

If we try to think less about what to ask for and start thinking more about how to be useful. If we begin to think less about our right to happiness and we begin to feel the duty to foster this happiness, to build it together with others. And I would add that we should feel this debt towards life but also towards the other lives of the various beings of our planet, that is the animal world. Buddha, but also our St. Francis, renounce what I have called the extroverted solution, they renounce not so much property, but unusable possession, they renounce appropriation, they renounce what Assagioli calls identification, because this renouncing allows them to find out what they really lacked, because it is this renunciation that allows what was previously perceived as empty, thanks to disidentification, to be transformed into a sense of Presence. A Presence which is then the reflection of the one, that is to say of the whole, and which allows us to rejoin the whole. This is being there, total adherence to life, which then means total adhesion to the relationship that constitutes us. Thus, also the external self resolves itself in this understanding, the self returns to the relationship that created it; by rediscovering the sense of debt towards life and towards others, he can finally rediscover the fullness that derives from all this in place of lack.

In Psychosynthesis this is the work that we propose through the realization of the discovery of Will, of the external unifying centre, of the ideal model and of the service that allows us to give back to life at least part of the good we have received, the task in which each of us must seek to put our talents to use. This is the duty/right that concerns each of us, and it is also what can bring us closer to joy, to a greater extent than any simple right. A civilization that knows how to teach and that allows every man the duty-right to realize himself, this is in my opinion the humanism from which our thought comes and which awaits humanity, but it is a future that is already ours from now, to the extent that each of us will be able to experience it in our present.

ASSAGIOLI HAD A CAT

Translation by Achille Cattaneo / Gordon Leonard Symons

“Two things have always surprised me, the intelligence of animals and the beauty of men”

Tristan Bernard

Why choose this theme? This title?

Whether we like them or not, animals, especially domestic ones, directly or indirectly, are part of our life; even if we do not have any, maybe we know someone, friends, relatives, colleagues, who have one. What is our attitude towards the animal kingdom, as Assagioli calls it? And digging deeper, how do we react with certain types of animals? I am referring not only to dogs, cats, but to butterflies, reptiles, bats, mice? Is it possible that we associate them with stereotypes, prejudices, preconceptions, phobias, or on the contrary, excesses of humanization, compensation, identification? It would be really interesting to know why we like them, or not, or if they leave us indifferent, and in any case, what kind of reactions they arouse in us.

And what position Psychosynthesis has on this issue. For years we have been investigating the intrapsychic dynamics of human beings; we too belong to the animal kingdom but to the higher one, if only for that famous cerebral cortex that makes us thinking and aware beings. I will not go into these questions, even though they are interesting, I only remember the famous phrase of Madame De Stael that says: “The more I know men, the more I love animals”.

I am not the spokesperson for psychosynthesists, so what I am about to write are personal reflections, but in the meantime will I quote a passage by Assagioli:

“We owe a great debt of gratitude towards animals, generally unheard of and unrecognized. Therefore, we

owe to these minor brothers the love that the Buddha and St. Francis felt so much “.

Having said this, I doubt that the tiger mosquito could have been loved so much by them too, even though one is a saint and the other an enlightened one! And anyway, some Buddhist monks think that if they crush an ant they could kill an extinct loved one, reincarnated in that form.

Assagioli, however, speaks of them as “brothers” to whom our gratitude always goes, especially when some species become food with their meat. In his experience of imprisonment, when in the summer of 1940 he was arrested in Rome, many testimonies are reported in the book, “Libertà in prigione” (Freedom in prison); a passage, in particular, in this regard: “The distribution of food, when you expect it hungry, evokes a thank you, even if not expressed, towards those who cooked it and those who handed it to you. A thought of gratitude to the animal that provided it, with the sacrifice of its own life, something that should be done when eating meat”.⁽¹⁾ This, just a reference to the thought of Assagioli.

In his country house, which I had the opportunity, years ago, to visit, Villa La Nussa, at Capolona, I noticed in a special space in the garden, a whole row of tombs with statues of the dogs which had belonged to the family. It was right there in the countryside that he also kept a dog, in the very last times of his life.

And what about the cat, who ruled over the various floors of the villa in Via San Domenico, in Florence?

Let’s take a step back. If 22 years ago it had been predicted that I would have been interested in a theme concerning animals, in particular a cat, I would have surely answered: “I don’t think so, they don’t interest me”, and I will tell you why.

As a child my father and my uncle were hunters, we all lived in the same house, in the basement they kept a dog, they had bought him as a puppy, a cocker, Leo, and since his arrival I was forbidden to have an emotional relationship with him, according to them I would spoil it for hunting. I could hear him yelping, moaning, then

I would secretly go downstairs, bring him some cookies and caress him. Each time I was discovered and scolded, and they locked the basement.

After some time, a relative gave me a kitten, finally a pet just for me, but the joy was short, the next day, on my return from school, I could not find it anymore, they took it away, because it would have disturbed the dog. Do these episodes remain etched in the delicate psyche of the children, and how does it end?

Over the years I have not thought about it anymore and I have made my own the stereotypes about dogs and cats felt in the family. So why am I interested in animals? And especially cats; have you ever heard of black cats, cats that are tools of black magic practices, that carry disease, scratch your eyes, destroy the house and are selfish opportunists?

But let’s go step by step. In 1988 an important Congress was held in Venice on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Roberto Assagioli. As often happens in other Congresses, a film about him was shown, a cross-section of his daily life in the Capolona countryside. The idea of seeing Assagioli in a film for the first time made me leap with anxious anticipation; what a thrill, and what a disappointment! The voice, which I imagined powerful, clear, like Moses on Sinai, was feeble, the vocal cords, worn out, emitted a trembling and almost incomprehensible voice. But the greatest disenchantment was when, seeing him walking, limping, in his garden, accompanied by a stick, all of a sudden, a dog passed him in front of him, and he promptly, with an impetuous gesture, pushes it away with the stick.

And I, inside myself: “But how, Assagioli beating a dog? And St. Francis? And the Buddha? I was really disappointed; then thinking about it, I realized that he was probably afraid of falling and that after all, it has been a defensive reaction. It was I who had idealized him, which, by the way, he never wanted.

But the biggest surprise was when I discovered that in addition to a dog, Assagioli also had a cat. And here’s what I found. In 1981, Dr. Ida Palombi died, his

faithful collaborator, who had inherited her cat, Freaky, a beautiful gray cat with thick fur; subsequently Anna Baldini, a psychosynthesisist, psychotherapist and yoga teacher, took him with her, for a few years, for 4 or 5. Despite the longevity of felines, the time also came for Freaky to join his human friends who had cared for him so lovingly.

Nella, Assagioli's wife, grieved the loss of her young son Ilario very much and probably the care of the kitten had somewhat alleviated her pain. It is said that in Dr. Palombi's apartment, small gaps had been made in the doors so that Freaky could circulate freely. I learned all this news recently, thanks to Susie Rosselli, Siria Spolveri, Piero Bartolini, and also to Piero Ferrucci who did not remember the cat, but the dog in Capolona, yes, so much so, that I was told he was always barking, but he did not bother Assagioli because he was deaf.

I had been attending the Institute since 1976, but I had never known of the existence of Assagioli's cat; by the way, do you know where he was buried? Right near the Center, in the courtyard opposite, near the wall that divides the property, on the left, under the jasmine tree. He was buried by Anna Baldini and Piero Bartolini, our yoga teacher, who herself was a friend of Anna's and among other things he told me that she had welcomed him with so much love, she spoiled him by letting him eat the gorgonzola, of which Freaky was very greedily fond, one day he even ate so much of it that he was sick !!

If years ago, before I started out, they had told me that one day I would talk about the special relationship established between humans and pets, especially cats, I would have been amazed by the experiences I have told you.

Even the idea that Assagioli had a cat made me turn up my mouth!!! But how did the conversion take place? I'll make it short; for the sake of my little daughter (the eldest still complains, because she was not allowed to have a kitten). I'll fly skip over the reasons for my rethinking, I am not here to talk about myself, but the practice of Psychosynthesis smooths personalities and hearts over time.

It is no coincidence that I used two terms, conversion and love. I have always thought that people who take care of animals have an edge in terms of generosity, altruism, kindness, sense of responsibility and sacrifice. When I was young, I used to say that those who love cats are depressed! Well, maybe over the years I have become a bit depressed too.

You know that Psychosynthesis covers five fields: self-training, educational, interpersonal, social and therapeutic. Now, I cannot dwell on the relationship with animals and these fields, but I can only mention that it is an interpersonal relationship, between man

and animal, between two living subjects, which satisfies many levels, bio, psycho, spiritual. The company of an animal highlights many aspects of the personality of those who care for it, it also plays a self-training and educational role. It is no coincidence that children should be accustomed to the presence and care of pets because this leads to making them responsible and freeing them from being self-centered. It also promotes encounters with other people, so it also has a social role, and not least the much-mentioned pet therapy, a true balm for lonely, physically ill people and more. Therefore, the company of an animal also has a therapeutic function, in the proper sense of a helping relationship. How is it that we often communicate better with an animal than with our partner, or with another family member? The relationship that is established is very deep; what needs come into play? What conscious and unconscious levels do they meet? And how does our consciousness interact with the consciousness of the animal? Perhaps, he is not aware of himself, but he is conscious. Do animals have a Self? How many questions, how many reflections. Often these creatures are real teachers, they educate you in respect, understanding and patience; they are eternally "puer", playful, and an expression of freedom, especially as regards cats. How There are many other things I could add, but for now I'll stop here, fondly remembering Freaky, and then my first Bijoux kitten who stayed in our family for 19 years, and now Milla, a mischievous and somewhat rustic kitten who by dint of breaking knick-knacks and travel mementoes, she educates me in non-attachment and reflecting on what are the most precious things in life, among these, the joy of his presence, his vitality, and his tireless desire to play: a real spiritual instructor.

Elena Morbidelli

Note

- R. Assagioli, *Libertà in prigione* (Freedom in prison), edited by C. Ann Lombard, ed. Istituto di Psicosintesi, Florence, 2018, p. 82