

## THE BABY AND THE BATHWATER A PARABLE OF RENEWAL

Translation by Greta Bianchi

We all know the meaning of the injunction not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater”, in its harsh but effective combination: *do not confuse what is more valuable* (especially related to an experience) *with what is less valuable, or even of no value at all*. This saying seems to be of Germanic origin, from around 1600, but perhaps it is even more ancient and derived, as well as other sayings, from the parable of the “weeds”, also called plant of the “bad lolium” (lolium temulentum).

In the Gospel parable, at night, the “enemy” of the owner of a field (i.e. the devil, from the Greek *dia-ballein* = *to separate, to divide*, therefore “the separator”, but also “the separated”) sows weeds among the wheat. It is important to learn to distinguish *opposing elements* by coexisting with both, patiently experiencing them in order to better recognize them at the time of the “harvest”, when it is time to decide which of the two to keep. If the immediate reaction to the suffered damage had prevailed, the owner of the land, following the impulse to eradicate the weeds, would have risked destroying the young plants of wheat together with the weeds.

The image of the “baby and the bathwater” takes us back to the dimension of our daily experience, animated by an energy that expresses itself, at its most conscious level, through responsibility and choice. Just as the owner of that land decides to wait for the wheat and the weeds to grow, so that they are better defined and recognizable, and only then he makes the choice between one and the other, a *good internal mother or father* will not confuse the baby with the bathwater made impure by the “remains” of the experience. Every time that the *child* is immersed in the water of that wash tub, that is, in the psychic energy of love and care, it is as if he also renewed his right to be loved the way he is and the right to grow, to develop. It is as

if all the fears, the errors, the false myths and the illusory beliefs about oneself and about the world became evident, visible in that “bathwater”, that therefore becomes an image of a possible redemption and transformation; as well as valuable information on how, until that moment, the experience of living was carried out and on the obstacles it encountered. Therefore, the “bathwater” testifies the renewal of life.

**According to Assagioli, the *renewal* is “the awakening of latent energies, of the plastic, new unconscious, not yet impressed. It requires the overcoming of inertia and the liberation from the illusion of security”** (*Lessons on psychosynthesis*, year 1967, section XII).

This is why I like to consider it “the theme of themes”. Both because it represents the potential of the ordinary, and because in these times we observe a certain tendency, especially among the protagonists of public life, to compete to see which are more legitimized to promulgate the “in with the new”. As if this did not involve the ability, neither simple nor obvious, to renew themselves first.

In the same way, when years ago we heard for the first time the word “dumping” referred to the action of some human beings *versus* other human beings and not versus refrigerators, washing machines or cars, many of us wondered if the “in with the new” was really just that..

On the other hand, it does not seem that today’s observable results have honored that promise of renewal, given the reappearance of adulterated faces that now deny the *Vetus*

(the Old), the extension of sexist, racist and xenophobic behaviors, the preaching of macro-economic recipes that consider well-being and dignity (I am not saying happiness) as negligible extras for the human being; not to mention those nostalgic-absolutist tendencies not exactly oriented towards brotherhood and inclusion among the whole of humanity. But this, of course, is only my personal opinion and is addressed to the “shadow” side of current affairs. The bright side, on the other hand, highlights the countless experiences of cooperation and practice of authentic solidarity - together with the many examples of responsibility and openness to the future by those who “do business” risking doing it in the first person - who place the common good at the center of their aims and, above all, of their actions. Indeed, whenever we exercise a free and conscious choice, we place ourselves on the ground of renewal. Not just this. We choose to abandon certainty for uncertainty, we leave our *comfort zone* to explore the unpredictable territory of the “unknown”. Be it idea, person, neighborhood, city, nation or continent; and each of these territories and dimensions, reflected within us, reshape our inner world. Nevertheless, in order to do this, it is important to look closely both at the *child* (his innate drive to exploration, to growth and evolution, but also his fears and illusions), and the *bathwater* (“residues” of previous experiences, mista-

kes, disappointments, remorse and regrets). It is necessary to observe them from another position, on another level, transcending our oscillation from one pole to another, from one extreme to another, from one illusion to another. Einstein used to say that **“no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”**

From a psychosynthetic and psychodynamic point of view, we can say that the overcoming of the repetition of ideas, beliefs, thoughts, images and behaviors that are hindering or dysfunctional can only happen by drawing on a part of us that is not conditioned by the past and therefore not denying that we can be and become something else.

Assagioli defined this unconditional part, not yet impressed by the past, a *plastic unconscious*. Namely the enormous reserve of psychic energies that are latent in each of us and which gives us an indefinite ability to learn, to elaborate, to create, even more and better if we cooperate with it respecting the laws (*psychological laws*), the rhythms (*recognizing and developing these latent energies*) and methods (*work with the dreams, imaginative techniques, creative and autobiographical writing, meditation, theatrical dramatization, bodily work*).

To draw on the plastic unconscious, however, you must want it.

You must want to make a choice, you must “want to want”. But how can we activate this capacity?

**First of all it is necessary to get rid of the “up to now”**, and to stop considering our regressions, defeats, errors, failures, disappointments as a triumph of the impossibility of overcoming repetitions. Every time we find ourselves living again an “old script” of the past, we can learn to grasp new aspects, to get to know it better. And by knowing it better, observing it from other angles, we can become more capable authors and directors, more skilled performers. We acquire a better mastery. We grow into awareness and therefore we free our will.

**After that, we must start saying “from now on”**, thus affirming the possibility, or better, the right to transform our lives from a precise moment.

This explorative aspect of research and discovery can be developed and showed by moving to a higher level, expanding the visual horizon and with it the perspective of life. However, with growing, with venturing higher, we also become more exposed to the wind - be it gentle breeze or storm winds - just like the tops of the trees that know how to bend to its strength, sometimes brutal, just because they are supported by a solid but elastic trunk and by deep roots.

From the moment we conquer the upright position, it is this vertical dimension that leads us to follow, through successive stages, the path of the Self, the profound nature of our soul, and therefore to profoundly recognize what we are and *who* we can become. In other words, we become spiritual beings, more evolved at all levels of our personality: we renew ourselves on the physical and emotional level, on the level of affections and feelings, thoughts and aspirations.

And like this, even if we feel we are in a phase of regression, of a return to “old scripts”, we can get help from imagining ourselves traveling along the swirls of an *upward spiral*, similar to our DNA. In this way, even if we have the feeling of returning momentarily backwards, we are still moving to a higher level, we are ascending, we are growing and expanding our horizon, as we gradually get closer to the center, to the soul of our tree.

It might also be useful to remember that wise Zen aphorism: *“Water which is too pure has no fish”*, signaling the risk of coming to an aseptic personality, without nuances or affective warmth capable of nurturing ourselves and others, if we let ourselves be seduced by the myth of purity and perfection. That is, if we fall in love with the colored glasses of the lantern, forgetting the flame that burns inside. The latter, for sure, pure and perfect.

In this journey, what does “bathwater” represent then?

We could simplify it by saying: *everything that hinders our self-realization from within ourselves*. Delegating our choices to others, complacency and inauthenticity, the neglect of our creativity, mental laziness and self-deception. In other words, all those tendencies that originate **from two great illusions, or misunderstandings, about ourselves: the fear of risking and the belief that we do not deserve happiness.**

If it is true that *the foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, while the wise man grows it under his feet*, we also know that only by risking, exploring, by creating new experiences do we truly become freer and wiser.

Only by overcoming the idealization of a perfect, compensatory future, “coming from beyond”, and instead by carrying out new actions capable of creating a future that is already present, can we renew ourselves by remaining faithful to the flame which burns within each of us. In this way, we could say that the perennial flame that enlightens and guides our personal psychosynthesis, leads us to know better the “up to now” to begin to discover our “from now on”, one step after another.

This is a good path, a good practice to learn how to activate our potentialities and renew our way of being in the world, at the same time liberate our creative energies.