

# Longing and Family Constellation Work

Alun Reynolds

One of the deepest longings is for life to have meaning, the longing for Truth, for what is most real. When this is realised it is deeply satisfying and we might regard it as a spiritual experience.

The longing for Truth may take us in the direction of longing to heal ourselves and our families. A common way in which children are injured is when there is a lie that underpins and corrodes family life, for example when a parent lies to a child about who its real biological parents are or when a parent has other children that are not acknowledged.

Regardless of how we think we feel about our parents, there is a deep longing in our souls to connect with those who gave us the precious gift of life, our biological parents. This longing is often painfully felt by those children whose biological parents are separated from them, for example by early death, by being given up for adoption or if the egg or sperm were 'donated', especially anonymously. Because it can be painful to feel, the strong yearning to connect with our parents is often suppressed or denied by some sort of

reaction formation, secondary feelings of indifference, resentment, bitterness, hatred or ingratitude that find no resolution, as a replacement for the original primary feelings of longing, love and gratitude. This is often accompanied by a sense of entitlement: my parents should have been this or that, as if we could choose our parents' qualities like buying a new house or car. The price of entitlement and lack of acknowledgment is very high, usually paid as a secret atonement by self-destructive

behaviour in various ways. The spiritual challenge is to align ourselves to receive life as a gift from afar through our parents on exactly the terms it comes to us, no more, no less, so we can be free to live life to the full in honour of the gift. This can be particularly challenging if we have been abused (physically, emotionally or sexually) or abandoned by our parents: nevertheless beneath all the hurt and pain, deep longings abide.

The longing might occur during childhood or it may be felt later in life or towards a dead parent especially if that longing was suppressed when the parent was alive. Parents can add to the pain by denial and a refusal to look at or know the truth.

One of the ways to find a deeply satisfying resolution to the longing is through Family Constellation work, founded by Bert Hellinger, usually conducted in groups of twelve to twenty people - although Bert Hellinger often has several hundred participants at his demonstration workshops. The facilitator initially talks to the patient or client to identify a burning issue, such as longing to be more involved in life or longing for a partner or longing for life to be more anxiety free or longing for reconciliation. The facilitator then asks about the facts of the current family or family of origin, who is in the family and major events, but not about the character or personality of the family members. From this information, the facilitator then proposes what to set up in the Family Constellation, not all family members but one or two,



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sometimes three or four. After choosing other group members to represent family members including one for himself, the patient then puts his hands on the shoulders of each representative and places them in relation to each other in terms of distance and direction of orientation. This is done on a gut-feeling basis without thinking too much about it. Even though this method owes its origins partly to Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, the representatives stand and are not sculpted. The facilitator asks each representative what they sense, feel and think. From these phenomenological reports, hidden dynamics emerge and these can be clarified and stated by the representatives with the help of the facilitator. Once entanglements are stated and identified, it may be possible to find a more life-enhancing resolution and the facilitator by a process of trial and error experiments with different positions of representatives and different solution sentences to see what best can support love and life. Sometimes it is enough to identify something exactly as

it is without any further movement.

One can observe longing in Family Constellations work in an interrupted reaching-out movement towards the parent which is reflected in the same sort of interrupted movement-out towards life. Another way Bert Hellinger found to work with this longing was to use a combination of primal therapy and NLP to restore the reaching-out movement. The client reaches out towards the therapist whilst in a regressed state experiencing the longing for the parent. This is supported by the presence and encouragement of the therapist and deep breathing by the client.

One of the things observed in Family Constellations is that longing for a dead person shows by a living person left behind saying I will join you either by losing my life or living my life half-dead. This entanglement with the destiny of someone else is maintained by only looking at one's love for the dead person not their love for you. Once their love for you is properly seen, a good resolution emerges where it is impossible for the living person to maintain their self-destructive or self-pitying position.

Sometimes we long for something we cannot have and can never have. The real attachment is not for the person or object we long for but for the frustration itself. This frustrating object relation was formed in early childhood in relation to our primary caretakers and can get played out later either by being a frustrating person or by being frustrated by others or by experiencing both. This may show up as longing in the form of passivity, longing for something and waiting for it to come to you, as a substitute for taking appropriate action. Another diversion for longing is to addictions such as food, alcohol, drugs, material success and gambling which are inherently frustrating because they only provide temporary respite from deeper hidden longings beneath.

Longing can be part of our survival drive, reaching out for those essential to our survival. It can also be part of our sexual drive to have intimate contact and procreate. It can also be part of our social drive to belong. The challenge is to integrate these more primitive drives with our enlightenment drive so that they serve it rather than threaten it, this is indeed a formidable lifetime task but one well worth doing.

**Alun Reynolds** is an experienced UKCP Registered Gestalt Psychotherapist and workshop leader. He is a trainer and staff member at the Chiron Centre for Body Psychotherapy. He is a registered Family Constellations Practitioner on the official Hellinger website at [www.hellinger.com](http://www.hellinger.com) and has run Family Constellation workshops many times in Edinburgh and London.