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Brief Introduction to Orders of Love

By Jane Peterson, PhD

When we set a constellation, it often becomes clear that one member of a family is unconsciously "following" another member. That is, the fate of one member has become entangled in the fate of another. Often it is the younger ones who unconsciously and out of love, take on the unresolved burdens or fates of those who came before. This is what Bert Hellinger, the originator of Family Constellations, calls "blind love" and it is a very powerful force. For example, a child may take on the illness of an aunt who was excluded from the family, or carry the depression and grief of a parent, or become entangled in the fate of a grandparent who suffered a "secret" misfortune and died young. One member of a family is "following" another by sharing their fate - out of a deep and unconscious bond of loyalty and love. But this "blind love," or unconscious following, solves nothing, only adding complexity and tragedy to the family line. This is why we use other members of the group as surrogates in setting constellations. Since they do not know our families or the secrets and stories that bind us, they can freely speak what members of the family often dare not say. Thus it becomes possible to expose the hidden cords that bind our fates together, to find freedom, while respecting the bonds that love places on us.

Bert Hellinger observed that it was possible for people to do evil deeds with a good conscience. Yet those who do good deeds often suffer a guilty conscience for going against the dictates of their faith, ethic group or other group identity. This puzzle led Bert to question the purpose of conscience in our lives. His conclusion was that conscience influences our actions so that we act in ways that allow us to continue to belong to the groups that are important to us.

Through careful observation over his many years of working with people in different cultures, Bert observed three levels of conscience that govern our actions. They are as follows:

The personal - These are the values and behaviors we have learned from our families of origin. Even within our personal conscience we sometimes experience conflict. Mother and father can have different values and we can please one and be in conflict with the other. We are often aware of this level of conscience in our lives yet many times feel powerless to violate its rules. This can also include our social conscience - the conscious that tells us what we need to do to hang out with the "cool" crowd, or what we need to do to belong to our church group or social organizations. We are often aware of the conflicting tugs and pulls of this level of conscience.



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The systemic - These are the deep unconscious bonds that bind us to our family systems. This conscience is like an archaic force that tries to balance the wrongdoings or misfortunes of one generation by enrolling members of the next generation to atone or remember the fate of those who have gone before. This "blind love" does not resolve things and only creates entanglements across generations.

The Greater Whole - There is a larger force that governs the whole family system and watches over the fundamental needs of Love and Life in our relationships. The demands of the Greater Whole may be quite different from that of our systemic or personal conscience. For the most part, we are unaware of this level of conscience and must often reach beyond the limits of our individual "guilt" and "innocence" to reach a deeper harmony with the greater whole. Doing Family Constellation work and seeing this Greater Whole in action has dramatically changed my views of death, of abortion, adoption and of illness, in sometimes surprising ways.

Bert observed three fundamental needs of relationships according to this Greater Whole:

1. Belonging - This is the strongest and has to do with our very survival. We often do whatever we must in order to continue to belong to a group, especially our family, even though it may not be best for us. These struggles to leave or stay within a group are often deeply felt. Our families are one "group" we cannot leave, and balancing the "rules" of our family of origin within our adult lives can be a source of a great deal of difficulty. Hidden and unconscious loyalties often govern our actions more than we realize.

2. Balancing give and take - When we receive or take from another, we feel a debt and some discomfort. When we give back we feel a freedom and a sense of innocence. If giving and taking are out of balance in some way, then we may feel guilt, and sometimes hiding that guilt, we feel anger or other emotions. This can be very apparent between couples and between parents and children.

3. Social order and place - That is, following the rules of the social group we belong to, the backbone of communal living. It also includes a sense of having a right place in the groups we belong to. This provides a sense of safety and stability. We know where we belong relative to the other members of our group. When this is not clear in a group a great deal of chaos can arise.

The conscience governing the Greater Whole requires three things:

1. Every member has the same right to belong. If a member is not given that right to belong, that is, if some one is excluded, then someone else in the group may be moved to identify with the excluded member and in some way share their fate.



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2. Wrongs must be redressed. If an injustice is done to one member, then another member will feel called upon to redress that wrong. Conversely, if a member commits a wrong, another member will feel called upon to atone for that wrong if the wrongdoer does not.

3. People have rank according to who entered the system first. This is one of the ways that we know our place. A teacher of mine was working with a man who had sinus cancer. He said he always felt like he should not have been the oldest child. In setting his constellation, the man suddenly remembered that there had been an earlier child who was stillborn. When he placed this "older" child in his constellation, the child was literally breathing down the man's neck on the same side as the cancer.

These "orders of love" as Bert calls them, sound very simple, and yet their affect in our lives is profound. I have seen this over and over in various constellations - the seemingly simple issues of having a place, balancing give and take, and so on, play out in amazing ways in our lives.

In addition to Bert's work, a French woman, Anne Schützenberger, has done a great deal of work with family trees, tracing the links of fate across many generations. She has discovered links between generations that govern everything from a car accident that occurred on the first day of school for the first born child in a family for four generations, to the more serious accidents and tragedies that plague some families. Her work is documented in the book, *The Ancestor Syndrome*.

For more information on Systemic Constellation work or to find out about Family Constellation workshops available in the Portland area, contact Jane Peterson (503) 293-0338 or **email**.