



What Transforms The Person, or the Family?

At the age of 20, I read **Siddhartha**... more than once. Herman Hesse's short novel retold the story of the Buddha so eloquently I thought. Sitting in the back of buses, lonely and estranged from both family and my religious upbringing, criss-crossing Europe on art history tours during a junior year abroad—I dreamed of walking the path outlined so beautifully in the book. Somehow, like the Buddha, I would leave the family for asceticism and training. Maybe I already had. But then would come immersion in business, passion, and wealth, followed finally by that enlightened epiphany in which I saw it all as "illusion"—and realized my essential oneness with everything. It was the classic, heroic, individual quest for unity with a transcendent Divine. I drank it in like a starving child.

Roughly four decades later, that quest remains. But progress has not come in the ways I thought it would. The grand vision absorbed in my youth had some things totally backwards. In some respects, it started me (and many others) walking more or less in the wrong direction. Take the idea, still prominent in Yogananda's **Autobiography of a Yogi**, for instance — that Mother Earth and this life on her are really just a platform for **private** spiritual evolution. She's all maya—illusion—anyway. Get on to nirvana, or heaven, as fast as you can. That's all that matters. While there's some truth to this, still, by itself, it can be irresponsible, escapist, and downright dangerous. It fosters the attitude that we can plunder and destroy the great, nurturing ecosystem that gives us all this chance to incarnate

and evolve. How can that not matter? The traditional message —“live for the afterlife, this one's a mess”—has turned out to be a deadly half truth. In our world, it's that message that has created the worst of the mess.

But more recently, into my awareness at least, has come a reversal even more radical. Not only must the transformational pilgrim be ultimately responsible to the planet and the rest of humanity, but even the “I”—the distinct, individual seeker—is a kind of reductionist fantasy. That lone “I” is far more bound up with collective families than we in the West have tended to think. From the perspective of Bert Hellinger's Systemic Constellation Work, we remain part of an ever-present, ancestral family system (or “soul”) that deeply influences our adult lives.

So to think, as I did, that I could just turn completely away from my family and achieve fulfillment and enlightenment as an isolated being—well, in an awful lot of instances, that may simply not be possible. So many cases now show that the life and love of the divine Mother flow to us through the root systems of our ancestral families. If these channels are damaged or clogged, the branches and leaves of our lives spread into the light of Father Sun sickly and undernourished.

In other words, what if the transformation the “I” seeks alone involves also a transformation of its ancestral family?

Of course, the first argument that arises against this is—well, you can't change the past, so your parents and grandparents are what they were. And the answer to that is: precisely, but what if they never accepted it? What seems to clog the familial root systems, and cause serious trouble for later descendents, is exactly denial of what they were. Serious aspects of our recent ancestors' fates, which they

were unable or unwilling to accept, tend to resurface as problems in the lives of their descendents. Out of “systemic” loyalty, the war, the lost baby, the bad marriage never accepted will emerge somehow once again in a grandchild's life. Constellation Work shows us, in vivid and fascinating ways, that we do have ways to help ancestors accept their fates—even after death.

How does this work? How can such a thing be? Intuitively chosen representatives “constellated” in workshops resonate somehow with the souls of non-living relatives in such a way as to help them come to terms with excluded aspects of their lives. For many, this has to be seen to be believed. But what it means is this. There is a bi-directional healing that takes place here. The client, whose issues and family soul are in focus, by doing this work helps recent ancestors achieve clarity and peace. As this happens, the ancestors “untangle” and pass life and love undamaged through to the client. With the “roots” clear, so the client experiences increased strength and freedom in life. Chronic issues of health, relationships, and business, no longer anchored “systemically,” begin to resolve.

So then, in this notion of transformation, there are the two great reversals. As individual seekers we are still responsible to the planet. And beyond that, we are forever part of a family collective that may need to transform along with us. Looking back, despite the surprises I felt over the decades in making these shifts, I see now what profound sense they make. For enlightenment has always been described as “unity with everything.” However did we get the idea that we could achieve this unity while turning our backs on not merely the planet, but the very families that birthed us? ▲