

CONSTELLATION WITH ILLNESS & HEALTH: MY NOTES ON THE WORK OF STEPHAN HAUSNER

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During the three days of constellations in Cape Town Stephan Hausner, a homeopath from Germany, dealt with people presenting the following problems: pounding headaches over many years, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, a torn calf muscle, craziness in a family; a psychologist-come-sangoma at logger-heads with her sangoma trainer who also has stomach aches for 15yrs and now headaches as well; a lady whose son is sexually deviant & tends to pedophilia; a 18 yr old granddaughter with collapsing lungs and heart condition presented by the grandmother (the grandmother had heart valve replacement; she has poor relationships with her daughter and husband and a father and brother both battling alcoholism); a lady with Limes disease, another with strange leg pains on one side only as well as gynecological problems and bouts of depression.

Constellation work is about transformation. Generally, people come for constellations having been everywhere else without much success. Solutions do not lie at a pragmatic and logical level; if they did the client would have found and implemented these solutions themselves!

The work touches core behavioural patterns and beliefs often spanning generations and is as such very intense. This is to be expected as 'solutions do not happen on the sofa' i.e. in one's comfort zone. The discomforts the client experiences are to be expected. Be gentle yet firm!

This work is not about truth. It is about a *truth experience* that helps us to move forward.

Good therapy is close to good mothering and a good mother knows exactly what and how much to allow while also being caring, compassionate and loving. With Constellations the client/child gives up the privilege of doing the work with their real family. Therapy is always a poor substitute for the real thing but it is better than letting the situation permeate in its current form.

What is illness? A temporary loss of balance...

We tend to isolate it to a particular part of the body, rather than seeing it as a systemic imbalance manifesting in a particular way.

The concepts of health and illness are subjective; they are mental constructs. It is hard to say where the one stops and the other starts. One can say these concepts are illusions.

Healing is essentially the result of self-healing; a return to balance.

Generally, the body (all living organisms) wants to survive as seen in even single cell organisms; such cells move away from stress/danger and move towards nutrition.

Survival depends on balance; so, for example, the body will develop a fever as part of its rebalancing efforts. If the fever goes too high, the solution can become the problem. Generally, what we call illness is a manifestation of dis-ease alerting us to the body's efforts to seek restoration.

We may thus regard illness either negatively or positively.

When we see illness as a wake-up call... a call to align mind, body and soul, we open ourselves up to the potential of a more aware, authentic life.

Illness reminds us of our mortality and the gift of life.

On the other hand, death does not really exist. We are immortal beings. The significance of a physical death is that it is a time for those that stay behind, to seek reconciliation.

Some illnesses are very difficult to understand. With the so-called incurable diseases (e.g. Aids), we need to expand the body, to look at the bigger context... to society... to what is happening at a macro level. If we take nature as our guide, we see that nothing is ever superfluous or unnecessary; we see there are only cycles and the most fertile place is the compost heap.

Various incidents and circumstance - genetic, environmental, familial entanglements – may result in physical illness. Health, i.e. balance, can be restored in the most unexpected ways and via various routes.

Bert Hellinger said, 'the important things /events in our lives are unavoidable.

As therapist we are trying to establish what it is that the client is not in harmony with.

Symptoms are merely the expression of an inner movement that belongs to a family over generations; it's a bio-dynamic. It is generally easier to deal with physical symptoms than relationship problems. When people's physicality is out of alignment, they often think that the solution also lies at that level but this is not always the case. The body is the most visible vehicle for a wide range of symptoms but it is not necessarily the cause.

Family Entanglements happen!

Bad news: "All parents are entangled". Good news: "we all have parents".

The only place that parents are truly together is in the hearts of children.

Children take life through their parents. Children have the choice to say 'yes' or 'no' to life. Our focus is helping children (old and young) to accept being here (in this life) rather than focusing on the parental entanglement.

All of us got something from our parents.

All of us are missing something from our parents.

There is only a future if you are at peace with your parents. Otherwise, you are constantly looking back to the unresolved past. To really have a future you need to take what you got and let go of what you couldn't get from your parents.

We need to acknowledge that we cannot change the past; we cannot be a child again.

Double-binds (ala Watzlawick et al) happen throughout life but the first one is the one we are born into: the double-bind with our parents - we are constantly trying to balance the belief systems that come through our father's lineage and our mother's lineage.

Split loyalties create an impossible choice; a real dilemma.

All children long for *acknowledgement (B-Nagy's term)* by their parents. Children need parents to be in this world. Parents do not need children to have a life. The child needs to grow out of 'acceptance' of their life into freedom i.e. 'As an adult I choose to live and to live my life independently'. Put another way: parents can leave a child but a child can't leave their parents. However, they can 'unblame' (*Boszormenyi-Nagy's term*) their parents, honour them and own their own freedom. It's a choice.

There are only good children!

The best mother **you** can have, is the one you got! (Jean: it's a soul's choice; your family of origin [f.o.o.] comes with all the lessons you need to learn this time round).

Some children are born into families that are unable to nourish them. As constellators we can help by creating the conditions for them to make peace with what happened in their past.

Parents' biggest obligation is to the youngest children in a family; young children can only take. As children mature, they learn to give and take. For adults giving is easier than taking. When you just take it leads to guilt. As you become adult you learn to deal with the guilt associated with taking / receiving. You learn to also give.

When there is guilt, the past is still dominant. Feeling guilty is the opposite of connecting with the present. The balance of give and take is out.

In families with many children, the older siblings share some of the parental duties. Sometimes they resent this. The youngest in large families, even as adults, long for acknowledgement also from their older siblings whereas these older siblings feel they need acknowledgement from the parents for sacrificing part of their childhood to raise their siblings.

Many problems start with major life changes. For example, the first pregnancy signals that the way back to one's family of origin is no longer possible; the new family takes precedence. Sometimes entanglements are triggered by normal, every day happenings or by maturation itself.

Beliefs can also take us out of balance e.g. the belief that our parents 'should come right' / 'behave properly'; that all should live as happy families.

When parents are in conflict, children lose both... it's like falling into a black hole for them. Some parental conflicts cannot be resolved; acknowledge it and end the illusion. Don't be seduced to solve problems that can't be solved. Rather pay attention to the inner world of the child (client) than to solve certain problems between the parents.

Consider that parents who strive for their children to have a better life than what they had are not present to their own life.

Before there is a mother there is a woman and before there is a father there is a man. When children move out there is again a man and a woman left.

When adults claim that they cannot live without a child, think/ask 'who is the child representing?' How are we able to nourish the inner child / inner need of the parent?

Some children think their world is also the world of their parents.
Some parents think their world is also the world of their children.

For some children the longing for closeness with the parents is stronger than the longing to live their own life.

When children can let their parents die with love, honour and respect, they are truly in life. Both parents and children are at peace. Letting go is the same as being in tune with the past.

When to constellate?

When spontaneous or natural restoration is not happening and conventional medical interventions are not working or working only partially. You sense that you are hitting a wall and something unspoken seems to block the return to balance; you sense this relates to family entanglements and that it may span generations. We want to find out the reason behind the physical reason... this is when constellations is recommended.

Constellations reveal long held beliefs, hurts and issues and are generally very emotive.

Through the process of constellations, we want to maximize the parents as a resource for the (adult) child in an effort to resolve old hurts that are holding the person back and slowing down physical healing.

*The past wants to be integrated into the present, so that it need not be repeated again and again in the future. The past will be repeated until it is at peace!
Stepping back is stepping forward.*

Our body is the instrument or container the subconscious uses to make itself known. When we heal our issues and let go of our stuff, our bodies often heal themselves. Physical restoration becomes more likely when the soul is at peace.

When not to constellate or rather postpone:

“I prefer to work when I can see a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel... maybe we just leave this constellation for now and come back to it this afternoon.” When we asked SH why, he said he sensed a lot of heaviness and darkness around the client. The afternoon session confirmed this – it was in fact craziness in the family system – but, with the client having witnessed the constellations of others, things had already begun to shift for her making her own situation now more workable.

SH: “when I feel uncomfortable with a client, I won’t proceed. If I in any way sense that there is an issue between the client and I, I first need to deal with that. Wait. Try to drill down into the discomfort. Sometimes I will ask the client to set up her/himself and me in a constellation. Generally that confirms that the client and I have an unspoken dynamic that has to be cleared before one can continue.”

Constellations are happening at many different levels simultaneously

- In the body of the client (literally, our organs re-constellate)
- On the floor with the set-up
- On the side with those watching
- With those further afield.
- Over generations and various circumstances.

We do not understand the phenomenon of representation; all we know is that it works. Thus, the focus is not on the representation as such, but on the way in which it affects all present. Often the work extends long after the constellation i.e. in the field. It does not end with the constellation.

Phases of the Constellation Process

1. Intake interview or dialogue
2. Client sets up his/her constellation
3. Facilitator engages the constellation checking hypotheses and for possibility
4. Direct Address or concluding statement
5. Conclusion: Reps step out of field; we all let go and trust the process (no discussing it)

PHASE 1: Intake interview or Dialogue

It is very important to know **why** and **what** to set up for constellations to be effective.

Why is the client here?; what is the client's expectation?; is the presenting reason the real reason?; how will life be better for the client after the constellation?

What's the reason behind the given reason? Also find out about the client's belief system e.g. do they regard the symptom as something doctors and meds must fix?

Hear the client's self diagnosis but don't necessarily buy into it. Wait. Slow down. Relax into quietness and allow the client's body to become quiet and for their verbal and non-verbal to be in harmony.

Enquire about the family's genealogy, just as in contextual therapy.

Also ask about still births, miscarriages, abortions and adoptions.

Remember, we are stepping backward so as to step forward.

Seek clarity: "What does it mean when you say 'it didn't work out?'"

"When did it start?"

"If we did this next piece of work, how would life be different tomorrow?"

"What is it that currently stops you from"

"What would you like as the result of this piece of work?"

"Is there anything else I need to know right now?"

Notice reoccurring patterns and themes in the family history: the really traumatic aspects in people's lives we tend to repeat e.g. not being heard in the family.

At the outset of the interview pay particular attention to the client's non-verbal. Do verbal and non-verbal messages match up? Notice small movements of their body to questions posed or suggestions made.

When the client responds very promptly, it may be that she is seducing the therapist into not noticing. This is an unconscious defense strategy of not wanting the real issue – for whatever reason – to be uncovered.

Go slow. The right moment is the right moment to step further.

Ask the right questions... be patient. Only when it is the right moment, set up the constellation.

Remember the story of the rainmaking shaman.

PHASE 2: Client sets the initial Constellation

The client firstly selects a representative for themselves; then for the disease, if appropriate. The client then chooses reps for significant other members of the family. Each rep remains standing at their chair until the client moves them into position. Sometimes the reps are allowed to find their own position. When the client is satisfied with the initial set-up, he/she sits down. The therapist may or may not clarify with the client certain aspects of their constellation.

NOTE: Do not crowd the floor with too many reps, especially to start out with. Every person brought in to rep takes energy from the therapist and the system. It can also become very confusing to remember who's who. Four to five reps is a good start.

PHASE 3: Therapist engages the Constellation about history and possibility

The therapist now goes to the reps to find out from them their experience of the position they find themselves in. SH may alter the constellation or ask the reps to intuitively move to positions they feel works for them. All the time the therapist is working with tight feedback loops and testing hypotheses. Every adjustment will affect the field and elicit some form of feedback, also in the client. Note especially the client's non-verbal reaction to changes in the field. Note also the physical demeanor of reps. Enquire from reps how various adjustments affect them.

In one sense these constellation adjustments are explorative, trial and error. Every adjustment elicits information. The system behaves congruently and coherently. While initially it is about testing hypotheses, there comes a time when essential features of the family in question congeal to reveal a major theme, an a-ha, a trans-generational pattern or a deeply held belief. These dynamics often lie at the heart of the stuckness in the system.

As therapists we want to find the leverage point/the arrangement that will offer the client system the greatest possibility for healing.

PHASE 4: Concluding statements aka Direct Address

With the insights gained from phase 3, the therapist now guides the client to address significant people in their constellation via the reps. The therapist speaks deliberately and slowly asking the client to repeat after him/her. Stephan's direct addresses went along the following lines:

- 'Dear Mamma and Pappa, whatever it is that is separating you, *within me you are one*. I now take the life that you have given me, because you are my parents and I am your child.' SH asks client to take a deep breath and allow the energies within the client to come together. He may then bring the husband and children in and introduce them to the parents: 'This is my family. Family, these are my parents. For this life I am grateful.'
- 'Dear Mom, whatever it is I carried for you, I carried it with love, but now I need to be me. I see what you are all carrying and I honour it, but I now need to be me.'
- 'Dear Mom, whatever it all is that you are carrying, I honour it. Even if it separates us, I honour it.'
- 'Dear Mom, dear Dad, what is it and how you are dealing with it... I honour you. Whatever it all is that separates you, in me you are one.'

These direct addresses tend to evoke a lot of emotion which is very cathartic and transformative (also at cellular level).

Generally clients look relieved and radiant directly after these statements. They are emotionally drained, even tired but also joyous and often look years younger.

PHASE 5: Letting go and trusting the process

The reps return to their seats. Sometimes SH has a few teaching comments and observations but generally all are encouraged to take a break... go outside, get refreshments, shake themselves out. The gathering is asked not to discuss the case any further.

By and large the process continues for some time in the bigger constellation, beyond the therapy room, in the field of the client's family. Non-local mind and resonance transmit information in a real and powerful way. In the days, weeks and months following the constellation, subtle and not so subtle, shifts happen to confirm or enhance the establishment a new order within a particular family system.

Some other Stephan Hausner comments:

The smallest therapeutic intervention is a thought. It is important that the therapist be present. Every thought that the therapist and client has, is relevant.

Client: "I want to be more accepting of my circumstance".

SH: ACCEPTANCE generally indicates that the client says 'no' to her circumstance; they are actually saying they would like it to be different.

The 'burden' or 'issue' is seldom the problem. It is the *attitude* we hold towards the burden or issue that matters.

Regarding sexual abuse and incest: It's important to pay attention to the mother-daughter relationship; what's their dynamic? Why is the mother offering no protection / not present to the situation? Is their substitution, maybe a silent agreement, etc?

With constellations it is possible to liberate the child from the incestuous dynamic, whether real or not. We ask the daughter to approach the mother and trust that she is able to deal with what may transpire.

About abortions and exclusions: you never know how many children pay a price for the exclusion of a sibling.

Rheumatoid arthritis is often due to anger that cannot be expressed.

Headaches are often due to love that cannot flow. They are often the result of love that rises and is then held back. Constellations often elicit headaches – this is good news as it means we are touching love in the souls of clients and reps.

About depression: It is very difficult for depressed people to say 'yes' to life because it means saying 'yes' to their parents through whom they took life.

There are two words depressed people cannot say: 'yes' and 'thank you'.

When falling in love stops, love can start.

Falling in love is often a looking for a father or mother substitution.

As constellation therapists we cannot offer solutions; we can only offer conditions for people to grow through.

Beware of happy endings in constellations with everything all neatly sewn up; rather leave the door open and allow the client to go out and do it in real life!

Representatives are adults until they sit next to the therapist requesting a constellation; then we all are children as everyone is someone's child.

Reps do not have an overview of the situation. They are being who they have been asked to be. It is the responsibility of the therapist to oversee the whole situation.