

What psychosynthesis taught me¹

by Joanne Wilson

How is it that the person with whom we spend the most time in a lifetime is often the one we know the least – ourselves ? How can we have a image of ourselves when we don't have the distance to see with? At each identity crisis in life, adolescence, marriage, the big changes, I asked myself "Who am I?". Who am I compared to others? Who am I compared to the person I wanted to become?

One day, a person I respected very much for her serenity and other human qualities, spoke to me about psychosynthesis. Just to say I had done it and maybe a bit curious, I phoned the French Institute of Psychosynthesis who sent me a brochure. Nothing special, but I was curious enough to do a trial run.

I told my teenage sons of my intentions. They examined the brochure then squarely forbid me to go. "Mom, it's a sect. Look, they mention "spirituality". What are you getting yourself into? You're too naïve." Since its not my kids who are going to impose themselves in my choices, you can imagine the rest.

That's how I started the first year of training in psychosynthesis, as suspicious as curious. As of the first day I was conquered and yet if I wanted to tell about it, there was nothing extraordinary in it, nothing but a few exercises yoga style, drawing, breathing, mild gymnastics, talking about one's impressions of the day, nothing to bowl you over with. But, boy, did I feel good! At the end of the day I had the impression that everything seemed simpler than usual, less complicated. I felt cleansed, maybe "cleansed" of my thoughts that had been too heavy? Then, very quickly, the mistrust came back: "Maybe that's how they soften up people to drag them in more easily?".

This whole first day (and almost every other session during the first year), I was suspicious, especially during relaxations, incapable of chasing my sons' words, watching for the moment they would try to hypnotise me. I can laugh about it now, but I don't regret it. A dose of mistrust when faced with something new is healthy. Giving too much trust which isn't earned or deserved, and showing too little discernment, that's what draws people into situations they wouldn't have chosen if they had envisaged in time *all* their options.

My distrust allowed me to verify all along the way that this teaching was good for me, that it made me more and more independent of the training. I know today that this latter criteria makes all the difference, even in love. We should run from everything that makes us dependent. True love renders stronger and more autonomous, helps raise us up mentally and spiritually, like any good teaching.

By the way, you might be wondering what was the "spirituality" in the psychosynthesis brochure? According to the *Que Sais-je*² edition on Psychosynthesis, spirituality is simply the creative energy in us that we progressively manage to listen to while simplifying our own lives. For me, its also freedom from everything that keeps us from fulfilling ourselves : pessimisms, critiques, details that invade our lives to the extent that we no longer raise our head up. God knows there are some beautiful things to see if we raise our heads, eyes looking at us with kindness, treetops, sky, nature incessantly renewing itself close to perfection, a perfection so natural that one can't help thinking about God or some force capable of orchestrating such marvels. Plato said that *beauty is the food of the soul*. In teaching me to take the time to look around me, to give myself quality time, psychosynthesis put me back into phase with the beauty around me.

Its sufficient to clearly formulate one's aspirations. Its sufficient to want. Personally, I wanted more serenity. When we hear "what you want you can get", its true. Expressing what we want equivocates to unconsciously fixing a point on the horizon, then something in oneself maintains the course.

¹ translated from an article published in the *Revue de Psychosynthèse*¹, n° 11 by the Institut Français de Psychosynthèse, 61 rue de la Verrerie, 75004 Paris, January 2002

² *La Psychosynthèse*, Monique Pellerin & Micheline Brès, Que Sais-je ? 2857, Presses universitaires de France, 1994

That is if you stay in reality and not in the imagination. That too, is another work in psychosynthesis. One of the exercises enable to distinguish between reality and imagination. For example, our obligations. We could think that unfortunately nothing is more real than these obligations that keep us from having fun or from doing something else or any other thing. These constraints, we have to accomplish them no matter what. In fact, we think that when we don't look at all our options. If I ask someone an example of an obligation, they could answer me : « feed my children ». Firstly, is it by obligation or because we have the desire to give pleasure because we love ? It doesn't matter, let's accept that the person perceives it as an obligation. Its true that the law creates a food obligation concerning one's children. Is that any reason you have to feed them yourselves. What are the options ? We can pay someone to do it for us. We can ask a family member to help us on this point. We can organise exchanges with neighbours or friends to gather together the children and, each one their turn, feed them as a group, send them to the cafeteria, etc.

When we accept to look at all these options, we start to realise that we are making a voluntary choice among these options. Once you're conscious of that, there is a good chance that we chose again exactly the same options. But we can no longer look at it as if its an obligation imposed on us. Its no longer a constraint but rather what we wanted, a conscious choice enabling us to affirm something of our personality, of our values. There is no good or bad choice, since all these options coexist. There is no perfect finality. Each person does as he can, as disappointing or great as that can seem.

In becoming clearer with oneself, we become clearer with others, which limits the misunderstandings and smoothes out some complications in a friendly way. In psychosynthesis, we learn the importance of real moments in life, those moments where we give ourselves the right to savour the present moment. We also learn to listen to our bodies [eh no, there weren't any hedonist experiences either, I also watched out for that during the whole first year, especially when I heard the words "sensorial exercise" – I'm the cautious one!], to integrate one's emotions which are as legitimate as one's thoughts. We especially learn to be in phase with oneself and to conciliate-integrate all aspects of one's life. Psychosynthesis enables the synthesis of all aspects of our psychic system in a global (holistic) approach of the individual, of his personality. Its part of what is called humanist psychology.

In psychosynthesis, the rhythm of each person is respected. Another quality of psychosynthesis is the absence of judgement. Personal discernment of each person is there, but value judgements are not welcome; the trainer watches over that, in words but also by the model given. This not-faked kindness encouraged me to apply myself during exercises to get all the sense out of it that I could, to advance in my understanding of myself, and through that, of others. This kindness also served as a model for me when it was my turn to start teaching.

As of the first session I went to, thousands of questions galloped in my head, but healthy questions, about me, about my aspirations, about what I really wanted. I realised that it was the first time in my life where I had needed to ask myself the question *What do I want* ? And I didn't have the vaguest idea, never having asked myself the question, always too busy satisfying wishes and needs of those around me, of my family, of my husband, of my children, of my in-laws, of my employer, of the associations I took care of, of the entire world with all its misery. I would have had to have been pretty selfish to put my own interests before those of others, no ? Eh no ! I just learned that I had the right to. And moreover, that I had the responsibility to do so, because nobody else would do it for me.

I drew the conclusion that maybe real generosity comes in the overflow once we have accomplished what is needed to satisfy one's own needs. What were my needs ? There again, total emptiness at the beginning of these questionings. But once Pandora's box is opened, we want to know the answer, or at least know that there is an answer.

I realise now that the problem of too much generosity to the extent of negating one's own existence seems to be a common denominator among trainees that I met in psychosynthesis. Can too much generosity be wrong ? My conclusions is « yes », if that means abnegating oneself.

Psychosynthesis put me face to face with my right to exist fully and to affirm myself if necessary. To co-exist with others, you need to exist yourself and to give yourself quality time. I take up the challenge and savour each step along the way.