

FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS:

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH SNEH VICTORIA SCHNABEL

By Colleen Clinton, September 2000

Colleen: What is a family constellation and why is it important?

Sneh: A family constellation is a method through which we can uncover in a very short time and with amazing precision, hidden dynamics of relationships in a family that lead to illness and misery. And with this method, developed by Bert Hellinger, one can **find out in what ways members of a family are entangled with each other, carrying someone else's feelings, someone's destiny**, and what course of action or non-action would be needed to free a person from such entanglements.

What can be experienced over and over with this method is, in short, that **we tend to take on feelings from other family members and experience them as our own**. An example would be – when a child has been given away, or a member has been excluded from a family, or their right to belong has been denied. Then invariably another member of the family, sometimes two or three generations later, will behave as if they had been shut out of the family, or feel pressure to leave in some way. This is what is meant by entanglements. A person of the following generation will identify with the given away or cast out person and repeat their destiny again, sometimes exactly the same, sometimes in slight variations, but with the same result of losing their place in the family. This all **happens on a very deep and unconscious level**; it even happens without the entangled person knowing about the other person, or ever having met him. It looks as though something like a family conscience will not allow that anybody's right to belong has been denied. And if it happens, someone else will take the place and fill in, as if to point in the direction of who is missing. That person will then feel himself drawn to follow the same pattern of living as the cast out person, without consciously understanding why.

When we understand our entanglement and find out about the missing person we are representing, chances are that **we can free ourselves from the pattern and start living our own lives**. Or maybe through the understanding we can accept the path we chose, and stay entangled and in peace with the entanglement. As once I heard a son say, whose father went bankrupt and who himself had just suffered major setbacks in his business, " Dear Dad, my failure brings me closer to you. I am your son, I am like you!"

His accepting "what is" made him relax, rather than struggle to not want to be like his father, and out of relaxation comes a more nourishing attitude towards life, towards business and ultimately towards oneself. A relaxed body and mind can think better, can heal better, can enjoy this whole life much better. And isn't that a life we enjoy the best prayer of thankfulness?

But now let me explain how a family constellation is done. You choose amongst the participants of the group, representatives for your family members, not for all, but just for the ones who are needed to understand the hidden dynamics. Then, you set them up in the middle of the circle according to your own inner picture of your family. Which members will be needed will be decided by the facilitator of the constellation workshop after talking with the client.

By asking the representatives about their feelings in those positions, the facilitator gets a picture of how the entanglement is happening and to whom, where eventually someone is missing in the

larger family who needs to be included again, to free the entangled out of the positions. Often someone's own fate must be recognized and honored, and one's own place must be taken again.

When we do not stand on our right place in the family, we also have a hard time standing our ground in our profession or in any group of people. To find our right place in the family means also to find our right place in life.

Colleen: How did this work originate?

Sneh: Bert Hellinger, who specified and created this special way of constellation work, gained much inspiration from his work as a missionary with the Zulus. I once heard him talk about how much he was touched by their way of honoring the ancestors. He was amazed about seeing the absence of conflict between children and parents, the young and the old generations. And his rich background as a counselor and psychotherapist working with primal therapy and transactional analysis gave him many insights into the working of the soul. He was the one to use this method in unique approach of finding the entanglements of missing members of the family clan. By the way, sometimes it is not about a person, but about the feeling a person did not express. What is totally and uniquely different with the work of Bert Hellinger is that the people on stage do not "act" according to what they think would be appropriate in that family, nor are the representatives of a family placed with gestures, like holding on to a family member. The representatives in the approach of Bert Hellinger are simply placed in the room, according to the client's inner picture, and only the place where they stand has importance, everything else will happen by itself. And the most miraculous thing will invariably happen – the representative will start feeling exactly as the member they represent had felt in their position.

Colleen: What are some of the benefits of having a constellation done?

Sneh: Observing over the years the outcomes of this work on people (including friends and myself), I am struck that through this work, **dramatic and lasting changes have been made** in ways I have never seen happening with such simplicity and often in such a short time. When I look around, I see two friends who were struggling for years with unhealthy and difficult relationships, seemingly falling again and again into some trap, and all of a sudden they find the partner of their life, and everybody around them can feel how well this new partner fits to them and how much happiness this new couple radiates. There has also been an astounding number of pregnancies that have happened after couples made a constellation addressing the problem of not being able to conceive children.

But the impact of constellations so far has **shown its strongest working on all kinds of relationship issues**, be it in partnership or inside the family. And it seems that, when we find our true place in our family, we find a partner much more easily, or the right work for us, or the good way to health. As long as we stand in an entanglement, happiness in life seems much more impossible.