

ALL UNDER HEAVEN

EXPLORING THE THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE

Anonymous

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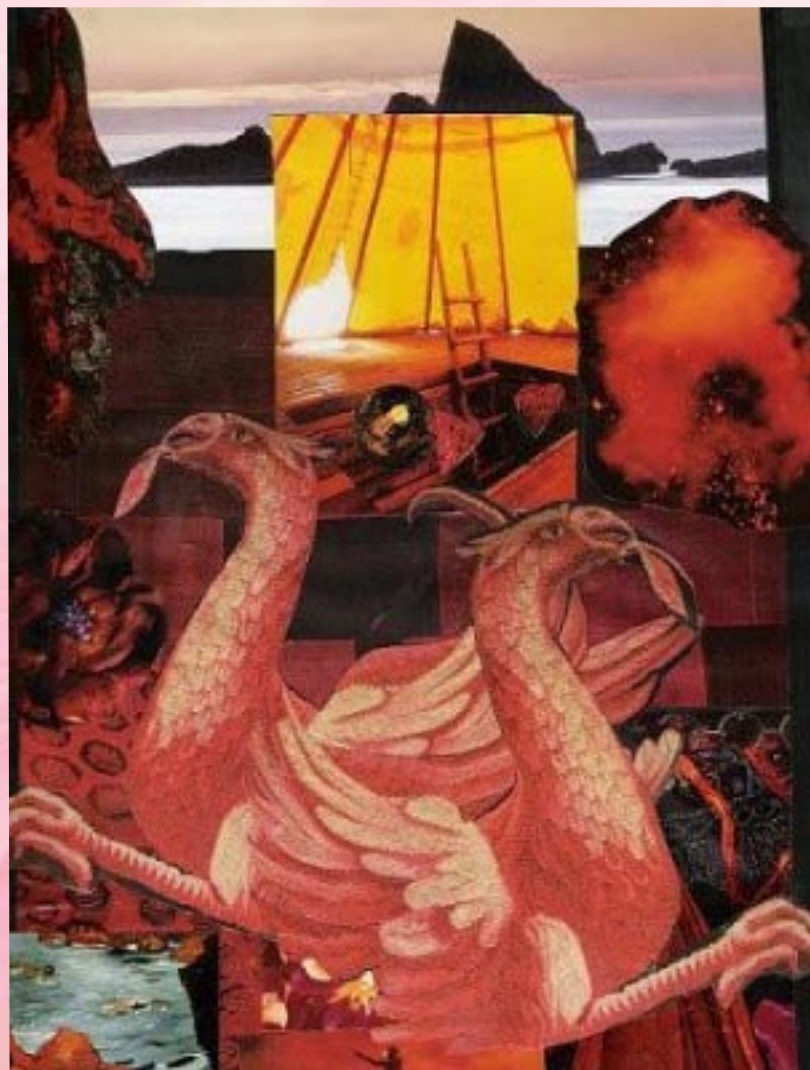
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Shakti Genaine

“There is one point which perhaps needs clarification, that there are different levels of moral conscience and that it is very important to distinguish between them. On the one hand there is the moral conscience that Freud discussed at length under the title of “super-ego”, which is to a great extent introjected from parental prohibitions and parental commands. This type of conscience is on the level of the personality, so to speak, and to a great extent is tied in with very strong affective charges of fear of consequences, of doing things wrong, etc. This has a rigidity to it, and a type of almost childish “black and white” sort of morality.

In contrast, the moral conscience that issues from the spiritual Self is quite different. It is a wise loving type of moral conscience; it is not harsh and follows to some extent the principle expressed in the words of Christ: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” This means “love thyself” with real wisdom and understanding of the problems of the personality; therefore, this type of conscience does not have rigidity and going beyond specific codes of conduct, has a certain quality of universality of values attached to it.”

Roberto Assagioli M.D.
Psychosynthesis,
page 204.
Synthesis Center, 2000

Introduction

In his article “The Empathic “I”, Empathy in Psychosynthesis Therapy”, Chris Meriam defines the empathic alliance as mainly consisting of the following five qualities: understanding, support, acceptance, validation and respect.

People involved in the therapeutic alliance are defined, based on love, will, chance and maintenance as: Counselors (Love, Change), Rebels (Will, Change), Controllers (Will, Maintenance) and Martyrs (Love, Maintenance).

In Jang Yimou’s film “Hero” these correspondences are very intensely portrayed during an epic of self-sacrifice and spiritual ideals in a continuous battle between love and will, change

and maintenance and its exaggerated portrayal in intense relationships, not very different from conflicts and agreements within a therapeutic relationship.

The film is divided in thematic chapters, each with its own color. The predominant colors are the five colors black, red, blue, white and green, corresponding to the five elements in Chinese esoteric tradition, namely earth, fire, water, metal and wood. Later on the film two colors are repeated (black and white) to effect the subtler distinction between their Feng Shuei division of Black-Earth between Mother Earth and Mountain and of White-Metal between soft and hard metal. The Green-Wood is only portrayed once but a significant change in its essence between monism and pluralism is effected during the Green chapter so the element of Wood is divided between soft and hard Wood. In effect the qualities of the five elements are eight and thus fulfilling the eight divisions of Feng Shuei.

In the Kabbalistic system of Hebrew esoteric tradition the tree of life with the ten Sephiroth-emanations of God is the main system of correspondences. There are seven sephiroth that define human relationships very aptly and hold a stunning resemblance to the above mentioned correspondences.

By following the eight thematic chapters of the film “Hero” we aim to bring all these correspondences together in a truly psychosynthetic way of describing the dynamic of the therapeutic relationship.

Black

As the nameless hero arrives at the palace having killed three renowned assassins that have long plagued the safety of the king of Qin, the whole palace resounds with the happiness of being safe again. Here we see the baser side of the pleasure principle in its dual form of pleasure seeking and pain avoidance. The king and the people are obsessed with their newfound security and become vain and ambitious to conquer all under their

dominion. No true ideal is portrayed in their behavior. They just want to follow their baser instincts and enjoy life as it is. No evolution and no determination guide their minds other than the baser side (the non-sublimated one) of the pleasure principle. They have lost their connection with the Self and just wander aimlessly in their lower unconscious.

The element of Earth is here in its hard and obsessive form of "Mountain" where obsession with safety and vanity is at hand.

The sephirah Netzah (Victory) is governed by the planet Venus and is of a similar essence with vanity and hedonism predominating.

The Martyr here is in its baser expression where the therapist and client do not actually want to effect change and just wallow in the black mire of the false security of the therapeutic space, totally ignoring the problems and feeling prideful and vain about their connection in the relationship.

Red

As the nameless hero starts to tell his tale of how he killed the assassins he tells the story of a city besieged by the king of Qin. As the massive arrow bombardment begins all have fled the city except the old teacher and the students of a school of calligraphy. When the arrows start to kill the students they try to flee, only to be greeted by their teacher with these words: "They may destroy our city and our bodies but they cannot destroy our culture. Today you will witness what our culture really is about." And at that he sits at his seat drawing ideograms in the sand while around him arrows fall like rain. Eventually the school is saved by the nameless hero and one of the assassins who go to the roof and deflect the arrows with martial arts techniques. Later on the nameless hero goes on to describe how he used jealousy and base passion to bring the assassins one against the other so the one murdered the other and then was distracted and defeated by the hero the next day.

Here we see both qualities of the element of Fire. The positive quality is that mind is over matter and the ideals overcome all obstacles. In the balanced position the body has to be preserved to contain the ideals that can sometimes be too much and make us separate dangerously from the reality of life. In the negative our baser instincts and our passions may blind us and lead us to distraction and destruction.

In the higher unconscious we have all the ideals that can lead us to perfecting evolution. In the lower unconscious lurk the baser instincts that hold us back and keep us away from expressing our true Selves. There is only one case in therapy when mind should not predominate over matter: the physical demise of the body. There are cases, as Kohut clearly describes, that a person might even sacrifice his life willingly so as to be consistent with quintessential values in his life philosophy. If in life such cases may even be laudable, in therapy such sacrifices are not only useless but abhorrent potentialities to be treated with extreme prejudice in their prevention. Even if sublimation can lead to higher ideals, it is always useful to disidentify with the sublimating process and see the base instinct and the final sublimation as different entities that can be separated and that are neither all encompassing nor all powerful. This way we are more aware of our base drives, we recognize the aspects of the Self as inherent and autonomous in our sublimations and we are governed by neither. This way life always prevails and sacrifice is done only when absolutely consistent with the Self, not as part of a neurotic (or should we say psychotic) vicious circle.

The element of Fire shows both base passion and sublime ascending towards higher ideals. Care is given not to let it burn excessively and shed its high striving and warming qualities to destructiveness and wantonness.

The sephirah Geburah-Severity is governed by the planet of Mars and is warlike and fiery-destructive when serving passion and protective when serving higher ideals. Stability and adherence

to ideals is paramount in this sephirah. Hence severity is the chosen name for it.

The Rebel can be both destructive and constructive by being obstinate in its adherence to ideals and ideas. Passion and sublimation should be disidentified from and observed under the clarifying spectrum of the reality principle. This way we will stay away from exaggerations and be firm and true to our Selves, no matter how much we are shaken during therapy. This stability and connection to the Self opens the path to true empathy.

And this is the way to provide Meriam's Support: by being a stable pillar of loving conviction and grounded ideals upon which the client can built on. We are being the model self-object material that Kohut speaks of and the Positive stable external unifying center of Firman and Gila.

Blue

But, as the nameless hero tells his tale, the king realizes that such renowned assassins could not have been of such base quality and he suspects that there has been a ploy involving the three assassins and the nameless hero so as to gain the trust of the king and bring him close to the king so that the nameless hero can assassinate the king himself. So he tells the nameless hero his version of the story where the three assassins have given their lives to provide the nameless hero with the opportunity to kill the king. In this version the last two assassins, who are lovers, do not kill each other in blind jealousy but instead both try to offer their lives to save the other. Here love overcomes even the very instinct of survival and the two are merged into one. The all-encompassing essence of unconditional love destroys duality and separateness and decisions are made based on unity and empathic brotherhood. In the presence of love and camaraderie the therapeutic relationship is strengthened and the client realizes his/her own self as totally accepted and validated since he/she is felt as the same as the therapist and therefore as

equal, valued and accepted. When Jesus made his only commandment to love each other as we love our own selves the essence of unity was the predominant quality in this ideal. How can we consider someone as more deserving than others when we are in essence the same? And what Assagioli means when he interprets this commandment as "love thyself" is that when we love ourselves with true wisdom and understanding of the problems of the personality we in essence "contain" the surface personality problems in wise and understanding love and focus on the universally common elements of all human beings and their basic unity.

The element of Water is closely related to feelings and affection. The baser side of the element leads to sexual obsession and affective delusions but the higher ideal of love and flexible containment of all is also at hand here. The sephirah Chesed-Mercy is governed by the planet Jupiter and receives the guise of the benevolent king that holds all his children under his approving arms, setting a model for them to follow.

The Counselor provides this validation by accepting the person as is and at the same time recognizing the potential for improvement and perfecting evolution. Disagreement and conflict are contained in the holding relationship that is provided by the quality of love in the therapeutic alliance. This sacrifice on the part of the therapist can inspire a client to realize change and accept this value as his own. There are no outside obstacles anymore and the client is brought opposite his/her own self.

White

This exact challenge of the self against the Self is what is brought for both the nameless hero and the king as the tale unfolds further and the nameless hero admits to the plot but tells another version of the tale-the true one this time. He has indeed enlisted the help of the three assassins that have been fakely wounded and have even now recovered.

But the woman assassin has a severe disagreement with her lover “Whirlwind” that believes that the king should not be killed. A fight ensues and there is a conflict about which conviction of the two is the right one. This kind of conflict is prevalent in relationships where the obsessive-compulsive need to be “right” is dominating. Needless to say that it only brings about dissent and disorganization of bonds since it revolves around domination and monism.

This is represented by the element of metal in its hard form, where the prevalence of the right conviction is the most important.

The sephirah Hod-Splendor is governed by the planet Mercury and is ruled by its ambivalence and its mental insistence on the right way of doing things. The shining spirit of Mercury can shine both in illumination and in obsession.

Green

During the tale, the king is reminded of the failed attempt at his life by the two lover assassins some years ago. Then it is explained to him why the assassin “Whirlwind” didn’t kill him when he had the chance. He started out as having an obsession to kill the king to adjust to the will of his lover, whose father had died in a battle with the king. But in time and through the realization of the philosophy of calligraphy he understood that the king should not be killed. Thus he spared his life during their confrontation. This realization came about out of the deepest respect for all humanity in general and the philosophy of the king in particular. The monolithic conviction that there can be only one truth and only one “right” decision slowly evolved into a pluralistic approach where all convictions and ideas can be contained and respected. This brings in mind the intersubjective approach where there is no fundamental a priori objective therapeutic truth, but instead there is the truth of the therapist, the truth of the client and the relationship between them. When

there exists a space for the client to be as he really is and be totally respected for exactly that, the difference in opinions diminishes and all involved are able to disidentify from their egotistical armors because these armors are now rendered obsolete. There is no further use for the armors since there is no more threat for the convictions these armors were built to protect. Now there is a space to exist and this space can very easily be used to examine the neurotic mechanisms within a detached inner objectiveness and with a non-judgmental -therefore accepted at face value- outer critique that helps the overcoming of blind spots. To this comes the added benefit of examining not only the inner and outer realities but also the live and evolving relationship between these two realities. Under this perspective true pluralism and disidentification comes about.

The element of wood can be both hard and soft. As this is the turning point of the film the green chapter involves a radical change that comes with understanding that monism can be replaced by plurality and still have harmony. In the first case of monism we have personal harmony since being true to the right ideal for oneself one achieves inner harmony. But this may bring conflict and disharmony. So there follows reflection and a new space is effected where all truths and convictions may coexist. Now there is no more personal harmony but universal harmony. As Assagioli put it: “Therefore this type of conscience does not have rigidity and, going beyond specific codes of conduct, has a certain quality of universality of values attached to it.” Now the hard wood turns into soft and harmonization from personal to universal.

The sephirah Tiphereth-Beauty is governed by the Sun and is central to the tree of life. Its Apollinian nature makes it harmonious and beautiful in this harmony. A harmony effected by the fact that, as central, this sephirah is influenced by all other sephiroth and at the same time containing of all the different influences in a harmonious balance.

There is no space for this aspect of harmony in the controller-rebel-martyr-counselor diagram, but if someone were to put it in there it would probably be in the middle influenced by all and interchanging constantly to effect a synthesis harmonious to each particular moment in therapy. The diagram then could something like that in appendix A.

White

After this realization of pluralism, the king realizes that he has indeed been spared by “Whirlwind” and seeks to know what was the reason, the idea behind this act. So the nameless hero goes on to tell him of the moment when “Whirlwind” asked him not to kill the king. He just stood in front of the nameless hero and told him that he would not fight him but he asked that he just consider the ideal he has come about after years of meditating calligraphy and swordsmanship. Then he took out his sword and drew upon the sand the ideogram that reads: “All under Heaven”. As the king hears that tears are brought to his eyes since he realizes that only his greatest enemy is the one that truly understands him. That the wars he wages are to bring peace and unification in the warring states and finally bring “all under heaven” in universal harmony. With this act of surrender to the will of the other absolute acceptance of the other’s choice is provided and no pressure is put upon him to accept or conform. This unconditional acceptance can lead the client to a true inner emancipation from all internalized oppressive commands and thus lead a true empathic way to the Self. Now the choice is not made by reaction formation and other devious defense mechanisms trying to keep in place the false self that constitutes the last bastion against outer oppression. The choice is now made without the ubiquitous oppression so no defense mechanisms bar the way to the path to the true Self.

The element of metal is here in its soft form and the intellectual approach is pluralistic and multifaceted, instead of

monistic and determined to uphold the “one” absolute truth.

The sephirah Chochmah-Wisdom is governed by the planet Neptune and is the higher manifestation of the mercurial essence of the sephirah Hod. It involves the ability to know all that goes on in a specific instance and discern the appropriate path at the correct time. Instead of sterile scientific knowledge it provides evolving all-encompassing wisdom.

The Controller in this instance is more akin to the Counselor, or rather there is a divine merging of love and will as the transcendental form of will is identical to transcendental love and vice versa. It is the combination of opposites in a sublimated transcendent new Love-Will where Will is governed by Love and Love is the expression of Will as can be shown in the diagram of Appendix B.

Black

Finally, the nameless hero is called upon to make the choice to kill the king or spare him and by this sacrifice hope to inspire him to follow the high ideals that are expected of him. Even though he has no reassurance that the king will follow these ideals he still makes the sacrifice in the hope that the best will prevail in the king and that he will indeed bring all under heaven.

The element of earth here is in its Mother Earth form and is identical to complete and absolute understanding. It is an understanding that contains everything and allows all to emerge in their purest form. It is the absolute empathic path to the Self.

The Sephirah Binah-Understanding is governed by Saturn and its deep introspective powers are the source of all understanding and compassion in a Great Mother quality.

The Martyr here is more akin to the peaceful rebel as there is a merging of change and maintenance (see Appendix C) in their combined transcendental form where change is effected when absolute understanding and containment

of maintenance (the client as he is) is effected. This containment and understanding provide the absolute holding environment where the client is validated and can go ahead to effect change under the protective wings of absolute acceptance no matter what. The sacrifice of the nameless hero is similar to the sacrifice of the therapist that surrenders to respect, understand, support, validate and accept the perspectives of the client even though they may differ from his own.

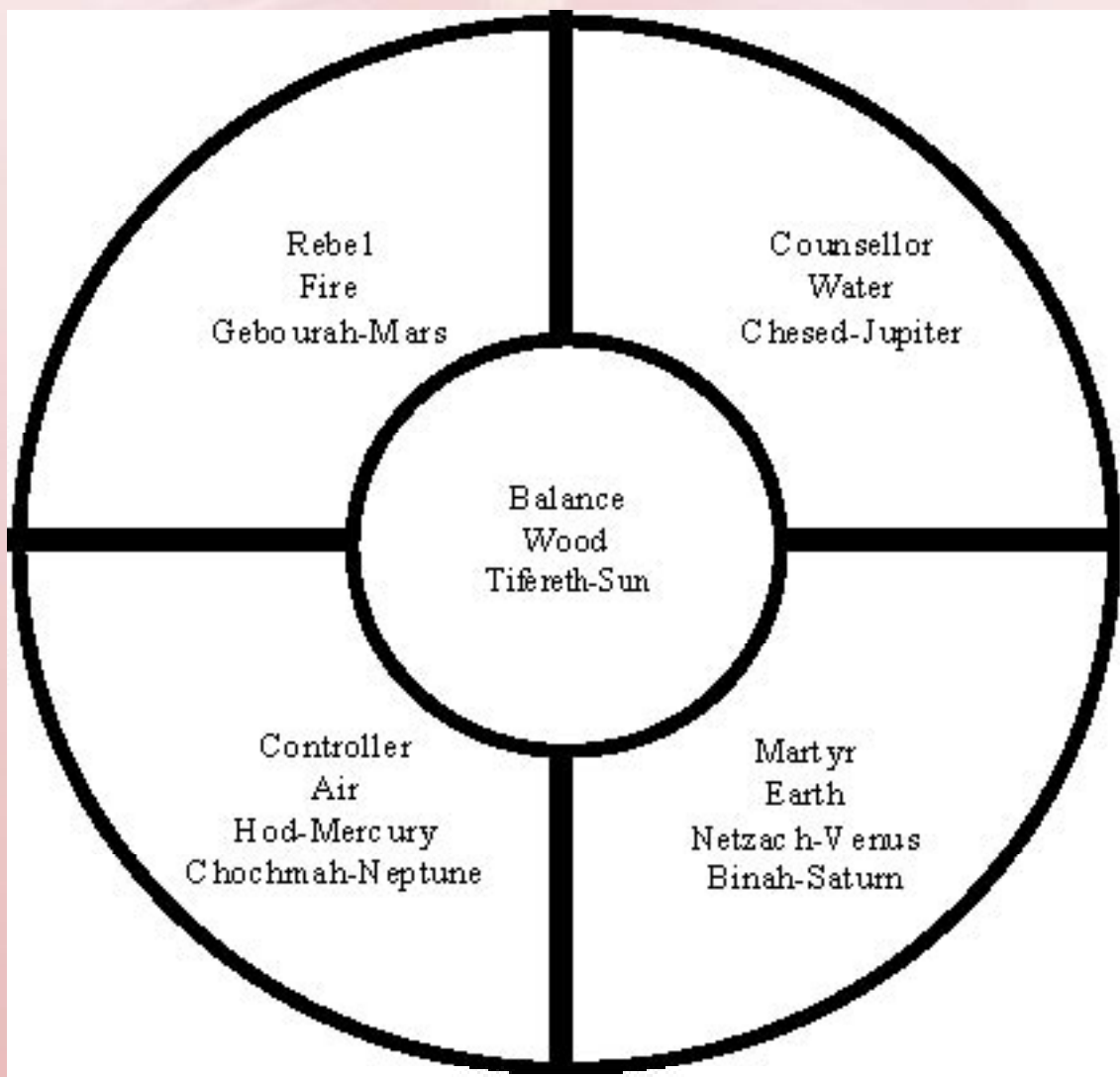
Kohut holds again a fine closing argument:

“...many times I believed that I was right and my patients were wrong, it turned out, though only after a prolonged search, that my rightness was superficial whereas their rightness was profound”

H.Kohut , “How does Analysis Cure?”
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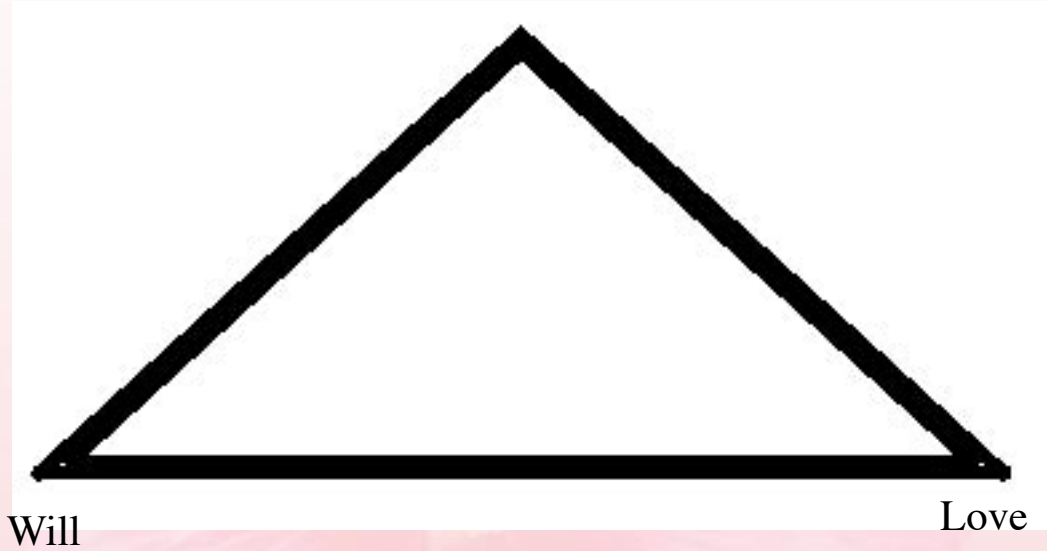


Appendix A



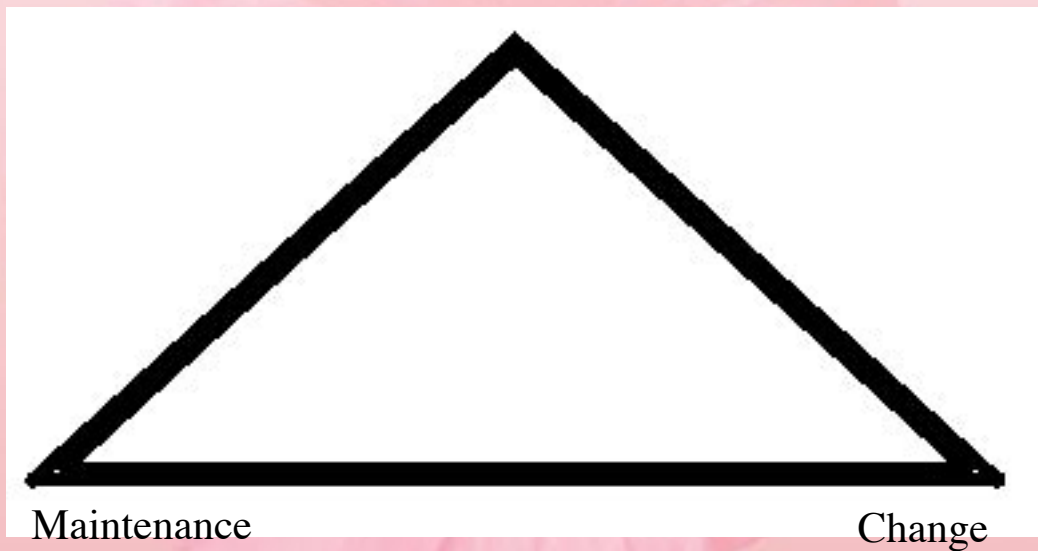
Appendix B

Transcendental
Love Will



Appendix C

Transcendental
Change Maintenance



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