

Spirituality in Social Transformation

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Lately I have been invited to various talks about spirituality, and I am always grateful though I know exactly what is going to happen when I sit in front of the keyboard and I start a new document. I know that the page will stay blank for a long time, because, how does one talk about spirituality? In spite of this I always accept the invitation -if words come they will be true words. They will be true words because something in me will have connect with those spaces within the human being, where words will be signs that translate something that has no signs -something that cannot be expressed through words. I feel a commotion just to imagine how someday this could be achieved.

Who might have uttered the word Justice and the word Liberty for the first time? I imagine a naked monkey like being fifty or a hundred thousand years ago staring into the fire in an immense night, on an immense land. Something big happens within him -something that is nowhere. And a whisper arises, an internal cry that won't bounce off the rocks. Justice!

The air in this room cannot be seen, but if I pumped it out we would all know it is missing, and we would run to break the windows so it can come in and fill our lungs. Something similar happens with spirituality -you cannot see it, you cannot feel it. It has no smell. But, if that substance escaped through a hole in our existence, a shivering feeling of emptiness would fill us and loneliness, fear and non meaning would cover us -and we would run for a window through which the spiritual wind can come in to shake our soul and renew our being.

We are going to talk about a substance which the senses cannot perceive and reason cannot apprehend, and which could be the very consistence (ingredient?) of everything. We make a container with clay, but the empty space is what we use. Existence comes from things but its meaning comes from the non existence (Tao Te Ching, Lao Tse).

If it cannot be perceived and it escapes reason like water through our fingers, it is worthwhile asking if there might be a way to access that which we call spirituality, in a direct and experiential way. The intuition of such a thing is a big step. Faith in such a thing is a different ay -but I must distinguish between naïve faith, fanatical faith, and faith based on experience.

It is worth asking what is all this useful for. Why would anybody want to have the undoubting evidence of spirituality? How can it help my career? Why could spirituality help to give a foundation to transforming ideas, to pedagogy, psychology, sociology or social work?

Why, because we are in trouble. We are experiencing rapid change and everything is becoming obsolete. I am not referring to the technology, which after all is what we adapt to the quickest. Systems of thought, institutions that were believed to be natural and immutable, models of life, social models where we put our trust and soon disappoint us, are all becoming obsolete. Daily life is stained by an atmosphere of disorientation and confusion. We are in trouble because our fundamentals have become blurred and we need to find them again. We have lost the Meaning and we feel each time more empty - within ourselves or in the society in which we are immersed. The sun that used to illuminate existence has become eclipsed. We now walk in the haze, and we need light.

This spiritual substance posts a problem in that it cannot be categorized in time and space. And, how can there be something outside time and space? And, if it is outside time and space, how is it possible that it makes contact with you and me?

If we could briefly make contact with that, if for a split second I could make contact with eternity,

what would happen next? What shall I do with it? Would the experience inspire my daily life, or would it be something unconnected -like an unimportant life anecdote?

My life, is it a construction filled with meaning and significance, is it a passionate search for liberty and transcendence -or is it a mechanical existence, filled with actions and reactions, distracted, and trying to avoid overwhelm? And, if my life was a bit mechanical, are there sublime moments in it that seem to connect me with another reality? The things I do, do they truly fulfill me?

If we trace the origin of cultures in human history, we will find moments when a culture witnesses the intimation of a transcendent and totalizing experience, which is the origin of the development of that civilization. That experience inspires centuries, and at times, millennium of transformation of that world. That transformed world increases its complexity until it requires answers it cannot find, and that civilization begins to clash, to become darkened, and to walk in the haze of the night, tripping at every step. Then, the people of the times, the generations of that historic moment search ever so intently. The more they trip, the harder they search for a foundation that illuminates them, that shows them meaning and helps them recognize their own essence once again.

Today we are witnessing the encounter of cultures and civilizations that were inspired at different historical moments. Today, hundreds of thousand years of human history are converging in one same space and time. They clash with one another -we trip at every step, and we search each time more intensely for that light and for that foundation that will fulfill us and give us meaning -to each one of us and to the entire human project.

Making contact with a spirituality that encompasses the different beliefs and acknowledges the value and the truth of each culture, a spirituality that gives impulse to the whole of humanity to realize the greatness that envelops it and impels it, and to translate all this into time and pace -this is what we might be needing the contact and the experience of that spiritual substance for.

We feel that something soft and new is happening inside every one of us. We don't know how to explain it. It might be that my very skin begins to reject anything that sounds like dogma, or imposition. I might be feeling disgust for lies and violence. And I search within, because I recognize dogma and violence in myself, and I don't like it.

Something soft and shapeless, a breeze that blows on my soul, a new spirituality is approaching, is making contact and is insinuating a future world.

If this is so -I want to know it through experience and direct connection with that greater reality, and not just because somebody said so.

I have read the ideological fundamentals of Transforming Social Work as they call it. I have loved the way New Humanism frames this profession in anew, solving the paradox of how to help an individual or a community that is a victim of social violence, and at the same time transforming the social structure that generates such violence. These ideas denote a pirituality -they translate a profound experience that takes shape in the project of Humanizing the World, and become concrete in the ideal of a Universal Human Nation.

I have reached these conclusions by following Silo's teaching. I believe we all need to make contact with a profound experience that fill us with meaning, and inspire our actions -not only our Social Work, or the people our Social Work wants to help. That is why I explain where I get the raw material for the experience of contact with myself. I will say personally and humbly that I followed this internal path proposed by Silo, in order to connect with my own spirituality and to be able to speak, somewhat, about this matters. Silo explains this in his message, and he also converts it into a series of personal and collective experiences.

We are not only what we do, we are not only what we think, we are not only what we feel, we are not only our family, our culture -we are not only our epoch. There is something great within each

one of us. There is something great in that child that asks me for a coin, and there is something great in the one that accumulates coins and does not know what to do with them. There is something great inside the knowledgeable and also the ignorant. There is something great in the Christian, the Muslim, the Jew, the Buddhist and the Atheist. What lives inside each one of us is life itself, inexhaustible life. It is there, inside, a little deeper, silent, and beyond silence. Today, that something wants to communicate with us and it will do so in the new languages of the soul.

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