

# *Love's Hidden Symmetry*

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## **Part I: The Phenomenology of Intimate Relationship Systems**

### **Guilt, Innocence, and the Limits of Conscience**

A clear or guilty conscience has little to do w/ good and evil; the worst atrocities and injustices are committed w/ a clear conscience, and we feel quite guilty doing good when it deviates from what others expect of us. We call the conscience that we feel as guilt or innocence a personal conscience.

Our personal conscience has many different standards, one for each of our different relationships; one standard for our relationship to our father, another for that with our mother, one for the church, another for the workplace, that is, one for each group to which we belong.

In addition to personal conscience, we are also subject to a systemic conscience out of our awareness, a conscience passed on from generation to generation. This invisible systemic conscience is the subject of this book.

In addition to to personal conscience, which we feel, and to systemic conscience, which works through us although we do not feel it, there is a a third conscience that guides us toward the greater whole. Following this third conscience requires great effort, perhaps even a spiritual effort, because it tears us away from obedience to the dictates of our family, religion, culture, personal identity. It demands of us, if we let it, that we leave behind what what we have known and follow the Conscience of the Greater Whole. This conscience is ineffable and mysterious and does not follow the laws of personal and systemic conscience, which we know more intimately. Many think they're seeking the truth of their own soul, but it's the Greater Soul that is thinking and seeking in them, allowing for great variety; one must surrender to it as to a river current that sweeps one along.

### **Personal Conscience and Our Feelings of Guilt And Innocence**

In all our various relationships, fundamental needs interact in a complex way. There is, first, the need to belong, to bond. Then there's the need to maintain a balance of giving and taking, i.e., for equilibrium. Then there's the need for the safety of social convention and predictability, i.e., for order.

We feel these 3 different needs w/ the urgency of drives and instinctual reactions, and they subject us to forces that challenge us and demand compliance, that coerce and control us, limiting our choices, forcing us to make

commitments, whether we like it or not, to objectives that conflict with our personal wishes and pleasures.

These needs constrain our relationships even while making them possible, because they both reflect and enable our fundamental human need to relate intimately to others. Our relationships succeed when we are able to fill these needs and to balance them with one another, and they become dysfunctional and destructive when we can't. With every action we take that affects others, we feel guilty or innocent. Just as the eye discriminates continually between light and dark, so too an inner organ continually discriminates between what serves and what hinders our relationships.

When our actions endanger or damage our relationships, we feel *guilt*, and we feel freedom from *guilt*, or *innocence*, when our actions serve them. We call our experience of guilt and innocence—that is, our sense of what serves or endangers our relationships—*personal conscience*. Thus, our feelings of guilt and innocence are primarily social phenomena that do not necessarily orient us toward higher moral values. On the contrary, by binding us so firmly to the groups that are necessary for our survival, *our feelings of guilt and innocence often blind us to what is good and evil.*

### **Different Needs Require Different Behaviors**

Our needs for belonging, the equilibrium of giving and taking, and social convention work together to maintain the social groups to which we belong, but each need strives toward its own goals with its own particular feelings of guilt and innocence, and so we experience guilt and innocence differently according to the need and the goal being served.

Guilt feels like exclusion and alienation when our belonging is endangered.

When it is well served, we feel innocence as intimate inclusion and closeness.

Guilt feels like indebtedness and obligation when our giving are not balanced.

When they are well served, we feel innocence as entitlement and freedom.

Guilt feels like transgression and as fear of consequences or punishment when we deviate from a social order. We feel innocence with respect to social order as conscientiousness and loyalty.

Conscience demands in the service of one need what it forbids in the service of another, and it may allow in the service of one what it forbids in the service of the others. Conscience serves various needs even when they conflict with one another and we experience the conflicts between them as conflicts of conscience.

Whoever reaches toward innocence with respect to one need simultaneously reaches toward guilt with respect to another. No matter how we struggle to follow our conscience, we always feel *both* guilt and innocence—innocence with respect to one need and guilt with respect to another. The dream of innocence w/o guilt is an illusion.

Acting in the service of our need to belong, conscience bonds us to the persons and

groups necessary for our survival regardless of the conditions they set for our belonging. Children accommodate w/o question to the groups into which they are born and bond to them tenacity. Young children experience their bonding to their family as love and good fortune, no matter how the family nourishes or neglects them, and they experience their family's values and habits as good, no matter what the family believes or does.

In the service of belonging, conscience reacts to everything that enhances or endangers our bonding. Our conscience is clear when we act so that our continued belonging to our group is assured, and we have guilty conscience when we deviate from the norms of our group and fear that our right to belong is jeopardized or damaged: guilt and innocence have the same goal of keeping us connected to our family and intimate community.

The conscience that guards our bonding does not stand above the false beliefs and superstitions of the groups to which we belong or guide us to a greater truth but serves and maintains those beliefs, making it difficult for us to see and know and remember whatever it forbids. Since bonding and belonging are so necessary for our survival and well-being, they dictate what we may perceive, believe, and know.

### **We Have a Different Standard For Each Group**

The *only* criteria followed by conscience acting in the service of bonding are the values of the group to which we belong. Persons from different groups have different values and persons who belong to several groups act differently in each group. When our social context changes, conscience changes its colors to protect us in our new environment. We have one conscience w/ our mother, another w/ our father; one for the family and another for the workplace; one for church, another for an evening out. In each situation, conscience strives to guard our belonging and protect us from abandonment and loss like a sheepdog holds the sheep together in a herd, barking and nipping at our heels until we move together w/ the others.

But what leaves us innocent in one group may make us very guilty in another. In a group of thieves, members must steal and do so w/ a clear conscience. In another group, stealing is forbidden. In both groups, members experience the same sensations of guilt or innocence as the penalty for violating their group's conditions of membership.

What serves one relationship may damage another. For example, sexuality is the fulfillment of one relationship and a violation of another. What happens when our belonging in one relationship collides with our belonging in another is that we are simultaneously guilty in one of them and innocent in the other.

### **Dependency Strengthens Bonding**

Conscience ties us most firmly to our group when we are most powerless and

vulnerable. As we gain power in a group and independence, both bonding and conscience relax. But if we remain weak and dependent, we also remain obedient and loyal. In families, children occupy this position; in a company, the lower employees; in an army, the enlisted soldiers; in a church, the faithful congregation. For the good of the stronger in the group, they all conscientiously risk health, happiness, and life and make themselves guilty—even when their leaders, for what is called “higher purposes,” unscrupulously misuse them. These are the meek who stick out their necks for the stronger, the hangmen doing others' dirty work, unsung heroes holding their positions to the last, sheep faithfully following their shepherd to the slaughter, victims paying restitution. These are the children who leap into the fray for their parents and relatives, who carry out that which they didn't plan, atone for what they didn't do, and bear burdens they didn't create.

### **Belonging Demands The Exclusion Of Those Who Are Different**

Wherever conscience acting in the service of belonging binds us to one another in a group, it also drives us to exclude those who are different and to deny them the right to the membership that we claim for ourselves. Then we become frightening for them. The conscience guarding our belonging guides us to do to those who are different what we most fear as the worst consequence of guilt—we exclude them. But as we treat them badly in good conscience, so do they in turn treat us in the name of the conscience of their group. The conscience that guards belonging inhibits evil within the group, but lifts this inhibition in regard to those outside the group. We then do to others *in good conscience* what our conscience forbids us to do to members of our own group. In the context of religious, racial, and national conflicts, suspending the inhibitions that conscience imposes on evil within a group allows members of that group to commit, in good conscience, atrocities and murder against others who belong to different groups.

Guilt and innocence are not the same as good and evil. We do destructive and evil things with a clear conscience when they serve the groups that are necessary for our survival, and we take constructive action with a guilty conscience when these acts jeopardize our membership in these same groups.

### **The Appearances of Guilt and Innocence Can Be Deceiving**

Guilt and innocence often exchange their garb so that guilt appears as innocence and innocence as guilt. Appearances deceive, and it's only by the final outcome that we know the truth. The conscience of the group gradually shapes the child's experience of the world, coloring the child's perception of what is with the family's beliefs. Personal conscience becomes the great pretender, setting feelings of guilt and innocence in the place of knowledge of good and evil. The good that brings reconciliation must overcome the false appearances created by

virtue of our belonging to various groups. Conscience talks; the world *is*.

### **Conscience and Balance in Giving and Taking**

Our relationships—and our experiences of guilt and innocence—begin with giving and taking. We feel entitled when we give and we feel obligated when we take. The oscillation between entitlement and obligation is the second fundamental dynamic of guilt and innocence in every relationship. It serves all our relationships, since both giver and taker know peace only when both have given and taken equally.

When we receive something from someone, we lose our innocence and independence. When we take, we feel indebted and beholden to the giver. We feel this obligation as discomfort and pressure, and we try to overcome it by giving something back. We can't truly take anything without feeling the need to give. Taking is a form of guilt.

Innocence in the service of this exchange becomes manifest as the comfortable feeling of entitlement that comes when we take fully and then we give a little more in return than we've taken. We feel innocently carefree and lighthearted when we've taken fully and our needs have been satisfied, and when we've also given fully in return.

There are 3 typical patterns people adopt for achieving and maintaining innocence with respect to exchange in relationships: fasting, helping, and full exchange.

### **Fasting**

Some people cling to the illusion of innocence by minimizing their participation in life. Rather than taking fully what they need and then feel beholden, they close themselves off and withdraw from life and need. They feel free from need and obligation, and because they don't feel need, they need not take. Although they feel beholden to no one and innocent, theirs is the innocence of the uninvolved observer. They don't get their hands dirty, so they often consider themselves to be superior or special. Their enjoyment of life is limited by the shallowness of their involvement, and they feel correspondingly empty and dissatisfied.

This posture can be observed in many people who struggle with depression. Their refusal to welcome what life offers develops first in the relationship w/ one or both parents and is later carried over to other relationships to the good things of the world. Some people justify their refusal to take w/ the complaint that what they were given wasn't enough or was not the right thing. Others justify not taking by pointing to the errors and limitations of the giver, but the result is the same—they remain passive and empty. People who reject or judge their parents—regardless of what their parents may have done—typically feel incomplete and lost.

We observe the opposite in people who have succeeded in taking their parents as they are, and in taking from them everything that was given. They experience this taking as a continuous flow of strength and nourishment that enables them to enter other relationships in which they, too, can take and give richly—even if their parents treated them badly.

## **Helping**

Other people try to maintain innocence by denying their need until after they've given enough to feel entitled. Giving before taking allows a fleeting sense of entitlement that dissolves as soon as we've taken what we need. Persons who prefer to maintain their feeling of entitlement rather than to allow others to give to them freely, say, in effect, “It's better for you to feel obligated to me than for me to feel obliged to you.” Many idealists hold this posture known as the “helper syndrome.”

Such self-centered striving for freedom from need is fundamentally hostile to relationships. Whoever wants only to give without taking clings to an illusion of superiority, rejects the bounty of life, and denies equality to his or her partner. Others soon want nothing from those who refuse to take, and become resentful and withdraw from them. Chronic helpers often are lonely and even bitter.

## **Full Exchange**

The third and most beautiful path to innocence in giving and taking is the contentment that follows a plentiful exchange of giving and taking, when we have both given and taken fully. This exchange is the heart of relationship. The giver takes, the taker gives. Both are giver and taker equally. Not only is the balance of giving and taking important to this innocence, but so also is the volume. A tiny volume of giving and taking brings no profit; a high volume makes us wealthy. High-volume giving and taking bring with them a feeling of abundance and happiness. Such joy doesn't just fall into our laps, but is the consequence of our willingness to increase love by needing and taking in intimate relationship. With such high-volume exchanges, we feel light and free, just and content.

In some relationships, the discrepancy between giver and taker is insurmountable; for example, that between parents and children or between teachers and students. Parents and teachers are primarily givers; children and students are takers. Equilibrium must be acquired by different means. Parents were themselves once children and teachers were students. They achieve a balance of giving and taking when they give to the next generation what they took from the earlier generation. Children and students may do the same. Likewise, people without children can give to others what they've received.

## **Expressing Gratitude**

Expressing genuine gratitude is another way to balance giving and taking for those who must take more than they can reciprocate. Sometimes this is the only adequate response, as, for example, for handicapped persons, the seriously ill, and sometimes for lovers. Whoever feels genuine gratitude affirms, "You give without regard as to whether or not I can repay, and I take your gift with love." Whoever accepts such gratitude affirms, "Your love and recognition of my gift are more valuable to me than anything else you might give to me." With our gratitude we affirm not only what we give to one another, but also what we are for one another. We tend to experience unearned good fortune as threatening, something that creates anxiety, secretly believing that our happiness will arouse the envy of others or of fate. We all tend to feel that happiness breaks a taboo and makes us guilty, as if by being happy we put ourselves in danger. Genuine gratitude reduces this anxiety. Nevertheless, affirming good fortune in the face of another's misfortune requires humility as well as courage.

### **Giving and Taking Constrain and Are Constrained by Love**

Giving and taking in intimate relationships are regulated by a mutual need for equilibrium, but no meaningful exchange develops between partners without the willingness of both to experience periodic imbalance. It's similar to walking—we stand still when we maintain static equilibrium, and we fall and remain lying down when we lose mobility completely. But by rhythmically losing our balance and regaining it, we move forward. As soon as equilibrium is achieved, the relationship either can be concluded or it can be renewed and continued by new giving and taking.

Partners in intimate relationships are equal—though different—in their exchange, and their love succeeds and continues when their giving and taking are balanced in the negative, as well as in the positive. Their exchange ends when they achieve a static equilibrium. When one takes without giving, the other soon loses the desire to give more. When one gives without taking, the other soon doesn't want to take any more. Partnerships also end when one gives more than the other is able or willing to reciprocate. Love limits giving according to the taker's capacity to take, just as it limits taking according to the giver's ability to give. That means that the need for a balance of giving and taking between partners simultaneously limits their love and their partnership. In that way, our need for equilibrium constrains and limits love.

But love also constrains equilibrium. When one partner does something that causes pain or injury to the other, then the injured person must return something that causes a similar pain and difficulty in order to maintain a balance of giving and taking—but in such a way that love is not destroyed. When the injured person feels too superior to stoop to the appropriate retribution love requires, the equilibrium is impossible and the relationship is endangered. For example, one of the difficult situations couples may face arise when one of them

has an affair. Reconciliation is impossible after an affair if one partner stubbornly clings to innocence, polarizing guilt and innocence.

On the other hand, if the injured partner is willing to make himself or herself also guilty by returning a portion of the hurt, then it may be possible for them to resume their relationship. But if the injured person loves his or her partner and wants the partnership to continue, the hurt returned must not be exactly as much as received because then no inequality remains to tie them together. Nor may it be more, because the wrongdoer then becomes injured and feels justified in seeking retaliation, and the cycle of harm escalates. The hurt returned must be a little less than was originally given. Then both love and fairness receive their due, and the exchange can be resumed and continued. In this way, love constrains equilibrium.

Some people find it uncomfortable to realize that, in such situations, the reconciliation that allows love to flow abundantly isn't possible unless the innocent become guilty by demanding just compensation. Nevertheless, as we know the tree by its fruit, we need only to compare couples who try the one approach with those who live the other to recognize what is truly good and what is harmful for intimacy and love.

It sometimes happens that both partners cause increasing hurt to each other and act as if what injures their love were good. Then their exchange in the negative increases and this exchange binds them tightly to each other in their unhappiness. They maintain a balance of giving and taking, but not in love. We can recognize the quality of a relationship by the volume of giving and taking, and by whether equilibrium is achieved in good or in harm. That also points to how we can restore a weakened partnership and make it satisfying; partners move from exchange in harm to exchange in good, and increase it with love.

### **False Helplessness**

When someone is wronged, he or she suffers helplessly. The greater the helplessness of the victim, the harsher we judge the wrongdoer. But injured partners seldom remain completely helpless once the harm is past. They usually have possibilities in action, either to end their partnership if the injuries have been too great, or to demand just atonement from their partners, and by doing so to put an end to guilt and to enable a new beginning.

When victims don't take advantage of a possibility to act, then others act for them—with the difference that the damage and injustice done by those acting on their behalf are often much worse than if the victims had acted themselves. In human relationship systems, repressed resentments emerge later in those who are least able to defend themselves—the children and grandchildren who experience an earlier anger as if it were their own.

Whenever the innocent continue suffering although appropriate action is possible, more innocent victims and guilty victimizers soon follow. It's an



illusion to believe that we avoid participating in evil by clinging to innocence instead of doing what we are to confront wrongdoing—when when we ourselves then do wrong as well. If one partner insists on a monopoly on innocence, there's no end to the other's guilt, and their love withers. Not only do those who ignore or passively submit to evil fail to preserve innocence, but they sow injustice. Love requires the courage to become guilty appropriately.

**Premature Forgiveness** prohibits constructive dialogue when it covers up or postpones a conflict and leaves the consequences to be dealt with by others in the family. This is especially destructive when the one who was wronged tries to release the wrongdoer from his or her guilt, as if victims had that authority. If reconciliation is desired, then the one wronged not only has the right to demand restitution and atonement, but also the obligation to do so. And the wrongdoer not only has the obligation to carry the consequences of his or actions, but also the right to do so. Love is well-served when the victim's demands for compensation remain appropriate.

### **Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Forgiveness that is truly healing preserves the dignity of the guilty person as well as that of the victim, requiring that victims not go to extremes in what they demand, and that they accept the appropriate compensation and atonement offered by the perpetrator. Without the forgiveness that acknowledges genuine remorse and accepts appropriate atonement, there's no reconciliation.

### **When We Must Cause Pain**

When one partner's action in an intimate relationship results in separation, we tend to believe that he or she made a free and independent choice. But it's often the case that, had that partner not acted, he or she would have suffered some injury. Then the roles would have been reversed, the guilt and consequences exchanged. Perhaps the separation was necessary because the soul required more space to grow, and the one who left was already suffering. In such situations, suffering is unavoidable. Our choices are limited to acting so that something constructive emerges out of the unavoidable pain we must cause or suffer. Often partners stay in a painful situation until they have suffered enough to compensate for the pain their leaving will cause the other.

When partners separate, it isn't only the one who goes who has a new chance. The one who is left often also has a chance to make a new beginning. But when one partner stays stuck in pain and rejects the constructive possibilities presented by the separation, he or she makes it difficult for the partner who left to start a new life. Then they remain tightly tied to each other in spite of their separation.

On the other hand, when the one who was left manages to accept the

opportunity for something better, then her lover also grants the former partner freedom and relief. Making something truly good out of misfortune is probably the most constructive form of forgiveness in such situations because it reconciles even when the separation remains.

### **Submitting to Fate**

People sometimes feel guilty when they gain some advantage at another's expense—even when they can do nothing to stop it or change it.

*A boy was born but his mother died. No one thought of holding the boy responsible for his mother's death, but his knowledge of his innocence didn't assuage his feeling of guilt. Because fate had died his birth to his mother's death, the pressure of guilt remained inexorable and he unconsciously created failure in his life in a vain attempt to atone for something he hadn't done.*

*A man's car had a blowout, went into a skid, and crashed into another car. The driver of the second car was killed, but the first man lied. Although he had been driving safely, his life remained tied to the death of the other man and couldn't escape his feelings of guilt. He was unable to enjoy his success until he came to see that the deceased man was demeaned by his misery, not honored.*

We're helpless against such guilt and innocence at the hands of chance and happenstance. If we were guilty or we deserved a reward because of our freely chosen actions, we would retain power and influence. But in these situations, we recognize that we're subject to forces we can't control, forces that decide whether we live or die, are saved or perish, thrive or decline—independently of our actions for good or evil.

Such vulnerability to happenstance is so frightening to many people that they prefer to spoil their unearned good fortune and to repudiate the bounty of life rather than to accept it gracefully. They often attempt to create personal guilt or to accumulate good deeds after the fact in order to escape the vulnerability to unearned rescue or undeserved suffering.

It's common for persons who have an advantage at the cost of another to try to limit their advantage by committing suicide, becoming ill, or by doing something to make themselves truly guilty, then suffering the consequences. All such solutions are connected to magical thinking and they are a childlike form of dealing with unearned good fortune. They actually increase guilt rather than diminish it.

Whoever has received something from fate wants to give back in kind, or when that's not possible, then at least to compensate with failure. But these remain

vain attempts, as destiny is utterly indifferent to our demands and attempts at compensations and restitution.

### **Humility in the Face of Fate**

We must submit to fate, surrender to the inexorable force of destiny, to either our advantage or our disadvantage. We must be humble, which lends us seriousness and weight, realizing that it isn't just us who determine our fate. Happenstance acts to our benefit or harm according to laws whose secrets we cannot and must not fathom. Humility is the appropriate answer to guilt and good fortune at the hands of fate.

### **Conscience in the Service of Social Order**

The third necessity for the success of love in intimate relationships is order, i.e., the rules and social conventions that constrain the communal life of a social group. All enduring relationships develop norms, rules, beliefs, and taboos that were binding on their members. In this way, relationships become relationship systems with power and structure. These social conventions constitute the surface convention to which all group members consent, but which vary widely from group to group. Such orders set the boundaries of membership: those who conform belong and those who don't follow the conventions of the group soon leave, like any bird that doesn't fly with the flock.

### **The Systemic Conscience of the Greater Whole**

Systemic conscience has priority over our personal feelings of guilt and innocence and which serves other orders which are the hidden natural laws that shape and constrain the behavior of human relationship systems. They are, in part, the natural forces of biology and evolution; in part, the general dynamics of complex systems becoming manifest in our intimacy; and in part, the forces of Love's Hidden Symmetry operating within the soul.

Although we are not directly aware of it, we can recognize the orders of this hidden conscience by their effect, by the suffering that results from their being violated, and by the rich and stable love they support. We often violate the Orders of Love when we follow our personal conscience. Tragedies in families and in intimate relationship are often associated w/ conflicts between the conscience guarding bonding, giving and taking, and social convention and the hidden conscience guarding the family system. Love flourishes when personal conscience and social convention submit to the orders and hidden symmetry of love.

### **Breaking the Magic Spell**

Whoever desires to solve the mystery of Loves' Hidden Symmetry enters a complex labyrinth and must carry many balls of twine to distinguish the paths

that lead to daylight from those that lead deeper into the abyss. We are forced to feel our way in darkness, confronting the deceptions and illusions that weave themselves around us, dulling our senses and paralyzing our understanding as we try to unravel the secrets of the good beyond guilt and innocence.

We are never “free,” but dependent on the air we breathe, on the farmer who grows our food, on our friends and family. We are all parts of a greater whole, and we depend on it as it depends on us. What freedom is that when we refuse to see what *is* and are condemned to live in the illusion that things are different than they are? Freedom comes by acknowledging reality as it is and consenting to it so as to pay in full measure what's owed and take in full measure what is given.

The intelligence of the systemic symmetry of love operating unseen in our relationships watches over love. It is easier to follow than to understand. We recognize it in the subtle movements of our inwardness and in the careful observation of our relationships. We recognize its laws only when we see the consequences of what we have done for ourselves and others—whether love increases or it is diminished.

We must recognize the limits of personal conscience, where they help us as well as where we must overcome them, and how we may know the intelligence of the Greater Soul that supports love are described in this book, the path of the knowledge of good and evil beyond feelings of guilt and innocence, that serves love.

When someone loses courage and doesn't want to go on, the problem is seldom lack of knowledge, but rather wanting safety when courage is called for, and seeking freedom where necessity leaves no choice. And so he goes in circles. A teacher resists appearance and illusion. He finds his center and waits for a helpful word, as a ship with sails raised waits to catch the win. When someone comes seeking help, the teacher is waiting where the visitor himself must go, and if an answer comes, it comes to both of them, for both are listeners. Waiting at the center is effortless.

### **Man and Woman, the Foundation of Family**

The foundation of family is the sexual attraction between a man and a woman. When a man desires a woman, he desires what he, as man, needs and does not have. When a woman desires a man, she, too, desires what she, as woman, is missing. Male and female form a complementary pair of partners who mutually define and complete one another. Each is what the other needs, and each needs what the other is. If love is to succeed, we must give what we are and take from our partner what we need. Giving ourselves, taking and having our partner, we become man or woman, and with him or her, we become a couple.

The expression of love in sexual intimacy, and sometimes the act of sexual

intercourse alone often bonds partners to each other whether they want it or not. It isn't intention or choice that establishes the bond, but the physical act itself. This dynamic can be observed in the sense of protectiveness that some rape and incest victims feel toward the perpetrators, and in those casual sexual encounters that leave lifelong traces.

Sexual consummation is the greatest possible human act. No other human action is more in harmony with the order and the richness of life, expresses more fully our participation in the wholeness of the world, or brings with it such profound pleasure and, in its consequences, such loving suffering. No other act brings such rewards or entails greater risks, demands more from us, and makes us so wise, knowing, and human as when we take each other, know each other, and belong to each other in love. In comparison, all other human actions seem merely a prelude, an encore, a solace or a consequence—an impoverished imitation.

The sexual expression of love is also our most humble action. Nowhere else do we expose ourselves so completely, uncovering our deepest vulnerability. We don't guard anything else with such deep shame as this inner place where partners show each other their most intimate selves and give those selves into each others's keeping. Through the sexual expression of love, both men and women leave their mothers and fathers and “cleave” to one another to become one flesh.

Whether we like it or not, the special and, in a very deep sense, indissoluble bond between partners arises out of, and is the result of, their sexual union. Only this act makes them a couple, and only this act can make them parents. For this reason, if their sexuality is limited in some way—for example, by inhibitions or by one partner's having been sterilized—this bond doesn't form completely, even if the couple desires it. Once partners have established a bond by sharing sexual intimacy, separation without hurt and guilt is no longer possible. This protects children from capricious or self-centered separations.

The crucial role that sexuality plays in a couple's bonding makes apparent the supremacy of the flesh over the spirit, as well as the wisdom of the flesh. Sex overpowers rationality and will.

### **Caring For Desire**

If the sexual desires of one of the partners aren't reciprocated, he or she is in a weak position because the other has the power to reject. For a relationship to succeed over time, the risk of rejection, as well as the joys and pleasures of giving, must be shared. Desire must be respected even when it is not fulfilled; it is a good thing and must be cherished/honored. We are especially vulnerable when we desire so a partner shouldn't have to risk a humiliating rejection when he or she feels and expresses desire. If couples honor this, they can risk desiring again, and their relationship can achieve depth and intimacy. Both must desire

and each must treat the other's desires with respect and love.

In order for a partnership between a man and woman to fulfill its promise, the man must be a man and the woman must be a woman. Instead of developing the feminine in himself he must allow his partner to offer it to him as a gift, and he must take from her the feminine she offers. A woman who desires to love a man must also accept the masculine from her partner. When a man and a woman both want and need what the other has, and have what the other needs and wants, then they are equal in their incompleteness—and in their ability to give. When both respect their limitations and preserve their need, their mutual needs complement and compete one another, and their giving and taking strengthen their bond.

This systemic view is exactly the opposite of the popular idea that men should develop the feminine in themselves and that woman should develop their masculine potential. Persons who do so don't need a partner to give them what they're missing, and they often prefer to live alone.

**Love Between Partners** requires the renunciation of our first and most intimate love, our love as a child for our parents Only when a boy's attachment—either loving or resentful—to his mother is resolved can he give himself fully to his partner and enter manhood. A girl's attachment to her father must also be resolved before she can give herself to her partner and be a woman. Successful togetherness demands the sacrifice and transformation of our earlier child bond to our parents—the boy to his mother and the girl to her father.

A boy lives his prenatal and early childhood years primarily within his mother's sphere of influence. If he remains there her influence floods his psyche, and he experiences the feminine as all important and all powerful. Under his mother's dominance, he may well become a skillful seducer and lover, but he does not develop into a man who appreciates women and who can maintain a long-term loving relationship. Nor does he become a strong and dedicated father to his own children. To become a man capable of joining fully in a partnership of equals, he must give up the first and most intimate love of his life—his mother—and move into his father's sphere of influence.

In earlier times, the process through which a boy left his mother was socially structured and supported by rites of initiation and passage leading a boy a firm place in his father's world. These rituals have disappeared and the process of moving out of the mother's sphere is often painfully difficult. A “daddy's girl” doesn't mature fully into her womanhood and has difficulty relating as an equal partner and becoming a generous, giving mother to her children.

A macho man and an effeminate man are the same—they've both remained in the mother's sphere of influence, ditto for a Don Juan that hopes by having many women to participate in womanhood forever. Needing to have a lot of partners is a quality of being stuck in mother's sphere: bragging, strutting macho

types are mothers' darlings.

A girl must leave her mother, go to her father, then return to her mother.

### **Renewing Maleness and Femaleness**

When partners enter a relationship, each brings his or her individuality to their togetherness, and in their togetherness, they lose it. A woman confirms her husband as man, but she challenges his maleness and takes it from him, and his maleness decreases in the course of their partnership. Likewise, a man confirms his wife's womanhood, but he also challenges her femaleness and takes it from her and she becomes less of a woman. If the partnership is to remain exciting for both, they must constantly renew their maleness and femaleness.

A man renews his maleness in the company of men and woman her femaleness in the company of women. They must leave their relationship from time to time in order to refresh their maleness and femaleness. The actual content of the exchanges among the men or women is unimportant. It might be at a coffee klatch, the corner bar, a club, a consciousness-raising group, or a sports team. What matters is being together with other men or with other women and doing things men and women do when they gather among themselves. If a couple does this, the relationship retains its creative tension, and can continue to develop and deepen. This element of relationship is overlooked in the romantic ideal of love, which envisions a loving couple giving each other everything each needs.

### **The Bond Between Partners**

The bond between a man and a woman requires that the man want the woman as woman and the man want the man as man. Their bond doesn't develop fully if they want each other for other reasons like recreation or adornment or as a provider or because one is rich or poor, Catholic or Jew or because one wants to conquer or protect or improve or save the other or because one wants the other to be father or mother of his or her children. Partners who come together for such reasons don't develop the strength of togetherness that enables them to weather serious crises.

If a man remains a son looking for a mother, or if a woman remains a daughter looking for a father, their relationships, although they may be intense and loving, aren't relationships of adult women and men. People entering into relationships with the hope—acknowledged or not—that they'll get something they didn't get in their relationships with their mothers or fathers, are looking for parents. The belonging that then develops is that of child and parent. It sometimes happens that a man looking for a mother finds someone looking for a son or that a woman seeking a father finds someone hoping for a daughter. Such couples may be very happy for a while, but should they have children, they and their children will experience difficulties as they adjust their partnership. Love is limited in exactly the same way when one partner acts toward the other

with the authority of a parent and attempts to teach, improve, or help the other. Every adult has already been brought up and taught how to behave, and all attempts to do that again are certain to damage love. It's no wonder that the partner who's being treated like a child reacts by pulling out of the relationship—the way a child pulls away from the family—and seeks relief outside the relationship. Most power conflicts in intimate partnerships occur when one partner tries to treat the other as a child, mother, or father.

### **Bonding in Second Relationships**

A second loving partnership is different from the first because second partners sense their partner's former bonds, experience their second partnership in the shadow of the first, even when the first partner is deceased. A second love succeeds only when the bond to the first is acknowledged and honored, when the new partners know that they follow the first and are indebted to them. Second togetherness doesn't have the same strength or quality as the first. The second partnership is often happier than the first and even more satisfying but always less dense. We can gauge the strength of the bond by the amount of guilt, pain, and loss that accompanies a separation. New partners take the place of earlier partners but their systemic obligation to the earlier partners and their feelings of guilt prevent them from taking their new partners as completely as they took their earlier partners. The situation improves if they admit to themselves that their gain is the first partner's loss, and that they couldn't have their new partners unless the earlier partners had given them up. Honoring all the others in the system is crucial to achieving systemic balance. A man and his second wife can then move closer together, but they still have an obligation to the first wife and their relationship will never be the same as a first relationship: it's crucial to recognize indebtedness to earlier partners and become aware of feelings of guilt and acknowledge the guilt and indebtedness that comes with their relationship. Their relationship then deepens, and they have fewer illusions.

### **Balancing Giving and Taking**

Although partners are equal, they are different, and their different strengths and weaknesses lead them to alternate giving and taking. One partner cannot habitually give or take more or what is given in love is not taken in love. For love to succeed, it is often necessary for partners to rise above the dictates of the conscience binding them to their reference groups (family, culture, religion, etc.) Thus, the price of love is often guilt. The only measure of equality in a partnership is the mutual feeling of balance and satisfaction. Partners must rise above the social beliefs they bring to the relationship and do whatever serves systemic balance.

Good intentions and wishful thinking are irrelevant. Whether or not the roles and functions of partners are in balance can be seen only in the degree of their



love and satisfaction and not in what the partners may claim or believe. You cannot arbitrarily set goals, duration, and structures of relationship and change them at will. Love only flourishes when the partners respect their bond and the constraints it imposes on them. The interdependence of love and systemic order is inescapable. Love alone is never enough, nor can it make up for what is missing. Love develops, flows, and blossoms only in an environment of systemic balance. Attempts to compensate a systemic imbalance by increasing love are bound to fail. Like a seed in fertile ground, love doesn't try to change the soil. Love develops between humans and is essential to us, but it can't influence the larger system that gave it birth; our love for one another plays only a minor role.

### **Hierarchy Between Parents**

The woman is slightly dominant, always, because of the immediacy of her body's involvement in pregnancy, birth, and nursing her children, her bond to them is naturally intimate and powerful. Through them, she also is bound to life and feels an importance her husband must work hard to achieve. A woman is the center around which her family is organized, and although she may be more restricted than her husband, she exudes a secure contentment and confident freedom that, paradoxically by her greater weight.

But children who remain centered around their mother too long find it difficult to achieve autonomy, and the mature, personal love of well-matched partners does not develop when one or the other dominates. We observe in constellations that all members of a family immediately feel better when the family's center of gravity can be shifted to the man's sphere—children feel the exuberant security necessary to explore the world, and the couple's love rekindles and comes to life. Love is well-served when a woman follows her husband into his language, his family, and his culture, and when she agrees that their children will follow him as well. Such following feels natural and good to women when their husbands lead with heartfelt concern for the family's well-being, and when they understand the mysterious systemic law that the masculine serves the feminine. Men and their families suffer grave consequences when this service is avoided, is distorted, or remains unfulfilled.

Division of function determines which partner leads. Families function better when the woman carries the primary responsibility for the family's internal well-being and the man its security in the world. But such traditional division of functions cannot and must not be maintained in some families. Sometimes men can't protect their families because of circumstances of war or loss of income, or because they fall ill or become disabled. Some men lack the strength to lead in a healthy way because they have not completed the movement of leaving their mothers' spheres of influence to connect to fathers/grandfathers, and the healthy world of men. Some women refuse to follow because they remain bound in their fathers' spheres of influence and have been unable to connect to their

mothers/grandmothers, and the primal force of womanhood. Others cannot follow because they continue to have an important function in their family of origin, perhaps because of exceptionally difficult or tragic happenstance. Then the woman must not follow her husband, but she still must agree that their children follow him as he guides them to the greater safety of his family's sphere of influence. At times the damage in the man's family is so great that the family can only find peace and good order when he and the children move into the woman's sphere, and he must follow her there. Such couples must then take extra care to ensure that their giving and taking remain balanced, and that the woman doesn't become a substitute for her husband's mother or father. Many women are surprised to discover the profound relief, the deep contentment, and the ease they spontaneously feel when a family system is brought into symmetry, and they find themselves naturally following a man who leads in the true service of his family. And men often experience a strange transformation when their service is acknowledged and appropriately valued.

### **Growing Toward Death**

Even when love thrives in a partnership, an incompleteness of the soul remains for each partner that the partnership cannot fill. Dealing w/ this profound and most human incompleteness leads us to the greater mysteries of life, to the spiritual and religious dimension. As illusions fade and die, couples whose love remains vital into old age confront both the limits of partnership and these greater mysteries. Sacrificing the hope that their partners will satisfy what no partner can, they begin to look more lovingly at each other, releasing each other from their earlier expectations and surrendering to a process whose outcome remains unseen.

Every intimate relationship is carried by the flow of time, moving towards its own end and making room for what comes next. Parents lose freedom when a child is born, but the joy of having a child and the sense of fulfillment in being parents replace what they surrender. The peak intensity in a relationship between a man and a woman usually occurs with the birth of their first child. After that, the relationship changes orientation, turning outward; other factors increasingly play a role; and gradually the intensity of the original togetherness decreases. These sacrifices of intimacy are appropriate, bringing us back to earth freed from naïve expectations of what a relationship could be.

Every crisis enables a couple to practice dying, requiring them to give up something they have cherished, but their love continues on a deeper, more enduring level. As the coverings of unrealistic hope are peeled away, partners are increasingly exposed and can be seen and loved as they are—and see and love their partners. Such a love is beyond illusion and abides in what is.

With each surrender and loss, the new that enters the relationship is more modest and more relaxed, nourishing the soul. As the couple's relationship

moves back down to earth and becomes more modest, they grow close to death and must befriend it. Thus, one can often see expressions of profound serenity on the faces of happily married older people because they no longer fear loss and death.

Miscarriages don't usually affect the system at all as long as the mother's health hasn't been jeopardized. Abortion doesn't usually affect the other children but it does affect the parents' relationship, deeply, in the soul, independent of whatever the parents may consciously believe about abortion.

The main problem with abortion occurs when people approach it as though it could undo something that has already happened. The burden of guilt and the consequences of abortion are worse than the burden of having the child.

Abortion may nonetheless be the least destructive of the available alternatives, but it carries a heavy price. There must be a shared sense of reverence for the unborn child as a person who needed and deserved to be seen. If the decision to abort can be made in the presence of the unborn child, with all of the pain and guilt that entails, and with a full awareness of what's being asked of this child, then the decision brings deep suffering that affects the partners for a long time but has the potential to draw them closer together and deepen their love.

Often the abortion ends the relationship, which then must begin anew for them; if they're not married, they often drift apart. Often sex becomes problematic. If the partners try to avoid the consequences of their actions and their feelings of guilt—say, by minimizing the gravity of what they've done, or by avoiding confronting their unborn child as a person—they pay the price for their neglect somewhere else.

Both parents have equal responsibility for an abortion, just as they have equal responsibility for the pregnancy, and one partner can't push it off onto the other without damaging their relationship or themselves. Abortion is something private, between the parents, that is no business of the other children. Abortion is an extreme case of giving and taking because the child gives all.

Some people condemn themselves to death following an abortion, contracting a serious illness or even committing suicide. Such decisions aren't made merely out of depression or superficial feelings of guilt, and they deserve to be understood in their depth and profundity. If an unborn child is asked to give up life, the parents have an obligation to see to it that it wasn't in vain. Rather than dying, they honor the child better by living fully.

Aborted children feel alone, rejected, abandoned, unseen, unacknowledged. The solution is for one or both of the parents in the constellation to make a connection with the child symbolically through touch and to take the child into their hearts. Then the child can accept his or her fate. Such a solution is only possible if the parents feel genuine grief and accept their pain. Their willingness to endure their grief and pain honors their child and reconnects them with the

child.

Young children have a basic willingness to die for their parents. They instinctively understand that death and life go together and can't be separated, so they don't feel the need to hold on to life any any price. When parents are able to recognize an aborted child as a person and to acknowledge that this child has sacrificed life for them, there's peace in the system but only after the child has been acknowledged as a real "other" and has been taken into the parents' hearts. In a constellation, a healing ritual can be performed by having the child's rep sit in front of the parents and lean against them. The parents can then lay their hands on the child's head, and feel the connection with love and grief. That often has a good effect on the whole constellation, and there's a profound change in the parents if they succeed in allowing the child to become a real person to them. When both parents allow themselves to feel the pain of their loss and of what they have asked from their child, there can be a deep atonement and reconciliation. Their pain honors their child so that the child feels included, finds his or her place, and is at peace. By accepting their pain and guilt, the parents become whole, and their wholeness gives them strength. Their partnership can grow again, but it will be on a new level. If only one of the partners experiences the pain, the partnership is broken, and they usually separate.

Another healing exercise after an abortion is for the parents to imagine themselves taking the child by the hand and showing him or her good things of the world. Perhaps for a year or two, the parents imagine showing the child the things they do and the places they visit just as they would show a living child. After that, the child can really be dead and find peace. Something good or special can also be done in remembrance of the child. It doesn't have to be anything big, but it should be something that wouldn't otherwise have been done.

Someone who lost many siblings through his/her mother's miscarriages, can say to them: "You didn't come into this world. I did. You're dead, I'm alive."

Then s/he'll have to deal w/ the guilt of being the survivor though he could do nothing about it. Then s/he can say, "You're dead. I will live a little while longer, and then I, too, will die." This formula reconnects the living and the dead, and the living no longer need to feel that they're somehow taking advantage of the dead.

To use semen from a man other than the husband is to end the relationship. They are playing with fate. If a couple can't have children, they must accept that fate. You can't change fate w/ technological interventions, it has unexpected and often dire consequences.

### **The Couple Comes Before the Children**

The fundamental relationship in a family is the relationship between the father and the mother. It's the foundation of parenthood. The strength necessary for good parenting flows out of the couple's relationship. As long as that

relationship is good and is the foundation of the family, the children feel secure. Children feel best when their father honors and respects himself and his wife in them, and when their mother also honors and respects herself and her husband in them. Then the parents' relationship with their children is a continuation and a fulfillment of their relationship with one another; the children are the crowning and the completion of their love for each other. Children feel free when their parents love one another. Crucial here are the direction and quality of the love. When a father's love for his daughter has a good effect, it flows to her through his wife; it takes a detour through her. The same is true of a mother's love for her sons, which flows to them via the husband. When parents love their children in that way, their love for the children brings them closer together and the children feel free and secure.

When a man and woman join together, they are a couple first, and only later do they become parents. The partner relationship comes before the parent relationship and takes precedence. Their togetherness becomes manifest in their children, and their children are an expression of their maleness and femaleness. A man and a woman are physically and visibly united in their children. Love as a couple came first and always comes first, as the roots of a tree support and nourish its branches.

When parents in a family allow their love for their children to become more important than their love for each other as a couple, then the order of love is disturbed and the family is in danger of becoming dysfunctional.

## **Singlehood**

Single men and women and couples w/o children obviously are not excluded from finding love and meaning in their lives, but they have some special issues to face and resolve. Facing loneliness and finding meaning in life can be especially painful for a single person who has no children. We share in suffering the consequences of what others in our family system did/do, just as what we do affects them. People who freely choose to be single also freely accept the consequences of their choice and they don't usually seek therapy. However, many people aren't single because they want to be, but because they're caught in a systemic entanglement, or are paying a debt they didn't incur. For example, a father abused his wife, and because she felt dependent on him, she endured the abuse w/o leaving. Their daughter developed a lifelong distrust of men and of intimacy and remained single. She has more freedom but pays a heavy price, unable to (paradoxically) know the freedom that comes from being bonded to a partner and from having to meet the demands placed on a mother.

There are still families in which a woman finds fulfillment and achieves her greatest psychological weight and dignity by having many children and large, loving family. You can still see such women in the rural villages of some countries. There's a look of profound serenity on their faces, and they radiate a

quality of being at peace and grounded in life. Theirs is a simple and completely natural greatness. This also applies to their husbands, although to a lesser degree. The demands on such parents are enormous; they had to learn to let go, and to be patient and take what life gives them.

The path to finding fulfillment by having a large family has been blocked in our culture for both women and men, but that doesn't mean that we're free to demean it. Because this profound and natural human fulfillment is no longer possible, women must seek other forms of fulfillment, primarily in a career. There's a culturally evolved illusion that helps them in this—that a career is more fulfilling for a woman than is being trapped at home with children. I can't imagine that sitting in an office, staring at a computer all day, is intrinsically more fulfilling than being at home with children. This illusion is necessary so that women can do what's demanded of them by the evolution of culture and still experience satisfaction in their lives.

Women often don't even notice this loss of possibility, or they deny that it's a loss and discount, as if it were unimportant. When they do that, they devalue what once was the greatest fulfillment of womanhood, and scorn what's no longer possible. Having children is devalued, homemaking is devalued, and men are devalued. The price is that they lose the connection to and respect for an important aspect of being a woman.

But, at least, if we honor and value what is *not* chosen, all those unrealized possibilities, what has been chosen is enriched. Women who are fully aware of the value of what they've given up and who make their choices consciously can rescue the feminine from this implicit devaluation and carry its fullness into their new lifestyle. And men can rescue the masculine in a similar way. If such a loss is acknowledged and a conscious decision is made to forego family or partnership without devaluing them, what isn't chosen adds something to what has been chosen, working in the soul.

### **Getting Needs Met Isn't Enough for Love**

Most partnerships start with looking for a partner to full needs and longings but that other person is looking for the same thing: falling in love reactivates the needs of our inner child, with the partner in the role of a mother. This must lead to disappointment.

A partnership is a difficult undertaking, and it's very different from an affair, even an extended one. If, in your heart, you allow a vision to grow that's worthy of your full dignity and the full power and depth of your womanhood, a man may come along who can offer you a worthy response. Falling in love is blind, but love is alert. Love truly accepts and wants the other just as he or she is. That touches something very deep and allows love to develop.

### **Homosexual Couples**

Everyone is an integral part of the relationship systems in which he or she lives and everyone has an equal value in the functioning of those systems—*everyone* in the family system is essential to the system.

Differences in a social system add to its durability and stability. The conscience that seeks to exclude individuals from the group because they are different operates on a different level than does the systemic conscience that seeks to balance the system as a whole by guarding the right of every member to belong to the system. It has very serious consequences for the younger members of a family system when someone is excluded from the system because he or she is different. I've seen many cases in which younger persons suffered terribly because they had to identify with an older relative who was excluded from the family because of his being homosexual. This fundamental commitment to the intrinsic dignity and value of all persons makes it possible to view differences openly.

Having said that, there's an inescapable fact that homosexual couples face: their love can't lead to their having children together. Procreation's insistence on heterosexuality has consequences that can't be ignored as if they didn't exist. In any partnership without children, the partners can separate with less guilt—they only hurt one another. But when parents separate, that has enormous consequences for their children, and they must be very careful or their children will be harmed by what they do. This added guilt makes it more difficult for parents to separate, but, paradoxically, it also supports their partnership. Couples without children—including homosexual couples—don't have the support of these consequences to hold them together during crises.

Homosexual couples, like other childless couples interested in long-term, loving partnerships, especially need to make clear and conscious decisions about the purpose and goals of their partnership. Some goals are more conducive to long-term stability in relationships than are others. Wanting to avoid loneliness or the feeling of emptiness isn't a goal that supports a long-term partnership of equals. Everyone has his or her own path in life—part of it we choose, but part of it just comes with life and isn't really chosen. That's the part that's hard to deal with. Homosexuals with whom I've worked—even those who maintain that they chose their sexual orientation freely—have been caught in systemic dynamics, experiencing in their lives the consequences of what others in their system did or suffered. They've been inducted into the service of the system, and as children, they couldn't defend themselves from the systemic pressures to which they were subjected: they're carrying something for the family.

When I work with homosexual persons, homosexuality isn't the primary issue. I merely try to bring to light any entanglements that might be limiting the fullness of life, but I have no intention of trying to change someone's sexual orientation—it's impossible and they never wish that, anyway.

I've observed 3 patterns of systemic entanglements in conjunction with

homosexuality but I don't know whether they're actually its cause:

--A child was pressured to represent a person of the opposite sex in the system, because a child of the same gender wasn't available. Or example, a boy had to represent one of his deceased older sisters, because none of the surviving children was female. Or another boy had to represent his father's first fiancée, who had been treated unjustly. This is the most painful and difficult of the 3 patterns I've seen.

--A child was pressured to represent someone who had been excluded from the family system—or who had been vilified by the system—even though that person was of the same gender. Homosexuals living in this pattern have the position of being “outsiders.” For example, a boy was systemically identified with his mother's first fiancée, who contracted syphilis and withdrew from the engagement. Although the fiancée had acted honorably, he was scorned and despised by the boy's mother. The boy's feelings of being scorned were very similar to what the man must have felt—as if they were his own feelings.

--A child remained caught in the sphere of influence of the gender-opposite parent, and was not able to complete the psychological movement of taking the same-gender parent.

Homosexuality demands a heavy price. Those who manage to affirm their sexual orientation and construct a happy, loving, meaningful life have a very different inner support than those who fight against their destiny or demean their loss—whether or not they consciously chose it, or would want to change it if they could.

## **Infidelity**

When a woman treats her husband like a child, trying to improve his behavior and acting as if she knows what's best for him, he often takes a lover. His lover is then his true partner. If he has a good relationship w/ his wife but still has a lover, then the lover most likely represents his mother. The same is probably true for a woman who takes a lover—either she's being treated by her husband as if she were a child, or she's seeking in her lover someone to represent her father or mother.

As a rule, a woman who is content to live in a three-way relationship is her father's daughter. If she were looking for a solution, she'd need to leave her father's sphere of influence and return to her mother's. A man who lives in a three-way relationship often is a mother's son, and the solution is for him to move into his father's sphere.

A relationship outside of marriage is often viewed as morally unacceptable. In such a situation, the so-called innocent partner sometimes behaves as if his or her claim on the other partner were exclusive and permanent. That's presumptuous. The conscience that watches over relationships isn't impressed by such claims. It respects only the real quality of bonding and the ecology of



give and take. Instead of winning the partner back with love, the injured partner often torments the other, as if such demands for exclusivity, without regard for the fulfillment of need and desire, would make him or her want to return.

I argue for something more realistic. I have a deep respect for fidelity, but not the kind of fidelity that demands, "I am the only person who's allowed to be meaningful for you and from whom you're allowed to take what you need." It often happens that you meet someone who becomes important to you, and that fact must be respected, just as the feelings of hurt and loss that arise must be respected. Such a meeting can have a very positive effect on a partnership. No matter how it turns out, a truly satisfactory resolution is only possible with love.

## **Jealousy**

Jealousy can bring couple closer, as when a woman's jealousy protects her children and her husband from a capricious affair or from another woman's interference in her family. But jealousy usually accomplishes the opposite of what it purports to desire, driving the partners farther apart. Often there's a secret systemic pressure pushing the jealous partner away from from her/his partner: the jealous person unconsciously wants the partner to leave.

There are many unconscious systemic dynamics that make us push our partners to go:

--To confirm an earlier belief that we're not worthy of love, or that we'll cause unhappiness. Some people fear they'll be abandoned and unconsciously push their partners out, thus creating what they fear, as if being abandoned were preferable to a chosen separation

--To be loyal to the beliefs and examples of the family, for example, to do as one's parents did when they didn't fully take one another when they separated, or when one of them died early in the relationship

--To fulfill an unconscious identification with another person who's owed something by the system, as when a woman didn't marry because she was staking care of her elderly parents. Her younger niece unconsciously identified with her and she also didn't marry;

--To compensate for some personal obligation, as when a man abandoned an earlier family in order to enter the present partnership. His second wife became very jealous of him and wanted to leave him. In the family constellation, it became clear to her that she felt a solidarity with and an obligation to his first family.

Often when one partner is jealous, the partnership is already over, but the participants haven't yet admitted it, or they don't want to see it. If both partners are willing, it's sometimes possible to bring a partnership back into order after jealousy has broken out, but this requires them to confront the systemic pressures that are pushing them apart. They usually have to face some painful

experience, perhaps guilt, loneliness, or a fear of loss or inadequacy. Partners can say to each other, "Sooner or later, I will lose you." That's a very painful sentence to say authentically, but it can restore order to the partnership.

It's often not possible for partners to bring a relationship back into order after jealousy has surfaced. They must then choose between two kinds of pain; the pain of separation and pain of staying in an unsatisfying relationship. If they choose to stay, it's better for them to consent to continuing their relationship the way it is and to give up their hopes and expectations that it will change. The worst choice they can make is to stay in an unsatisfying relationship and keep on hoping that things will be different. However, that's the choice most couples prefer.

Sometimes a second wife feels guilty about breaking up her husband's first marriage, and unconsciously identifies with the first wife; jealousy then becomes a way of paying off her debt to the first wife, by sabotaging the second marriage.

### **Love Sets Limits On Freedom**

Guilt begins as soon as you cross the boundary of your relationship system; you feel free and innocent within the boundaries, and there's no freedom or innocence without clear boundaries. This process is clear in schoolchildren for example, who often become distraught in their teacher hasn't set clear limits.

When the boundaries have been tested and are clearly defined, the area of freedom is also clearly recognizable.

Fulfillment and satisfaction are found within the boundaries of a partnership.

When we go beyond the boundaries, we damage the relationship, sometimes so much that we no longer can return to it. If the limits are too narrow, one partner may take a lover to stretch the boundaries and create new free space. If the boundaries become too loose and what the partners hold in common too unclear, the relationship is threatened. Then they must turn back and redefine their limits, or separate.

Their belonging to one another sets limits on their freedom, and such limits are an integral aspect of every relationship system. There's a point at which our freedom of choice is limited by the consequences that our choices have for our sense of belonging. We may choose to go beyond the set boundaries of a relationship, but not without paying a price of guilt, not without consequences for our own and our partner's happiness, and not without endangering our relationship. This reflects a natural law of systems—that there's a limit beyond which a system cannot change without evolving into a different system.

### **Separation**

People often allow themselves to suffer a long time before they feel free to leave a bad situation because they don't want to hurt their partner or because they're afraid of what others might think or say. Usually one person wants a new and

bigger space, and doesn't feel justified in taking steps to get it, because it will hurt someone. The person acts as if his or her own suffering could neutralize the partner's pain or justify the person's action in the eyes of others. That's one reason that divorce proceedings take so long.

When a separation is finally accomplished, both parties have the opportunities for and the risks of a new beginning. If one partner rejects the opportunity to make a new beginning and ignores the chance to create something good, and instead clings tightly to his or her pain, then it's difficult for the other partner to be free. On the other hand, if both accept the possibilities presented and make something out of them, then both partners are free and unburdened. Of all the possibilities for forgiveness in situations of divorce and separation, this is the best because it brings harmony even when a separation occurs.

When a separation doesn't go well, there's often a tendency to look for someone to blame. Those involved try to get out from under the weight of their fate by blaming someone else. As a rule, a marriage doesn't end because one partner is at fault and other is blameless, but because one or the other is entangled in the unresolved issues of his or her family of origin, or because they are being led in different directions. By blaming one partner, an illusion is created that something different could have been done, or that some new behavior could rescue the marriage. Then the gravity and the depth of the situation are ignored, and the partners begin blaming and accusing each other. The solution to overcoming this illusion and the destructive blaming is for both to surrender to the deep relief they experience because their partnership has come to an end. This grief doesn't last long, but it goes very deep, and it's extremely painful. Once they've allowed themselves to go through their grieving, they can talk about what needs to be talked about and arrange the things that need to be arranged with clarity, reason, and mutual respect. In a separation, anger and blame are usually substitutes for the pain of grieving.

When two people can't manage to separate cleanly, it's often because they haven't fully taken from one another whatever has been given. Then one must say to the other, "I take the good you've given me' It's a great deal and I treasure it. All that I've given to you, I have given gladly, and it's yours to keep. I take responsibility for my part in what's gone wrong between us, and I leave your part with you. I leave you now in peace." If they manage to say this to each other authentically, they can separate in peace.

Partners often behave as if their participation in the relationship were like a club membership that has been freely chosen and can be freely terminated. But the unconscious and relentless conscience guarding love teaches otherwise. If we were free to terminate our partnerships, separation would be less agonizing. In a serious partnership of equals, we are bound to our partners and can't separate without pain and guilt. The consequences are invariably destructive when partners separate irresponsibly. If one partner says, "I'm going to do

something for myself and my development, and whatever happens to you is your problem,” it's not infrequent that a child will die or commit suicide following the separation. Such a separation is experienced by the child as a crime that requires atonement. Bonding is both the reward and the price of love.

## **Suicide**

A child commits suicide out of love; the family needs someone to disappear but who was it that really needed to go? Usually this is a family pattern that continues over many generations. Such un-grieved, forgotten, and deceased live on and run the family system until they are honored and brought back into the family system. A child will commit suicide out of love for a parent who otherwise would have to commit suicide: “Better I go than you, dear Father, or dear Mother.” To stop the pattern after a child has committed suicide, the parent must give the deceased a place in his/her heart so that the child can live on in the parent, saying, “I know that you did it for me, and I carry you in my heart so that you live on in me. I'll do something good in memory of you,” and the parent can say to the other children, “He (the deceased child by suicide) has a place in my heart, and I'm asking you to give him a place in your hearts too.” This would be an Order of Love, a resolution through love.

When a constellation doesn't work, it's often because it was set up from a thought, from the head, not from the heart, as if set up by a secondary and not a primary feeling.

Together with the client, I survey the entire field of the consequences of his or her actions and fate. I don't limit it to what's easy and pleasant. I go with clients to the limits of their systems, to the boundaries where their systems stop. In effect, that means that we eventually meet death, and with them, I look at the possibility that they will die, or that something terrible will happen. I accompany them, I go with them to the outer limits, without fear, without hesitation. We look at everything that's there, up one side and down the other.

Once we've done that, we've seen the entire field of reality that's operating in their system. We've explored the whole field and we know where the limits are. Only by going to the outer limits can we know what's possible, the good as well as the bad. That gives clients strength, and with that strength, we can look for a resolution that's good for everyone.

Sometimes the resolution is that we must accept the inevitable, that we've reached the limit, and that nothing else is easier or possible. But usually there's another possible solution. When there is another possibility, it can be reached more easily after we've already been to the outer limits. The client can see the reality of the situation and can then choose the best and most appropriate path for himself or herself.

The facilitator's tranquillity and clarity of perception are made possible by consenting to the world as it is without any intention to change it. That's fundamentally a religious attitude, because it aligns me with a greater whole without separating me from it. I don't pretend to know better or hope to achieve something better than what the inner forces already at work in the system would do by themselves. When I see something terrible, that, too, is an aspect of the world, and I consent to it. When I see something beautiful, I consent to that also. I call this attitude "humility"--consenting to the world as it is. Only this consent makes perception possible. Without it, wishes, fears, judgments—my constructs—interfere with my perception.

The Orders of Love aren't rigid structures. They're always changing; they're different from moment to moment. There's something richly varied in them, a profound abundance that we can glimpse for only a brief moment. That's the reason why every family constellation is different, even when the issues in the families are similar. When I recognize that an order is a certain way, then I say what I see. Each of my statements, however dogmatic it may sound, is only a recognition of the truth that could be glimpsed in a certain moment. It applies only to that moment, and in that moment, it has its full truth.

## **Parents and Children**

The love between parents and children, like love in other relationships, is constrained by bonding, by giving and taking, and by dividing functions appropriately. Unlike other love, parent-child love succeeds when a disparity of giving and taking is maintained. The first systemic Order of Love between parents and children is that parents give and children take.

The most valuable thing that children receive from their parents—no matter who their parents are or what they may have done—is the opportunity to live. Receiving life from their parents, children take their parents, and those parents are the only possible ones for them. Children can't add to, omit from or reject anything in the life their parents give, and it's also impossible for parent to add or withhold anything when they give themselves as parents to their children. When children take life from their parents, they take what their parents previously have taken from their own parents. In a certain sense, children are their parents and grandparents. Love succeeds when children value the life they have been given—when they take their parents as parents as they are. Everything else that children need in order to thrive can be given by someone else, but only their parents can give them life.

Parents know deep satisfaction when they are taken by their children, when they see the quick flash in a child's eye, or hear the joyful laughter that says; "I'm glad

you had me.” Children now peace when they take their parents as they are. In addition to giving them life, parents also care for them, and provide them with advantages, disadvantages, and opportunities for good or ill. Children are unable to balance out the great disparity of giving and taking in their relationship with their parents, even when they want to. And so an irreconcilable disparity of giving and taking is the second Order of Love with which children must contend.

The bonding love that young children feel for their natural parents is blind to the details of what the parents do or fail to do. Children act as if love could tolerate no difference—as if only being similar would bond them together and that being different must lead to separation and loss. Their actions bear witness to the magical thinking of the child's soul: “Like bonds to like.”

This unconscious assumption about love gives rise to a child's instinctive urge to bond to the parents by being like them. Children must imitate their parents but this aspect of children's love continues to operate in family relationships. Acting out of love, children follow their parents even in suffering, and although it's usually unconscious, they perpetuate their parents' misfortunes by copying them.

Children unconsciously aspire to equal their parents in suffering. Their bonding love is so deep that it blinds them and they can't resist the temptation to try to care for their parents by taking on their parents' suffering. Although acting out of love and believing that they are doing good, they begin to function as their parents' parents, and they live out their parents' greatest fears by damaging themselves. Their blind love protects their bonding to their parents, but by functioning as parents and trying to give to their parents rather than take from them, they reverse the flow of giving and taking and they inadvertently perpetuate suffering. Love between parents and children obeys a hierarchy within the family that demands that they remain unequal partners, that parents give and children take. Thus, the third Order of Love is that love succeeds best when children are children and parents are parents—that is, when the hierarchy within the family according to time and function is respected.

### **Giving and Taking Between Parents and Children**

Both parents and children are tempted to give and take what damages love. Misunderstandings about what love allows are common, and the consequences are often painful. Three common injurious patterns of giving and taking between parents and children are:

- 1. Children refuse to take their parents as they are, but judge them,** saying in effect, “I don't like this about you, so you're not my father,” or, “You didn't give me what I needed, so you can't be my mother.” This is an absurd distortion of reality. Children are powerless to change anything about this primal connection.

Children experience inner solidity and a clear sense of identity when they find resolution with their parents, when they take both parents and acknowledge them as they are. They feel incomplete and empty when they exclude one or both of their parents from their hearts. The consequence of demeaning or excluding a parent is always the same—children become passive and feel empty, often depressed. Children, even when hurt by their parents, can still say, “Yes, you are my parents. Everything that was in you is in me too. I acknowledge that you are my parents, and I accept the consequences that has for me. I take the good from what you gave, and I trust you to deal with your fate as you see fit.” Then they are free to set about the often difficult work of making the best out of what may be a very bad situation. Children contribute to their parents' feelings of guilt when they refuse to take them as they are. If children remain unhappy, caught in a cycle of failure and suffering because their parents' care-taking was deficient, then the parents are guilty of causing hurt to the children to whom they gave life. If children are able to overcome whatever they may have suffered in childhood and learn to live happy, satisfying lives, then their parents feel relieved. Because they have good lives, these children don't cling to their resentments against their parents but take the life they've been given and live as fully as they can. But many people refer to remain unhappy rather than take life fully and aid their parents in putting old feelings of guilt to rest.

Becoming a father or mother has nothing to do with being a good mother or father, which is a process beyond good and evil. Conceiving a child fundamentally serves life, not morality. A child can acknowledge his or her father as a father without assuming responsibility for the father's actions. This doesn't minimize or excuse their father's actions but allows them to say, “What you did is your responsibility. Still, you are my father. Whatever you have done, we/re related. 'm glad that you gave me life. Even when what you did was horrible, I'm your son, not your judge.”

**2. Giving or taking what's harmful, say: debts, illnesses, obligations, burdens of circumstance, injustices suffered or committed, and any privileges gained by personal achievement, all of which remain the parents' responsibilities.** It's the parents' job to protect their children from the negative effect of such things and children must trust their parents to deal with whatever fate has meted out in whatever way the parents choose. When parents give what is harmful, or when children take it, love is injured. Likewise, when a younger person feels entitled to the rewards and privileges of an older person without having earned them. Children must differentiate themselves from their parents and recognize the limits of their rights and responsibilities, thus showing respect and love for their parents. Love is injured when children feel entitled and demand to take what their parents have acquire through personal efforts or suffering.

Bitter quarrels that split families and destroy love may result when children

expect or demand an inheritance. An inheritance is a gift from parents to their children and like any gift may be given however the giver wishes. Even if one child gets everything and the others nothing, resentment has no good effect. An inheritance is always unearned, and complaining about getting less than someone else is inappropriate and creates unnecessary turbulence in the family. Sometimes children take something harmful from their parents and sometimes parents try to give to their children an obligation, resentment, or debt, as if that were a good inheritance. Fate brings advantage and misfortune in different measures. Individuals may be able to turn misfortune aside or escape its consequences, but sometimes they cannot and so must suffer the consequences of fortune's whimsy. Such unavoidable blows of fate, however also give strength and wisdom to those who understand and surrender to them. The good qualities earned in this way may then be passed on to others without the price that's already been paid. Passing on wisdom earned through suffering is possible only if the other members of the system have the courage, respect, and wisdom not to interfere. Grandparents who have accept with grace whatever unavoidable suffering and loss fate has given, give freely to their grandchildren and are loved by them. But whenever younger persons—even if motivated by love—take on burdens or obligations from older persons, they intrude into the most personal sphere of those older persons and rob them and their suffering of the power for good.

The order of giving and taking in a family is turned upside down when parents haven't taken enough from their own parents, or when they haven't taken and given enough to each other in their partnership. They then want their emotional needs to be met by their children, and their children may feel responsible for meeting them. Parents then take like children, and children give as if they were parents. Instead of flowing from older to younger, the giving and taking run against the flow of gravity and time. Such giving can't reach its proper goal any more than a mountain stream can flow from the valley up to the peaks.

When parents have unmet emotional needs, it's appropriate for them to turn to each other or to their own parents. When they turn to their children with demands to be comforted or reassured, the roles and functions in the family are reversed. That's *parentification*—children assuming the position of a parent toward their own parents. Children can't protect themselves against this process. Everyone suffers when families are caught in the pattern of children feeling responsible for their parents and parents expecting their children to behave as adult partners. The children take on an exaggerated and inappropriate importance in the family, *and* they're doomed to fail, for no child can satisfy his or her parents' emotional needs and emptiness. And the parents can't protect themselves from doing to their children what they don't wish to do. Moral arguments and logical justifications don't count at all, only the actual experience of love. The flow of love can be felt, but not legislated; Children know whether or



not they are open with their parents.

Healthy taking from the parents separates. It's not something done against the parents, but something that completes and rounds out the relationship with them. Taking your parents means, "I take whatever you've given me. It's a lot and it's enough. Whatever else I need, I'll take care of myself or get from someone else, and now I'll leave you in peace. I take what I've been given, and although I may then leave my parents, I have my parents and my parents have me."

Parents have the right to butt into children s' life whenever they want to just as the child has the right to go ahead and do whatever they think is right for themselves anyway.

Children who don't take their parents compensate in sublimated searches such as that of self-realization, enlightenment, or even for God. Many a mid-life crisis has been resolved by taken on a previously rejected parent.

Anyone can take a parent, anytime, anywhere; it's an inner process.

Taking one's parents doesn't demand denying what was negative, but it permits children to touch the depths of all parents' hearts where they suffer bitterly when they see their children caught in the same pattern in which they were caught. When people succeed in seeing their parents in that depth, they're changed—and so are their parents. We then see our parents in the context of their own fate. We see their failures, we see their suffering and disappointments, we trust them to deal with their fate as best they can, and we remember our own position as children in the family hierarchy and to the larger mystery of life that flows to us through them.

### **Hierarchy between Parents and Children**

Healthy, happy children and loving parents can be found in all cultures, religions, and social classes. This means that there are many successful ways to rear children, and that they differ from, and may even contradict, one another. Nevertheless, love demands bonding, a balance of giving and taking, and appropriate social orders in all cultures, but it leaves us great latitude in how we achieve them.

Love flows smoothly when all members of a family system follow the hierarchy of time, weight, and function. As for time, the family hierarchy flows down from above and from earlier to later. Children always come after their parents and the younger always follow the older. The relationship between father and mother exists before they become parents; there are adults without children, but no children without biological parents. Love succeeds when parents care well for their young children, but not the other way around. The relationship between

husband and wife takes priority in a family. This applies also to siblings; those closest to the beginning of life take from those who have lived longer. The older give to the younger, and the younger take from the older. For this reason, the eldest has compensating privileges and the youngest takes more responsibility for caring for their parents in their old age.

New relationship systems also have a systemic priority over older systems. This is the opposite of the dynamic of precedence within a system where the older members have precedence over those who come later. The couple's relationship takes priority over the relationship with the family of origin in the same way that a second marriage has precedence over the first. Relationships suffer when this principle isn't honored—when parents remain more important than partners and children, and first partners more important than new ones.

With respect to weight, the most important relationship in the family is that between the father and the mother; then come the parent-child relationships, the relationships with the extended family, and finally, those with other, freely chosen groups. Certain individuals who carry an unusually heavy fate may have enough systemic weight so that the normal sequence according to time must be adjusted.

Whatever happens between our parents is none of our business; forget anything one parent might have told you about the other. Let go of such entanglement. Likewise, telling a new partner about intimacies from a previous relationship is a violation of trust. What was private between you and a former partner should be protected and kept as a secret. If you expose the intimate details of your earlier relationship, your new partner will have difficulty trusting you. Parents' affairs are also none of their children's business, unless there are offspring.

### **Systemic Entanglements**

Whenever parents outwardly act against the best interests of their children, one may assume that they're caught in some earlier systemic violation of the Orders of Love. Parents naturally desire that their children be spared whatever they themselves have suffered, and they suffer when their children suffer; they know discouragement and defeat when their children know them. When parents' suffering is balanced out blindly by their children's suffering, it passes from person to person, from generation to generation, and knows no end. The work with family constellations frequently reveals repeating patterns of harm and suffering crossing generations within families.

Children are boundless in love but limited in life experience, so it's a great temptation for them to unite with their parents in suffering. If a mother is depressed, her children feel tempted to be depressed as well. If a father drinks too much, his children come under pressure to find some way to emulate his suffering, perhaps by failing to be successful in life. But maturing love demands that children gradually give up the blind love of childhood and learn to love as

adults. Instead of repeating what is harmful, mature love demands that they free themselves from the family entanglements. Then they fulfill their parents' deeper expectations and hopes for their children. The better the children are, the better are the parents.

Children disentangle themselves from the negative effects of the blind love by recognizing and obeying their parents' true wishes—that the children be happy and fulfilled. It takes great courage for children to see their parents suffer and yet still obey the greater love, to see to it that they themselves succeed in life and fulfill the desires of their parents' hearts.

Even though children want to be like their parents, they also fear their fate. For this reason, children may outwardly reject their parents and strive to be different from them even while they secretly emulate them. Such children, although they make a great show of being different from their parents, still unconsciously do as their parents have done, and attract—or react to—life situations in which they experience approximately what their parents have experienced. When children say to their parents, “Under no circumstances will I ever be like you, “ they still love their parents blindly and are bound tightly to them. In spite of themselves, they commit themselves to following their parents' example, and they become exactly like them. When children fear becoming like their parents, they constantly watch their parents, because whatever they don't wish to be like they must continually observe. It's no wonder then that they become exactly like their parents.

A man brings the values and traditions of his family into a partnership, and a woman does the same. Yet their values and traditions are often quite different. Children outwardly follow the more dominant parent, but inwardly they follow the other parent. It's more common for the mother's values to dominate and to be outwardly followed by the children, with the result that, although they outwardly reject their father, they secretly emulate him—usually without noticing what they're doing. In deviating from one parent's values, a child is generally following the value system of the other parent. For this reason, disobedience to one parent is often a kind of loyalty and obedience to the other. If children get the direct or indirect message from one parent, “Don't become like your father/mother,” then their loyalty demands of them that they become like the forbidden parent. One parent can never really triumph over the other: children secretly emulate the parent who comes out worse in a divorce, sometimes with destructive consequences.

In adoptions that don't turn out well, and when stepparents have difficulties with their stepchildren, it's frequently the case that the adoptive parents or stepparents wish to replace the natural parents rather than complement them. Then the loyalty to the natural parent puts the child under pressure to undermine the new family.

## **Child Custody**

Children should go to the parent who most values the other parent in them (the children). Whoever abandons the relationship shouldn't be rewarded with custody of the children. Usually the father values the mother more in their children than the other way around. If the woman doesn't value the qualities of her former husband in the children, she harms the children by wanting and valuing only half of them. Parents, not therapist, must decide who gets custody of the children. Even if the children are living with only one parent, they will always remain the children of both parents. However the parents proceed, it must remain clear to the children that both parents remain their parents, even though they're no longer a couple.

## **Adoption**

When children can't be raised by their own parents, then the best alternative is probably the grandparents, they who have the deepest connection to the children. The next best choice is an aunt or an uncle. Adoption is a last resort and should be considered only if no one in the family is available. The crucial factor is the adoptive parents' intentions. If they're truly acting in the best interests of the child, then the adoption has a good chance of turning out well. Their motivation cannot be to rebel against their childless fate, for then they're implicitly asking the child to protect them from their disappointment. When that's the case, then the fundamental flow of giving and taking and the order of the relationships are disturbed before they start, and the parents can expect to suffer the consequences of their actions, or that the child will suffer. When partners adopt a child out of their own needs and not out of concern for the well-being of the child, they effectively take a child from his or her natural parents in order to meet their personal needs, the systemic equivalent of the theft of a child with serious negative consequences within a family system. It doesn't really matter what motivated the natural parents to put the baby up for adoption; the adoptive parents very often pay with something of equal value. For example, it frequently happens that couples divorce after adopting a child for the wrong reasons. Sacrificing a partner is the compensation for robbing the natural parents of their child though I've also seen illness, abortion, and death as a result of adoption for the wrong reasons. In its most destructive form, this dynamic has expressed itself in the illness or suicide of one of the couple's natural children. It's also not uncommon for adopted children to resent their adoptive parents and not to appreciate what's been given to them. In such families, it's often the case that the adoptive parents secretly consider themselves superior to the biological parents, and the child, perhaps unconsciously, demonstrates a solidarity with his or her natural parents. When the biological parents have given their child up for adoption when it wasn't absolutely necessary, then the child feels legitimate resentment toward

the parents but targets the adoptive parents instead. If the adoptive parents are clear that they're only acting *in loco parentis* for the natural parents then the negative feelings remain targeted on the natural parents and the adoptive parents get the appreciation they deserve.

Adoptive parents must realize that they have an important function, but as adoptive parents only, coming after the biological parents no matter who they are and what they have done. If this order is respected, then the child can accept and respect adoptive parents.

When children are adopted, it's helpful to make clear distinctions between the names of the parents, as: "Father and Mother" vs. "Dad and Mom." Adoptive parents shouldn't identify an adopted child as "my son" or "my daughter." Rather they might say, "This is the child we've been given to care for as representatives of the natural parents."

Adoptive parents must retain a deep respect for the natural parents and make this respect clear to the children. Thus, it's better for the adopted child to keep his or her original name so that it remains clear that this is an adoption even if the child wishes to take the stepparents' name.

Likewise, if the mother respects and honors the natural father, there will be no problem for the child with her second husband acting as a stepfather. The same is true for a stepmother.

It's better for a stepparent *not* to adopt the child of a second marriage because it forces the child to deny his or her own father or mother.

## **Raising Children**

When parents are having trouble raising their children, it's often the case that they don't have a harmonized system of values, goals, and priorities, a more inclusive one than either of them brought into the marriage. This is difficult, creating a sense of guilt toward their respective families of origin. Once parents are united in one value system, they have a sense of solidarity with each other when they face their children, and the children feel secure in their common value system and follow it willingly. When parents aren't united, their children must live in two different belief systems or value systems at the same time and in the same house. That's confusing.

A father and a mother have different ideas about what's good for their children according to whatever they experienced as important or missing in their own families.

A child accepts as right and follows whatever *both* parents believe is either important or missing.

When one parent overrules the values of the other in raising the children, the children automatically ally themselves with the one who was overruled.

Children need to be told, sincerely, that each parent loves to see the other parent in that child.

## **Illegitimacy**

Quite often, something good comes out of our sins that is beyond the grasp of the moralists. You can't talk about deep issues in the presence of someone who judges you and looks to see if what you do is right or wrong.

A common motivation for the search for God is that the searcher doesn't have a father and is looking for him. If the father is found, the search for God isn't so important anymore—or it's different. The whole thing started with Jesus. As far as we know, he, too, grew up without a father.

## **Caring for Elderly Parents**

Children have a responsibility to care for their elderly parents but not necessarily in the way that the parents wish. Children must say, “We will do what's right by you.” Children can't see their parents as they are. Regardless of their actual age, as soon as they meet their parents, children have a strong tendency to feel and act like five- or six-year-olds. And parents see their children as five- or six-year-olds, regardless of their children's actual ages, and treat them accordingly. These elderly parents have priority over all else but the nature of the caring depends entirely on the situation, i.e., the children needn't necessarily sacrifice their lives to care for their parents: solutions can be found once the willingness is there.

## **Incest**

Incest is often an attempt to love that's gone wrong. The victim-perpetrator model of looking at incest does not help the child. We always look at the children and listen to them in the context of the whole family relationship system. We ask: What's going on in this family, and what's best for the child? What does she or he need to find peace? The solution for each child is different; it's always better to sacrifice a preconceived belief than a child.

If you look at the family as a whole, you usually see that the parents have a problem, and the child was recruited to help them solve it. Incest, more often than not, is a family problem, and is possible only when the parents collaborate. Both parents participate—the man in the foreground and the mother in the background—and they share the responsibility. When incest is a family problem, resolution becomes possible only when the complexity of the family situation as a whole is clearly seen. In those situations, children need to have the courage to hold both parents responsible.

Often, incest is an attempt to compensate an imbalance of giving and taking in the family—usually, but not always, between the parents. When that's the case, the perpetrator has been denied something; for example, what the person does for the family isn't sufficiently appreciated. In this form, the incest is an attempt to correct the imbalance of giving and taking in the family. One common pattern

is that a mother with a daughter marries a man who has no children. Although her new husband provides for her and her daughter and concerns himself with their welfare, his efforts and needs are discounted, unappreciated, ignored, and sometimes even belittled or ridiculed. An imbalance of giving and taking develops between the partners in which the man gives more and the woman takes more. A woman in that situation might still be able to balance the giving and taking if she were to communicate genuine gratitude to her new husband, "Yes, it's true that you give and I take, and I deeply appreciate what you o." Then correcting the imbalance might not have to descend to such a destructive level. However, when there's an additional deficit in the exchange between the partners—for example, in their sexuality or their emotional needs—an imbalance develops in the whole system. The woman attempts to balance the sexual deficit in those situations by offering her daughter to the man or by abandoning her daughter to him in such a way that he is actually drawn into a compensatory relationship with her. The child in effect offers him/herself up to redress an imbalance in the family.

Blame helps no one. To find a solution, look at the family dynamics, dispassionately. I seek a solution for the person who's come to me. I resist the temptation to go beyond that. The solutions are different for every member of the family. Everyone in the family knows, at least unconsciously, that the family has a problem, so we need to look for a solution that allows everyone in the system to accept his or her share of the responsibility and to maintain dignity. For a child who has been induced to help with an imbalance of giving and taking, and some other forms of incest as well, the solution is to get to the place where she honestly can say, "Mama, I consent to do this for you," and to her father, "Daddy, I did it for Mama." Sometimes, when the man is actually present, I've had the child say, "I'm doing it for Mama, and I agree to do it for her." These sentences name the dynamic *already operating* in the family, *and they bring the child's love to light*. A child who authentically speaks these sentences gives voice to the archaic beauty and power of her innocent love for her parents. She reveals the depth of the soul where children willingly, although often unconsciously, make the most painful and destructive sacrifices for their parents. Systematically viewed, the child is sacrificed to redress an imbalance in the family and at least unconsciously agrees out of love. The solution for her is to speak the truth, to name the system dynamic and to declare her love openly. By openly naming the mother's part in the incest dynamic, the child extracts herself from her unconscious agreement to help solve her parents' problem. The sentence names her mother's complicity in what happened but doesn't release her father from his guilt.

The sentences remind children that they were trying to do something good, even if it went wrong. When they consciously feel their love and we confirm it, they *know* that they're good. That's a great relief. When victims manage to say the

words authentically, they're released from their entanglement in their parents' problem. They don't have to wait for their parents to change before they can do this. They're free to go on their way regardless of what their parents do, whether or not they admit responsibility and feel remorse.

A victim by definition is a person who couldn't prevent what happened. If victims want to change anything, they've got to get in touch with their authentic power. Children's power is their love. That's what the sentences do: They reveal the child's love, making clear to everyone in the system what the child has one to try to solve the family's problem.

When you offer sentences like these, you must listen very sensitively to hear the the sentences the child's soul is *already speaking*. When you've found them, you cautiously offer her a gift, words that express what's she secretly been feeling but couldn't articulate. If you listen deeply enough and find the words that are just right, her soul understands the message: "You acted out of love. You did the best you could, but now it's okay to give the problem back to the adults. It's their problem, and they can handle it." It requires courage, but many girls have found release by saying aloud what they've secretly been feeling all along.

The proof as to whether or not you've found the right sentences is their effectiveness. If you've found the right formulation, a girl, or an adult woman, experiments with the sentences, and all at once she feels a change in her body and knows herself to be good. She feels relieved because he sentences demonstrate her love and her dependence, and therefore her innocence. It's of absolute importance that the child be helped to find a way back to self-worth and dignity and that her love be acknowledged and affirmed.

The father or perpetrator must accept fully the consequences of his actions. If he was charged and convicted, he must feel agreement with the verdict and the penalty. Then he has to face his daughter and really see her, see the consequences for her of what he has done. He must genuinely tell her that he carries the full responsibility and bears the full consequences for his actions, and that he'll withdraw from her and leave her in peace.

Since there's no way to undo what's been done, he must see to it that something good comes out of it. Guilt gradually fades away when it accomplishes its purpose—change for the better.

Punishing the perpetrator isn't enough to bring resolution fro the child. A system is disrupted when one of its members is rejected or excluded from the system. Resolution requires that the wholeness of the system be respected, that the excluded person be taken back into the system, and that everyone accept his or her appropriate share of the responsibility.

When you work systemically, even though you're working to find a resolution for the client, you must serve and protect the wholeness of the system. Therefore, you have to connect yourself to those who are excluded. Unless you are able to give the perpetrators a place in your heart, you can't work with the whole



system. You gradually come to view what happens in the context of larger systemic dynamics, and that larger perspective opens more options for healing. That's why I regularly ally myself with the excluded and the hated.

It's inappropriate and impossible for a child to forgive her parents for incest. She can say, "What you did was bad for me and I'm leaving *you* with the consequences. I'll make something out of my life in spite of what happened." Or she can say, "You've done me great wrong and I must not forgive it. I have no right to do that." She can confront both of her parents at the same time and tell them, "*You're* at fault, not I. And *you* must take the consequences, not I." In doing this, she shifts the guilt back to her parents where it belongs and distances herself from their responsibility. It isn't necessary for the child to make massive accusations against her parents. It's enough if there's a clarity between them that sets her free.

A father can't ask his daughter for forgiveness after he's committed incest with her. If he does, he asks her for something that goes beyond her right and duty to give. By asking *her* to limit the consequences of *his* actions, he effectively misuses her again. He can say something like, "I regret what I did" or "I acknowledge that I've wronged you." But he still must keep the full responsibility for his actions, and suffer the full consequences.

Never talk disparagingly about the parents in front of the child, although you must help the child to see the parents' responsibility and to feel innocent of any wrong doing. Children's suffering increases when they must testify against their parents.

### **A Guilty Victim**

A woman in a workshop had been abused by her father and her uncle. She'd been seriously disturbed for many years, was filled with self-hatred, and had made multiple suicide attempts. She had the delusion that when she was in a group, everyone could see that she was evil, and that they wanted to kill her. I asked her to explore the feeling of being evil, which she did. She sat in the group, looking down, feeling evil. She suddenly remembered her uncle, and imagined him lying at her feet. She remembered that he had committed suicide. As she continued to look at him in her imagination, her face became hard and old. I took on an expression that wasn't her own, so I asked her, "Who looks down at him so hatefully and triumphant?" She answered that it was her mother. As the work continued, she gradually pieced together her memories, and it emerged that her mother had become pregnant during an affair with her husband's brother. So the man she had thought was her uncle was in fact her father, and the man she had thought was her father was her uncle. Her mother had felt relieved when the child's biological father committed suicide, but the child felt responsible for his death, as if he had killed himself because of her, as if she were his murderer. Her self-hatred and suicide attempts

were expressions of her feelings of guilt.

Because of such guilty feelings many sexually abused girls subsequently take up a victim profession. Many prostitutes were abused as children, continuing as adults what they experienced as children. I've met nuns who were victims of incest and abuse, apparently entering the cloisters as an attempt to atone for the wrong they felt they had done. Other victims become mentally ill, paying for what they already suffered with more symptoms and suffering. Some commit suicide. Some defend the perpetrators to the end, continuing to allow themselves to be abused in various ways, as if to say, "You don't need to have a guilty conscience for what happened, because I really am a worthless person." Some become perpetrators themselves.

The first sexual experience, even an incestuous one, normally establishes an especially intensive bonding. Children who have bonded to someone through an early sexual encounter have difficulty in later sexual relationships unless they become aware of the bonding and deal with it by acknowledging the love involved.

Some children have found their incest experiences pleasurable, even beautiful. Children in such situations must be allowed to admit that they also experience pleasure. People often tell them that something bad happened, and they need assurance that they're innocent—especially if the experience was pleasurable. In such cases, children must be allowed to acknowledge their experience—that sexuality can be fascinating—in spite of what others may think.

It's completely appropriate for a child to be curious about sex and to want to experience something she finds fascinating. If the child's curiosity isn't recognized as being normal and healthy, her sexuality is put in a terrible light. Sexuality isn't dirty or evil—even when it's incest. When a child can hear that, she feels relieved.

It's perfectly normal for a child to be seductive at times. That mustn't be a criticism of her. Why shouldn't she be allowed to be seductive? If she's being seductive with her father, it doesn't mean that she wants sex like an adult; she's just practicing and learning about being a woman. It's his responsibility to understand that difference and to keep the boundaries clear. It's his job to provide her with protection. It's not hers to meet his needs.

Violence dramatically increases the consequences for both the child and the perpetrator. But the power of the soul to affirm life after tragedy is miraculous, so even in cases of great damage, there's still hope.

Whenever love flows, the destructive power of guilt is dissolved.

### **The Conscience of the Family Group**

In addition to being children, partners, and perhaps parents, we also share a

common destiny with our more distant relations. Whatever is done by or happens to a member of our family group, whether for good or for ill, touches us, and also all the others. Together with our family, we form a fellowship sharing a common fate. Members of the family are also linked to other members long deceased or far away. The systemic orders that allow love to thrive in families are difficult to define precisely. They have far greater flexibility than social or moral laws invented by societies or individuals and that must be obeyed to the letter. They are also different from the rules of a game that can be modified to suit the circumstances or according to whim. The orders are simply there. Love requires what it requires, and it's immune to individuals' wishing that its requirements were different. You can't break the order as you break a law, but the Orders of Love can, and do, break individuals who insist on ignoring them. If you don't act as love requires, it simply withers and dies, but it often demands restitution for such neglect. It is an act of humility to submit to the Orders of Love in a relationship. Contrary to being a limitation, this submission supports freedom and life. It's like swimming in a river that carries you along: if you swim with the current, you're free to maneuver from side to side.

Belonging to a family system, whether alive or deceased, are the children, parents and their siblings, the grandparents and sometimes great-grandparents, any others who have moved aside to make a place for someone in the system; for example, a former partner or lover of a parent or grandparent—even if separated, divorced, or deceased—or someone from whom a family member gained some advantage by loss, misfortune, departure, or death.

### **The Organization of Family Groups**

Love succeeds in our relationships when belonging, a balance of giving and taking, and a good order can be maintained. This is also true for the extended family. Five additional dynamics constrain the success of love in family systems: 1) honoring the right to membership 2) maintaining the completeness of the system 3) protecting the hierarchy according to time 4) following the order of precedence between systems and 5) accepting the limitations of time.

### **Honoring the Right to Membership**

Individuals may continue to affect the other members even when they are shunned by their family, excluded from participation, and perhaps even forgotten. As long as they have an influence on any other member of the group, even unconsciously, they are members of the family system, and anyone who has no visible or hidden effect on any member is no longer a member of the system. Membership doesn't depend on the family's decisions or beliefs, only on effect. Everyone in the system has an equal right to belong, and no member can deny another his or her place. A family system is disrupted when one member communicates to another, "I have a right to belong, but you don't." This

happens, for example, when members shut out of memory someone who suffered, or was sacrificed, or did some wrong—perhaps a sister who died in childhood or an uncle who became insane. Members of a family are naturally tempted to exclude those who have committed a crime, brought shame on the family, or violated the family values, but the exclusion of any member is destructive for those who come later in the system, no matter what the original justification was.

The family constellations of people w/ serious psychological and physical illnesses often reveal such acts of exclusion. Although those suffering such illnesses are unaware of the connections, they reenact in their own lives the fate of the excluded or forgotten person. Members may forget those who have been excluded, but the system “re-members” its own. Exclusion of persons who have a right to membership is the most common dynamic disrupting a family system.

### **Maintaining Completeness**

Members of an extended family experience themselves as a whole and complete when everyone belonging to the family circle has an honored and respected place in their hearts. Persons who are only concerned only with themselves and with their personal happiness don't feel whole. Whenever a member of the family succeeds in “re-remembering” an excluded member in his or her heart, the difference is immediately felt. The internal images of family and self become more complete, and he or she actually *feels* more whole. Our sense-of-self changes when excluded members of the system are brought back into awareness, members such as former spouses or even boy/girlfriends.

### **Protecting the Hierarchy Within a System**

Whoever enters the system first has a certain precedence over those who came later. Parents enter the family before their children, the firstborn before the second, and so on. Time establishes a natural hierarchy within the family that must be respected.

In dysfunctional families, a younger person often disrupts the hierarchy of the family by assuming the responsibility, function, privilege, or guilt that belongs to an older person. An example is a son who is suffering for his father's wrongdoings, or is trying to be a better husband for his mother than his father is. Younger persons who injure the hierarchy of time by assuming the functions and responsibilities of earlier persons often unconsciously react with a tendency to self-destruction and failure. Because violations of the order of precedence are motivated by love, those caught in this dynamic don't recognize their guilt. Such violations are often important contributing factors when events in a family turn out tragically—for example, in cases of suicide or psychogenic mental illness, or when a later person turns to crime.

The orders of precedence according to time that support love in a family are

more complicated when two existing families are combined. When partners bring children from their previous marriages into a new relationship, their love for each other doesn't precede their love for their children. In these families, successful love usually requires that the earlier bonding between the partners and their children take precedence over their younger love for each other; next comes their togetherness as man and woman in a partnership of equals; and, finally, the bonding to any children they may have together.

Many problems in second marriages occur when one of the new partners feels jealous of the other partner's earlier children; that is, when he or she wishes that the new love would have priority over the earlier love between the children and their parent.

### **Maintaining Precedence Between Different Systems**

The order of precedence between two relationship systems is different from the order of precedence within a relationship system. Here the new system has priority over the old system. When a couple starts a family, the new family system takes precedence over their families of origin, just as a second marriage assumes precedence over a first.

If a young couple's love for their parents continues to take priority over their love for each other, there's a disturbance in the order of precedence that must be dealt with if their relationship is to succeed.

Second partnerships present special complications. The new system must have precedence over the first in order for the new family to succeed, but if one of the new partners brings a child from a previous relationship into the new one, then the bonding to and love for the child must maintain precedence over the bonding to and love for the new partner. Couples have problems when the new partner demands precedence over a child from a previous partnership, or when the new partner demands from the child the love that belongs to the child's natural parent.

When a person has a child during a partnership with someone other than his or her partner, the partnership is usually over. That means that if a woman has a child with another man during her marriage, she forms a new system with him. As a rule, she must leave her first family and go to her new partner. If she chooses to stay with her husband, the only safe place for the child is with the natural father.

The precedence of a new system over a previous one also requires that a man who has a child with another woman during his marriage leave his family and go to the new woman and child. Nevertheless, he must continue to support his first wife and child. In situations like this, the former partners and children pay a very heavy price, but experience shows that all other solutions result in greater pain for all involved.

Family systems react profoundly to the birth of a child.

## **Accepting the Limitations of Time**

Although it's necessary for all members of a family to have their places and be “re-membered,” families must be allowed to forget what is past after an appropriate time. Members of a family group must let things go, both positive and negative, as soon as their effect for good is past. Let bygones be bygones. Allow the future to come as it will. Change is constant. Members of families are born and die and holding on to what was once good or bad inhibits the natural flow of life. Holding on to the past can limit freedom as can trying to control the future. We delude ourselves when we think that we can determine the course of fate. No matter what we may believe to the contrary, we must submit to the future as it comes.

## **Entanglements in Family Groups**

Family members don't experience injuries to the hidden orders of the family group as guilty feelings in their personal conscience. Injuries become obvious only in the suffering they bring, especially to children, who often suffer the consequences of things they themselves didn't do. The dynamics of a family bind all members in full participation. The family whole binds each member so firmly that the obligations and sufferings of one member are experienced by other members as debts and obligations. Any family member can become blindly entangled in other members' debts and privileges; in their thoughts, cares, and feelings; and in their conflicts or goals. Individual happiness and suffering are limited in the interests of the family, just as a whole constrains its parts. Many of us are caught in a web of tragedy that began long before we were born. When the love that binds together the individual members of a family operates blindly, it demands blind obedience, and unless individual members gain insight into its dynamic and transform it, they unknowingly submit to the laws of blind systemic justice—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Then the damage is passed from one generation to the next, and the extended family finds no peace. The systemic laws operating within the family don't respond to a child's love. The drive for balance working in the family group is more fundamental than love, and it readily sacrifices individual love and happiness to maintain the larger family equilibrium. The struggle of love against the dynamics of family systems is the beginning and end of the greatest tragedies. Extracting oneself from this battlefield requires insight into the Orders of Love, and a willingness to follow them with love. Insight into Love's Hidden Symmetry is wisdom; following it with love is humility. That requires giving up an inflated sense of self-importance and returning to one's designated place in the family order, while those who have before regain their higher place in the hierarchy. It is always better to choose love over revenge, when we can.

## **Recognizing Entanglement**

Unfinished situations from the past express themselves in later relationships in the form of impulsive inappropriate actions and inappropriately intense feelings. An identification with another person has the feeling quality of “not being quite myself,” or “something just got into me.” Whenever a person displays unusually intense emotions or behaviors that aren't understandable in terms of the current situation, you can suspect that there's a systemic entanglement of some kind. This is true when one person has unexplained difficulty in talking with another, or reacts in an inexplicable way—as if he or she were influenced by invisible conflicts and anxieties. People who are fanatic about being right are often entangled. When they “fight” with exaggerated bitterness and vehemence, they may well be representing someone else in the system. If there's a scapegoat in the present family, it's often the case that there was a scapegoat in a previous generation, and it's useful to look for it carefully. Any reaction or emotion that seems exaggerated, or inappropriate, or amplified may be an identification. You develop a sense for the cues that hint at entanglements.

## **Identification**

One important aspect of resolving entanglements is to find out who's missing from the family, who has been excluded, and then to bring that person into awareness and so complete the family unit. As a rule, an excluded person is someone who has suffered or has been the victim of some injustice. In the eyes of the other family members, that person was often seen as bad, and was excluded from the family system with moral justification or righteousness. Those remaining then feel morally superior. The central dynamic is that someone in the system uses a moral justification to claim a systemically unjustified privilege, to say, “I have more right to belong than you do.”

The pressure of a group to “re-member” all of its members, to maintain its wholeness, demands that a later person that s/he represent the excluded person. The wholeness of the group is frequently maintained by *identification*—a younger person unconsciously assumes the roles, the functions, and often the feelings of an earlier, excluded person. The family group “re-members” the excluded, the ignored, the forgotten, the unrecognized, the dead. When a legitimate member of the group is shut out, someone in a later generation must compensate for this injustice by suffering a similar injustice. The persons drafted for this service don't choose their fate. In fact, they usually don't even notice what's happening and can't defend themselves against it. They relive the fate of the excluded person, and recreate that person's experience, complete with the guilt, the innocence, and all the other feelings that belong to that experience. Identification is like a systemic repetition compulsion. It attempts to recreate and reproduce the past in order to bring justice to an excluded person. But such justice is primitive and blind, and it brings no resolution. In this dynamic, later

persons become entangled in the destiny of an earlier person. Even if their actions are motivated by love, they take upon themselves an inappropriate responsibility. A later person can't set something in order for an earlier person after the fact. Such a retroactive justice only continues the systemic imbalance indefinitely. Taking on someone else's tragedy creates no life-affirming energy. If misfortune is to be useful in developing strength, it must be returned to the person to whom it belongs, and he or she must be trusted to endure it. The effect of the identification diminishes as time goes and after a while they have no longer any effect.

Whatever has been repressed in a family tends to reappear in those who possess the least ability to defend themselves.

The double shift is a subtype of identification. The first shift occurs when a later person takes on the feelings of an earlier person via identification. The second shift occurs when the feelings from the excluded person are expressed, not to a guilty party, but, through a further shift, to an innocent person. A great many problems in relationships exhibit this dynamic, including situations in which the victim was so weak that he or she couldn't take appropriate action. Problems like that don't belong to the individuals alone but to the whole family, and anyone in the family can be called on to compensate for the wrong-doing of someone else in the family.

An identification can be resolved when younger persons who are repeating the fate of earlier persons realize what the problem is. Then they can look at the shut-out person, or stand by that person and give him or her a loving place in their hearts. This love creates a relationship and then the excluded person becomes a friend, a guardian angel, a source of support. An identification is, after all, the opposite of a relationship. When I'm identified with someone, I feel and act as that person does, but I can't love the person because I don't experience him or her as different from me. I can only love someone I experience as separate from me. When I love a person as separate from me, my love dissolves any identification I might have. The identified person can then return to his or her appropriate place in the family, and the equilibrium of the system is reestablished and a feeling of being unburdened.

Be wary of relying on theoretical knowledge about family systems, because there are always new and novel variations on the common themes, and each family is different. The work is always trial and error; you've got to experiment with various possibilities until you find one that works. If there's no relief, you haven't found the solution, regardless of what your theory tells you.

At some point, the past, whether good or tragic, must be allowed to be past in order for the system to find peace. Excluded members become a source of blessing rather than intimidation when they're reinstated as guests in the soul.

When everyone who belongs to the system has a proper place in the hearts of the other members, all of those in the system feel whole and at peace.



Descriptions of people's character don't help, only what *happened*.

The therapist always watches the effect that any moves have on the constellation. The reps' spontaneous reactions give the most useful information.

### **Love and the Greater Soul**

In addition to our personal relationships and the social systems to which we belong, we are also members of larger relationship systems. The various Orders of Love that support us in our intimate relationships are not applicable to other relationship systems. If we are dealing with larger wholes and meta-systems, for example, with God or fate or the wholeness of the world, then those same orders and principles no longer apply. Attempts to apply then lead to absurd consequences.

Remembering our experiences as children, we may reach out to God, or the mystery behind the world, like children reaching out to their parents, and seek a good father or a good mother. Then we believe like children, hope like children, trust like children, love like children—and, like children, we may fear what is beyond our experience.

Remembering our experiences as members of our extended family, we may relate to fate or the mystery behind the world as we do to members of our families, as if we were blood brothers in a company of saints. But then, as in a family, we may be selected or rejected according to a rigid law we neither can know nor influence.

Remembering our experience as members of freely chosen groups, we may relate to the mystery of the world as if we were its business associates, behaving like its representatives or spokespersons, making covenants and agreements, as if life would allow us to regulate mutual giving and taking and to control our mutual benefits and loss.

We may approach the mystery behind the world as if we were entering an intimate relationship in which there are a lover and a beloved, a bride and a bridegroom.

Or we may relate to the mystery like parents to their children, daring to tell what we consider wrong with its world and demanding improvements. And not being satisfied with the world as it is, we attempt to save ourselves and others from it. But there is another way. When we relate to the mystery of the world, we can forget what applied to the relationships we know, just as when we are swimming in the ocean, we forget the rivers flowing into it, and when we are at our goal, we forget the path.

### **Leaving a Lesser Faith for a Greater One**

Faith is destructive when it teaches that you can belong to God in a special way, and that God is angry and vengeful when you act in a way that's in harmony with creation. Belief and disbelief, like guilt and innocence, are inextricably bound together in the soul, and just as we continually swing between guilt and innocence, so do we swing between belief and disbelief.

There's a kind of religious belief that teaches us that the world is evil. If I follow that belief, I must divorce myself from creation *as it is* and, implicitly, from its Creator. In order to do that, I must turn away from everything I see and experience, and I must turn toward another god about whom I've only heard what others report they believe he revealed to them. That's all I know about that god. I have no personal experience of him, only what others have said. So the belief in that God, actually, is a belief in some other person's report, whose witness then is binding for me. If I wish to worship and to follow that God, I must forsake and deny what I experience and see, and I must believe what others claim has been revealed to them.

That kind of religion is passed on by culture and family tradition. People follow that kind of religion primarily because their family follows it. Or them, renouncing such a faith means renouncing their family. This explains why everyone who turns away from religions of this kind have identical feelings of guilt, whether Muslim, Catholic, Jew, Protestant, or Buddhist. This kind of faith, therefore, is quite independent of the content of the Catholic faith, the Protestant faith, Islam, or Buddhism. It's a matter of loyalty or disloyalty to their families—not actual experience of God or the Greater Soul.

Religion and faith based on consenting to the world as it is unites humankind, whereas the faith of a particular confession or group builds walls between people. The religious experience that encompasses and loves the world as it is recognizes no borders.

Those who accept and love the earth as it is can't remain within the confines of a single group. They go beyond the limits of their particular group and embrace the wholeness of the world as it is. This love of the earth and the movement such lovers make—reaching beyond their group toward the larger wholeness of the world—have a quality that is very different from the belief that fears and hates and divides. This love embraces, holds, and cherishes the diversity in the unity of life.

## **Part II**

### **Psychotherapeutic Considerations**

#### **The Therapeutic Posture**

The most important in successful work with systems is the therapist's posture. More important than learning techniques and procedures, those wishing to work systemically must understand the basic orientation and the values that guide the work. Therapists working in this way prefer to work with resources rather than

with weaknesses, with solutions rather than with problems, and with the smallest interventions necessary for change. Above all, they look at whatever is actually visible, rather than allow themselves to be guided by theory, belief, or ideology.

## **Seeing**

“Observing” means observing individual details at the cost of the perception of the whole. When I observe someone's behavior, I observe what he or she does, but the person as a whole escapes me. When I see persons, I take them in as a whole. Then, although many of the details of what they do escape me, I grasp with immediacy what's essential about them and I do this in service of that person as “Other.”

Seeing another person in this way is only possible when I turn toward him or her without ulterior motives. Seeing a person in this way creates relationship. It calls a specific intimacy into being the nevertheless requires profound respect for individual differences, and that requires maintaining a certain distance. In seeing, each person is treated as unique and no norms are established that later must be overcome. Judging right or wrong has no place in seeing, but only serving love and the quest for resolutions.

Seeing another person also places me under an imperative to serve. I may imagine that I'm free to do whatever I want, but as soon as I see someone in his or her situation and see what he or she needs, I'm compelled to adapt myself to be as the situation demands of me.

In a therapeutic context, only seeing can serve the quest for resolution, and seeing is useful only toward that end. Seeing doesn't help to make a diagnosis, or to make empirical observations, unless the diagnosis and the observations themselves serve some resolution. Seeing finds resolution and completion, not objective truth. It always has to do with the questions: “What does the client's situation demand of me now?” and “What does it permit me?” As a therapist, I ask myself these questions and I offer myself in service of the other person.

When a person tells me something, I ask myself, “What is appropriate for *him or her*?” If I succeed in truly seeing the client, then I'm in contact with something greater than either of us alone. My immediate goal can't even be to help, but only to see the client in the context of a larger order. That's how seeing works, and it allows therapeutic interventions to remain respectful and loving, while at the same time being a force for healing.

It's strange how people change when I tell them what I see. Seeing is a creative process that has an effect on those who are seen as well as on the one who sees. There are secrets to seeing that I don't understand, but they too can be seen and used.

When you have an idea about what's going on with a client are wondering if you should say it or not try to see the person. If you succeed, you'll see whether your

idea will help or will weaken. Seeing isn't something that you can make happen. When I open myself to someone, I'm often totally surprised by what I see. Often I see things that I never could have thought up. I often have a sense of fear and trembling about seeing, but if I shy away from what see, if I hold back—even out of fear of hurting someone—something closes down in my soul, as if I'd abused something precious.

Intuition is different, a flash of understanding that shows me where to go, that orients me toward the future and comes without my doing anything, instantly. Seeing means that I open myself completely to complex connection and allow them to work in me, to affect me.

That's how I came to understand conscience. For a long time, I couldn't understand what happens when people claim to be acting according to their conscience, or acting conscientiously. That's a huge phenomenon, and I still don't understand it completely. But because I couldn't understand it, I tried to see what was happening. I just let it work on me, holding it in my attention, opening myself to it, but not actively trying to understand it. It took years, but all at once, I saw what conscience really is and how it works. Conscience is a perceptual organ for system balance that helps us to know whether or not we're in harmony with a reference system. It warns us if what we're about to do carries the consequence of being excluded from the system or assures our continued belonging to the system. A clear conscience entitles continued belonging to my group. A guilty conscience means only that I need to worry about whether I'll still be allowed to continue to belong.

Suddenly, out of a complexity of phenomena, the essence of the thing was clear. That clarity had an enormous effect on everything I did. I call this process the phenomenological method. It works only when I'm not intending to achieve something—to confirm a belief, for example, or to glorify a tradition. It's a very humble, simple, basic method of knowing.

### **Beyond Good and Evil**

When I see people, I see them in the contexts in which they live, in the context of larger wholes, in the groups and subcultures to which they belong. All relationship systems are such wholes. When you see people in their larger contexts, your perceptions of freedom of choice, personal responsibility, and good and evil change. You see that most, perhaps all, evil isn't done because people are personally evil, but because they're caught in something on a larger scale. Evil is mostly a function of systemic entanglements; it's not really personal.

Good and evil are systemically bound to one another. If you want to work with people systemically, you must find a position beyond moral judgement, a position that allows you to see larger systemic phenomena and their effect on individuals.

For instance, when one member of a system assumes a position of moral superiority, he or she claims more right to belong to the system than the one judged and challenges the other's right to belong to the system. That always has disastrous results. It makes no sense philosophically or theologically to think that people no longer belong to the larger order of the universe because of their behavior. Individuals don't choose the roles fate gives them to play, but their roles do have consequences for the greater whole. If you do as the others do, you can belong, and if you don't, you're out. The groups to which we belong determine how we act, and, in most cases, we don't choose those groups.

Systemically viewed, the major difference in individual beliefs about good and evil is arbitrary. No group knows what's good for other, larger groups. Going beyond the limitations of one group's morality requires identifying with a larger systemic order. That's a truly moral movement, and you need to be willing and able to endure the feeling of guilt and alienation that comes when you violate what your friends and family hold to be good.

In systemic psychotherapy, it's simpler and more useful to avoid moralistic judgments altogether, to take the position that everyone is basically good, and that they do bad things when they're entangled. That way, you remain free to see them and to try to understand how they're entangled, and what needs to happen for them to get untangled. Because you're not caught up in feeling morally superior to them, you can also pay attention to how they affect you as you work with them. Thus, everyone maintains equality and human dignity. It's good in any psychotherapy to keep your distance from the idea of personal evil.

Nevertheless, what we do has consequences, and we all carry the guilt and pay the consequences for whatever harm we do to others, even when we act because of an entanglement, or because of what our group believes.

I'm always thinking about what a good resolution could be: the important thing is how it turns out. If you really see, then you see that those who claim innocence don't really accomplish much good.

Reality contradicts our expectations constantly. There's a rule of thumb in systemic therapy with respect to good and evil: It's usually the opposite of what people tell you. I've seldom seen an exception. In the constellations in which the father is presented as the bad one, you automatically look for the mother's destructivity and entanglement, and vice-versa.

A basic error in Western thinking is that individuals have the power to choose and shape their fates, but there are many powerful forces influencing us that we can't control, forces that impinge on our individual freedom of choice—historical forces, for example. Think about the changes in the Eastern block countries. No single individual made that happen, not even Gorbachev. It was a powerful historical process that swept up millions of people, and it changed their lives regardless of whether they supported or opposed it.

When you judge someone to be personally responsible, you imply that the

person should or could have done something different, and that if he or she had, things would have turned out different, implying that you know what the person should have done. That's a morally superior stance that has no therapeutic value. It's better to help people find a resolution that heals, to put right what's gone wrong. If you ask the moralistic question, you focus your attention on the past, where there's no freedom of choice at all. The therapeutic question focuses attention on the present, where some corrective action may still be possible. We *can* influence how things turn out, and we are responsible for what we do, even when we're caught up in something we can't control. But we have freedom of choice only in the smaller things. The consequences of our actions for our relationship systems and the larger whole remain our responsibility, that's what counts. Those consequences remain whether or not we feel personal guilt. The question is only whether or not we have the courage to look honestly at what we do and at what the consequences really are. When individuals are caught up in a great flow of events, they aren't free. They're personally responsible in the sense that what they do has consequences—perhaps more for others than for themselves—but free choice is often very limited. You carry the systemic responsibility for the consequences of what you do even if you didn't freely choose your actions.

I condemn those who killed Jews during the Nazi era. They must accept the consequences of their actions. Nevertheless, they were entangled, caught up in something larger than they were. Holding them responsible for their actions, and, at the same time, seeing that they were caught up in a far greater evil, is different from morally judging them to be evil persons—and feeling morally superior to them. You must decide whether you are thinking morally, legally, or systemically. All deeds of great evil are done by people who think that they're better than the others in some way—and because those that judge them also think that they themselves are better, they, too, are in danger of doing evil. Victims tend to become perpetrators. Assuming any position of moral righteousness and acting as if we know what's right for others always causes injury to the larger system.

If the Nazis prevailed on a father to have his autistic son killed, the father is accountable but his guilt or innocence is not the point. The point is that someone later on will unconsciously compensate for the boy's death, that the unfortunate affair *continues*; I'm just trying to put an end to such consequences, not judge the father or anyone else: judging doesn't ever help or heal. Recognizing the father's entanglements doesn't change the consequences. Holding people responsible for their actions is not the same as judging them to be good or bad people.

## **Understanding the Principles of Helping**

Giving up wanting to help or rescue people is essential if you sincerely respect

them. Better is deliberate *non-acting*, actively being present without intentionally acting. This isn't withdrawal or holding yourself back, rather is taoist. When the therapist actively holds what he sees within himself without saying it, then what the therapist sees will often occur to the client. Sometimes it's easier for the client to find resolution when therapist actively does nothing. Nonaction is very difficult to carry out actively, but it leaves the client free to discover. In any case, therapists have no control over what clients do with their interventions. The therapist must respect the client's freedom to live without being changed, respect each individual's freedom, including the freedom to fail or stay stuck. Good therapy has the quality of being present in relationships without intention and without specific goals. Up to a certain point, we must relinquish all our attempts to influence the client. That kind of presence creates the empty space in which healing can occur. Everything beyond the minimum necessary to get the change moving weakens the client. In therapy, less is usually more.

Often, doing nothing is the very best option.

Some people just can't be stopped from throwing the torch of good deeds into the haystack of the world. If people need your help, they'll come to you or let you know in some way what they need. In the meantime, you can practice being present without acting. The most common error that would-be helpers make is that they do more than others really want or can assimilate. If you resist the temptation to help, if you can practice active nonacting, being present w/o acting, you'll have a completely different understanding of help. The most common error that would-be helpers make is that they do more than others really want or can assimilate.

### **Working with Resolutions Instead of Problems**

When you look at a problem as a problem, you've got a problem. Seeing only works when you search for a solution. Ask "What needs to happen?" Where does the client want to get to, and what does he or she need to do to get there?" Then you can start to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and you can swim with the current. You don't need a problem to find a resolution—it's too easy to get stuck with the problem and ignore the solution. From a systemic point of view, problems are unsuccessful attempts to love, and the love that maintains the problem can be redirected to resolve it. That's called searching for the therapeutic leverage. Instead of raging at a husband for being still too overly attached to his mother, the wife might try saying, "I respect your love for your mother." That switches focus from problem to resolution. The creative force doesn't work in relation to problems, but only in relation to resolutions. The movement toward a solution is love, and *seeing* only serves good intentions and lover. When I confront a person with a problem or describe it to that person, I'm in a one-up position.

Resist clients wanting a theory about a resolution: don't theorize. Avoid theory. Simply accumulate experiences and let them inform interventions; stay open to new experiences, *invite* them. When people describe a problem, they want to convince you to accept their world view, one which in turn justifies the problem. Interrupt the description of problems swiftly or it will be too late. Once you're caught in their belief system, it's difficult to see anything outside of it and you can't help them find resolution. Stopping people is important, useful, necessary. Don't let them go on and on, hanging everything in a noose, neatly. Most descriptions of problems are false, anyway. The correct description of a problem contains the resolution to the problem.

If the group gets restless, it's a sign that some blather is irrelevant: trust the group's wisdom. It's important to understand that when people go down the wrong path, they do so with love, even if their love is distorted or blind.

### **Resistance as Misplaced Love**

Clients use their strength to hold on to their problems and avoid solutions because they allow us to belong to our group. Suffering is the proof that our child soul needs that we're not guilty with respect to our family. It secures and protects our right to belong to our family. Every unhappiness that's caused by systemic entanglement is accompanied by the deep contentment of knowing that we belong.

Therefore, finding solutions to our problems is threatening and unpleasant. It carries the inherent fear of losing our belonging, of feelings of guilt and betrayal, of falling out of favor, of breaking faith with the group to which we belong. When we strive for a solution, we imagine that we break the family rules that we've obeyed up until now and we feel guilty. Resolution and happiness seem dangerous because we believe they'll make us lonely. Problems and unhappiness on the other hand give a feeling of belonging, something people nearly always choose over happiness.

Therefore, solutions are often accompanied by guilt, and change requires the courage to face that guilt. Systematically caused suffering is always accompanied by feelings of security and innocence. Asking people to change is asking them to give up innocence.

### **Distinguishing Different Kinds of Feelings**

Primary Feelings support constructive action, support people. They're simple and don't require elaborate descriptions. They're intense, w/o drama, w/o exaggeration. However exciting and intense, they bring a sense of assurance and calm.

Secondary Feelings only justify not acting, or substitute for not action. Therapy most deals with secondary feelings that function to convince others that the one can't take effective action, so they need to be dramatic and exaggerated. When



you're in the grip of secondary feelings, you feel weak, and the others present feel a need to help. If the emotions are dramatic enough, the would-be helpers don't notice that there's really nothing that can be done in the situation. When people cling to secondary feelings they avoid looking at reality, which interferes with the inner images necessary to maintain the secondary feelings and to avoid change. When people who are holding on to secondary feelings 'work' in therapy, they often close their eyes and withdraw into their private worlds. They answer different questions than the ones you ask but don't notice that they do. It helps to remind them to open their eyes and to look at the world. I tell them, "Look here. Look at me." If they can open their eyes and really see, and still stay with the feeling they're having, it's usually a primary feeling. But if they lose the feeling as soon as they open their eyes and look, then you know they were caught in secondary feelings.

Secondary feelings last longer and get worse by being expressed, instead of getting better. That's the main reason why therapies that encourage the expression of secondary feelings take so long.

Primary feelings only go as far as is good. You won't do anything shameful if you're feeling a primary feeling, because the feeling itself has a very precise shame boundary. It's extremely rare that anyone is mocked or scorned for displaying a primary feeling. On the contrary, other people are usually profoundly moved and enter into the experience. That's only true of primary feelings. Secondary feelings don't have the same shame boundary, and it's quite possible to make a fool of yourself when expressing secondary feelings. You can't trust secondary feelings to take care of you. But they have a certain fascination. They're exciting, dramatic, and give an illusion of being alive. But the price of such aliveness is that people must stay weak and helpless.

Explanations or interpretations also distract a client, keeping them caught in images that maintain the secondary feelings.

Grief, for example, can be primary or secondary. Primary grief is a powerful pain of separation. If we surrender to the pain, allowing it to do its work, the grief eventually finds its own completion, and we are free to begin anew. But often people don't surrender to grief, shifting it instead to secondary grief, self-pity, or attempts to get pity from others. Such secondary grief can last an entire lifetime, prohibiting a clean and loving separation and denying the fact of loss. It's a poor substitute for primary grief.

Primary guilt leads to ameliorative action. If we accept our guilt, we naturally do what's both possible and necessary to make amends, to put the situation right, and we live with whatever cannot be changed. Secondary guilt feelings transform action into worry. They don't motivate effective action for change; in fact, they prevent change. People can worry a good problem for years, like a dog worries a bone, but nothing changes. They torment themselves and others, but there's no productive change. People who need to avoid positive change for some reason

must convert their primary guilt into secondary guilty feelings.

The desire for retaliation can also be primary or secondary. Primary retaliation maintains the injury and systemic imbalance and prevents resolution. An example is the clan feuds that have been taken on from previous generation. The avengers feel the need to avenge wrongs they haven't suffered themselves. And their actions often are aimed at persons who have done no wrong.

Anger has primary and secondary forms. Primary anger cleanses a relationship, and passes without leaving scars. Secondary anger at someone often follows our having done something to that person, who then has reason to be angry with us. By being angry at him or her, we preempt the person's anger. Secondary anger, like secondary guilt feelings, is often an excuse for not acting. In relationships, secondary anger is sometimes used to avoid asking for what one wants, as in, "You never notice when I need something." Another example is the man who felt that he'd earned a raise, but didn't get one. Instead of going to the boss and negotiating a raise, he went home and became enraged at his wife and children. When suffering is primary, clients endure what needs to be endured, and then they begin to pick up the pieces of their lives and begin again. When suffering is secondary, they start another round of suffering. Complaining about something is usually a secondary distortion of consenting to what is.

The distinction between what strengthens and what weakens also applies to many other areas, to knowledge and information, for example. You can ask yourself, "Does this knowledge lead to resolution, or does it prevent it? Does this information support action, or hinder it? Does what's going on strengthen people or weaken them, support effective action for good change or hinder it?" I'm less interested in helping people to "get their feelings out" than I am in constructive change. Getting feelings out sometimes helps, but also often obstructs change.

My recommendation is for therapist to try and avoid working with secondary feelings entirely, to distract the client's attention, perhaps by telling an appropriate joke or by shifting the client's focus of attention. My intention is not to change clients' experiences, but to guide their attention toward their primary feelings, which are the prerequisites for finding their own resolutions.

Secondary feelings have something manipulative/whiny about them. They're attempts to get someone to do something, as if one couldn't do it oneself. They serve as justifications for not acting and as rationalizations for holding on to the problem. That's the reason why you usually can't do any effective work with a client as long as he or she is stuck in a secondary feeling.

The third category of feelings are feelings that have been taken on from the system; that is, when what one feels as one's own feeling is actually someone else's feeling. It's strange for most people to think that what they're feeling isn't their own feeling, but somebody else's. Nevertheless, strange as it seems, it

happens a lot in the constellations, and it's usually very easy to recognize. Once you've recognized it there, you begin to see it in other situations as well.

Whenever you feel a feeling that belongs to someone else, then you're caught up in something that's not of your own making. That's why your attempts to change it usually fail.

Exaggerated rage is often associated with a huge systemic need for justice. The need for revenge is often taken on from the system; trying to achieve justice for someone in the past. Feelings like that are usually much less intense when the injustices have been directed at you. It's as if the identification with someone out of your past actually intensifies the feelings, just as dreams intensify certain feelings. To deal with these, we must purify ourselves from the systemic contamination that doesn't appropriately belong to us.

Those who are easily hurt often identify with someone who *was* hurt.

The fourth category of feelings are *meta-feelings*. These have an entirely different quality. They are feelings or sensations without emotions—pure, concentrated energy. Courage, humility (the willingness to accept the world as it is), serenity, remorse, wisdom, and deep satisfaction are examples of meta-feelings. There's also meta-love and meta-aggression.

And example of meta-aggression might be what a loving surgeon experiences while operating, or what a therapist occasionally feels. The discipline necessary for making nonabusive, strategic interventions is meta-aggression. Strategic interventions demand absolute self-discipline on the part of the therapist if they're truly to serve the needs and interests of the client, and not to degenerate into abuse manipulations, and they cost enormous energy.

Authentic remorse is a meta-feeling and happens when people are centered in themselves and know what's appropriate for them, allowing immediate, appropriate, effective action.

When people feel bad because they're about to do something inappropriate for their souls, that's a meta-feeling. We might call it a conscience of a higher order. Sometimes it's the only thing that keeps us from going along when our group is caught up in something destructive.

Feeling what's appropriate for souls also keeps us from living out a script that we've inherited from our system. The script has an effect; it influences what we do and experience, what we believe and perceive, but it doesn't lead to the fulfillment of our own individuality. On the other hand when awareness of meta-conscience has been developed, there's a criterion for judging what's truly appropriate. Then the limitations imposed by the systemic dynamics and scripts gradually disappear.

The crown of all the meta-feelings is wisdom. Wisdom is associated with courage, humility, and the energy of life. It's a meta-feeling that helps us to distinguish between what really counts and what doesn't. Wisdom doesn't mean

that I know a lot, but rather that I'm able to determine what's appropriate to the immediate situation and what's not. It tells me what my personal integrity requires of me in every situation. **Wisdom is always related to action.** The actions of a wise person are not deduced from principles, but what is required by the situation is perceived directly. That's why the behavior of the truly wise is often a surprise.

When meta-feelings appear, they're experienced as gifts. You can't make them happen; they come on their own as blessings. They're the reward for life experience—like ripened fruit.

Meta-love is a fundamental property of the bounty of life that we can feel in all areas of our lives, especially in relationships. Meta love, in addition to primary love, gives relationships strength and security, and is the source of true responsibility, trustworthiness, and faithfulness.

Self-induced or neurotic suffering brings no good.

Beware disrespectful descriptions and attribution of negative qualities such as the word “strict.” Character descriptions are irrelevant. By omitting such descriptions, the actual events in people's lives regain their importance. It's one of the negative influences of psychoanalysis in our culture that we lend more importance to the interpretation of the events than to the events themselves. Resolution is always bound up with honor and respect.

Interpretations work only if they touch The client's love so try and activate and affirm love. Beware positive reframing; it can be a capricious intervention that trivializes the seriousness of the situation and it doesn't work. Successful interpretation and reframing arises out of *seeing* what is. Truth is whatever serves and enhances life. The body responds with aliveness when this is true and with a contraction, hardening, or deadness if not. When an interpretation is true, clients feel it immediately, a sense of relief in their body, a distinct feeling of, “That's right.” It's difficult to define truth, but it's not difficult to feel it.

Follow events, don't control them, let them lead you on, humbly.

Believing you can put the family to right is self-inflation; much that happens we cannot control. There is such a thing as sickness; not everything connects to family dynamics and if you try you drive yourself nuts. There's a tendency to look for psychological connection between things in order to create the sense of order and control.

Don't overdramatize.

Memories are often selected in the service of maintaining the victim position or a problem. Think about everything that average parents do for their children for 20 years or so. Then compare them with the memories that clients bring into therapy. Mostly they choose the five or six really negative experiences they have

had and forget the rest. When there was a trauma, the most important thing is usually forgotten—that the individual survived. Memories are often a mental armor that help to maintain a certain position and to prevent change. We're more interested in disarmament here.

Curiosity is destructive when we want to know more than is helpful for effective action. View the therapeutic situation as being part of a larger movement in which you meet someone, perhaps give the person something, and then go on with your life, then everyone is really free. The meeting is important, but not the “therapeutic outcome.” Neither curiosity nor skepticism is helpful: there are dynamics that lead to resolution and dynamics that don't. We work with those that do.

The tragic inflates us. Ease and lightness are qualities of truth and they bring us further. When something is difficult and requires great conscious effort, it's mostly useless. It's like a donkey carrying a heavy load down a long, dusty road. He is tired and hungry and thirsty. There are green meadows with streams of fresh water to the right and to the left of the path, but he keeps on, telling himself, “I'm on my path.” That's effort.

Control always turns into control of nothing; it's worthless.

Feelings stay as long as you leave them alone. As soon as you try to hold on to a feeling or mood, it disappears. Life is like that; it always moves on, moving on to the next thing and the next. And when you move on, it moves too. As soon as you stand still, it stands still.

Many people have a deep fear of happiness, a fear of taking the decisive step to where they can experience the depth of their love. Deep love brings both joy and pain. The go together profoundly and inseparably. We shy away from this depth of love because we fear the pain that goes with it. The happiness we feel in this kind of love isn't exuberantly joyful, but rather full, and still, and deep.

I have no intention of controlling or changing anyone. What I say may be right or useful, even as a probe, when I say it. It's a momentary perception; a good therapist is like a good leader who sees what the people want then gives an order to do it. A good therapist sees where clients' energy is pointing, and then recommends they move toward where they are going anyway! I'm constantly watching where people want to go and where they're stuck. When there's a systemic entanglement involved, clients can't find the liberating sentences by themselves—that requires a knowledge of the dynamics of systems that they usually don't have. If I find a sentence that might be helpful, I send it up like a

test balloon and watch carefully to see what happens. I can quickly see if I've offered a sentence that helps or if my offer was off target. If it's the latter, I let the client lead me to another. It's trial and error. It's very clear to everyone when we find the sentences that help. The client is directing me, and I do my best to follow faithfully.

### Helping is often self-inflation.

The only real freedom I have is to say “yes;” saying “no” shuts me down.

When I work with couples, I let both the husband and the wife set up the constellation, so we can compare the two.

Putting a forgotten, still-born child in its place in the family can relieve much pressure and bring a new depth through shared grief and loss to the parents who must accept this fate, together, a burden they share. This child bonds them. The still born must be given an honored place in the family to allow any identification w/ him by other children to dissipate.

When we dis-cover the correct order in a family system, then this order brings about something healing or resolving in the system. Order is something hidden. For example, a tree grows according to an order and can't deviate from it. If it did, it wouldn't e a tree anymore. Humans and human relationship systems develop according to certain orders. The true orders of human life and human relationships are hidden and embedded in the phenomena of living. We can't always find them immediately but it's much worse if we try to invent them to suit our wishes.

I experience the process of finding an order as turning inward while, at the same time, keeping everything in view—without intention, without fear of consequences. When I'm completely gathered in myself in this way, I'm in contact with something I call the Greater Soul. It's something secret, but there's a force that pours out of it. When I'm in contact with that fore, I can recognize the structures that help people and that hinder them.

You can learn about these orders at a superficial level and then apply them in your work, or you can learn about them at a deeper level. If someone discovers an order and tells you about it, then can work with it intellectually. You don't work form an immediate, personal recognition of the orders, but you can apply your hearsay knowledge mechanically.

If I want to achieve something at a greater depth, I must gather myself together around a midpoint of emptiness. When I'm centered in that emptiness, I'm in contact with something healing that I can't explain, but you can see its effect on people. I immediately see it in the person's reaction whether or not I really was

in contact—if what I say opens a movement in him or her, or if it only stimulates curiosity, objections, or questions. That's how you can tell if you were in contact with an order.

### **Some Helpful Interventions**

Family constellations are developed in three phases and create two different images of the family system: an image of the destructive dynamics and an image of resolution. The first phase of the constellation presents the client's memories and internal images, and is a highly subjective and personal picture of the hidden dynamics operating in the family. It furnishes a visual representation of the ways in which the family system continues to influence what the client feels and does.

The first phase generates a working hypothesis about the systemic dynamics operating within the family. The reps' reactions provide information that's supplementary to what the client says. The combination of their reactions with the visual images of the constellations and the client's information is a better basis for the search for resolutions than are the client's memories and internal images alone.

After the hidden dynamic has become clear, it's possible to look for a resolution. In the second phase of the constellation, we begin a step-by-step, trial-and-error search for an image of systemic balance and resolution with love. This new constellation allows the client to see and feel a possible healing option.

The final phase of the work is a constellation that's an image of what can be, Love's Hidden Symmetry, in which every member of the extended family has an appropriate place and function. It's healing when clients succeed in allowing this new image to work in them, gradually modifying their old personal reality. Sometimes, the resolution constellations even affect other members of the family and the other group participants. Observers are often impressed by how quickly groups, even large groups, develop an atmosphere of alert lightness and laughter. And conversely, the group atmosphere contributes to the res' ability to immerse themselves in other peoples' fortunes and misfortunes so that each constellation of resolution is unique. The resolving constellations are frequently so powerful that they continue working change for several years.

### **Setting up a Constellation**

The first step in setting up a constellation is to get an overview of the family. The task is to identify all of the persons who belong to the system, that is, all persons who systematically affect the client. The therapist begins by asking about unusual events in the extended family, such as deaths, suicides, separations, divorces, accidents, handicaps, serious illnesses, and absences. Descriptions of character and evaluations of people are interrupted because that information

influences the reps and interferes with their spontaneous reactions to the constellations.

### **The Conditions for Setting up a Constellation**

When clients set up a constellation, their intention must be serious and their purpose legitimate. Frivolous interest and idle curiosity don't produce the sensitivity and alertness necessary to distinguish between personal projections and systemic effect. The effect of constellation can go very deep. For this reason, a group atmosphere of attentive cooperation is essential. Participants shouldn't say anything while being set up, nor should the person who is setting up the constellation.

“Center yourselves, collect yourselves. Forget your own problems, your intentions, your goals. Just notice the feelings and sensations that arise as you're moved to your places, and notice whatever changes in you when others are brought into the constellation. It's important not to try to figure out how you think you should feel in this or that place based on what you see or believe Trust your body reactions. When you feel different than expected, report that neutrally, without judgment. You may experience feelings that are taboo and that cause anxiety or embarrassment. For example, you might feel relieved when someone dies, or you might feel drawn toward an illicit or incestuous relationship. If you don't say it, then important information doesn't come into the open. It works best when you say what you experience without censoring it, without leaving anything out or elaborating on it in any way. Whatever you experience when you're repping someone has to do with that person, and not with your personal life.

“When you set up your constellation, do it by feel. Actually touch the reps, take them by a shoulder and move them to their places so that you can feel what's right. You can forget what you thought before, because that's usually not helpful. Don't worry about gestures and sentences, and in which direction people are looking. Just find the place for each to stand that feels right.

### **Choosing Reps**

It's best if reps are the same gender but that's often not possible. In a minor role, it's fine, but in a major role it can disturb the process. If the rep really feels the effect of the position, the right info will flow. Don't let the same person be consistently chosen to play the same kind of role.

### **Ignoring Interpretations and Reps' Personal Material**

You can't do a family constellation if you have the idea that what you feel is personal. That's too confusing. If you try to figure out whether it's your feeling or part of the system you're already distracted from noticing how the position is affecting you. It's simpler to assume that what you feel is a function of the



system and not your personal history.

You enter into a foreign system when you're a rep, and you have foreign feelings and sensations. Obviously, your personal memories and experiences can be touched, but it has a destructive effect if you allow yourself to think about them as long as you're in the role. Then you're mixing personal and external things. For this reason, it's very important that you remain clear—although you let yourself get the role fully, the feelings that come aren't your feelings and they don't apply to you. After you get out of the role, you can deal with our feelings if you want to. It's a little like being an actor who is playing an intense role. The feelings of Othello may touch the actor's personal feelings, but he's going to go crazy if he tries to deal with his personal issues *while* he's identified with Othello. It's better to work on your issues in the context of your system. When you've observed a number of constellations, you see how the same participant has different feelings in each different system, and you see how the feelings constantly change within one constellation. As an outsider, you can't always tell how someone will react in a position.

### **Family Sculptures and Family Constellations**

Family sculptures set up the family w/ gestures and postures, turning people's heads to look in a certain direction, and so on. When reps are sculpted like that, their experiences are completely determined by their position, and they aren't free to notice the changes that occur in the course of the world. If the reps are simply put in their places, they can follow the changes in their inner sensations as the constellation develops. If I turn their heads for them or tell them whom to look at, they can't allow the position to affect them because I've defined their experience.

Gestures and poses also make it difficult to feel the effect of the family dynamic. The very simple, almost plain constellations, on the other hand, allow us to get a much better picture of the dynamic of the family system, of how the system influences its members. If we just lead the reps to a certain position in relation to the others and allow that to affect them, they start to get symptoms, perhaps weak knees, anger, silly ideas, or something like that. When that happens, we're getting info from a different level, not just from the protagonist's conscious concepts.

The moment you step into a system, you're no longer yourself, but another whose feelings you feel: it requires a certain discipline, especially not to interpret, make up stories about what's happening, come to conclusions about the overall action—stick to what you feel, through your body. You can't actually make an empathic connection with your clients if you identify with them completely. You need alertness and a certain distance to be truly empathic. If you contact another person with that kind of alertness, you can usually sense what he or she is experiencing. Looking for a solution requires a completely

different alertness than asking the question, “What's the problem?” You can't empathize when you're looking for problems.

People setting up their systems are often tempted to give much more info than is necessary, thereby interfering with the reps' ability to experience directly how the system affects them. Too much info confuses. It's also tempting to set up more members of the family than are necessary for resolution. Every unnecessary person in the resolution constellation diminishes the power of the image: always work with the minimum necessary for resolution. People can be added to the system later as needed; avoid confusion, look for the basics.

You don't need your family to set up a family system. The constellations have a clearer effect when reps from the group are used instead of family members. If family members set up the other members, they can't avoid setting up their conscious relationships, what they think or feel about the others. That's a very different level of info than what we need to find a resolution. Working like that can lead to good relationship clarification but not work with the dynamics of the family system.

I'm cautious about doing therapy with the entire family. When the entire family goes to a therapist, the children tend to lose some of their respect for their parents: I prefer to work with the parents only and let them pass on resolution on to the children.

Constellations are images, snapshots of what was and could be. They don't show the whole truth of the situation, just certain aspects. It's best to simply allow the new image to take effect on its own and be surprised what ensues. Don't talk about the constellation.

The goal is that at the end everyone feels good. Usually this entails that whoever was there first has priority, the direction of priority in a constellation is clockwise, between a man and a woman who entered the system at the same time, the man generally comes first, and then the women, in the resolution constellations, the children usually come next, the oldest closest to the mother's left. Quite often, the constellation is more relaxed when the children are standing opposite their parents. Stillborn children usually stand with their siblings in their order of birth. Aborted children, if they're important to the system at all, usually feel good sitting in front of their parents, leaning against them. When they're in that position, the other members of the constellation usually can relax, too. Aborted children aren't counted with the others—they affect their parents, but not their siblings. First families always take precedence over second families. If the client is a man who was married three times, the constellation starts w/ his first wife and the kids they had together to her left; then the second wife and children; then he; and finally, his third wife with the children they had together on her left. It needn't always be done this way, it's just a general template: customize! A complex family doesn't start with the client, but s/he is its midpoint. The children from a divorce stand between their

parents.

The only child of a widow must integrate his or her mother into the new family if he or she marries. When a person has one or more family, they all form one complex relationship system.

Divorced persons are only separated from their partners as partners, but as parents they're still connected: thus, resolutions are possible only if that's acknowledged and the whole system is brought into balance.

Since the father and mother enter a family system at the same time, their ranking is determined by their function and by their psychological weight. The person responsible for the family's external security usually has the first position, and that's usually the man, except when her family of origin has unusual weight because of its history. Then that family's fortune or misfortune outweighs the man's protective function. Feel free to experiment with the constellation to see which order is better for the participants.

When the man's place is to the left of the woman w/o there being a legitimate reason for it, he has a fool's freedom and he tends to wander away from his family and avoid responsibility, and the woman often feels very alone and unsupported. As soon as he's standing on the other side, he feels responsible and the woman feels protected and helped.

It's difficult to change traditional roles and functions. It's simply clear that it works better when the fathers do their best to protect and serve their families and when the mothers support them in that and follow their lead. When a man asserts his strength in a way that's contrary or oblivious to the needs and interests of his wife and children, or when wives and children claim the privileges of the lead position w/o truly accepting the responsibility and danger as well, the result is invariably destructive to love. When partnerships and families are having difficulties, it's often the case that the actual dynamics of the family are different from what the partners would like to believe.

Love requires that the overall power, privilege, responsibility, and freedom in the family remain balanced and well-matched, and that the roles and functions of family member remain systemically appropriate.

The resolution constellation emerges from the process itself, by listening closely to the reps' reports and following them toward the resolution. Sometimes the therapist must trust his or her own perceptions more than the reports, especially when the nonverbal behavior isn't congruent with what they say.

Resolution is for the client, not the others, but it generally heals everyone once balance is found. The nature of the process depends on who the protagonist is and whether childhood was experienced as a boy or a girl.

Seeking a resolution for someone is a service that only be done with humility. It isn't your job to create a resolution when one doesn't emerge on its own—you'll make a mess if you try. You must sometimes consent to being stuck and trust that the process will continue on its own. Trusting the process is also to model a

a healing attitude to all concerned.

A resolution constellation has its greatest power for change when clients see it, take it, and give up the attempt to do anything actively. It's as if the resolution constellation were an unconscious picture that can work if you let it. You'll do better if you just let time pass,, like convalescence after a serious illness—it takes time, but after a while, you're healthy again. It may take several years for the healing process set in motion by the resolution constellation to complete itself. No one else in a system must change in order for the client's life to change. No one has to assume a different function in the system. The entire shift in the family system occurs as a result of a shift in the client's inner image. It's not even necessary to tell others in the family system about the constellation. Once parents get their image of the family in order, it affects their children, so there's no need to tell them what happened: the order of the system itself has the effect and the honoring of it in the client's soul. It's a characteristic of a good resolution that everyone in the system has a good place. If the resolution constellation reveals that you still owe someone something, you've got to take care of it. Often the details of the resolution are completely forgotten, and only the effect remains. This is the effect of “nondoing.” The good image makes things happen. When insight is present, I only need to keep my strength collected while a new pattern emerges. Changes just happen when the systemic images are in order.

It's not always possible to find a good resolution. After you've looked for a while w/o finding anything, the group starts to lose interest. When you notice that happening, it's time to quit. Usually there's information missing that you need in order to uncover a resolution. The process of watching the constellation being set up has already provided plenty of useful insight for the client, and my general principle is that it's better to quit while you're ahead. It's better to do too little than risk doing too much.

The primary issue to watch out for is how people go about setting up their constellation, whether or not they have a confusing or a clear effect on the reps. Some constellations are very clear whereas others are diffuse and the reps don't get a real sense of what's going on, forget whom they're supposed to represent, and so on. After you've had a bit of experience, you can see how deeply engaged and centered someone is.

Really collected clients move slowly, feel their way into each movement, tending to take each rep tenderly by the arm, as if physical touch helps them get the feel of what's right. They lead the person to his or her place, make fine adjustments, and stay with the person until it's just right. They then go and get the next person. When clients want to make sure that they've got it right they instinctively walk around the periphery, looking at what've done from the outside.

When a client doesn't set up the constellation w/ this kind of genuine respect,

there's a difficult and subtle test for the therapist. Everyone unconsciously watches to see if the therapist is really in charge of the situation and notices the difference. If the therapist doesn't notice, he or she might as well go home because real trust can't develop. There's something in the soul that recognizes whether the therapist truly respects life. If the therapist were to tolerate a careless or irreverent handling of issues of life and death, then people would be foolish to show their real concerns.

When I notice that someone is setting up the constellation according to a plan worked out ahead of time, I usually stop the constellation and tell the person that I can't work with such constellations which are mental constructs, not images of what really is happening in the family. It's always more effective not to have any mental images of your constellation before you set it up. Interrupting a constellation is the most difficult intervention in systemic psychotherapy, but it's also one of the most effective.

Also, when people ask if I want them to set up the families the way they were or the way they are now, I stop. If they start out setting up their constellation by trying to do what I want, they're not respecting the truth of their own soul. Or if they try to create images according to a conscious plan, they prevent the images that could help from emerging spontaneously. It's always more effective not to have any mental images of your constellation before you set it up.

It's best that therapists work on the assumption that there are no general patterns but that each constellation is unique, requiring a unique resolution that can be discovered only in a sensitive dialogic process with the participants.

Some constellations reveal the dynamics of companies, institutions, an illness, abundance. This technique can also be useful when a person has two professions, or when the parents come from two different countries or cultures, allowing the importance of both elements to be acknowledged yet find the appropriate balance between the two. Constellations are an excellent method for seeing larger systemic wholes, for getting an overview.

When a couple at a seminar wants to work on their relationship, I first have one of them and then the other set up their relationship using the same representatives. The reps stay standing and after the first constellation the other partner moves them to new positions. Sometimes you can see that one or the other is avoiding setting up the constellation so that issues are clearly visible. In cases like that, the reps' comparisons of how they felt in the two constellations are especially important.

When partners join together, each brings an internalized family system often distorting the reality of their relationship. When both partners set up their relationship and the important members of their families of origin, they're confronted with a more complete picture of their partner and a more objective reality. When the internalized systems are brought into order, then their mutual perceptions are also more appropriate.

## **Summary of Things to Consider Guidelines for Protagonists**

--Set up a constellation only when there's a burning question and a true need. Curiosity alone is not enough.

--As the reps are chosen, it's useful to arrange them in their natural order—parents first and then the sequence of the siblings. Before the constellation itself is begun, it's useful to repeat everyone's role, to detect and avoid confusion.

--Avoid characterizations and info about how persons acted or thought. For this work, only info about actual events is helpful—illnesses, physical handicaps, separations, and deeds that had consequences for the person's life.

Characterizations of the members of your family interfere w/ the reps ability to sense the effect of the family dynamics.

--Center yourself and orient yourself toward the “feel” of the family. Your ideas and plans about how to set up the family interfere with sensing the info that helps. The constellation will emerge only as you go through the process of setting it up. Allow yourself to be surprised by what emerges.

--As you look for the right place for each rep, take the person by the hand or arm and go with the person to his or her place so that you can “feel” where the person belongs. Moving him or her a few inches can make a big difference.

--Search for the proper place, but don't sculpt gestures or movements, or tell the person where to look.

--After you've set them up, go around the outside of the constellation once, make fine adjustments, and say, once again, whom everyone is representing.

## **Guidelines for Reps**

--Gather yourself and concentrate your attention on your reactions to being in this place. Your job is to let the position affect you and to report that as clearly and concisely as you possibly can.

--Avoid coming to conclusions about what you think you should feel based on what you see. If you feel nothing at all, then say that.

--Say whatever you notice about how this place affects you, regardless of what it might be—especially when the feeling goes against your personal values and sense of right and wrong.

--Don't worry about whether or not the sensations are your personal reaction or a response to the situation. The therapist will sort that out.

--Report what you feel, but guard against interpreting your feelings. Trust them as they come.

--Don't have any intentions other than to report accurately how the position affects you. This may include certain ideas or images that occur to you. With experience, you'll develop a clear sense of what needs to be said and what can be left out.

## **Guidelines for Therapists**

--Your orientation is toward finding a resolution. You must seek it, but you can't create it. It's not your job to create a resolution, but to seek the one that suggests itself from what you actually see in your constellation.

--Look for those who have been excluded and forgotten, but who still have an effect on the system.

--You must stand by all those in the system who have been vilified, hated, scorned, shut out. In cases of abuse, that will often be the perpetrator.

Resolution requires that the system be completely represented.

--Look for those who want to go, those who must go, and those who must be allowed to go.

--Trust the reports of the reps.

--Stop the constellation when you notice that the the protagonist isn't sufficiently serious or isn't centered and making good contact with each rep or isn't seeking the "feel" of the constellation or when important info is missing or you when you cannot see a resolution..

--Keep it simple; use the minimum number of persons necessary to find resolution.

--Pay attention to the mood of the group. If the group isn't serious and gathered, something is wrong.

## **Suggestions for Seeking a Resolution**

--Whoever entered the system first has precedence over those who came later. Watch the order of precedence. It runs clockwise, the later persons standing to the left of the earlier one. Parents have equal ranking, but which of them stands first varies from family to family according to their function in the family.

--Between two systems, the later system has precedence over the earlier one. The present family has precedence over the family of origin, the second marriage has precedence over the first, and so on. When a person has a child with another person during a marriage, this second relationship has precedence over the first.

--When a man and a woman are set up facing each other, that's an indication that their sexual intimacy has been disrupted.

--When a mother chooses a woman to represent her son, suspect systemic pressure toward homosexuality.

--When one of the participants has an urge to leave the room or the constellation, suspect suicidal tendencies.

--When one of the parents had an earlier relationship with firm bonding, the new partner often needs to stand between him or her and the old partner; otherwise, there's no separation from the old relationship. This can get complicated when bonding has taken place w/ several personas since they all form one large system.

--When all the reps are facing in the same direction, look for a missing person standing in front of them.

### **Stories that Heal**

When I tell people that they should do this or can't do that, they owe it to their autonomy and sense of honor to refuse. If I have methods for indicating where change is possible that don't require them to give up their autonomy, then they can listen to my offer and decide for themselves what's appropriate for them.

That's what telling stories does. They can listen to the stories without committing themselves to change. They can take from the story whatever they need and throw away the rest. They don't need to get into a conflict with me; in fact, they can forget me altogether. When we watch a film, we forget who's operating the projector, just watching the film and going home.

Bed wetting: a father can tell his daughter that he is happy to have married her mother, then relate an altered fairy tale in which Snow White turns off a drippy faucet or fixes a loose tile on the roof, or puts some straw down to catch a roof leak. The girl's unconscious will do the rest.

Try to find a nonintrusive and respectful way to talk with a child by telling stories; indirection is more effective because there's no loss of face or shaming.

### **Working Through Images that Bind and Creating Images that Liberate**

In therapy, you often observe that people are living out certain inner images or patterns, what Transactional Analysis calls *scripts*. The images have different origins: some arise out of personal experiences and trauma and some out of systemic entanglements.

When a child has a traumatic experience, it's often internalized and then organizes the child's later experiences. Many fairy tales and myths describe this kind of pattern. Sleeping Beauty describes a pattern in which a girl stays "asleep" with the illusion that when she awakens after a 100 years, she'll still be 15 years old. The story actually encourages her to keep on sleeping while waiting for her prince. When it dawn on her that she's really getting older, she wakes up pretty quickly. Women who choose Sleeping Beauty as their favorite fairy tale are often identified with their father's former partner.

Many fairy tales contain images that limit us and the solutions they suggest are destructive illusions that serve to maintain the status quo. I ask people to tell their favorite fairy tale, one with which they identify, and then to compare the fairy tale with their own situation.

When a person chooses a fairy tale about something a child can experience before the age of seven, the client's problems are most likely actual experiences. When people choose the story of *Rumpelstilskin*, for example, their problems usually don't have to do with systemic entanglements, but with actual traumatic



experiences.

The mother is missing in many fairy tales, but fairy tales are very clever and they distract us from the essential message. In *Rumpelstiltskin*, the diversion is the sentence, "Lucky for me that no one knew that Rumpelstiltskin is my name." For the people who choose it, Rumpelstiltskin was an image for the experience of being given away or abandoned, for example, the experience of a girl who was abandoned by her father after her mother died or left, and who, in her turn, abandoned her own son. A few had a sibling who was given away. When I suspect that might be the case, I tell a variation of the story that gives them a chance to recognize the hidden dynamic.

The second kind of pattern reflected in fairy tales arises out of systemic entanglements rather than from direct personal experiences. When clients identify with stories that only adults can experience, for instance, *Othello* or *The Odyssey*, my experience is that they're most likely identified with someone in their family system. There are many famous stories and myths of this type that fascinate children and adults, although they can't say why. I believe the stories have to do with another person who played an important role in the life of the family, someone who suffered tragedy or misfortune, who was shut out of the family, or who left to make place for someone else. Such stories are literary images of real-life events that have influence on the life of the family system. Telling the story allows the missing person to be present, even if only in representational form.

In therapy, it's possible to identify the inner images that bind you and those that liberate you, regardless of whether they're related to personal experiences or to systemic dynamics. One method I developed to help clients to identify the script or the image that's important for them is to tell them the following story:

*All the World Is A Stage*

*Once upon a time, a man decided that the time had come to retire. He had worked hard and it was time to do something good for himself. He left his home and went somewhere else, wandered around a while, and came to a house with a sign in big letters: "Theater of the World."*

*He thought, "This is the right place for me," and bought a ticket. It was a bit expensive, but he told himself it didn't matter. He went into the theater, sat down in a comfortable chair, leaned back, and waited. The lights went down, the curtain parted, the performance began. As he watched, he thought, "I know this piece from literature. That's absolutely nothing new at all." As he continued to watch, he noticed it was a play in which he had played the leading role.*

*As yourself, "What's the name of the play?" It's a play that can be found in literature, a book, a play, a film, a story of someone's life. When you discover the name of the piece, it's a bit of a surprise and a bit embarrassing.*

## **Healing Rituals**

Rituals that heal arise out of love and are performed in the service of love. Rituals that seek to change reality for any other reason don't heal. Healing rituals involve movement and they're effective in therapeutic settings only when the sincerity of all participants supports the completion of the ritual movement. Therapeutic rituals of healing are offerings made to clients that, when properly performed, can change the systemic dynamics that shape their lives, change the inner images that organize a client's experience of the world, and may also affect the client's situation at home. Clients frequently report that after performing a healing ritual in a therapy group, the behavior of the other members of their family changed. Completing reaching out, reliving birth, and bowing down are highly effective healing rituals.

## **Completing “Reaching Out” Toward an Appropriate Goal**

There are two basic situations that lead to difficulties in relationships. One is an unconscious identification with someone else in the system. The other is an interruption of the natural movement of “reaching out toward,” which can't develop properly when the the natural reaching-out movement of the young child toward someone the child loves was interrupted—through death, illness, circumstances, or other experiences. Such interruptions are accompanied by strong feelings of hurt, rejection, despair, hate, resignation, and grief. These feelings overlay the primal love but are the reverse side of love. When young children can't reach the person they love, they have a strong tendency to feel rejected, as if there were something wrong with them, and they stop practicing the movement.

Whenever such persons want to reach out to another person later in life, their memories of hurt unconsciously emerge and interrupt their movement, and they react with the same hurt as before. That's not a primary hurt that supports appropriate reaching out toward someone who could give what is needed, but secondary feelings that prevent the movement from developing and reaching its goal.

Sometimes an interrupted reaching-out movement manifests as muscle tension, headache, or self-destructive behaviors; for example, “I'll never show weakness,” or “Nothing really can help me.” Instead of carrying on with the movement until it reaches its goal, such a person draws back or goes into a circular “approach/avoidance” pattern. That's the basis of neurotic behavior.

When a person becomes angry at the point at which the reaching-out movement gets interrupted and the therapist encourages the expression of the anger instead of going back to the basic love and trust, the interruption of the movement is reinforced. The expression of emotions that cover and protect the more painful earlier ones doesn't bring resolution, which only comes when the movement reaches its goal and is completed. This is possible in a therapeutic

setting by accompanying the person back to the point at which the interruption occurred, and then helping the person to complete it. The therapist, or another member of the group, can represent the parent and the client then actually practices and completes the movement. When he or she has made a new experience of completing the movement, then other reaching-out movements are also easier. Often the entire process lasts only 15 to 20 minutes.

If you look, you can see whether or not the expression of an emotion facilitates resolution. The long-term effect of expressing secondary anger is destructive. When there's a birth trauma, the reaching-out movement to the mother is already interrupted at birth. Then it's appropriate for clients to relive their birth, to reestablish a bond to the mother and father. Reaching out to our mother and the experience of being accepted by her is the most fundamental and intensive experience of relationship that we can have. Even when the primary bonding to the mother didn't succeed in childhood, many people are still able to reestablish bonding through a healing ritual of reliving their birth and then being held appropriately.

I just say, "Go back slowly in time through your life, and when you come to a place where you stop, just stay there." Then, after a minute or so, a client will start to sob or weep, and I ask, "How old are you? What's happening?" If it's appropriate for the client, he or she will lead you to the birth experience. I help the client to relive the experience in a good way and I hold the person securely or have another member of the group do so, so that he or she feels safe no matter what feelings come up. I see neurosis as a circular movement that always returns to the point of interruption instead of moving on. As we remember the interrupted movement, feelings and memories come up, the decision we learned as children comes up, and then instead of completing the reaching out, we turn back to the starting point and start all over again. Sometimes, after this kind of work, I invite people to look at the rep of their mother or father and recite the following:

*Dear mama/Mother, I take everything that comes from you, all of it, with its full consequences. I take it at the full price it cost you and that it costs me. I will make out of it something good in memory of you—to thank and honor you. What you did must not have been in vain. I hold it close and in my heart, and if I am permitted, I will pass it on—as you have done.*

*I take you as my mother, and you may have me as your (son/daughter). You are my only mother and I am your child. You are big, and I am little. You give, I take, dear Mama. I'm glad that you took Daddy as your husband. You both are the right parents for me.*

*Dear Daddy/Father, I take everything that comes from you, all of it, with its full consequences. I accept it at the full price it cost you and that it costs me. I will make out of it something good in memory of you—to thank and honor you. What you did must not have been in vain. I hold it close and in my heart,*

*and if I am permitted, I will pass it on—as you have done. I take you as my father, and you may have me as your (son,daughter). You are big and I am little. You give, I take, dear Daddy. I'm glad that you took Mama as your wife. You both are the right parents for me.*

There's no better feeling than being accepted after one's birth, so I help clients experience that as an anchor. Then I let them return to the present through their memories, including any traumas so that negative experiences are contained and transformed by the more fundamental positive one. All later childhood traumas can be worked through at one time in using this anchor, accompanying them into their traumas and letting them look at each experience until they're finished, one at a time.

The ritual of bowing down before the appropriate person, paying homage, restores balance and order. In our culture, this movement has become difficult for many people; bowing down as an act of respect is easily confused with bowing down as an act of unhealthy submission. When we bow down and pay obeisance to someone who deserves to receive our honoring gesture, the soul and the body respond with release and a sense of lightness. It feels good and it has a good effect.

When we refuse to pay our obeisance to someone who has a legitimate right to receive it, the body and the soul respond with constriction, with a sense of effort and heaviness. The reasons for our refusal are irrelevant.

When families don't follow the orders of love, the children must learn to ignore their own souls and later they won't be able to recognize what's true and right for them.

Like reaching out, bowing down is a movement of both soul and body. It can be completed most easily in a constellation in which the whole family system is represented. The completeness of the family system legitimizes the movement. Appropriate bowing frees love to flow.

In a round, each participant has an opportunity to report what he or she is working on, one after the other. I seldom work with an individual in a round for more than 10 minutes, but these short interactions have continuity, building on one another of the course of a seminar. The result is that some interventions with people last four or five days. I work in small doses that leave a lot of time in between for personal reflection so that no one is overloaded or under pressure to do more than is possible at any moment.

In group dynamic psychotherapy, every participant can interpret everyone else. Everyone is exposed and vulnerable to everyone else. When participants do not have very strong personalities or are not experienced in group work, they get caught up in group dynamics, which act as a collective defense, and certain important themes systematically get shut out.

Groups have a strong tendency to adopt certain principles and to make them into a group rule; for example, “Nothing can be done in this group with out the

consensus of all members.” Consensus is important in the life of a group, but when it becomes an absolute rule, it's destructive. Then the objections of those people who don't serious desire to explore something in themselves interrupt the process of the whole group and hinder others from doing the work they came to do. Beware giving too much power to “squeaky wheels.”

The use of the group round has the advantage that interactions between members of the group are discouraged. No one can interfere with someone else's work. No one is attacked; no one can be blamed or praised (which is just as damaging as blame). The round method builds trust. Respect for the individual and the loving and supporting posture of the therapist establish an unconscious solidarity within the group that has a more spiritual quality than that which is possible within a group-dynamic-oriented psychotherapy.

If you recognize and accept personal guilt you no longer feel it as guilt. It gets transformed into a powerful force for action. You still know about your guilt, but it doesn't oppress you as guilty feelings, which develop at the point at which you refuse to act responsibly with respect to your guilt. When you open yourself fully to your personal guilt, then you have a source of support for doing good. Whenever you feel guilty and try to atone for something, you feel tight and limited. When guilt empowers, the effect is totally different. Suicide is often an attempt at atoning for guilt.

Centering happens when I open my eyes and ears and take in the richness of the world all around me, and allow it to order itself in me.

Abused children usually take the guilt and the consequences of the abuse onto themselves. It's much more difficult to leave the guilt and the consequences with the parents, and also the responsibility. But children cause themselves additional damage when they feel that they have the right to get even with their parents, in the sense of, “All right, now you're going to pay for what you did to me.” That has very damaging consequences.

## **Dreams**

I don't work much w/ dreams but when I do, I resist mythologizing them. I don't treat them as messages from God. If your energy is flowing into avoiding decisions and effective action, or into maintaining the status quo, then your dreams justify that posture. If people jump right into the telling of their dreams, without feeling, without respect for the dream, without an appropriate shyness and shame, then it's almost certainly an avoiding gambit, a *secondary dream*, that goes with secondary feelings. If you take such dreams seriously, you only reinforce the problem and some part of the dreamer laughs at you for falling into the trap. Secondary dreams are like bait, testing to see if you're ready to bite. It's

so much easier to gossip about dream content than make real changes in your life.

*Primary dreams*, on the other hand, are coded memories, undramatic. Dreams of water, for example, often carry the memory of birth.

*Shadow dreams* show us the side of ourselves that we don't want to look at. We're generally not ready to deal w/ what they tell us, often revealing a hidden side of ourselves.

*Systemic dreams* portray an unresolved situation in the family or extended family, but if the dreamer takes on the task of balancing the whole family system, the consequences are usually disastrous. Such dreams often have something brutal about them, dealing w/ murder, suicide, death. The shadow of the system is often visible. When you try to interpret these dreams as if they were statements about the person, you abuse the client, making him or her personally responsible for something that's much larger.

In dream narratives, everything you need is in the first couple of sentences. The telling of a dream usually reaches its peak after about the second or third sentence. Everything that comes after that is just frosting on the cake and detracts from the power of the dream. The person relating a dream tends to become lost in the details. If you get people into the habit of telling dreams in a very concentrated way, and stop them after the second or third sentence, then you have a better chance of getting a clear message with which to work.

*Meta-dreams* help people already working on themselves to get even clearer. They generally know immediately what a meta-dream is about and it needs no interpretation, bringing a solution into consciousness.

When a trauma is worked upon in psychotherapy, the most important thing is usually forgotten, namely, that the person survived. Unless that's acknowledged, the gestalt won't close and there's no resolution.

Client: "I'm sitting with someone in a bus. He's driving."

Hellinger: Good. That's enough. That's the point of the dream. (Pause) What's the solution?

Client: I could drive myself.

Hellinger: Okay. Change places w/ the driver.

Client: My dreams always end with chasms and cliffs, w/ anxiety about falling.

Hellinger: Okay. When you have this dream, support yourself by imagining yourself with your back leaning against your father. When a child's in danger in

a dream, the person who can help is almost always the father. Sometimes the grandfather is needed as well. It doesn't matter what the father did or didn't do, or whether or not the child knew him. There's strength in the masculine.

Often the solution lies *before* the dream, that the parent holds the child *first*.

Most dreams only affirm the problem, especially the dreams people immediately want to tell, only rationalizing failure. People swimming around endlessly in their misery often feel certain: **resolution must be approached with fear and trembling.**

### **Resistance**

As soon as a client begins resisting, interrupt with an explanation to the group or an anecdote. He can afford to confront rather blatantly since the groups quickly recognize how much love and respect are contained in his interventions, and how often a good resolution emerges in the end.

It's wishful thinking that a woman's lover and husband be friends unless they want a homoerotic affair with each other by sharing the woman.

Raising hypothetical objections in therapy cuts off the energy, disturbs a healing possibility, because it's always easier to come up with objections than it is to find good solutions. Whoever raises objections usually doesn't have to take responsibility for their effects. It's very different when someone enters into the situation, and through his or her personal involvement, discovers a new variation. Then he or she can speak from personal experience and bring insight to supplement or correct what was originally said. Criticizing and questioning everything with hypothetical possibilities is a game you play at the university. But when you're working with real people with real suffering, you can't do it. The consequences are too great. I can question everything, but what does it accomplish?

Likewise, looking for causes and explanations blocks real action towards healing. Usually we seek explanations for our own refusal to act, or for our unhappiness. As soon as we've found an explanation, we stop trying to understand our refusal or our unhappiness, and the process that was started by the experience is interrupted. You have to jump in the river and see where it takes you.

There are three kinds of people: those who say no, then think; those that say yes, then think; and those that just think.

Stubbornness is the inability to take/receive. The antidote is to put it off for 5 minutes.

One progresses by leaving behind everything from before, even old insights; the goal is only reached with the final step, everything before was only the preparation.

Whenever people make themselves weak, they're filtering something out of their perceptions, and they can't see, or hear, or act appropriately. Everything that weakens people interferes with their doing what they want to do. If a person needs to feel weak, let them do so and tell them to enjoy it, but it's not therapy.

It's important to honor our neediness and to communicate in our relationships that we need our partners, but without misusing them. In good partnerships, both partners are needy, and that grants their relationship strength. To deal with neediness never ask for something general but for something specific like, "Please stay w/ me for 1/2 hour and talk to me."

### **Grief and Separation**

People have a right to their own destinies; you can't help them deal with matters of destiny.

Tragic circumstances—like a handicapped child—require honoring the magnitude and consequences of procreation. The child must be honored and loved; it's a question of human dignity. That's the humble attitude that allows resolution. Parents generally accept a retarded child without difficulty—it's strangers who have problems. Parents must affirm a child as s/he is and generally do; it's harder for others who should simply butt out of others' business. No therapist has the right to feel responsible for protecting a family from life and all that belongs to it. The illusion that therapy can change the realities of life or improve it is the source of a lot of hurt, especially in relationships. Life is the way it is, with all its joys and sorrows.

When a person is angry at a deceased person, the grief doesn't stop. Better to say "I respect and honor your life and your death."

Don't give anyone an answer that he or she can't yet live.