.

Before my sessions with Assagioli, no one had kindly helped me understand the processes underlying the production of speech. I did not know the cause- and-effect relationship between A) myself (the one in the driver's seat), B) how I used my psychological functions, and C) the effects (of my discourse or silence) on the outer world. So, what were the results? Idle speech? Small talk? Irritated shouting? Loving whispering? Determined command? Or indeed true affirmation of Purpose? I indiscriminately thought all of these were simply a “sincere” expression of myself.

“On the contrary” said Assagioli, “sincerity and spontaneity require real self-control in the sense ‘control by the Self’.”

How was Assagioli going to “teach” me—without making me feel guilty for my old idle habits of speech—to become conscious of the power everyone has: the capability for right speech (and therefore right thinking)? It was not obvious to me at all. Yes, I did need to learn this vital lesson.

Why? First, because if we don't have at least a little awareness of how thoughts become words, and words action (and therefore expressions of a will, of a purpose), we are in trouble: Life circumstances can lead us in circles. We're on a carousel, endlessly repeating the same mistakes. And then we are also easily manipulated. That means we cannot exercise free will. We need free will to achieve our main Life Purpose as a human being: to grow from “seed” to full “maturity”—something the vegetable kingdom illustrates perfectly.

The second reason I needed to learn the vital lesson of right speech is that, like almost every purposeless person, back then I had the habit of talking like a fountain without watching the purity of the emission! It just had never crossed my mind that words were expressions of thoughts leading to a goal: They needed to be guarded or, being aimless, they would lead us astray. I needed to recognize their immense, purposeful value when used beneficially—and their terrible destructive potential when not!

Looking back, I realize that, as a teenager and adult-in-the-becoming, I was so much like almost everybody else around me: jumping to conclusions, running after illusory values such as being “number one,” getting everyone to admire me”, and anything except becoming my true self! This is indeed purposelessness, even if the pursuit of vain things does also give the deceptive impression we’re doing things for a purpose.

It is not that my mother had not explained to me the importance of kind speech (so that she could be proud of me in public)! She had actually already tried to make me get the point when I was only 6 by telling me the fairy tale of a little princess “just like me.” Every time this little princess would say naughty things, snakes, fearful toads, and disgusting, slimy monsters would jump out of her mouth. And when she would say nice, gentle, and kind words, precious stones, pearls, and lovely fairies would come to the light of day. (I was enthralled. You see, at the age of 6 for a child, words are just words. The child is just guessing the impact of the words, depending on how adults reacted to them.

(Therefore her tale was giving me a hint.) The trouble was that after repeated efforts to say things that adults would finally judge as “nice,” I did not see any precious stones coming out of my mouth. I therefore decided that her story was baloney. I was disappointed, and in a certain measure I lost faith in her being “unfailing.”

On top of that, the point she wanted to make, namely the importance of the quality of the thoughts we wish to express, had completely escaped my understanding. Worse

still, I came to the simplistic conclusion that words were just as unreal as tales: No diamonds. No pearls. Thus no evidence that the tale meant what adults pretended it meant! At 6, I somehow strongly felt attracted by precious stones: hence my even deeper disappointment. I instinctively sensed that jewels represent most-precious concepts. No wonder I would later, much later, be impressed by the oriental “Word of Power” referring to “the JEWEL in the lotus.”

The jewel symbolizing the eternal nature of every being; the jewel, springing forth from the rainbow-color flower of its soul qualities, blossoming on the surface of the pristine water, the flower carried upward on its strong stem growing out of roots firmly grounded in the muddy bottom of the stream or pond and heading straight up towards the light, almost like an arrow shooting through the water and keeping its direction no matter how strong the current.

A word of power (OM MANI PADME HUM) summing up the purpose of Life—from seed to full flowering and liberation of the seed’s light-revealing polar opposite: the jewel! The lotus image with this mantra is seen as a condensed form of all the Buddhist teachings.

But the moment I saw the manipulation in the tale of that princess “just like me,” I felt helpless. It is terrible at the age of 6 not to understand that when I sincerely produce something I am sometimes lauded and sometimes harshly criticized. At those moments I felt desperate—and for a kid, that is traumatic. As a matter of fact, not until I was sent to Assagioli at the age of 19, would I find the life purpose that corresponded to the real me.

Until then, I had suffered much and gotten pulled into the quicksand of an attitude of self-pity and carelessness instead of developing self-confidence and wisdom. Of course, this is just one view looking back at that time; there was more: I also experienced many happy and useful situations. Nevertheless, the main quest was What is my destiny? Should I do like Mother Theresa, or become a great artist, or become a super photographer, or a Formula One racing champion?

As it happened, life decided for me.

As I mentioned above, my mother sent me to Florence to sort out my personal life, learn art history, and learn Assagioli's method so as to teach it to the students of her school. And indeed this became my life purpose—and all my life circumstances adjusted correspondingly. It wasn't easy, but it was worth the while.

So when I arrived in Florence I was at the very beginning. I had to learn the very first sparks of the main lesson: the value of speech, of words, of purpose in life.

Imagine this: Assagioli, instead of lecturing me on this topic, gave me carefully selected excerpts of a poem to copy. It described what he figured I needed to understand, what he hoped I would learn from it! He gently asked me to do him a favor: would I please copy “for him” some chosen excerpts from a long poem by Victor Hugo (1802–1885). That stupendous poem (as I found out by copying it and later reading the whole poem) described most vividly the mystery of words in general—and of the Word “FIAT,” “let there be.” (It's different from “AMEN,” “let it be”.) FIAT four letters, yes just four. They disclose that The Word is the Will and the Will is life. And if you think it through, this implies that the Will is the purpose of life. Assagioli was well aware of this: It's the reason, I gather, he wrote “The Act of Will.” He published it in 1973; however, already at the beginning of the century had he intensively been lecturing about the education of the Will.

These four letters, “FIAT,” also disclose that the myriads of words bouncing around like particles in the “void” of space, similarly mold (p.33) the desires affecting, and infecting, every human, young or old—and through them humanity. They lead individuals or nations to be afflicted (thus to work out fleeting and idle desires), or effective (to accomplish their Life Purpose in the concert of the Nations).

Here are selected lines you might like to see from that Victor Hugo poem, “Réponse à un acte d'accusation (II)”, in the Collection: “Les Contemplations (1856).” I

did not find any English translation for these few lines that I copied in French, so I did my best. Please forgive me: it is not perfect— especially as in poetry some words, depending on their place in the sentence, have various meanings, each relevant and worth reflecting upon. (Yes, that in itself is “food for thought”!)

Car le mot qu'on le sache est un être vivant !
For a word, one ought to know, is a living being!

Le mot fait vibrer tout au fond de nos esprits.
The word gets to vibrate all in the depth of our spirit.

O main de l'impalpable ! ô pouvoir surprenant !
O hand of the imperceptible! O stupendous power!

Cette toute-puissance immense sort des bouches.
This immense almighty potency comes out of mouths.

Mon nom est FIAT LUX.... Oui, tout-puissant ! tel est le mot. Fou qui s'en joue !

My name is LET THERE BE LIGHT. . . . Yes, omnipotent! Such is the word. Mad is he who disdains its power!

This line, which is not the last one (you might like to look for that yourself) was singled out by Assagioli with I guess the purpose of illustrating that the path to mental health is through adequate focus on words (thought processes) and going from them to Purpose. Yes, one who has no life purpose, or has not found something to look forward to that gives meaning to their existence (not just getting a salary), who has not somewhat defined their reason for being here and doing what they do (not just following orders or the latest fashion), is just mad. Notice, Assagioli does not say this himself in that blunt manner; he quotes an eminent text. He allows the reader to find out by himself what he (Assagioli) merely points at to show the way!

This approach is admirable: It respects free will.

And I see now, in 2020, that not without reason (again, a synonym for purpose) did Assagioli give me these lines

to copy. At that time (the early sixties) I really, really, really was not aware of the responsibility we (and therefore also I) have: to manage with care and attention the processes that express as words. I was not aware in the least that once we invest our attention in them they do have power. And of course the more I would chatter around, the less would I be able to recognize their mighty power—and the less would I listen to what I was told! Yes I loved to talk! It gave me a good feeling, mostly because it would attract the attention of others, and that energized me!

Our attention turns life purpose into life endeavor! The choice of direction and emphasis is ours.

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The whole subject of transference of psychic energy warrants further study. Assagioli called it the Fifth Force in psychology: psychoenergetics. It is an extraordinary subject. To approach it in a sound manner, one must be able to stand in “spiritual being”—for psychoenergetics is the science of the Soul, therefore heart Qualities—and be in perfect harmony with all. Remember: Assagioli’s motto was “IN TUTTO ARMONIA.” That discloses his Life Purpose, which is what his method is all about!

AH, HOW I DESIRE POWER!

Translation by Achille Cattaneo/Gordon Leonard Symons

It is a phrase that is rarely heard expressed aloud, and if it were said in front of us, it would certainly provoke in us a reaction of disapproval: but how is it that not only do we feel such an unworthy desire, but we actually say it, too!

Our imagination would immediately run to some murky example of a power struggle: the assassination of Caesar ... the plots of Cardinal Richelieu ... the abuses of power that we still see today ...

But it is a phrase that we lodge within us, even if we do not dare to express it even to ourselves. Except that, trying to ignore this “insane” desire we deprive ourselves of the possibility of understanding more deeply what it expresses.

For example, we deprive ourselves of the awareness of often feeling helpless.

Impotence is an unpleasant sensation: to want to do something, to be different from what we are, to set events in motion, and not to succeed is at the very least frustrating, if not despairing.

We spend a good part of our life feeling helpless, without telling ourselves it or at the most, complaining about it, and we’re often even ashamed of this condition.

But in this way we are not recognising something important: the situation of Impotence is a conflictual situation between the perception of something that would be worth doing and the impossibility of carrying it out. Which means that although we painfully feel our inability to act, we do not feel as keenly the fact that this happens because we have goals, goals that attract us.

Objectives and goals that call us beyond our usual abilities, push us to overcome our current, narrow limits.

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