

IDEA OF THE MONTH

March 2024

The great power of love

Every life is like a marvellous chest that contains beautiful colours that blend together in great harmony. However, it may often happen that the chest is shattered and the harmony of colours is lost mainly because the fundamental unity between Body, Mind and Spirit has diminished. The latter are three essential components that are evident in needs we all have, in the feelings we experience when these needs are met or not and in the behaviour that results from what we feel.

Unmet needs lead to discomfort, bitterness, frustration, resentment ... and these feelings can result in behaviour that displays closure, hostility, aggression, reproach and hatred.

Contrastingly, if our needs for autonomy, authenticity, creativity, trust, protection and empathy are met, we experience feelings of affection, relaxation, enthusiasm, freedom... and our behaviour towards others will be more and more loving.

In order for the great power of love to be active within us always, we need to "make ourselves one with the other person" as Chiara Lubich says in her book "*The Art of Loving*". "To make ourselves one" means to understand the world of another person, to share their thoughts and dreams, in mutual acceptance, and to live with as much transparency as possible.

If, sometimes, lack of trust and esteem makes us restless or short-tempered, confused or indifferent, we must courageously find the strength to communicate to others our need for their approval and confidence in us. With humility, we need to ask for their help in order to regain the understanding that may seem to have disappeared.

In the same way, if we have aroused feelings of animosity, anger, resentment in someone, we need to bravely ask for forgiveness and so also help the other person to understand our fragility.

Even when people have committed crimes and acted with hatred, we should avoid making straight forward moralistic judgments such as good or bad, guilty or innocent, capable or incapable, hateful or lovable. Judgment should start from our own experience and acknowledge that situations of injustice, prevarication, hoarding and violence can always trigger reactive feelings and judgments in all of us.

In his book "*Non-violent communication - A language of life*" ("*Le parole sono finestre oppure muri*" [*Words are Either Windows or Walls*] - Italian edition), Marshall B. Rosenberg recounts that when confronted with a Palestinian who had called him a murderer just because he was an American, he listened attentively to the man in whom he sensed deep personal suffering, and asked him various questions to understand what injustice to his people had led to that verbal

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aggression. The man felt understood and shared what was in his heart. He referred to all that had led him to believe the Americans were proponents of an unjust policy. A real relationship began between the two people that day. It was the end of Ramadan and Rosenberg found himself invited to dinner by the man and they remained friends.

If a human being is driven by anger, resentment and hatred to take another person's life, we have a moral duty to understand what vital human needs were not met in him or her to the extent that they generated violent feelings and disrupted inner harmony, producing such devastating and harmful effects.

That is what is being attempted today in some (but too few) penal and reform institutions which base their programmes upon the human and spiritual rehabilitation of those who, blinded by negative feelings, have committed serious crimes.

Only then is it possible for the person to understand the mistake that has been made and for the healing of their psychological infirmity to take place. There is the opportunity to rejoice together when he or she asks for forgiveness for the evil committed.

Viktor Frankl, initiator of logotherapy, writes in his book "The Suffering Man" that "even from negative aspects, and perhaps especially from them, one can 'extract' meaning and thus transform it into something positive: suffering into service; guilt into change; death into a stimulus to responsible action" and thus overcome one's guilt.