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The Presence & Essence of Indigenous Field In Family & Human Systems Constellation

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Haganeuh! I am the granddaughter of Thomas Premo & Anna Frank Premo, the daughter of Naomi Premo Mason, and Ron Mason. On my mother's side, I come from the Shoshone: "Newe" in our language. The Bands of my Grandparents are Doya Dupia, and Duba Ducut. The English translation of the bands of my grandparents is: "Pine Nut Eater", and "Fish Eater". My Grandpa was from the Pine Nut Eater Band, which also means: Mountain Shoshone. They are people of the mountain, and so feel strongly the song of the trees. My Grandmother was "Fish Eater", ...or Valley Shoshone. They are more people of the water, and the wind in the meadow grass. We are all children of the Coyote, and Blue Stone Woman. On my father's side I am the great granddaughter of four immigrants to the United States.

First, I would like to thank you for being here, and I would like to honor the people who stand behind you, the ancestors you have come from. I would like to invite your ancestors to be with us, and to help us in knowing what they have to bring to this work.

When first I encountered constellation work, I had the sense that I was remembering something that I had already known, something that had almost been forgotten. The feeling that I had, watching the facilitator, reminded me of the Bear Dance. For many societies, the symbols of womanhood are delicate or petite. They portray the fragility of women, the vulnerability. For the Shoshone, the Dance that celebrated the women was the Bear Dance. This powerful dance had stopped in the 1930's (when so many customs were being discontinued), when the people were too tired to dance anymore. Little by little, people began to heal, and then one day, in the late 1990's, the Bear Dance came back.

Only women did the Bear Dance. In couples, sisters, mothers, nieces, cousins, took to the center of the floor at a pow-wow, and did a firm beautiful dance, each couple holding each other. At first, only the older women looked smooth and firm. They remembered the dance. Their faces were happy and sad. Many had a younger woman as a partner, and with every beat of the drum they all remembered their dance, the little girls who had never had their feet feel the steps, the teen age girls who had never seen it, and the grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, they all remembered the mother bear, that animal woman who would protect her children, that woman who knew where to gather roots, and who would



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teach her children how to dig. That formidable woman creature could stand her ground anywhere; she was the perfect symbol of womanhood. The walk of the Bear woman, and this Bear Dance was what tied all of these women together, and as they danced they remembered her, and they remembered their walk. When I first heard a lecture, and saw Constellation work being facilitated my soul felt that it was remembering a Bear Dance. I felt I somehow remembered this work, and I felt that my Grandmother would know this work. When I encountered Constellation work, I could feel my soul, and the soul of my grandmother doing the Bear Dance together, in the center of the circle.

For me personally, Family Systems Constellation could only be identified in terms of my own multigenerational experience of "field".

Walking in the "field" for many indigenous people is a way of life. Listening to the wisdom of the "knowing field" is not something that has been historically encouraged or easily accepted in western thinking. Talking with ancestors has in fact been the one identifying mark of the heathen. Relationship with creation, the Creator, and the ancestors have often been surgically removed from many western-healing movements.

I was given the opportunity to facilitate Family Systems Constellation at a Native American Conference on Wellness & Spirituality.

The organizers were cautious about introducing Constellation work, in light of the fact that the work was virtually unheard of. Their impeccable reputation was the result of many years of work and dedication by a number of professional/traditional Native American individuals.

Through discussion, with Administrators of the Conference, it was determined that the confidentiality statement may be uncomfortable for the Native American participants, and it would not be necessary if we approached the "Indian Community" as the client. This would avoid any individual exposure or embarrassment. Approximately 100 individuals attended the Conference from many North American Tribal traditions. Most were well grounded in their own tribal traditions. A number of the participants spoke their own tribal language, and many had parents who spoke their own indigenous language, myself included. Most of the participants had extensive history working in Indian communities.

Prior to the introduction of the Constellation Session in the conference there was a Session on Prayer, Some 25 participants shared their own tribal prayer traditions with the group. Without exception, water was mentioned as a sacred element. From the sweat lodge, to



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ceremonial bathing, to the drinking of water to signify cleansing, water was a metaphor for the conscious connection between us, the Creator, and all life.

At this point, after the discussion on Prayer, (in which a number of Native American tribal traditions, perspectives on prayer and ceremony were shared by the participants) the discussion of water led to a quiet in the room. The facilitator invited each person to drink a glass of water. For each person in the room, in that field, the water was experienced as an Indigenous sacrament. The facilitator stated, "We have experienced a Holy Moment" and we had.

At the appointed time, a group came together to see what Family Systems Constellation was all about, and if it might have the potential to help Native American Communities. Within the group that gathered, (exactly as in the discussion with the organizers of the conference) some discussion determined that the "client" should be the "Indian Community".

All of the Native Americans in the room had experienced suicide or untimely death in their families. Shot gun fatalities, hangings, auto accidents, overdoses, murders, alcohol related deaths, some losses were only weeks prior to the conference. In truth, we were coming together as one family which had experienced incredible loss.

Collectively, the group indicated what statistics verify. The U.S. Center for Disease Control indicates that between "1979-1992, suicide rates for Native Americans (a category that includes American Indians & Alaskan Natives) were about 1.5 times the national rates. There was a disproportionate number of suicides among young male Native Americans during this period, as males 15-24 accounted for 64% of all suicides by Native Americans." Moreover, Native Americans (American Indians) are the racial/ethnic group with the highest overall suicide rate." (American Association of Suicidology, Some Facts About Suicide in the USA, "2001".)

I opened the Constellation work with "smudging". The sage that was burned, has been burned by my family for perhaps thousands of years, and came from the Owyhee, Nevada area, on the Duck Valley Reservation. A Shoshone elder prior to my mother giving it to me had blessed the sage. In burning the sage, each of us invited our ancestors, and we acknowledged the presence of the Creator in whatever would occur. We acknowledged that nothing happens in our life without the Creator and the ancestors. As the burning sage was passed in the abalone shell, from individual to individual, around the circle of persons who were seated, each person made their own prayer. Some fanned the smoke over their heads,



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and over their feet. One woman, who was from a strong tribal tradition, but also a fundamentalist Christian, passed the abalone shell, and the sage, without using it as a tool. However, she demonstrated a definite respect for those who were using the sage, and there was a sense that she was also committing her prayers, in her own way, to facilitate healing for the Indian community

A man who had come from generations of men who had Song Medicine was willing to open our Constellation with a Prayer Song.

A Native American woman who had personally experienced a positive interruption of a destructive family pattern, through Constellation work provided my introduction. Briefly I presented background on the work, and handouts, which cited several of Hellinger's books. As always, I encouraged participants to investigate the Internet, and watch for Constellation workshops that they might have an opportunity to attend. I indicated that I would be willing to answer questions after the Workshop, or from my home, should anyone want more information. I also indicated that there were several individuals who were "Masters" of the work that I would feel comfortable to call upon, should a question or request arise that I did not feel qualified to address. I provided my home phone, email and mailing address to each participant, via a brochure.

My opening of constellation work included a meditation in which each participant visualized their parents, grandparents, and all of their ancestors. With Native American communities I always acknowledge gratitude, and a respect for the ancestors who survived, and I invite them to look at us. The strength and the soul of all of those individuals are honored, and invited to participate in a helpful way in what we are about to do.

The Constellation, which was done for the Indian Community, addressed the issues that were central to the health of the Community. It does not seem appropriate in this context to discuss the specifics of the constellations, as they were identified and experienced by several people present as "medicine", or "ceremony". But, it is appropriate to indicate that the work was primarily the product of "movements of the soul". When the representatives were encouraged to trust their bodies, and trust what was there in the field, a slow and holy dance began.

In one of the Constellations there was a point at which one key representative for the Indian Community could barely stand. The man stated that the weight on his back was so heavy, and although in many situations with that description, I would encourage that he "follow the movement", he asked in a weakened voice, "Can I sing?" It felt entirely right to



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honor the work and I said, "Please do."

At that moment, this weakened man began to sing a tragic, then healing, then strengthening Native American song that touched and changed every corner of the room, and every person in it. When the man was asked later, if his beautiful song had ever been recorded, and if perhaps it was available on one of his CD's, he shared that he had never heard the song before, but it came to him in a powerful way, as he had stood in that place.

While the man, who had inherited Song medicine from his Father, and all of the men before him, was singing, another representative who was in a weakened state was spontaneously given a glass of water by one of the participants in the room. In this field there was an amazing significance in that water. The act of spontaneous introduction of this holy element was indeed a part of this constellation. As the representative drank the water, and began to feel stronger, and the Native American man sang, the ancestors were present.

There was no doubt, that in this context, Family Systems Constellation was a description which somehow did not describe what we had participated in. The indigenous field in the constellation had introduced ceremony.

In indigenous healing tradition, there is a link between the individual who is facilitating healing and the client. We are both coming to the circle acknowledging our weakness, and our openness. At times, the link becomes physical.

In one constellation, actually a structural constellation, the type of constellation introduced by Mathias Varga Von Kibbit, one of the participants began to experience something, which was expressed as a stinging and numbness in the feet. When the words were spoken, I sensed in my body a particular kind of anxiety. In prayer I asked to recognize what my body was trying to contribute to the constellation, and immediately I remembered doing outreach for an Indian Health clinic. On several occasions, I had been asked by medical personnel to try to discuss the prevention of amputation with Native American clients who were brittle diabetics. Knowing, with certainty, that my body was remembering that intervention, in combination with the physical information the representative was experiencing, I told the person that it looked as though perhaps the family soul was wishing to address something, I of course asked if the client was comfortable to continue.

With the agreement and comfort of the individual confirmed, I asked if there was anyone in the family system who had been diabetic. Immediately there was identification of someone who had died of diabetes in the system. And given the opportunity, the honoring of that



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individual was the priority of the ancestors.

Since this constellation, that particular statement in the language of the soul has repeated itself several times in constellations.

For many traditional people, the connection of the body and the soul is fluid. Although there are numerous indigenous traditions, with varied techniques of accessing the knowing field, perhaps what is more familiar to the indigenous mind, than to the cognitively based western thinking, is that the knowing field is wise. However unlikely, however it appears to confound logic, if there is trust, if the field is prepared, what will come is what is true.

Comfort with, and trust in, the truth of the field has global application. It is not just created in constellation.

One very good friend, who works in Physical Medicine, is also a student of her dreams. She is grounded, well trained, and began to have dreams which more frequently and directly affected her life, and her understanding. (She frequently refers her clients for constellation work, if she begins to get a sense that their physical pain may have a systemic factor contribution.)

At one point she began to dream about going to Mexico, and meeting a "medicine man", a healer, a "curandero".

(Curanderos are healers, predominantly in Mexico, who practice a combination of tribal and folk medicine. Many are believed to have greater wisdom through prayer, and consultation with saints, and a "knowing field" which reveals to them what the appropriate intervention would be for a particular patient.)

The reoccurring dreams resulted in my friend booking a flight, which would allow her to spend several days in a small town in Mexico. She inquired as she went through the town, "Did anyone know of a traditional healer in the area?" After several days, she had found no healer.

She began to wonder if she had misunderstood the dream. Had it actually been "teacher", or "medicine person", not necessarily Medicine man? Was she in fact the teacher she had come to Mexico to meet? Had the dream simply been a way that her intuitive self encouraged her to take a vacation? She increasingly felt her disappointment turn to peace.



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On her last day, only hours before her return flight, a young man came up to her and asked if she wanted to meet the Medicine Man, the "curandero".

She immediately said yes, and with his broken English he directed her to a rather dilapidated jeep. She got in with him, and he drove for miles down dirt roads, toward distant hills. As she felt her anxiety mount, she calmed herself with her dreams, and she followed the young man to a remote place where she faced a tiny brown wrinkled man. Her assessment was that he was perhaps in his 80's.

The curandero instructed her to lie down on a woven mat, and as he prayed, the old man began to kick her gently. At this point, it would be redundant to describe how unusual this woman is. As she lay reassuring herself by remembering her dream, she became very body aware. A trained practitioner, she observed that his gentle kicking was both selective, and therapeutic. She began to relax, and at the end of the "session" she assessed that she had just experienced possibly the most effective bodywork she had ever had.

In a very relaxed state, she still felt some regret that the experience had not provided her the depth of insight she felt implied in her dreams. As she prepared to leave, she needed to ask, "Is there anything you could tell me? I work with many people who are in pain, and I want to be able to help them."

The curandero prayed, then he smiled at her kindly, and told her, "You must tell them they need to smile, and they need to keep their ass tight."

My friend thanked the elder, barely catching her return flight home. Initially, she was deeply involved in trying to approach the curandero's instruction as some sort of spiritual metaphor. She prayed to understand what he meant. She shared with me that her fellow passengers must have thought she had Tourette's, because intermittently, when thinking of the old curandero, she would simply burst out in laughter.

However, between her laughing, she began to think about the physical implications of "keeping one's ass tight", and she realized that with aging, incontinence is one of the most disruptive consistent difficulties that many of her clients over the years experienced. She reflected on the Kiegel exercise, and realized that there was strong sound instruction that had been given by the little old curandero.

When she returned home, we talked and I shared with her a number of things I had read regarding the physiology of smiling. Smiling produces a release of endorphins, helping to



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alleviate the experience of stress. Smiles, from infancy, are usually reciprocal; your perception of the world begins to change, because you have altered the world's perception of you when you smile.

We talked, and I knew that I was learning again, that in traditional indigenous approaches to healing, as in constellation work, there is often incredible simplicity. Not everything is a metaphor. Our challenge is simply to be able to acknowledge what is, even when we are challenged by the simplicity, or the absurdity, of the truth.

The presence of prayer in a traditional indigenous community in healing ritual is not usually optional. If one is not comfortable to include prayer, and the Creator, it is difficult to present any credential that would compensate for that missing element.

If there is discomfort with any aspect of constellation work, or something, which initially does not fit, I have seen examples of the indigenous field providing it's own answers.

In one group, which included several tribal people, there was a constellation in which the only thing the system would allow was for one of the individuals in the system to be placed outside of the circle. Several of the Native American people in the circle were uncomfortable with what they initially thought was an exclusion of a family member.

One traditional Native man greatly respected in that community felt that he should speak, and he very quietly asked if it was all right in this circle to say something.

In that moment, there was a quiet in his voice, and openness in the field, which was felt by everyone in the circle.

Respectfully given the opportunity he said, "When I saw that person being put outside of the circle, I thought and I hurt for him for a minute, and then, I thought of our acorns."

"Our people have always gathered acorns. We leach the nuts; run water through them in several ways, to take the bitterness out. We do it in different ways. The Indians in Happy Camp used to gather the acorns, and make boxes that they would put in the creek in the fall, and then all through the fall, and into the winter, the creek would leach the acorns. In the spring when you took the acorns out and let them dry they were sweet. An old man from Happy Camp told me about that. He is the same old man who told me about the way he used to hunt and carry the deer home, when he was just a boy."



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"The old man told me that when he would hunt, and when the old ones hunted long ago, if they got a deer they would skin it out, if they were alone and had a long way to walk back home they knew how to carry their deer. They would skin the deer and take off the neck roast, and the hams, the back-strap most of the meat of the deer, and they would use the hide as a sack. They would put the meat in the middle of the hide, and then gather the four leg parts of the hide, and hold them. It made a good sack, and then they could carry the deer meat home if they were alone and on foot. The Happy Camp Elder who told me about how he carried deer is the same one who told me about how they leached the acorns in the creek."

"Anyway, different people had different ways of getting the bitterness out of the acorns. For some of us, we would dry them, pound them into flour and they would be leached in a special basket. Water would be poured over the acorns, again and again until they were sweet."

The young man had everyone in a trance as he spoke with a soothing melody in his voice, quiet, strong, and calm. He looked at the eyes of the people watching him and he decided to wake them up. He fed them something for their cognitive mind: "They say the bitterness of the acorn comes from the tannic acid. That's what we're actually leaching from the acorn."

Again he relaxed and began to sing them the rest of the story, "When we used to gather acorns, and today when we do, we often have to put them in a sack or a bag, and then we keep them while they dry. Now days we put them in a paper sack, in the old days, when they had been dried a little bit, they would be put in baskets, or leather bags."

"When we are through gathering the acorns, we have to look at each one, to see if there are any worms that have gotten into the acorn. You look for little, tiny holes on the outside of the thin shell, or sometimes there's just a big hole & you see the worm right there. If we keep the wormy acorn with the rest of the acorns, they will all go bad; they would all be at risk for being ruined. When we find such an acorn, we put it aside."

"When we are through sorting the acorns, we take the wormy acorns, and we pray over them. We thank the creator for making them, and we honor that the life of those acorns took a different path. We take those acorns, and we give them to the earth. We don't say that they're bad, we just know that they could harm the other acorns, so we give them to the earth, because she is able to take care of them."



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"That's what I thought of when I saw the person, who represented the murderer, being taken outside of the circle. The acorn is still a part of the acorn family. It might be too dangerous to stay with the rest of the acorns. But, it is still a part of the acorn family, it could never be anything else."

The Indian people in the group listened and nodded. And those who had relatives who were not safe for the family remembered that they were still a part of the family. They could never be anything else.

One Navajo gentleman, after observing the Family & Human Systems Constellations observed that the process was in many ways familiar. In discussing the possibility of erasing entanglements with the past that cause destructive patterns, he explained that sand painting healing ceremony has exact parallel. In the Navajo Sand Painting Healing interventions, through prayer, (opening the field), the men become aware of a link between the tribal members distress, and some place in their creation stories.

After the link is identified in prayer, a sand painting is created which represents that ancient story, or place, to which the person's malady is linked. As the men pray, and in particular, when they "rub out" the link, (as they "wipe out" the story they have created with the sand painting) the identification is dissolved, and the person is released from the entanglement, which caused their distress.

For generations, the indigenous field and indigenous knowledge have been discredited. There may be schools of thought, products of the Cartesian model of healing, which will seek to discredit, or marginalize Family Systems Constellation Work.

Perhaps indigenous healing traditions have something to share with the Family Systems Constellation movement. It may be something as simple as: When you are remembering a Bear Dance, it is of no consequence what others are saying. All there is for you to do is listen to the drum, and follow that ancient step.