

## INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS -

Lecture and Demonstration in Taipei on October 11, 2001

Held by Bert Hellinger in October 2001 at a workshop at Taipei ( [Netra](#) was the organizer of that workshop). You'll read about some parts of family constellations performed by Hellinger on stage as well.



[Human greatness](#)

[Parents are great, children are small](#)

[On entanglements](#)

[How to do a family constellation](#)

[Comments on adoption](#)

[Anorexia](#)

[Bulimia](#)

[Suicide](#)

[Cancer](#)

[Family constellations are based on observation](#)

[Trusting a greater force](#)

[The experience of being a representative](#)

[Incest](#)

*(See the according video announced here later at 2:11:35 - 2:41:08)*

I thank Netra that he invited me to Taiwan and that he prepared this evening and this workshop in such a marvellous way.

Tonight I want to introduce you briefly to the art of family constellation and to say something about the background of family constellations and something about the dynamics of families that come to light by means of family constellations.

Human greatness

In the beginning, I want to say something about human greatness. Some time ago, I was reading texts of Kungtse. When I read these texts, I understood something about human greatness. What I understood from his writings was: What is greatest in human beings is what makes them equal to everybody else. Everything else that deviates higher or lower from what is common to all human beings makes us less. If we know this, we can develop a deep respect for every human being.

Parents are great, children are small

Of course, human beings are different. Nevertheless they are equal. I will explain this by an example. If a child is born, it has these two particular parents. It cannot have any other parents. It can only have these two parents. Therefore, these parents are the best ones for this child. There cannot be any better parents. They are the right ones for this child.

Now, some people complain about their parents. They wish that they be other than they were. In this way, they are not able to take from their parents what they really gave them. When we look at our parents, then we see that behind them there are their parents, and behind their parents there are other parents, and so on through many generations. The same life flows through all of them until it reaches us. In fact, it does not matter how these people were in real life.

Whether they were what we call good people or whether they were what we call bad people, whether they were caring for their children or were perhaps neglecting their children. With regard to passing on life, they were all the same. There is no difference among them. Life flows pure through all these generations. None of these parents could take away something from this life, and they could not add something to it. So, all the children through all these generations received the same life.

When we look at our parents and see that life comes from very far, then we can take life as it flows through our parents to us without any hesitation. In this way, parents are great, children are small. Parents give, children take. If we look at our parents in this way, we can honour them as parents however they are. If we do this, we feel rich. Our heart opens and we feel strength. This is a very simple truth. If we attend to this and accept it, how much would change in our life.

Through family constellations we have brought to light what it actually means when we honour our parents in this way. Actually, all psychotherapy begins with honouring ones parents. And who is a good therapist? A good therapist honours the parents of his clients. He will never allow that somebody accuses his parents. Because as soon as somebody accuses his parents, he is no longer in connection with the flow of life.

This simple truth is for many very new. You can find that in many psychotherapies some psychotherapists side with the client against his parents. But nobody can be at peace with himself or herself unless he is at peace with both his parents. If you meet depressed people, you can always find that they reject one of their parents. Depression is healed if they are led to get reconciled with their parents.

On entanglements

Now I say something about family constellations. What does this mean? First of all, it is just a method. If a client has a problem, the therapist asks him or her about events in the family. But he does not ask them about their father, was he good or was he bad, or how was their mother? Because experience with family constellations shows that this is not important. Just as I explained before, it does not matter how our parents are. We get life nevertheless from them in full.

Other things count in a family. For instance if somebody in the family was not treated as an equal. We find, that in some families a member is excluded. Parents might get angry with a child perhaps, and they don't want to know anything anymore about that child. Or children reject their parents. Then they are no longer part of their family. And sometimes something happens in the family that causes fear in the family. For instance, if a woman dies at childbirth, many in the family are afraid of what happened. For instance, because of this other girls in the family may be afraid to have children.

As a result, such a woman very often is no longer mentioned in the family. In this way, she is excluded. She is denied her equal place in that family. Or if a child died at birth, it is very often no longer mentioned. But it is a member of the family. Sometimes, parents want to have another child as a substitute for this child. When they have the other child, they no longer think of the first child. These are important events in a family. Or if there has been a suicide, the person who killed himself or herself is no longer mentioned. Or the other members of the family are angry with this person. So they are excluded.

In such a family not all members are regarded as equal in their rights to belong. Some behave as if they had more rights to belong than others. So the basic equality is no longer upheld.

What happens then in such a family? Later on, sometimes several generations later, suddenly a child behaves like the person that had been excluded before. Or that child leads a life similar to that person who was excluded. But this child does not know anything of what had happened before. This shows that the members of the family are part of something greater, of a greater soul that unites them, or of a collective conscience which moves them all in the same direction. This greater force does not tolerate that anybody is excluded. It wants to do right to those who had been excluded by forcing another member to repeat their life. Therefore, a late member of the family is identified with an earlier person. This we call an entanglement. But nobody is aware of this. It is a completely unconscious process. Now through family constellations these entanglements are brought to the light, and a solution can be found that people can get free from an entanglement.

How to do a family constellation

I say briefly something about family constellations. A client selects from a group representatives for members of his family and puts them in relationship to one another. If he has set them up, he may be very much surprised of what he suddenly sees. In the first picture something hidden is usually shown already. For instance, we may see that some of the members want to leave the family. And we see, when they are set up, the representatives feel like the people they represent without knowing them. So, they know about the people they don't know. That shows something about the human condition. We are not just on our own, we are connected with many others in a very mysterious way. What also comes to light in family constellations is that in the end all in the family are equal. Nobody is better, nobody is worse. So at the end, we can be very humble and take our place in our family, and by taking our right place in the family, we feel good and free.

Perhaps I should demonstrate now a family constellation

*A Demonstration follows, documented at the Video 2:41:11 - 3:12:05*

*There follows an constellation of a couple who have adopted a child.  
Video 3:12:07 - 3:17:56*

Comments on adoption

In family constellations it is very important that the therapist has no compassion with those who were guilty. If such a mother would come to a psychotherapist, how many psychotherapists would have pity on her. What happens if they have pity with the mother? How is their attitude towards the child? They have no pity on the child. Therefore in family therapy, the therapist first of all gives a place in his heart to the person who has suffered most. And this is the child. He looks for a solution for the child, and he does not take away any responsibility from those who were cruel on the child. Not that I condemn these parents. We don't know the circumstances. But still, they were the parents and they were responsible for the child. The truth was, that they gave away the child forever.

If this truth is covered up, for instance if the mother would tell the child, "You know at this time I had to work and I was not able to care for you", then she would behave like a child, and the child would must behave like her parent, taking care of her. So the reality

is just distorted. So, the therapist has no fear to tell the truth as it is, and to face the people with the truth as it is.

Here, the parents were faced with the truth. The child was faced with the truth, and the adoptive parents too. They had to recognise that the child actually is loyal to her natural parents. Only if the child succeeded in a clear separation from her natural parents, could she turn toward her adoptive parents.

Many adopted children are angry at their natural parents because they gave them away. But they do not turn that anger toward their natural parents, they direct that anger toward the adoptive parents. So this is very difficult.

*(See Video 3:17:58 - 3:45:06)*

This was a relatively simple example of a family constellation. But it showed some important issues. Now I want to tell something in general about the application of family constellations.

#### Anorexia

In family constellations certain dynamics come to light which cause unhappiness, illness, accidents, suicide, criminal behaviour. First of all you must know that a child is bound to his or her parents with a very deep love. The child has no greater desire than to belong to his or her parents. If a child feels that her parents need something, she is prepared to sacrifice everything, even her life, out of a blind love. For instance if a child feels that the mother will die, it says, "I will die in your place." Then the child gets ill, perhaps, or has a fatal accident. Or if a child senses that her father will leave the family, she says, "I will disappear in your place. Such a child develops, perhaps, anorexia. The anorectic girl says in her heart, "It's rather me who should disappear than you, my dear dad."

There is a widespread theory in psychotherapy that anorexia has to do with the mother, that the relationship to the mother is in some way distorted. But family constellations show that, usually, this has to do with the father. The father want to leave the family, and the girl says, "I do it in your place."

Now, what to do with this? If we have a family constellation, and the father may be present in the family constellation, I let the child face her father, look at him and tell him, "I will leave in your place." What happens to the father when he hears this? Can he leave now? No. So, he can tell the child when this has come to light, "I will stay, and you have my blessing if you stay alive." In this way, anorexia can be healed, actually in a very simple way.

#### Bulimia

Then we have, for instance, bulimia. That means if a girl - it is usually a girl - eats and vomits afterwards. They first eat and then they vomit. Very often, bulimia follow anorexia. What does bulimia means, actually, bulimia in this case? It means, when she eats, she says, "I will stay alive." And when she vomits, she says, "I will die." So, she has not overcome the difficulty. The solution is: whenever she wants to vomit, she says, "I will live." Then she may stop vomiting.

We have bulimia in a different context as well, the more common bulimia, when there is no connection with anorexia. What is the family dynamic in such a case? If we look closely at a family like this, we can see that the mother says - not openly but she

conveys this to the children - "Don't take anything from your father, you must only take things from me."

I will tell you how I discovered this. There was a bulimic girl who said that her mother told the children, "Your father doesn't give you anything to eat." Therefore she cooked secretly for the children and the father should not know about it. From this I found the solution for this kind of bulimia. I tell the bulimic girl, "Whenever you have a bout of eating, you just buy all the food you want to eat, place it on the table, look at it, and then you take a small teaspoon, and you imagine that you sit on your father's lap. Then you take a little bite with your teaspoon, imagine that you look at your father and you tell him, "With you, the food really tastes well" Even the thought has healed many bulimic girls. All this comes to light through family constellations.

#### Suicide

In many families there has been a suicide and people then say, "This person killed herself or himself because of this and this and this." But the reasons given, are usually wrong. When we set up the family, some other things come to light. I give an example. An old man who was a doctor, told that his young son hanged himself one night. The boy was 14 years old. He had sent him to buy some food. When the boy came home, he spread the food on the staircase. Then the father got angry and hit him. In the night afterwards, the child hanged himself. That was many years before, and the old man still felt guilty about the death of his son. A few month later, he came to another seminar, and during the break we walked together. Suddenly, he remembered, a few days before the child hanged himself, the mother told the family at table that she was pregnant. And that child cried out in panic, "But we don't have enough room in the house." That is why he hanged himself. He made room for the other child. When the old man saw this, tears flowed down his cheeks, and he said to me afterwards, "Now I am in deep peace."

Most suicides are committed out of love, either in order to follow somebody into death. For instance whose mother died at childbirth has a deep desire to follow the mother into death. Then they get sick or have an accident and, sometimes, they kill themselves. Or, if they see that in the family someone want to kill himself, they do it in the place of this person.

Once I had a very strange case in a seminar. A woman who was the second wife of her husband, set up the family. She reported that the first wife of her husband had committed suicide. Then I placed a representative of the husband in front of the first wife who had committed suicide. As he stood there, he went on his knees crawled over to her, embraced her legs and cried aloud. Actually, he wanted to commit suicide, and his wife had done it in his place.

Shall I tell you some more examples about the dynamics of family constellations? Are you still strong enough? I tell some more. Perhaps about cancer patients. But I think, with regard to cancer patients, Netra can relate a personal example

Netra tells this example only in Chinese. His father was ill with cancer. Netra set up the family in the hospital, and his father himself stood in the constellation, although he could barely stand on his feet. After the constellation, he was very happy and was singing in his bed. Shortly afterwards, he died very peacefully.

HELLINGER to NETRA I am sure, your father will be present her and bless all that you do here.

*(See Video 3:45:08 - 4:05:35)*

If you still have enough strength, you may ask some questions

Cancer

I still like to hear more about cancer in a family constellation.

With cancer patients very often we can see that they want to die. They say that they want to fight cancer but deep down they want to die. One very common dynamic I have seen with women, is they are at war with their mother. Therefore, very often if I have to do with a woman who has breast cancer, I let her face her mother.

Recently, we had a constellation where we did that. But here it was different. The woman who had cancer went on her knees in front of her mother, and her mother did not look at her. She passed by her daughter and looked at something else, she looked to the ground. In a family constellation, if somebody looks to the ground, he or she looks at a dead person.

So I selected a representative and let him lie on his back in front of the mother. She then clenched her fists. So I asked the ill woman, "What happened in the family?" She said that the brother of her mother had killed his fiancée. From the constellation we could gather that certainly her mother knew about it and had consented to it.

Now what happens within a person like that? She feels guilty, and in a way they know in their heart, they also have earned death. But then, her daughter said in her heart, "I die in your place." That is why she developed cancer. This was the secret background of her illness.

But I come back to the example of women and their mothers. Very often I do a very simple exercise. I tell them they should kneel in front of their mother and bow to the ground in respect for them. Many women who have breast cancer cannot do that. There is such a strong resistance to honour their mother that it becomes apparent that they rather die than to honour their mother. Of course, you cannot say that each woman who has breast cancer has difficulties with her mother. That is wrong. But there are quite a few cases where I have seen this.

I give another example. Once I had a seminar only for cancer patients, and I worked with a woman. She was not centred and I had to break off the constellation. As a result, she became angry with me. But very often, when I break off a constellation, it is a therapeutic intervention. Next day, she was quite changed. She came forward and said, she had to report something.

She remembered, immediately after she had been operated on her breast, when she was just waking up after the operation, her daughter came to her and said, "Mum, in our house I heard two children crying." She brought two dolls and placed them on the shoulder of her mother and said, "I bring you these two children." The woman knew immediately who they were. She had aborted two children. Then we could set up the constellation. She could look at these children and give them a place in her heart. A few years later, I met her again perchance, and she said, "I am doing fine."

Any other questions?

Family constellations are based on observation

How did you discover or develop this method?

All this is based on observation. I have no theory about it. I have seen thousands of family constellations, and I exchanged my observations and findings with many of my colleagues who also do constellations. We found some basic laws operating in families. But you cannot use them like a theory. They point in a direction, but every family constellation is different. You cannot rely on a former constellation to apply it to a later one. There are some similarities, of course, but you have to face them anew each time. Therefore, a therapist never stops learning.

Trusting a greater force

He also has to develop a certain personal attitude in order to do this work. He exposes himself to a situation without any special intention. He looks at the constellation, exposes himself to the constellation, and he doesn't know what to do. He just waits, and he has no fear of what may come to light. He trusts a greater force. It is very close to the attitude which Laotse is describing in the Tao te king. By not doing, something will happen. Suddenly he sees the next step, or he hears a sentence which he asks the client to say, as I did with you when you were representing the girl here. These sentences are not thought up. They come up from the depth suddenly, and if to tell them, they have strength.

So, family constellation is also an art. After some time, if you do this over the years, you may become wise.

One more question.

The experience of being a representative

You don't derole the representatives?

I don't do that because they have a special experience when they are representatives. The woman who represented the girl will never feel like an adopted child. She cannot experience this in her life. But by being a representative here in the constellation she could experience this. She gained something by it. The same applied to the woman who represented the natural mother. This was a live experience. So, why should I take it from them. Only if somebody has to represent something very hurtful, do I help them to say goodbye to this representation.

You have another question?

Incest

What is the dynamic with incest?

It would fill a whole hour to talk about it. But the main thing about incest is, if there is incest, the child is bound to the perpetrator. She loves the perpetrator. But she is not allowed to show it. Therefore, she remains bound to the perpetrator.

Where there is incest, usually there are two perpetrators. One in the open - this is usually the man, and one who remains hidden - this is the mother. Very often, the mother wants to go away from her husband, she breaks the relationship with her husband. Then the daughter substitutes for her. Very often, that is the secret dynamic of incest.

to Netra In the book you translated, there is a beautiful example on how to deal with that.

Okay, this is the end of the evening