

CIRCLING THE SQUARE - THE PROCESS OF WILLING

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*'All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And spite of pride, in erring reasons spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.'*
(Alexander Pope)

The will is not a static entity but a natural process, the spark of life that energises the choices we make on our life journey. The process of willing is a deep expression of both the moving and the maintaining functions of soul. Empowerment comes through our ability to surrender to this inner power.

To understand the will we have to move away from the idea of the will as a thing and reframe it as a process - the act or process of willing. Also, we can only really understand the will in terms of our personal and human existence, for as Assagioli said, there is no such thing as will, only willers. The problem with trying to describe the process of willing is that everything we say about it, although it might be true in some cases, it is not true in all cases. Therefore all descriptions of the process of willing are partial. The best descriptions are usually found in poetry, paradox, Zen koans, mystical riddles, aphorisms, and the like. The famous Zen koan: What is the sound of one hand clapping? expresses the process of willing precisely.

There was once a student of Psychosynthesis who really wanted to understand what the will was so he worked hard on his course, went to all the seminars and workshops that he possibly could, made all the notes, did all the exercises, and he still could not get it. He tried putting everything together and it still didn't sink in. Eventually he got totally cheesed off with this state of affairs and decided to leave Psychosynthesis and forget the will altogether. He went to live in the country in a little house with a smallholding and seemed to himself and others content with digging his garden. Then one day as he was preparing a vegetable patch, his fork caused a stone to fly up and hit an iron post. Clang! it went. At that moment, the student finally understood the will and exclaimed, "Aha! Now I realise. There isn't much in this will after all."

This story demonstrates well how through completely letting go of trying to understand, the understanding came. At the moment the student 'knew', he was enlightened. The person who has a moment of truth, and yet as soon as he utters a word has moved away from it, is the subject of many stories of enlightenment. The words in this story: 'there isn't much in this will after all' are about the nearest to truth that we can probably reach with words.

Beyond words is the Word, the divine utterance that heralds the moment of creation. But is this Word that can create a universe different

from words that cannot describe the will? Is there a Word that can describe the process of willing? There is an esoteric belief that at the beginning of each new age of humankind a Magus (not necessarily a man) appears and utters a Word for the forthcoming period. This Word describes the current of the divine will for that age. The belief is that if we attune ourselves to that Word then our acts of will succeed; if we are somehow off-course, then however hard we try, we will not make things happen.

Is this the same Word that was spoken by God in the Christian Bible, and if so what is that Word? Perhaps it is the creative utterance itself, the first cry of a newborn baby, the shout of joy of someone released from imprisonment after many years. Perhaps it is an exclamation we can only really describe with a symbol - !

We may find a clue to this Word if we look at the first letter of the alphabet. The letter 'A' is graphically like an eye looking downwards, a symbol used by freemasons to represent the eye of the creator that oversees all our processes (of willing and loving). The first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, aleph, means ox. The ox is the Egyptian goddess Ta-urt, the mother of cycles of time. So the Word we are looking for can come from a female source as much as a male source. Perhaps, just as it transcends gender, it also transcends all attempts at analysis.

What is the Word of the will? Even though we may utter a sound as pure and untainted as that of the first cry of a newborn baby (and each of us have done that at least once!), to reach the Word we have to delve deeper, earlier, to the source of that utterance. When we can be in the awareness of the source of the utterance of that sound, and maintain relationship with everything else in our consciousness, then we are a complete and pure expression of the process of willing. Of course, no one is that perfect. The truth is that we have moments of this pure willing; we come in and out of its presence. We cannot force it or make it happen. Sometimes such a strategy appears to work, but more often than not it fails because we are pushing our energy in the opposite direction to, or at cross purposes with, the flow of the divine willing, at odds with the Word in some way. It is paradoxical but true that we have to be flowing with will before we can use will.

We need to quieten ourselves so in silence we have the space to become more attuned to the process of willing. When this happens the world glows. Here words become inadequate, we have to move to imagery or poetry to try and describe what we are talking about. Once I stop trying to describe what I am talking about then the words may just flow, and in tune with the process of willing. If I could fix this into a description, then it would be an imperfect description of the process of willing.

The process of willing is just to be. Everything comes to you. This is what Laotse is trying to describe in the Tao Te Ching when he says that non-action is more powerful than action. The willer in a state of becoming is a perfect embodiment of the process. She is holding the tension; simply being with what is, being an integral part of what is emerging, what is be-coming.

WILLING WITHIN THE PROCESS

'Entering the forest, he does not disturb a blade of grass; entering the water, he does not cause a ripple.'

(R.H. Blyth)

Assagioli's model of the act of will has a distinctly linear appearance. He may well not have intended this, but it is implicit. The cultural mind-set into which he was born inevitably informed the map he created. The 'act of will' starts with purpose and passes through six stages until the will is executed. Nowhere in The Act of Will does he say this isn't a linear process. In fact, he asserts: 'the act of will consists of six sequential phases or stages. These six stages are like the links in a chain; therefore the chain itself - that is the act of willing - is only as strong as its weakest link.' So the performance of an act of will is going to be more or less successful and effective according to how successfully and effectively each of the stages is carried out.

The act of will does not have to be linear, and it's possible to loop around in this apparently linear map. After making a choice, for instance, you might need to go back to deliberate, then you might do some planning, then you might need to reconnect to your purpose, and so on. In fact, you usually only succeed either through your spontaneous ability to jump from one stage to another, or through the tiring process of trying to align yourself with an artificial linear model.

Assagioli's original will model is theoretically brilliant in its simplicity, and it clearly describes a process for making the will work. For instance, if I was a very physically able teenager I could train in an athletic sport and by really working very hard and keeping myself to a particular training schedule, preferably with a coach to make sure I'd stick to it, because it would be hard to do it without. I could turn myself into a great athlete and win races or jump the highest, excel in whatever my sport. This programme would be very much in line with Assagioli's model. Speaking of the will, Assagioli asserts: 'Its training and use constitute the foundation of all endeavours ... applying all the necessary means for its realisation and in persisting in the task in the face of all obstacles and difficulties.'

The best athlete might put in an inordinate amount of daily effort, but that still wouldn't be what makes them the best athlete. That would be something else, something that originates from the source of the process of willing. This something cannot be attained through a programme of exercise. Assagioli agrees with this, saying: 'the true function of the will is not to act against the personality drives to force the accomplishment of one's purposes.' He immediately retracts somewhat, however, by then adding: 'The will has a directive and regulatory function,' thus bringing us back to a rigidified description of what is essentially a fluid process.

THE WILLING CIRCLE

Start with the three basic shapes of a point, a circle and a line. A point has no direction, takes up no space, and is non-dimensional. This point could be seen as the source of the will, because when something happens, the happening comes out of nowhere. It did not exist then it did. My desire for a bar of chocolate didn't exist, and then my desire did. Next we have a circle that represents the process of willing happening, like the ripples around a stone dropped in still water. Finally, the straight line represents an alignment. It squares the circle, and the process of willing that originated from the original desire (the point) now happens. In other words, if my willing is successful, the chocolate bar exists, too!

When the process of willing is conceived of as a circle, we can understand the process more through discovering what the circle contains. Whilst words cannot convey an understanding of the process of willing, they can suggest areas where we might wish to look if we want to uncover more about the process. Firstly, as already said, we have the point at the centre of the circle which is the source of the energy for the process of willing. In other words, it is the place out of which the willing happens. We can define this point as both spiritual and also as something material, our own human existence.

I want to go outside and sit in the sunshine. Assuming the conditions are there (I am in the right place at the right time) then what is going to make it happen is me. The source of the energy that moves me into the sun comes from the point inside me where my willing potential resides. So long as it remains potential, the act does not happen. As soon as the potential is realised the act is taking place.

Of course, I have to consider the outside conditions (in this instance, is it sunny or not?) as I co-create my world experience. I only exist through my relationship with this external world. I have to trust in the space being available. If my mind is too cluttered, I am not going to be able to discriminate as to whether the space is there or not. I might not even have the (internal) space to realise I want to go out in the sunshine, I might be too busy with other things. Or I may not be able to make the space to do it, I think I have to do the washing up, or must go and write those letters, or oh well I'll do it in a while when I'm ready, I don't want to do it yet. We become caught up, caught in or caught out one way or another.

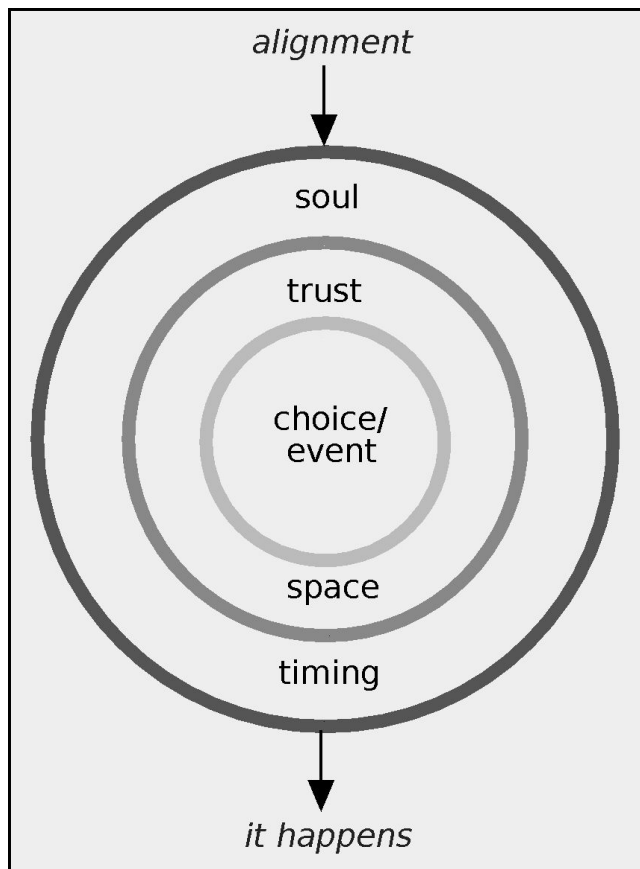
To make the space, we have to have trust that what emerges as foreground out of the space (or into our field of awareness) does so at the right time and in the right space. We can force something to emerge or we can watch what emerges and go with it. This involves trusting that what emerges is appropriate for us because it is emerging out of this point at the centre of ourselves. Trusting in that way, we can see that events happen in their rightful time. To everything there is a season; as the wheel turns, the right thing for you emerges at the right time.

If I want to watch a sunset, I have to consult an almanac to find out what time the sunset is, or I have to observe the sun in the sky and predict the time and direction in which it is going to set. I have to decide where I'm going to be to watch it. I have to create all the right conditions, but if

the timing isn't right then I will miss it. I can only make the sunset happen when the sunset happens. That's a different aspect of trust, moving onto a deeper level that connects with soul, both the soul of oneself and the soul of the world. In reality, that's an artificial division, for soul is not divided only our sometimes partial impression of it.

At this level, we can comprehend the depth of meaning in the Sufi phrase: trust in god and tie up your camel. We trust in god that there will be a sunset. We tie up a camel by preparing the conditions as much as we can to have our wish fulfilled. We have to be facing in the right direction, we cannot have a brick wall between the sunset and us, we have to be there at the right time, and so on. Space and time are vitally important factors in the process of willing which involves co-operating with the flow of universal forces.

A CHOICE EVENT



The diagram is a two-dimensional representation of a multi-faceted, constantly changing process. Imagine both the trust/space circle and the soul/timing circle as constantly turning and continually changing direction. At any moment they may happen to move in the same direction and at the same pace. Perhaps much of the time they move in different directions and at different speeds. Only when the choice and the

event meet, do the soul, trust, space and timing become aligned, which is why they are placed in the central circle. When the soul, trust, space and timing are aligned, then the choice and event happen simultaneously. In other worlds, when these conditions are attained, whatever the choice is, whatever we wish, happens.

If I'm trusting, I have the space, and the time is right, whatever I choose happens. My role here is as a witness of this, not to force the issue. I do not have to try and make the sunset happen before its time, but witness the inner and outer conditions, so that when the alignment happens, it - my choice and the event - happens. It is a paradox, in accordance with many spiritual teachings, that the less I do the more happens.

We can increase our understanding of this model of willing through studying the juxtaposition of concepts within the diagram. Space and timing, for instance, immediately suggests the space-time continuum, the place (it isn't really a place) within which everything happens. You have to be in the right space at the right time for your choice to happen. Indeed, if it really is your choice, something in line with your purpose for being part of the space-time continuum, you are inevitably in the right space at the right time. An important factor in willing, then, is not to try and be in the right place at the right time, but to be in touch with your purpose. This can be found in many ways, from complex procedures involving ritual or years of psychotherapy, to simply pursuing a dictate such as Joseph Campbell's famous: follow your bliss.

We also do not have to be in the right place at the right time to make choices. We have to be there for the choice to happen. I *now* choose a sunset, but it will only happen in the right space at the right time. At the top of the two circles, we find the concepts soul and trust. Trusting in soul carries the same meaning as flowing. An old Chinese story tells that Confucius and a friend of his were looking up at a very high waterfall above a deep gorge. All of a sudden they saw a figure appear and then leap into the water. They were sure he most have been a suicide, for no one could hope to survive the fall with such a great flow of water. To their amazement, the man appeared in the water at the bank beside them and came clambering out. They rushed up to him and exclaimed: "We thought you were a goner! How did you do it?"

The man was calm in his reply: "I just go with the flow, and allow the water to take me, I am flowing with the current." The supreme surrender implied in this story is clearly intended to impress the hearer with the importance of flowing. Yet we can also understand a deeper meaning in the story through attending to what is omitted. If what the diver said expressed the whole truth, when he jumped in he would go this way and that way with the current and never be able to leave the water (unless the water happened to beach him). What is omitted from his response is the key to understanding the secret or silent aspect of going with the flow - the act of trusting in soul. This is what leads to him reaching the bank, climbing out of the water and offering an important insight to Confucius and his friend. Through trusting in soul what we are choosing happens. To do this we have to accept that our lives are perfect as they are. This is my life, now. I'm not going anywhere; I'm not going to

be somebody different in the future. I might be, but right now, when I live my life in this moment, then what I'm choosing happens.

THE SILENT MEANING

'I am not angry when I speak gentle words. I do not beat the donkey and call myself beloved of gods. Truly, I strive to carry the load without noticing the burden, to be on this hot earth a cool jug of water, to stand in the wind like sturdy sycamore branches, a place where birds sit, where cattle gather, where sap rises, wherein earth and sky are home.' (Normandi Ellis)

Assagioli chose to call his book *The Act of Will* to emphasise that will only exists through a verb, motion. He could have called it *The Act of Willing* to emphasise this more, but we do not usually describe doing willing so it would have sounded strange. Yet we do use the phrase 'being willing (to do something)' and this approximates more closely to the nature of the process of willing here described. Willing is an expression of both the moving and the maintaining functions of the soul brought together in fine balance. We may find we are 'being willing' without having to trans-personalise or categorise the process. It just is - or more correctly, we just are.

The will only exists, as far as we are able to comprehend and experience it, through the process of willing. In other words, it only exists through its manifestation; when the willing is happening and when there is a willer to witness or be involved in it. Power (the Will) only exists in relationship with the willer (whether its a shared or a hierarchical relationship). We have the choice to make our willing part of a process of power with - that is we are tuned into the universal flow of willing - or power over - when we exert this power to the detriment or at odds with the flow of willing.

In esoteric teachings, the four powers of the sphinx are described as to know, to will, to dare and to keep silent. The first three of these powers clearly relate to the process of willing. Traditionally the fourth power - silence - has been described in terms of containment. To make our willing successful we are advised not to prematurely share it with others, to keep close to our hearts our most important willing processes. There is another deeper meaning to this fourth power of the sphinx, however, which we can now understand in the light of the process of willing. To keep silent means to go with the flow of the willing process, to follow the path of least resistance, to be uniquely oneself in osmotic relationship with the unfoldment of life. We do not achieve this silence through rigorous exercises that attempt to make us other than what we are. Indeed we can only achieve this silence when we accept who we are in our entirety. That has to include both our spiritual potential and all the atavistic aspects of our nature that make us fully human. We can then circle the square: we began with the word and we end with silence.