

Carmen's Dream

INTEGRATING CONSTELLATION WORK WITH ONGOING THERAPY

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the integration of three pieces of constellation work into a client's ongoing therapy. The emphasis will be on the constellation work with some reference to: supportive therapy in the style of Kohut's self psychology; trauma theory; a mindfulness technique based on Buddhist Vipassana meditation and the Jungian technique of Active Imagination.

I will also outline some of the professional support I received through the email discussion group 'ConstellationTalk'. This support enabled the therapy to progress to a successful resolution.

INTRODUCTION

The constellation work addressed the systemic family issues very effectively, especially the trans-generational ones.

The three pieces of constellation work were as follows:

1. An individual constellation done in my rooms, using markers on the floor to show representatives' positions
2. Carmen's experience at a workshop where she was chosen as a representative in a constellation
3. A constellation with images that emerged in a dream of Carmen's, using active imagination

BACKGROUND

Carmen is a 42 year-old Latin American woman who migrated to Australia one year before first coming to therapy, in July 2002. At the time of coming to see me, she was living in temporary accommodation with her three children, having been separated from their father for thirteen years. Carmen and her family were having trouble settling into this country. They were struggling to adjust to the

different language and culture and Carmen was encountering ongoing problems as a result of her political activism. There were also a number of unresolved issues related to her life in Latin America prior to emigrating. Carmen was referred to me, as she needed to see someone who could give therapy in Spanish.

Although Carmen had symptoms of anxiety and depression, they were not considered severe enough to require medication. She had no evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder, despite having suffered severe trauma earlier in her life and having been a political refugee. She had some back pain that flared up from time to time and tiredness linked to anaemia. All these problems seemed to be made worse by the exaggerated sense of responsibility she seemed to carry for the welfare of her homeland, friends and family.

Carmen had felt very competent in her own country, yet she was experiencing an overwhelming sense of vulnerability living in Australia. Consequently, her early therapy was mostly supportive, consisting of validation of her difficulties, which could be seen as a normal part of

adapting to a foreign culture and language. My personal experience of marriage to a Latin American woman, helped me to empathise - in the tradition of Heinz Kohut - with some of the cultural dislocation that Carmen was feeling.

Kohut states that empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person. (1984 p.84) This description develops an almost phenomenological flavour when he states that this is done by attempting to experience as closely as possible what the patient is experiencing. (ibid. p.16) By doing this I was able to validate Carmen's experience and help her contain her distress. This process enabled her to re-establish the sense of self she had felt prior to her migration. In this way her anxiety and depression quickly began to improve, as did her English and her understanding of the Australian culture.

The history of Carmen's extended family suggested a number of possible systemic entanglements. (To reduce the possibility of identification I will not list all of them here).

Carmen was one of several siblings. Her parents had separated when she was ten years old. The entanglement, which is important in this narrative, is related to the fact that her mother's parents had been killed by the right wing military when her mother was only eight years old. Following this, her mother had lived alone in the countryside for several months, until a family took her in and employed her as a servant.

INDIVIDUAL CONSTELLATION - REMEMBERING GRANDMOTHER

As part of her adjustment to Australia, Carmen was having quite a lot of difficulties dealing with her adolescent children, especially her daughter. After several months we did a small constellation in my consulting room, using placemats on the floor. Carmen was very surprised when I put her grandmother behind her mother. Previously she had had no sense of her grandmother at all.

The inclusion of her grandmother enabled Carmen to acknowledge her mother's loss of her own parents and she could see her mother getting stronger as she accepted the grandmother's support. These images then made it possible for Carmen to bow before her mother and accept her support, which put her in a stronger position in relation to her daughter. This trans-generational strengthening fits well with Kohut's idea of development and maintenance of sense of self.

ONGOING THERAPY - STILL TAKING ON OTHER PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

Carmen's relationship with her daughter subsequently improved. However, she continued to exhaust herself by taking on other people's problems. Not only was she trying to help Latin American refugees emigrate to Australia, she was also involved in bringing Latin American political representatives here, as well as taking on the issues of any friends that she got involved with. Carmen was constantly stressed and tired.

Much of the second year of therapy revolved around these issues. Despite developing a great deal of insight, her behaviour only changed slightly. I was perplexed by this, as she seemed to have taken a much more appropriate place in her family. The consequent physical

exhaustion was increasingly frustrating for Carmen.

A SERIOUS ADVERSE REACTION TO BEING A REPRESENTATIVE IN MARY'S CONSTELLATION

Carmen was chosen as a representative for Nourishment in a constellation that was set up by Mary, a client who came to a workshop wanting to address the issue of her obesity.

We set up one representative for Mary and Carmen was chosen to represent Nourishment. Once these representatives settled into their positions, it became clear that the representative for Nourishment seemed to be behaving like a little girl. Mary confirmed that she had a younger sister. Mary's representative felt very strongly that the second representative was in fact her sister. Once this was affirmed, Nourishment's representative (Carmen) immediately became very distressed and started speaking in Spanish.

Carmen told me in Spanish that she was experiencing a severe chest pain, which was consistent with angina or a heart attack. So I removed her from the constellation and attended to her in a quiet corner of the room. At the same time Libby, my co-facilitator, selected an experienced participant to take over the role of the sister's (Nourishment's) representative. The group became distracted by Carmen's distress, and my co-facilitator did some work to re-focus and collect the energy before the constellation could continue.

Very soon after Carmen was removed from the role as the sister's representative, the chest pain and the distress disappeared. As she recovered she experienced a relaxation in her breathing and small shivers. I later realised that this was consistent with the process of

recovery from reactivated trauma as described by Levine. (1997)

As soon as the new representative took that same position in the constellation, she started to experience quite severe pain in her throat. At this point Mary volunteered that her younger sister had almost died from swallowing turpentine when she was only a toddler. (This could explain both the chest and throat pain). As soon as this was mentioned, the symptoms experienced by Mary's representative started to settle. It seemed that Mary was carrying the physical pain and the fear of death for her sister. A representative for the mother was introduced and the constellation eventually reached a good resolution.

As the constellation proceeded Carmen returned to the holding circle. When the work was completed she reported that when she had left the constellation, she had felt ashamed of what she judged as her weakness for having to withdraw from the role. This settled as she was reassured and brought back into the holding circle. Mary then reported that emotional weakness and the shame about that weakness, were feelings with which she had struggled for a large part of her life.

FEEDBACK FROM 'CONSTELLATIONTALK'

Given the gravity of the issues raised by this constellation, I sought permission from Mary and Carmen to discuss the constellation with other practitioners on the email discussion group, 'ConstellationTalk':

One contributor wrote:

"We should consider the safety of participants. Perhaps facilitators who are not medical practitioners or nurses should have updated qualifications in first aid."

This contributor is in good company here. Gunthard Weber (2004) says the following, in an article about organisational constellations:

"The constellation work ... can lead to intense emotional reactions and stressful experiences - for the representatives as well as for the clients. Those who want to offer constellation seminars should therefore know how to deal with, for example: fainting or circulatory problems, hyperventilation, asthma or migraine attacks, suicide risk, abrupt withdrawals from the group and emotional escalations (for instance, panic attacks, crying fits, etc.). I don't want to create fear, and I want to remind you to be equipped for such situations. Recently a colleague of mine reported that during a workshop of hers a participant had a heart attack. The first distinct physical symptoms were wrongly interpreted by the facilitator and by the participant as the after-effects of a constellation, in which the participant had stood in a very stressful place."

Another contributor wrote:

"... Sometimes I check in with the representative: 'Can you hold it?' when physical symptoms are revealed. Just asking this acknowledges their effort and indicates that I am there with them, aware of what is happening. Sometimes this is enough."

Another invaluable tool is distance: Sometimes you can move her further from the other representative(s). Distance often provides safety and a greater ability to see what is going on for the representative."

In this email the contributor drew my attention to the possible re-activation of past trauma for this client.

In fact Bertold Ulsamer (2004) writes:

"Trauma workers are fully aware that the attempt to resolve trauma

inherently carries the danger of re-traumatisation. Is this true for constellation work as well? Is it possible that a constellation brings up such intense memories and sensations that the client, overwhelmed by the event, returns to the state of shock previously experienced?

When taken a step further, can this also happen to representatives who are standing in for the traumatised client? My colleague, Anngwyn St. Just, a trauma specialist ... frequently watched both clients as well as representatives enter the frozen trauma states without the facilitator even noticing it."

It is now clear to me that Carmen had been feeling overwhelmed by the activation of trauma within her own system.

In the weeks following her role in Mary's constellation Carmen reported that she was much more aware of the cost to herself and others of continually taking on other people's suffering, just as she had experienced as Mary's representative in the constellation.

However, I had still not dealt specifically with the trauma in Carmen's system. Even when she told me a week later in therapy that the episode in the constellation had reminded her of past 'incidents' in her life, I was still thinking of her as vulnerable rather than 'traumatised'. It was only when I got the feedback from 'ConstellationTalk' that I was able to make sense of what was happening.

Carmen seemed very competent and strong most of the time. It was when her trauma was re-activated that she became overwhelmed and appeared weak. This insight helped me to be more vigilant in Carmen's subsequent individual therapy, and eventually led to the breakthrough described below.

AN UNEXPECTED CATHARSIS

Carmen was seeing more and more clearly that she was unnecessarily taking on other people's worries to her own detriment. We worked with a mindfulness technique adapted from Buddhist Vipassana meditation practices, (Kornfield, Jack 1993) which led to some useful work around illness she had experienced early in her life. This technique simply involves the non-judgemental labelling of worrying thoughts as 'just worrying' and bringing conscious attention back to the breath or changing the subject.

Carmen adopted this technique and indeed the worrying subsided but she developed a terrible feeling of disorientation and fear. In fact she felt like she was going crazy. A friend supported her through the worst part of this, which lasted for two days. Carmen saw me three days later and she was still experiencing the fear and disorientation, although it was less severe than it had been.

As we explored this response, Carmen suddenly realised that it was a very familiar feeling that made her feel about eight years old. She then remembered at that stage of her life she had suffered chronic conjunctivitis, which meant that she woke up in the mornings unable to see until her eyes were cleaned. At the same time her parents were fighting a lot so she woke up blinded and terrified with her parents fighting and feeling totally out of control.

Once Carmen identified this childhood feeling as being the same feeling that she had recently experienced, she was able to separate the two. This allowed her to calm down considerably. She was then able to identify the residual anxiety as a feeling of a knot in her abdominal region. It then struck Carmen that she had been carrying these feelings of anxiety in her abdomen most of her life and a lot of her incessant activity and helpfulness was an attempt to distract herself from this chronic anxiety.

Over the next few sessions Carmen became more interested in this feeling of anxiety in her abdomen without being so afraid of it. She even began to find the variations in intensity of this feeling a useful barometer, which indicated to her when she was experiencing more stress. In this way, she began to manage her stress levels and the difficulties in her life more easily.

Then one day, she appeared for her therapy session very distraught about her relationship with her older sister Luisa, who was still living in the capital city back home. Luisa had recently been sending emails to all the other family members viciously attacking Carmen. Carmen and Luisa had had a very difficult relationship since childhood and Luisa resented Carmen for moving to Australia. She then described the following dream, which resulted in a surprising piece of constellation work:

THE DREAM AS TOLD BY CARMEN

(Translated from Spanish)

"I was in the capital city at a very big party, like a carnival, with fireworks and music and lots of happy people in the street dancing and laughing. I was with an old friend Veronica and we were laughing with joy. She needed to go to the toilet. Unlike me she was unfamiliar with this place as she was from a village a long way away. I knew that Maria lived very close and I offered to take Veronica there so she could use the toilet. There was always someone home at Maria's house.

We ran there because we wanted to get back to the street party. I took Veronica's hand so that we wouldn't get separated in the crowd. We arrived at a building and climbed a long spiral staircase to reach Maria's apartment. We knocked on the door, and someone opened it. We stepped straight into a sitting-room and saw Maria and some other people who lived in the apartment, whom I didn't recognise.

A man was lying flat on the floor with his face covered. Although I knew he was dead I wasn't frightened. Veronica looked very surprised and asked me what to do. I laughed and said we should be calm and take no notice of him and go quickly to the bathroom. However, to get to the bathroom she had to step over the dead person.

Right at that moment he moved and his face was revealed. He looked around slowly as though looking for something. I was more worried for my friend than for myself. When Veronica returned to the sitting-room, I saw that the dead man was moving and seemed to want to run towards me. Veronica tripped over the dead man and fell to the floor in a panic. She jumped up and began to run, shouting and telling me that we had to leave this place. She was very scared and the expression of terror on her face infected me with fear as well. I insisted that she calm down and that nothing was going to happen because the dead man was harmless, but she would not listen to me.

From this moment on, the rest of the people who lived in the apartment began to shout at the dead person ordering him to calm down. But he didn't seem to listen and was out of control. I seemed to know that Maria would make him go back to sleep, and this time it would be different. But even so, I wanted to run with my friend to get out of this place. No-one could block the dead one's path and he came after us with his arms extended trying to grab us.

We ran very fast down the spiral staircase looking back to see if the dead man was still chasing us. Sure enough he was there, with a lost look on his face, full of exhaustion and anxiety. I had a strange sensation: even though I knew that the dead man was not evil and that he wasn't going to do us any harm, I couldn't shake off the feeling of terror and so I ran, trying to protect my friend who was even more terrified than me.

In that moment I woke up."

ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE DREAM

I began working with this very intense dream that Carmen had reported. We looked firstly at her associations with the main characters in the dream.

Veronica: *"She was a very good old friend with whom I laughed a lot. I remember her from my time in prison. She was a political prisoner, a member of a resistance group. I very much admired her ideals and her courage as she had renounced her own personal interests and freedom, to defend the rights of her compatriots. She had a noble and honest heart."*

Maria: *"She is a member of my extended family. She is a great person, very friendly and with good morals. She lives in one of the best suburbs of the capital city. She is one of those elegant ladies with good manners that likes acts of charity and goes to the church daily. She doesn't understand much of politics but she repeats what she has heard in the news: 'We have to help the government in order to stop the guerrillas!'"*

When I recovered my freedom Maria took my children and me into her house. I lived there for a couple of years until the time I had to flee my country. I remember Maria with a great deal of gratitude because she helped me when I was sick and penniless."

The Dead Man: *"I knew the face of this dead man, even though I didn't recognise him. He had a very thin body, dressed in very formal clothes with a tie. His face was very pale and cold. His expression frightened me; yet, in my heart I knew that he was not going to cause me harm."*

THE DREAM CONSTELLATION

Having heard about Carmen's problems with her eldest sister, immediately followed by this dream, I had a strong intuition that Carmen's sister had an identification with the assassin of her grandparents in the family system. I felt

there might be a double displacement (Hellinger, 2001) with Carmen representing her forgotten grandmother and the unresolved antagonism between the grandparents and the assassin being acted out between Carmen and her sister.

I sensed that the dead man represented Carmen's grandparents' assassin. In the dream Carmen had gone with her left-wing friend, Veronica. She was the one who experienced the most fear - not surprising if the dead man represented the right wing assassin. All this happened in the house of Carmen's naïve right wing friend Maria. Maria's house could easily represent Carmen's country, a place where she found some refuge after being released from jail. This understanding came to me in a flash as an intuitive insight. I decided not to tell Carmen, but rather to use my understanding to work directly with the dream.

As often happens when a client relates an intense dream, Carmen had entered a dream-like state. This was very conducive to working with the dream using Carl Jung's technique of active imagination. (Whitmont 1978, p.76) I had a strong intuition that not only was this the right thing to do, but also that this dream could be seen and worked with as if it were a family constellation.

So I asked Carmen to imagine herself turning around to face the dead man who was lying on the floor and to kneel down at his side. At first this made her heart beat strongly but eventually her fears settled. I then asked her to imagine her sister kneeling on the other side. Surprisingly this had an immediate calming effect.

I then asked Carmen to say to the dead man, "You are dead and I am alive, but we are connected." She said that this felt true. I then asked her to say, "You're the one who killed my grandparents and now you are dead too." When I suggested this she looked shocked and tears started rolling down her face. She nodded to let me know that it was also true.

I then asked Carmen to imagine her sister kneeling at the opposite side of the dead one and to look at her. Again she was surprised as her sister looked kind. She had not thought of her sister as being kind for some time. I asked her to say to her sister, "You are my big sister; I am your little sister." And then, "This one here is dead and we are alive." With that her sister looked at the dead one; Carmen observed that interaction. I asked her to imagine her sister saying to the dead one,

"You carry a heavy fate. It's yours to carry not mine." As Carmen's sister said this, Carmen reported that she saw the dead man's eyes closing. I said to her that he could now rest in peace without having to bother her or her sister anymore. With that she nodded, smiled and heaved a deep sigh. I did not feel it necessary to bring in the grandparents and have them lie with the dead one, as the constellation seemed to have already reached a good resolution.

After this session Carmen lost all desire to respond directly to her sister's malicious e-mails or even to speak further to members of the family about them. She also felt a lot more at peace when she thought of her sister and was able to speak much more kindly of her.

Since this issue has settled, Carmen has remained calm. Her sessions are now becoming less frequent with a view to terminating therapy shortly.

(People interested in joining ConstellationTalk can go to www.constellationflow.com)

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Entering Inner Images

FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS IN INDIVIDUAL SETTINGS USING NEURO-IMAGINATIVE GESTALTING (NIG)

In Issue 5 of the Systemic Solutions Bulletin, Vivian Broughton's article '*Constellations in Individual Sessions*' looked at the issues of adapting systemic constellation work for use in individual sessions. She reviewed two different books presenting differing approaches to this topic: Ursula Franke's book, '*In My Mind's Eye*', which deals with imagined constellations seen through the mind's eye; and '*Entering Inner Images*' by Eva Madelung and Barbara Innecken, which presents a constellation method using floor markers. In this approach, the client produces sketches representing the persons involved and uses them as floor markers in the constellation. The system, known as Neuro-Imaginative Gestalting (NIG), was originally developed by Eva Madelung and a detailed description of it is offered here by Barbara Innecken and Eva Madelung.

WHAT IS NEURO-IMAGINATIVE GESTALTING (NIG)?

NIG integrates several different systemic methods, including primarily the family constellation method of Bert Hellinger and elements of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), but also aspects of solution-focused brief therapy of De Shazer (SFT), systemic family therapy according to the Heidelberg School (Helm Stierlin), and components of art and body therapies. In our book, *Entering Inner Images*, the theoretical origins, development, and practical applications of NIG are presented in complete detail. NIG is an approach that lends itself

to a wide range of constellation work: for example, looking at specific topics, interrupting patterns, laying out a life path, developing resources, or working with inner parts of the personality. In this article, we would like to look at the one-to-one use of the method for family constellations as introduced by Bert Hellinger.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

What does this look like, practically speaking? The therapist asks the client to take a sheet of paper for each member of the family (or selected members of the family relevant to the issue at hand), and to make a sketch for each one, characterising that person. The client is free to do this in any way he or she feels is suitable. For example it could be merely colours or abstract forms, or it might be a representation of some particular characteristics of the person. The paper is also marked to indicate the direction the person is facing. These sketches are used as floor markers (spatial anchors in NLP) i.e., the client lays them out on the floor according to an inner image of their spatial relationships. The client then stands on the various papers as the therapist guides him or her to attend to physical sensations and feedback and to use the body as an intuitive source of information relevant to the therapy. Standing in the various positions, and looking 'through the eyes of another', the client is able to gain a different perspective on family members and relationships, as well as a different view of his or her own position in the family. An 'in-forming field' (Albrecht Mahr)

then arises out of the interaction between client, therapist, the constellation of sketches, and the body reactions coming from the unconscious. This can lead to a relevant overall 'change of perspective' for the client.

USE OF THE NON-DOMINANT HAND

The sketches are done using the non-dominant hand, which is less under conscious control and therefore more open to influence from the unconscious. The client is also freer of demands for perfection in the drawing or writing. It is interesting to note that with our non-dominant hand we tend to draw or write more like children.

USING THE SKETCHES

The client stands on each of the various sketches, moving back and forth between them, and noticing what reaction or awareness emerges. The attention is primarily focused on physical reactions such as: a change of breathing pattern; gestures and expression; muscle tension; emotional attitude and movement. The direction the person is looking in, is particularly important, as are any changes. The body serves as a reliable tool for determining what is really essential, and avoids an overly rational interpretation or speculation about relationships or facts. Sometimes bodily reactions are so minimal that the client is not even aware of them: for example, a hint of the upper body moving backwards, a minimal swaying, holding one's breath, a barely perceptible movement of a

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTORS: EVA MADELUNG AND BARBARA INNECKEN
TRANSLATED BY COLLEEN BEAUMONT

finger or a slight raising of the shoulders. In such cases, it is helpful if the therapist draws the client's attention to these physical reactions or asks the client to increase the movement in order to enhance awareness of the emotional message.

THE META-POSITION

In addition to the sketches, we use a meta-position, an element from NLP. We ask the client to lay out a blank piece of paper at a distance from the other sketches, to serve as the position for the neutral observer. From this distance, the client can look at the situation in a detached way. This technique is useful in individual sessions, because the neutral observer position is outside the relationship field of the family. This is similar to the position of the actual client during a group constellation, where the client watches the process from a place outside the constellation. In an individual setting, it provides an opportunity for the client to change positions repeatedly. By looking at things from the viewpoint of various family members, alternating with the detached view from outside the constellation, the client has access to new points of view and the resulting insights.

Withdrawing repeatedly to the meta-position throughout the process, provides an opportunity for looking at the whole, returning to a calm space, and distinguishing between what is essential and what is peripheral. This process is also useful for problem-solving in everyday life and is connected to what we would call 'wisdom'. We occasionally refer to the meta-position as the 'wise woman' or the 'wise old man'.

FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS USING NIG

Using sketches to do a family constellation in individual sessions makes it possible to reach the level of the archaic laws of relationships that is normally provided by neutral representatives in a group setting. The aim is to discover the significant points of entanglement, and to set a process in motion that may lead towards a good solution. For example, you can incorporate family members who have clearly been excluded by adding an additional sketch to the constellation; or you can alter positions. You might return a son to his appropriate place in the row of children, instead of the problematic position next to his mother, which would normally be taken by her partner.

An intuitive and experienced therapist can identify and work with entanglements in a one-to-one setting. In order to work competently, the therapist needs to have gathered sufficient personal experience, training and supervision in a group setting. Assuming the client is then willing and able to take in what is revealed and experienced, it can set an inner process in motion that moves in the direction of resolution. The following case study from Barbara Innecken's practice provides an example of this process:

CASE STUDY OF A FAMILY CONSTELLATION IN AN INDIVIDUAL SETTING*

Presenting Situation

Mr. Steiner, aged 48, is ambitious and successful in his work in advertising. He is particularly valued by his bosses and colleagues for his integrity and for his precise and careful work. In spite of his obvious success and the recognition from his team, Mr. Steiner lives in constant fear of something going wrong in his professional life. He wakes in the

night fearful that he has made a mistake and will be sacked. He dreads criticism that almost never appears. For several sessions Mr Steiner has focused on these fears and worked on the issue by resolving some personal traumas from his past. Over time, through this work he has become calmer and more relaxed. His high blood pressure has dropped into a normal range and he is able to discontinue the low dosage beta-blockers he has been taking. His concrete fear of making mistakes has clearly reduced and has been replaced by a trust in his own capabilities. The fear remains, however, that in spite of everything, he might be unjustly treated some day. He continues to wake in the night worrying about being subjected to some unjustified punishment. In his dreams he is at the mercy of people who treat him very badly without any justification.

Issue

Mr. Steiner would like to feel safe. He wants to overcome his fear of unjustified punishment in the way he has managed to overcome his other fears.

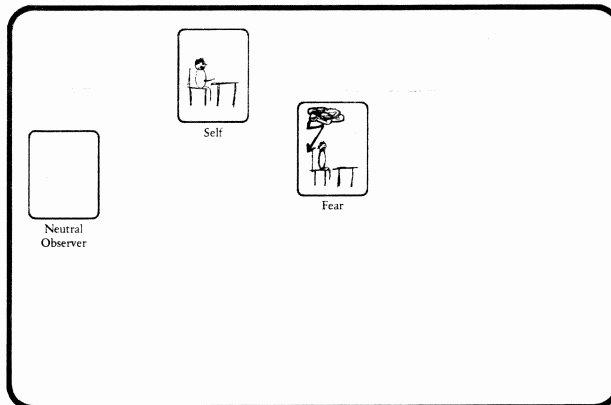
Process

First Session

At the request of the therapist, Mr. Steiner makes a sketch of his fear with his left hand. It depicts a man sitting on a chair, in danger of being hit by a bright yellow bolt of lightning. When the therapist then asks him to do a sketch of himself, he indicates the drawing of the fear and says, "That is me!" The therapist points out that the first sketch was meant to be a representation of his fear. Mr Steiner seems puzzled, but agrees to do another drawing of himself. This sketch depicts a friendly, smiling man, also sitting on a chair, but without the bolt of lightning. Mr. Steiner lays out the two drawings on the floor, plus a third paper for the position of the neutral observer.

*Footnote

This case study is an excerpt from the book *Spektrum der Einzelarbeit* (Across the Spectrum of Individual Work), Edited by Wilfried de Philipp, due to be published in 2006 by Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, Germany



Mr. Steiner first stands in the position of the neutral observer and looks at the two sketches. "Actually, Günther is doing pretty well," he remarks. "He'd be quite happy if that threat weren't there. It is so vague and faceless. It looks like a storm cloud and the lightning is coming from behind it. But a thunderstorm also moves on - it doesn't stay anywhere forever! Günther doesn't believe that, though. He needs to have a bit more faith."

Mr. Steiner moves to the sketch of himself and looks at the fear from this angle. He feels nervous, weak and under attack and takes up a defensive posture. He wants to run away. When the therapist asks him to follow his impulse, Mr. Steiner turns around on the spot so that he cannot see his fear anymore. Looking away from the fear feels to him like looking forwards. He feels more relaxed, stronger and more self-assured but on the other hand, he feels weak in the knowledge that 'there is something there'.

The therapist asks Mr. Steiner to stand in the position of his fear. In this place, Mr. Steiner feels relatively strong. He notices tension in his legs and a readiness for battle, for defence. From this position, he cannot see the sketch of himself at all as it is outside his line of vision.

Somewhat confused by the differing impressions, Mr. Steiner returns to the position of the neutral observer.

From here he feels clear looking at the sketch of himself and that of his fear. "These two are not so unavoidably bound together as it seems and as Günther believes. As a neutral observer, they

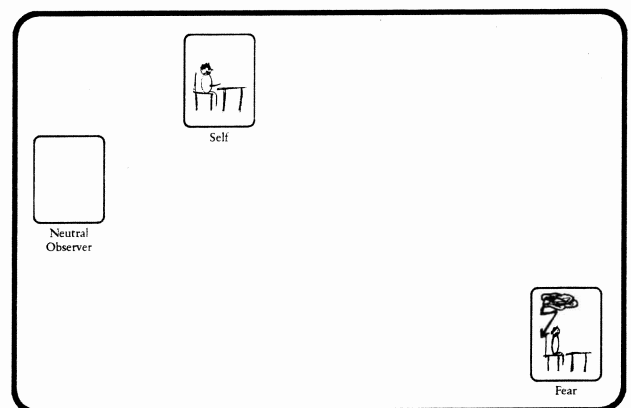
appear to me to exist rather independently of one another. I would suggest re-arranging the papers." Mr. Steiner moves purposefully to the sketch of his fear and removes it from the original place suggested by the therapist, laying it far away on a carpet in another part of the room.

When the client now stands in the position representing himself, he feels a sense of positive energy. He stands very straight, facing forwards. He feels as if he is on a path towards happiness since his fear is in another area and has no effect on him at the moment. When he stands in the position of his fear, he remarks, "That over there doesn't concern me, but I'll be looking out for another victim."

The therapist has Mr. Steiner step out of this position, and then asks him who in his family might be this other victim. After careful consideration, Mr. Steiner talks about his uncle, his mother's

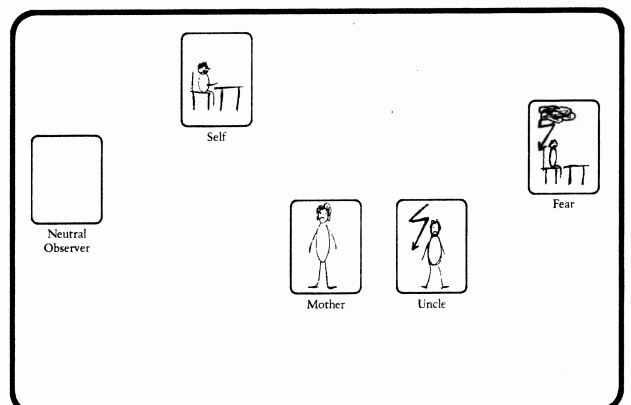
brother. This uncle was often unreasonably beaten and punished by his tyrannical father, the client's grandfather. The client's mother was also involved because she kept trying to protect her brother. Mr. Steiner completes sketches of his uncle and his mother and lays them on the floor.

In this new constellation, Mr. Steiner first takes the place of the neutral observer. "Yes, something clearly happened there, because the uncle has the same bolt of lightning as Günther's fear! That has nothing to do with Günther."



Standing in his own position, the client states that he feels stable and safe when he looks at his fear. "Aha! That was before my time," he remarks. Finally, he stands in the position of his fear. From this place, he feels drawn to his uncle, but doesn't want to look at him. When he overcomes his reluctance and looks at his uncle, he nods and says very quietly, "Yes, that is my victim."

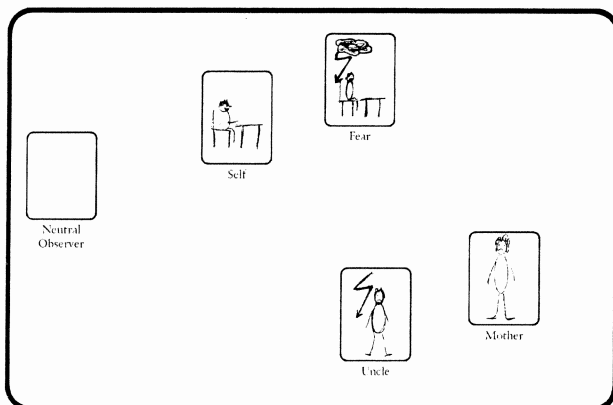
To conclude the session, the



therapist asks Mr. Steiner to take the meta-position once more. From there, the client confirms his earlier impressions. "Yes, that's the way it is. The fear has to do with this uncle, and Günther has nothing to do with that."

Second Session

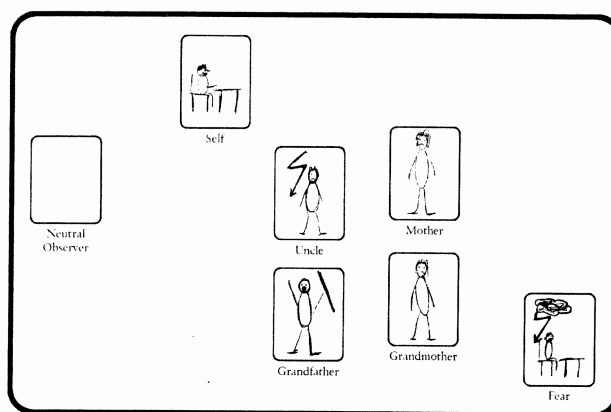
Mr. Steiner comes to his next appointment after some time. He reports an inner split: "On the one hand I know in my head that everything is basically okay, I've seen that. On the other hand, this fear keeps coming up, and I'm finding it difficult to enjoy life at the moment." Mr. Steiner has brought along his sketches from the previous session, and the therapist asks him to lay them out in a relationship that feels right to him at this time. He places the sketches of himself and of his fear close together. The sketches of his mother and his uncle are on the carpet in another part of the room.



Mr. Steiner takes the meta-position first and comments, "It looks like the fear is hanging over Günther's head, and the clarity of our last session has gone." He is asked to take his own place. From this position, he looks over at his fear and also looks nervously and guardedly around the room. As his attention finally settles on the two people, his mother and his uncle, the therapist suggests he say to them, "Out of love for you, I'll hold on to

my fear for a while longer." Mr. Steiner feels much calmer here, and senses an impulse to change the position of his fear. He slides the sketch away from him till it ends up behind his mother and his uncle, then he exhales audibly.

Now that the fear has been put in a good place, Mr. Steiner looks sadly at his uncle. At the therapist's suggestion, he



says to his uncle, "Dear uncle, I have carried it for you so long." Looking at his mother, he says, "Dear mother, I wanted to keep you near me and I have helped to

carry this for you." The client sadly confirms these statements. After a while he breathes out and his body relaxes visibly.

The therapist asks Mr. Steiner to stand in the position of his uncle. He looks through his uncle's eyes at himself, the nephew. Spontaneously he shakes his head and says in a firm voice, "My dear nephew just let it be. You cannot help me. The help has to come from

somewhere else." Where could this help come from? The therapist asks about his grandparents, the parents of his mother and uncle. Mr. Steiner has no further information about them. He draws a sketch of his grandmother with tears running down her face, and a sketch of his grandfather swinging a big stick. He lays the two sketches behind his uncle and his mother. To make room for the sketches of his grandparents, he has to push the sketch of his fear even further back, until it is lying under a chair behind the sketch of his grandmother.

The constellation has expanded and Mr. Steiner looks at the new configuration first from the meta-position. He notices that the fear now seems to belong to his grandmother, and perhaps originates even further back. The neutral observer has the impression that the forbears are positioned like a bulwark between the client and his fear. When Mr. Steiner takes his own place, he looks forwards into his own life, and feels confident and strong. The therapist encourages him to look at his fear again. "That's not me any more!" says Mr. Steiner spontaneously, and smiles for the first time during this session.

Finally, a look at his uncle convinces him that it is not only he himself who feels the relief, but also his uncle: the fear belongs to his grandmother or perhaps an earlier generation. As Mr. Steiner looks at

his grandmother, he begins to weep and is overcome by grief. The therapist asks him to say, "Grandma, I am only your grandson. I'll leave this with you." This sentence of resolution, accompanied by a deep bow to his grandmother's fate, helps Mr. Steiner return to a calm and collected state. After a while he follows the therapist's suggestion and asks his grandmother for her blessing on him and his life. Mr. Steiner imagines his grandmother's blessing on his slightly bowed head.

Following this touching moment, as the therapist is about to end the session, she notices the client looking over at the fear. She has him say, "Now that I know where you belong, I have respect for you." He accompanies this sentence with a bow. The peaceful expression on Mr. Steiner's face seems to deepen even more and the therapist is again ready to end the session. Mr. Steiner, however, turns to his grandfather and looks steadfastly at him for a long time. As the therapist sees a tiny nod, she asks the client to tell his grandfather, "I can now see that you are also entangled. It's not up to me to judge you. I honour and respect you as my grandfather." The session ends on this serious note.

EFFECTS

When the client is questioned after a period of time, he confirms that he feels no more fear of being unjustly treated or punished. He no longer wakes in the night with this fear. Comments from his boss that he previously interpreted as threatening, are now more realistically evaluated. Although the therapist had suggested doing a family constellation in a group, to look more precisely at the situation, this step now proves to be unnecessary. Mr. Steiner continues

to work on his relationship with his mother and father in individual therapy.

COMMENTARY

This case study shows how moving to a family constellation in an individual session can lead to a lasting solution for a problem at the biographical level. Beginning with the representation of his inner fear, with which he is initially completely identified, the client is able to see the fear as a part of the system. In the course of his exploration, it becomes clear to him that this fear is a feeling taken over (Madelung & Innecken 2004, p.42) from his uncle and his grandmother, and he gradually feels more and more freed. He only feels truly calm when he has acknowledged his respect for the fear and for his rejected grandfather.

In this case there were beneficial results when the therapist allowed the client leeway to follow his own intuition about changes in the configuration of the constellation. This is not necessarily always the case. With some clients, the entanglements frequently keep them from feeling relevant connections or changes. In many cases, the therapist has to rely on background information and intuition to formulate suggestions that will prompt an inner movement in the client towards a good solution.

THE ADVANTAGES OF NIG FOR FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS IN INDIVIDUAL WORK

A basic advantage of Neuro-Imaginative Gestalting seems to us to lie in calling up the client's creative skills for shaping experience, even when those skills may be rusty from disuse. This is an implicit indication of the client's

own powers of self-healing. Sketches made with the non-dominant hand offer the therapist information beyond that which is included in verbal communication. The client also discovers something new by looking at the sketches. Pictures say something, which is beyond words. In addition, this kind of work with sketches is suitable for continuing exploration alone at home.

Another essential aspect is the opportunity to identify connections directly through their physical expression. In the procedure of physically moving around in the constellation, physical awareness is often complemented by visual, auditory, or olfactory memories or fantasies. A person's position, posture, or movement can be understood as a living metaphor holding messages for the unconscious. We learn with our brain and belly. (Madelung & Innecken, 2004, p.52) Movement is a living metaphor for change. Standing is a metaphor for independence. Bowing, which plays an important role in family constellations, is a living metaphor for an inner posture in which one can recognise the dignity of another.

NIG is dependent to a large measure upon the conscious and unconscious reactions of the client. At the beginning the therapist or counsellor is focused on the unconscious body signals from the client and seeks to distil the developing process through minimal interventions, possibly strengthening them through his or her own physical reactions. An informing field emerges during the session which includes the client, the sketches and the therapist and allows the 'wisdom of the unconscious' (Milton H. Erickson) to take effect.

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OPINION

HELLINGER & THE SPIRIT WORLD

It is as a human being I speak about Spirit. It is enough. To speak with authority about religion in our culture requires one to be a minister or priest or scholar. But Spirit and the experience of It is profoundly personal. It is with this in mind and heart that I approach this topic.

My orientation to the work is informed by my contact with Energy Field Healing and with Indigenous Healers, including two Maya Mam Spiritual Elders and several Ojibwa Elders of Northern Ontario who walk the Medicine Way. Through them and others I have learnt certain principles of conduct when approaching the Spirit World. These have been consistent in the ceremonies in which I have participated in North, South and Central America.

What is the Spirit World? It is the world of dreams, the world of internal guidance, the world of the ancestors, angels, spirit guides. It is the world we invoke in prayer, the world from which we are born and to which we return when we die. It is on the other side of the veil, a dimension we often experience as outside us but which is inside us as well. It is the world of synchronicities, déjà vu, visions and miracles. It cannot be approached wilfully. Until we begin to recognise it, it hovers in our peripheral sensing, elusive, with its own obscure yet familiar language. Awareness of, and steady contact with the Spirit World requires a phenomenological understanding of the unfolding of this life. Walking between the two worlds gives us patience, deepens our sense of awe and frees us from expectations. Once we commit ourselves to this walk, our trust and sensitivity

deepens and larger contexts of life open to us.

The principles I refer to may be foreign to anyone brought up with hierarchical thinking. In modern society the capacity to aggress and to take is valued. The wisdom and values of the Spirit world are elusive and do not respond to such an approach. Cultivating an ally in the Spirit World requires humility, diligence and patience. Once established, such an ally can guide you, comfort you and provide you with gifts. I am deeply grateful for my allies when I encounter a lost or recalcitrant spirit energy in a constellation. I am unable to help this energy on my own, by my will, with what I know, or see. I surrender to the wiser, more delicate precision and power of the ancestors. They move through me; the wisdom of the Creator moves through them and through us in our blended intention: love.

Upon first exposure to Hellinger's Family Systems and Movements of the Soul, I experienced a constellation that changed my life and my relationship with my father. No other therapy even came close to the deep shift that occurred as a result of that work. It also changed my world-view and I began to see, in practical terms, the Life of the Spirit World. We could talk about modern physics in relationship to these phenomena, but I will leave that to a physicist. Suffice it to say, Western Science is engaged in the discovery of what the Indigenous Peoples have not forgotten. We are all connected, one with another, the living and the dead. Memory is not simply a function of the individual

brain. It is a living, breathing dance within time and space that transcends time and space and gives it coherence.

We in the western world do not live as if this were so. However, in the constellation, memory becomes vivid to the body and immediate to the soul.

As I became more deeply involved with the work, witnessing Bert and others facilitating constellations of many different types, I felt uneasy for two reasons. The first was that I felt the container for the work did not acknowledge the sacredness of the process and our indebtedness to those who would come willingly into the circle we created for them. I did not see an honouring and protective invocation, nor did a respectful releasing of these energies follow the constellation. I was also disturbed by the cavalier way in which representatives were asked to 'step out of their roles'. I felt neither they nor the facilitator had a real understanding of what can happen when an individual opens to the energetic vibration of another being. What would the symptoms be if that *being* were unable or chose not to leave? My friends up north call this a 'rider' or 'cling-on'. The Catholic Church calls it 'possession'. There are many degrees. An entanglement is certainly one of them. The situation can be serious. A dead person who suddenly finds himself invited into a vibrant human body to express himself in service of the living may not want to leave. There may be other issues with other relatives. He/she may not have been given the opportunity to express all he/she needed to express. The

representative may go through the motions of shaking out etc., but may still feel slightly heavy or dizzy. He/she may have a headache or pain somewhere unusual in his body. This situation is serious. It can lead to long-term exhaustion, illness or disorientation. It can affect a person's mood and outlook. The facilitator must be able to discern when a person comes to them with a symptom, if this symptom is specific to that individual or residual from the constellation. And they need skills or the knowledge of someone with the skills to release that residue.

The Ojibwa have a traditional healing called a cedar bath in which the auric field is cleansed and energy work is done to remove blocks. It is a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing done fully clothed by a team of trained medicine people. The space and participants are cleansed with sage beforehand. The cedar, which has been gathered in a sacred way and boiled to make tea, absorbs negative energies. Its capacity to absorb is legendary. Given the readiness of the one receiving the bath to let go of a block and/or a 'rider', the cedar can receive it. Burning sage cleanses the hands, arms and fields of the helpers and areas where a block has been lifted. The Ojibwa use these and other ways to lift a deeply embedded energetic systemic burden. Their ceremonies require sensitivity of perception, deeply respectful fear that invokes the power of the ancestors and allies to help, and a willingness to let the body carry a greater wisdom than what is held in the structures of the individual healer's mind.

After witnessing Bert work in Fort Lauderdale, The Ojibwa who attended Hellinger Workshops with me contributed their skills with the Spirit World in invocation, closing, and healing. I am deeply grateful to them for this and what they have

shared of their way. To them, the Spirit World is close. Grandfather Wallace Black Elk would call softly, "Yoo Hoo," smile and say, "This is how close they are, just there. They hear that."

I recognise and understand the reluctance of therapists and clinicians in the modern world to acknowledge, much less discuss, these phenomena. Words like 'primitive', 'superstitious', and 'your imagination' come to my mind when I probe this reluctance in myself. Nevertheless, I have experienced these energies. They are subtle. They are real in the same way that sound, although we do not see it, is real. They can affect the material dimension and they have the capacity to lodge in the body.

Initially, I was painfully shy about revealing myself as a spiritual person; one who prays, implores and expresses gratitude, one who treats the Spirit World in ways I have observed and found familiar and good. Now, my relationship with the Spirit World is strong and, together with the material world informs me equally of reality and mystery. I recognise My Creator as The Creator of us all and the Earth, who gives material manifestation of Our Creator's impulse, as my Spiritual Mother.

There is also a truth of place. The spiritual practices that arise out of a place, which use the plants and animals of that place, key into the vibration of that place. I respect that the energy of an Italian ancestor who comes into a constellation I'm facilitating in Santa Fe will pass through the vibration of Santa Fe, with its holy places, its cycles of light and dark, its weave of histories. I

ask permission of the place where I facilitate. I ask an Elder who was born there, if they are available, to speak a prayer. I make an offering to the place and I make a food offering to the ancestors who have come to assist us. This is dialogue. Each time I ask permission, I open a space for dialogue. When I request the presence of the ancestors I acknowledge them, as I do with each offering, each expression of gratitude. They come in. They serve themselves and us in the sacred opening of memory. Then they leave, remaining close enough to be friendly, not so close as to be invasive or a burden.

Each person finds his or her way with this work. I respect Bert Hellinger for keeping the practice as open as he has. I believe he is aware of the deep currents we newer facilitators will experience as our capacity grows. For me, this is a spiritual practice. It engages, stretches and strengthens every gift I have been given.

So I offer this to Hellinger facilitators: You are a doorway into the Spirit World. Honour yourself as such. You move through the constellation, touching in and sensing. Where does the energy need to build? Where is the movement's cry? You use your own body, your heart and soul to listen. It is a perilous and privileged walk. The constellations you facilitate will be as open as your heart is. We do this work to acknowledge those who have been excluded. We do it in honour of a high, fine vibrational grid of right relationship. We do it because we are bridges between worlds, because we are called to it.

And this is a gift.

'Ach wie gut, dass ich es weiss'

SUMMARY & TRANSLATED EXTRACT

Most of us know stories, especially fairy tales, from our early childhood years. One or two of these might have become a favourite or have had a strong impact on us and stayed with us into adulthood whereas others will be easily forgotten. Then, as we move through life, there might be other stories, novels or films that move us at a soul level, that seem to have a particularly personal meaning for us. In their book: *Ach wie gut, dass ich es weiss* Brigitte Gross and Jakob Schneider explore the use and value of such stories as a tool in phenomenological systemic psychotherapy. Drawing on their experience in their own private practices and workshops, as well as that of Bert Hellinger, they look at how such stories can often reflect and reveal family entanglements, secrets and fate. In some cases a person identifies so strongly with a story or a particular character within a story that it can become their own life script. In working therapeutically with such stories, ways can be found to reach a solution to family entanglements.

The book begins by introducing and explaining some of the fundamental ideas of Bert Hellinger's phenomenological systemic psychotherapy and follows on to look briefly at why issues arise out of family entanglement and bonds.

It describes the method of using fairy tales in therapy and finally discusses individual tales in relation to clients' case studies. The following is the translation of an extract, which looks at the story of Snow White and the family entanglements of two women who chose the fairy tale as their favourite:

'Ach wie gut, dass ich es weiss'
(Oh, how good that I know it)

by Jakob Schneider and Brigitte Gross

published by Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 3rd Ed. 2003

Mirror, Mirror on the wall who is the fairest of them all?

Who waits in the glass coffin for the prince? White as snow, red as blood and black as ebony! It's Snow White. The magic mirror responded in favour of Snow White in the conflict between her and her stepmother as to who was the fairest in all the land. This conflict is about who has the right to the place closest to the father. For Snow White this conflict nearly leads to her death. In reality, if there is jealousy and competition in a family between mother and daughter over the father, then it's usually the child who has to leave.

As a child, Eva was always afraid that her mother wanted to kill her. She related how deeply and tenderly her father had loved her then. Even in puberty she would often romp around with her father, until her mother banned her from their bed. In order to keep the peace, her father then withdrew from her and became more absorbed in his work. In the constellation, the dynamic within the family became clear. Before her mother married her father, she had a fiancé who was killed in an accident just prior to the wedding. The mother was clearly drawn to this man in the constellation. The father didn't want to know anything about the attraction and pull his wife felt towards the dead fiancé; he only had eyes for his daughter.

When the representative for Eva's mother was placed by her fiancé, Eva's representative went immediately to her father and hugged him. At this the mother became angry and said, "I don't want that."

The solution in the constellation had two elements: the parents were placed next to each other and a dialogue followed in which the father acknowledged and honoured his wife's love for her previous fiancé. The mother then said to her husband that he was now truly her husband and would make her very happy if he would take her into his heart. The representative for the father responded, "Now I see my wife for the first time." At this Eva became furious and said, "This is pure acting, I don't believe it." The therapist replied, "If you're ready, you can do a very difficult exercise." Eva was prepared to try and so she had to bow down deeply and for a long time in front of her mother. As she stood there bowing, she began to shake and cry. The representative for her mother went to her and took her in her arms, holding her until her crying had stopped and her breathing had calmed down. She looked her mother in the eye and simply said, "Mama." Following this the therapist placed her in front of the father and told her to say, "Papa, the place next to you belongs to Mama. I withdraw from you with love."

Sometimes the story of Snow White relates even more closely to a family situation: where the jealousy is between a stepmother and her stepdaughter. Christa came to a workshop because she had difficulties with her husband and children. Her husband's first wife died and he brought two children into the second marriage. Christa's first husband also died and she had two children from this marriage. At the time of the workshop all of these children were between 16 and 18 years old. There was naturally a lot happening in the family. Christa took care of all the children and made a great effort not to treat them unequally, even down to the smallest details. In the group she said that her husband didn't help much with the parenting, and she didn't think she could take it for much longer. In the constellation of another participant, who was always afraid that his mother would leave him, she had burst out with the comment, "But a mother never leaves her child!"

She had chosen Snow White as her favourite fairy tale. When it was her turn to give the details of her family of origin, it became clear that she had an exceptionally close bond with her mother and that the fate of Snow White belonged to her mother,

whose own mother had died when she was five years old. The grandfather had married again soon after. Christa's mother didn't get on at all well with her stepmother and so at the age of eight was sent to live with an aunt. She had loved her father deeply as a child, but became angry with him when he married again and later agreed to sending her away. At this point it became clear where Christa's misplaced spontaneous outburst belonged: to the grandmother, who had left Christa's mother by dying. In the constellation, she said to her grandmother, with full conviction, "I will look after my mother in your place." At the same time, she was furious at her mother's stepmother on her behalf and felt she would never forgive herself if she acted in a similar way by putting her husband's child last. She spoke disapprovingly of the grandfather because he had agreed to be separated from his daughter.

Christa filled the gap for her mother that the grandmother's early death had created: she looked after her mother and sympathised with her. Christa's anger at the stepmother was her own mother's anger at being sent away from her father and she shared her mother's grudge towards her grandfather for

not giving priority to his daughter and protecting her.

The fairy tale Snow White usually exposes a family issue frequently found in psychotherapy - the entanglement of a child in the parental relationship. If the parents' needs as man and woman are not fulfilled in their own relationship, the daughter is drawn to her father or the son to his mother, as if the children could provide that parent with what the other parent is not providing.

The authors provide many such examples and explanations throughout the book. They warn, however, against generalisations in the interpretation of the stories and emphasise that each story needs to be constantly looked at anew, in relation to the person who has given it as their favourite. They also point out that the work with stories is a very valuable tool in psychotherapy and in many cases complements family constellations. However, it is not appropriate in all cases and the therapist needs to develop a feel for this through their own experience.

(Editor's note: Unfortunately, at the present time this book is only available in German)

Bow Down

GARY STUART

Bow down, to all those that came before us as they remain alive at your innermost core, seeing the world through your eyes.

Bow down, to the suffering and strife that your ancestors endured, surviving the conditions that led to your life.

Bow down, to all the pain that life may have caused because you are the Joy of their toil and labour that can't be ignored.

Bow down, yet again to your very own parents, even if their gifts to you were never apparent.

Bow down, to the mysteries of life that fail to make sense, it's God's way of showing there's always a chance.

Bow down, to it all no matter what you think, if you do not stop to do this your life could be gone in a blink.

To bow down, is a humble act of honouring to those that came before. If you can't bow down to your creator then what in life means more?

Bow down

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