



WHERE SHAMANISM AND PSYCHOTHERAPY MEET 2003

Differences and correspondences, illustrated by examples from family constellation work, from the point of view of a practitioner of both methods.

Summary: Shamans practise the most ancient form of medicine and psychotherapy. Bert Hellinger's method of working with family constellations shows not only differences, but also a number of obvious as well as hidden correspondences with shamanism. Transpersonal processes, - e.g., when a group member, once he agrees to take a role of an absent or dead person, makes correct statements and often uses the same words as the represented person and to some degree even feels his symptoms, without prior knowledge, - cannot (yet) be explained by scientific methods, but very well by the shamanic conception of the world. Albrecht Mahr assumes that there is a "knowing field" where one can get information. Maybe this is just a different way to describe the shamanic conception that everything that exists is interconnected?

Sometimes the same things are seen from different sides. Whether a deceased person occupies a living person, steals his soul and lures him into death, or the living person out of love follows the deceased into illness and death - this, in my opinion, is only a matter of point of view. Popular sayings in Europe also know both attitudes: when a father and a son die one after the other, it is said that "he has fetched him", but also that "he has gone after him". Both the psychotherapist and the shaman consider the verbal and nonverbal signals and evaluate them in the light their previous experiences. The therapist in constellation work lets himself be guided by intuition out of the "blank centre" (Bert Hellinger) or "non-knowledge" (Varga von Kibčd), the shaman tries to become a "hollow bone" (Lakota), so that he can be guided by the spirits he contacts in shamanic journeying.

Seems different, but is it really?

Zusammenfassung: Dieses Referat entspricht weitgehend SCHAMANISMUS UND FAMILIENSTELLEN, das ich 2001 in Würzburg und Gmunden gehalten habe. Der Unterschied besteht im Schwerpunkt, daß ich bei den Aufstellungskongressen in Europa vor allem schamanische Sicht- und Vorgehensweisen, den Schamanen beim Symposium in Sibirien vor allem das Familienstellen vorstellen wollte.

Since 1961 at the latest, when Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin circled our globe, we have known how small the earth is. And modern communication media bring us even closer together. And thus, the manifold traditions of healing and problem solving also approach each other more and more. I am honoured to point out to you today possible connections between ancient shamanism and young psychotherapy.

I am doing so because I feel the vocation to build bridges between psychotherapy, shamanism, and the Christian mystic and healing tradition. I am doing research in this field for personal reasons, too, as I am a Catholic theologian as well as a psychologist, but I also work with shamanic healing methods. So I had to harmonize the different theories and practices within myself.

Today I would like to compare shamanism and "systemic solutions for family constellations", a method developed about 20 years ago by the German Bert Hellinger. That's a special form of role-playing: the patient chooses out of the group

representatives for the relevant persons or other elements relating to the client's problem. The therapist tries to bring in a good order all parts of the system.

Let me give you an example first:

BIRGIT

tells me her problem: she is 20 years old, a borderliner, and has already made an attempt on suicide. "I can't find a good place in life", she says: intimate relationships broke up, she started several professional trainings and didn't finish any of them. She feels weak and restless, and has got a couple of symptoms, like rashes and frequent headaches.

I invite her to a group therapy.

When she begins to set up her family, I learn the following: Birgit is the sixth of eight children of her parents. Two of them were aborted, two were born dead. Birgit was born at the end of six months of pregnancy, had already been given up, and hardly survived.

I ask Birgit to choose representatives for her parents and for the four surviving children, and to set them up in space according to her inner image. I make the representatives of her four dead sisters and brothers lie down in the middle. The representative of the mother cannot stand looking at the dead and would rather lie down with them. The representative of the father tries hard, but awkwardly and ineffectively, to help the children.

There, Birgit's head begins to twitch like mad, and she starts screaming. I can prevent her from taking refuge in insanity, but it takes her a long time to face pain. Finally she begins to weep heartrendingly. She can also release her anger about the dire circumstances of her start into life.

Finally, upon my invitation, she gives back the terrible burden of responsibility to her parents. She honours the fate of her dead brothers and sisters, and gets their permission to stay alive, instead of following them into death by being half dead, half alive, half insane, or attempting suicide. With great relief she finally states: "Now I'll stay."

This example shows one of the many applications and forms of constellation work.

THE PLACE OF FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS WITHIN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The vast range of psychotherapeutic techniques and theories can be classified into five major schools:

In-depth therapy with Sigmund Freud's (my compatriot's) psychoanalysis. According to him, the roots of diseases and disorders are mainly hidden in the unconscious. Other representatives and founders of similar methods are, e.g., C.G. Jung and Alfred Adler.

Second, behaviour therapy deals mainly with the analysis of symptoms, their trigger mechanisms and effects. Prominent representatives are, e.g., Skinner and the Russian Pavlov.

The third important line of psychotherapy, called humanistic psychology, sees the unconscious as the infinite potential of man, as an abundant reservoir of wisdom that everybody has within himself, and that can be dug up gradually. Representatives of this school were namely Maslow, Rogers, Perls, etc.

In the fourth main school of psychotherapy, systemic psychotherapy, the function of a person's disease is regarded within

the system of relationships that he lives or lived in. Important representatives are, e.g., Satir, Minuchin, Jackson. Bert Hellinger's systemic solutions for family constellations also belong to systemic therapy.

The shamanic views on healing are most concurrent with transpersonal psychology, a recently developed school, where healing takes place mainly in altered states of awareness, but usually of the client only. Early forerunners were to some extent the Austrian Rudolf Steiner, and first of all the Swiss C.G. Jung, a famous disciple of Freud's.

Within the more than hundred different psychotherapeutic methods Bert Hellinger's family constellations can be classed as mainly belonging to systemic therapy.

WHO IS BERT HELLINGER?

Bert, who is now 77 years old, studied Catholic theology - like myself - and philosophy, and after that worked as a priest in South Africa for several years. Upon return to Germany, his home country, he completed several psychotherapeutic trainings: in psychoanalysis, gestalt therapy, and transactional analysis. I first heard of him, when he gave therapeutic sessions according to Janov in a neighboring city. Through systemic therapy he discovered the importance of the multi-generation aspect, especially through Hungarian psychologist Boszormenyi-Nagy. Now he calls his constellation system "phenomenological", which means that he is oriented towards phenomena without interpreting them.

Now I would like to outline Bert Hellinger's basic ideas.

BERT HELLINGER'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP SYSTEMS

Hellinger speaks of three basic needs in relationships (not to be mistaken with the general basic needs described by Abraham Maslow): I quote from Hellinger's book "Love's hidden symmetry"

In all our various relationships, fundamental needs interact in a complex way:

1. The need to belong, that is, for BONDING. Konrad Lorenz described the phenomenon of imprinting among animals. John Bowlby and his students have described the bonding that occurs between a mother and her children. Bert Hellinger has recognized the importance of the bonding between sexual partners, which ties them together quite independently of the love they may feel for each other. However, the bonding referred to here is primarily a social bond that ties an individual to his or her group of reference.
2. The need to maintain a BALANCE of giving and taking, that is, for equilibrium. The importance of balanced giving and taking in family dynamics, as well as the importance of the hidden bonds and loyalties operating in family systems, has been described by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy.
3. The need for the safety of social convention and predictability, that is, for ORDER. We feel these three different needs with the urgency of drives and instinctual reactions, and they subject us to forces that challenge us and demand compliance, that coerce and control us. They limit our choices and commit us, whether we like it or not, to objectives that conflict with our personal wishes and pleasures.

When our actions endanger or damage our relationships, we feel guilt, and we feel freedom from guilt, or innocence, when our actions serve them. Thus, our feelings of guilt and innocence are primarily social phenomena that do not necessarily orient us toward higher more 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. 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 obligated to you." Many idealists hold this posture, and it's widely known as the "helper syndrome".

A little story: A Gift of Love A missionary in Africa was transferred to a new area. On the morning of his departure, he was visited by a man who had walked several hours to give him a small amount of money as a going-away gift. The value of the money was about 30 cents. It was clear to the missionary that the man was thanking him, because when the man was ill, the missionary had been concerned and had visited him several times. He understood that 30 cents was a huge sum of money for this man. He was tempted to give the money back, perhaps even to add a bit to it, but upon reflection, he accepted the money and thanked the man. Having given in love, he was obliged to take in love as well.

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.

1. Guilt feels like exclusion and alienation when our belonging is endangered. When it is well served, we feel innocence as intimate inclusion and closeness.

2. Guilt feels like indebtedness and obligation when our giving and taking are not balanced. When they are well served, we feel innocence as entitlement and freedom.

3. 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 can demand in the service of one need what it forbids in the service of another.

THE SYSTEMIC CONSCIENCE

In addition to the feelings of guilt and innocence that we consciously feel in the service of bonding, the balance of giving and taking, and social convention, there's also a hidden conscience operating in our relationships that we do not feel. It's a systemic conscience that has priority over our personal feelings of guilt and innocence and which serves other orders.

These orders 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." Unquote.

HOW DO FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS AND SHAMANISM GO TOGETHER?

I would like to explain this, starting from the following question:

How can a person sense something in another person and know something she cannot know at all?

For science, this is a mystery.

The phenomenon is well known: in gestalt therapy as well as in psychodrama, family reconstruction, parts party, family and structure constellations - whoever works with these methods has experienced the fact that you can rely on the essential statements of the representatives or role players (apart from very rare exceptions). It sometimes happens that the role player even uses the very same words that the therapist knows from the represented person, and that he to some extent feels his symptoms. It happens over and over again that a group member learns about an unknown because concealed brother or sister, e.g., an illegitimate child of his father, and this fact is later confirmed.

Why this works, cannot be explained scientifically. Not yet. We know verbal communication, which has been thoroughly studied. Nonverbal communication as well. But ways of communication beyond that could not be proved or explained until now. Some scientists even deny the existence of these phenomena. Not even all therapists working with family constellations are aware of the fact that these are transpersonal processes.

Where does this come from?

In the Western world we are convinced to be isolated individuals, so to speak alone in our world. In Europe this began in the Middle Ages, when many people, mostly women, who were still able to be in connection with the whole cosmos and with the otherworlds, were accused of being witches and burned at the stake. It was not by accident that this happened at the time when the first universities were founded, and when empiric science took a first upswing.

At the time of the Renaissance, beginning around 1500 AD, man was more and more seen to be most important, especially his capacity for thinking. "Cogito, ergo sum", said René Descartes, "I think, therefore I exist". The connection with the spiritual worlds was finally cut off in the second half of the 18th century, in the of so-called age of Enlightenment.

This age brought a number of advantages: the golden age of empiric studies, an enormous specialization of sciences, and, as a consequence, a great degree of scientific, technical, and economic development.

However, at a very great price: disregard of the world of feelings and drives, and of the spiritual and religious dimension of man, which, up to our days, in industrialized societies produced a widespread feeling of senselessness. During the last century, many people cut off their remaining ties with religion (which literally means connectedness).

Another great price to be paid was imperialistic subjugation as well as economic exploitation of peoples and cultures, and of natural resources.

Thus, western people command of very advanced technologies, and most of us live in comparatively great material wealth, but many people are lonely, and their hearts are empty.

But there is also a number of counter-movements, in science, too. I would like to mention a few of them.

In the psychological field, C.G. Jung was the first to describe man as being "unconsciously mixed up with other individuals", and he developed the conception of the "collective unconscious". But his highly esteemed goal was individuation.

The British biochemist Rupert Sheldrake (he, together with a theologian, even wrote a book on angels) put forward his theory of structurizing and organizing fields, which he calls "morphogenetic", in order to describe the development and connection of living organisms.

The German Bert Hellinger speaks of the "great soul". "What I try to do in my work, is to try to harmonize people with this great force. I myself fall into line with this force, harmonize with it, and like that I work with something that only passes through me."

And the German Insa Sparrer, an other founder of constellation work, says, "In systemic structure constellations the knowledge existing between us becomes apparent. All essential thoughts flow from the source of this knowledge. We are only recipients for it."

In recent years, neuroscientists like Rizzolatti discovered so-called mirror neurons in the brain, which possibly represent a

physical proof of interpersonal subjectivity, and are supposed to make empathy possible (in schizophrenics, who sometimes cannot distinguish between their own and other people's feelings, these neurons are out of order, just like in autistic people, who can hardly put themselves in the position of another person).

The origin as well as the expression of these concepts may differ, but they all start from the idea that, apart from individual people, there is something that interconnects everything. This systemic or transpersonal view is the basis of shamanic acting as well as of any constellation work: Apart from the healer and the patient, there is a third thing that connects us all.

What to natural science (still) appears as an unsolved mystery, is natural and easy to explain in the shamanic view.

"There is a dream that is dreaming us", the San, the bush people of the Kalahari say.

In the tradition of the Native American Medicine Wheel according to Swift Deer and Hyemeyohsts Storm, position no. 15 in the Eastern centre means "the soul of all people", where everything is recorded what ever has been thought and done in the world.

From the shamanic point of view, the specific form and distinction of an individual from others is not being denied, just like a finger is different from the others and even has its own name: index finger, middle finger, ring finger... But our Western world has lost the sight of the fact that

EVERYTHING IS PART OF A WHOLE:

When one finger is injured, the other finger also feels it, for there are connections: skin, tissues, bloodvessels and nerves. If I see myself as part of ONE body, this not only gives me power through the experience of connectedness, but I can also make use of this connection and sense what is going on in another part of this ONE body. So I needn't box anybody's ears, I could just as well give myself a box on the ears; and when I treat somebody with love, then I treat myself.

If you believe this connection to exist, then it is natural that a person can make correct statements about another person, even if he is already dead. From a shamanic point of view, this connectedness comprises not only all people, but also everything that exists: animals, plants, matter, the whole cosmos, everything that has existed and will exist, from the beginning to the end of time. "I am old, I am young, I know what was told", a celtic [keltik] song says. Those who meditate may know this fascinating and overwhelming experience. From this holistic point of view, many phenomena can be understood, up to economic and societal processes.

DOES HEALING TAKE PLACE WITH THE AID OF SPIRITS, BEINGS OUTSIDE OF ME OR OF PARTS OF THE PERSONALITY, THE WISDOM OF THE UNCONSCIOUS OR THE GREAT SOUL?

Interestingly enough, many shamans don't have a problem to reconcile these seemingly diverging points of view. When, e. g., Papa Eli from Burkina Faso and Brant Secunda, who was initiated by Mexican Huichol people, share the view that the spirits are WITHIN US.

From in-depth psychology we know the concept of "internalization", according to which real people, like father, mother, or caretaker, become parts of one's own personality, so that it is practically irrelevant, whether in therapy you are, e.g., dealing with an imagined father or with the superego. Constructivistic conceptions draw similar consequences.

This seems to be one of the reasons why individual therapy is also possible, and just as effective as family therapy, because all relevant persons, be they dead or alive, are within me. Maybe, internalization relates not only to the persons I experienced as a child, but, - unconsciously - to all my ancestors, just as, physically and genetically, I have got something of

them within myself. In this way, our ancestors are at the same time outside of us and within us, and maybe the usual dividing line between "intrapsychic" and "interpersonal" doesn't exist. But this also means that the shaman needn't be angry about the psychological interpretation of processes experienced to be external, and the psychologist needn't be angry about "esoteric" explanations of his or her experiences with the psyche. Each of them can stick to his concept of reality and work with it very well, because - this is my theory:

THE REALMS OF THE SOUL AND OF THE SPIRITS ARE ONE

From this point of view, family constellations represent not only the structure of a client's relationships, real other persons, but ALSO the constellation of his inner parts. (By the way: the same constellation can be found inside the body too). Just as the different elements of a system constellation not only represent the members of an organisation, but often at the same time living and/or dead relatives and the client's parts of his soul. I have supported this view for 25 years, and it was confirmed by experience.

However I think about, that makes no difference as far as the effect of the therapy is concerned. If I use the term of personality or soul (used synonymously here) in this broad sense, it is the same (in the literal sense of the word), whether the dead are present in a constellation or not. In practice, there is no difference anyway, as I already explained with examples in my article called "To be or not to be".

From this point of view, it is understandable that not only I, but also already deceased people, if they are still entangled with the living, are in need of redemption, so that peace and clarity are restored within me and/or in relationships (in religious conceptions, too, mutual influencing is regarded as a matter of course). I'm going to talk about shamanic psychopomp work later (in point 6).

CONCLUSION: From a psychological point of view, shamanic treatment can be called healing in trance with the aid of the wisdom of the unconscious. And, from a shamanic point of view, systemic solutions for family constellations can be called healing with the aid of the spirits.

My friend Carlo Zumstein, a Swiss psychologist, who also works with shamanic methods, would certainly object here, stating that the goal of psychotherapy is to build up one's identity, to enter into relationships, and to take a good journey through life. On the other hand, the goal of shamanism is, according to Zumstein, to connect man with everything, transcending his ego.

My response is: the experience of connectedness is not an end in itself, the goal is - just as for meditative immersion in all-unity - to take a good journey through this (!) life, which in many tribal cultures is called the middle world, that is every-day reality.

The main difference between some psychotherapeutic methods and shamanic healing is that the helping elements, the resources we are connected with, are on the one hand seen as parts of the personality, on the other hand as spirit beings outside of one's own personality.

I maintain that the same processes are concerned. I myself experience them sometimes in one way, sometimes in the other way, depending on the method I am working with and on the client I am dealing with, whose "language" I assume. Although both theoretical explanations and rituals and the images involved are very different, I experience them as

THE SAME CONTENTS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.

I'll give you an example: In my opinion, shamanic soul retrieval corresponds with gestalt reintegration of disconnected

parts of the personality. The shaman journeys to the realm of the souls, maybe negotiates with the possessing forces there, or asks the piece of soul that maybe was lost because of a shock, whether it wishes to return, and then brings it back; whereas in gestalt therapy the client imagines the disconnected, usually unloved or unknown part of his personality as sitting opposite to himself, and talks to it until he is able to integrate it.

Or, in psychoanalysis, the client experiences the trauma once again, whereby tied-up energies are set free and become available again.

Whether a dead person possesses a living person, steals his soul and lures him into death, or whether the living person out of love follows him into disease or death, in my opinion, is only a question of point of view. In family constellations according to Hellinger, (conscious or unconscious) love for an excluded, devalued ancestor can be expressed in a more productive way: instead of continuing to live an unhappy life out of love for the disregarded ancestor, his fate is acknowledged and life is taken in abundance out of love for him and to his honour.

In Autogenic training, the journey to the spiritual leader/teacher is part of the advanced form of this method.

The stone oracle corresponds with the projective methods in psychology. In shamanism, experiences are seen as feedback, of a stone, e.g., whereas in projective tests they are seen as projections of the client, of which he becomes aware looking at the stone.

In guided affective imagery, or in dream work of various kinds, the images showing up are seen as an expression of the momentary condition of the soul, which give clues for the healing process. Shamans through their experiences during journeys as well as in dreams, also receive information in concrete terms about the diagnosis and the suitable healing method for the patient.

When I learned about shamanic healing methods and conceptions, I was fascinated by the fact that I already knew most of the techniques from psychotherapy, and had practiced them for years, without knowing about their shamanic origin. The fact that Western psychotherapy (like Christianity) contains a variety of shamanic elements, can be explained in the following way: first, many things have been discovered anew, because they belong to human constitution; on the other hand, several founders of psychotherapeutic schools, like Perls, Jung, etc., didn't only read about other cultures, but were also influenced by personal contacts.

How can we unite both points of views into a single conception of the world?

CONCEPTION OF THE WORLD

In my essay "Are shamanism, Christian mysticism, and Western psychotherapy compatible?" I already stated that, between the material world (which in the West is usually seen as the only one existing) and the Unnameable (which in our culture is usually called by the word "God"), there can be assumed to exist an intermediary world: the realm of the soul (or of the spirits), to which we belong and part of which we are, even in the time of our materialized existence on the earth.

The term "the unconscious" in my opinion is particularly well suited for this sphere of the soul, because it doesn't say anything about itself, but expresses only that its contents and processes are not conscious - but they can be brought to the light of consciousness by means of shamanic or constellation work, as well as with other techniques.

So you could imagine concentric circles - worlds in worlds in worlds - where each inner circle is part of the outer one and is shaped by it:

In the innermost of the concentric circles there is matter, the physical world, everyday reality with space and time; the world of the conscious, of one's own will, and of thinking; the subject of our natural sciences; in many tribal cultures called "middle world", surrounded above and below by the otherworld.

Surrounding it, the otherworld; the realm of spirits, those beings between God and man that, e.g., in the Bible are called forces and powers, angels and demons, and in some cultures are called gods; the realm of the dead and of the ancestors; in psychological language: the realm of the soul and of the unconscious; non-ordinary reality; also called dream-time; in some tribal cultures it is divided into the "upper world", where often wise spirit beings or teachers can be experienced, and into the "lower world", where often "power animals" can be met.

The reality that in monotheistic religions usually is called "God" would exist in the unlimited space surrounding the circles, penetrating and including everything else. By definition it cannot be defined (which means limited), otherwise it wouldn't be the reality we are talking of. That's presumably why shamans, although they revere it, seldom heal in the name of this reality. In reliable terms it can only be said what it is not, as "negative theology" says. All rhetoric can only be an approach, an attempt to put something incomprehensible into words: the Most High, the Great Spirit, the Creator, the One, the coinciding of opposites, the Unnameable, all-embracing love, the foundation of existence, Wakan Tanka

Interestingly enough, anthropologists also arrive at this division into three parts, equating the realm of the soul with that of the spirits. Holger Kalweit, e.g., calls them body, plasmapsyche, and pure mind (in Scharfetter/Rätsch, pp. 170ff).

But here I've got to modify: this point of view is, like all the others, only an attempt to explain and to understand the world. Explanations give us more confidence, they are, however, - like space and time - just helpful constructions. The above-mentioned model of the different worlds, e.g., makes us easily overlook the fact that these worlds in reality are ONE.

In most tribal cultures, it is also experienced as ONE world, held together and connected by the axis of the world, or by the world tree that grows through all the worlds. In psychological terms, God as well as the world of the spirits could be called personifications of parts of the personality, or projections according to Sigmund Freud. The German Graf Dürckheim calls them "reflections of the inner experience". Not in a devaluing sense, since man, experiencing transcendence, is at one with everything existing, and with the essence of all beingness, and only what exists "inside" can be projected "outwards". Whether I experience my existence extending to and comprising everything, or dissolving, no longer existing and merging in the ALL-ONE: in any case, in deep meditation we can experience that these and all other limitations have been lifted, an experience, however, that in our digital language is very difficult to describe.

How should we know that our inner eyes can see less clearly than our outer eyes, if both "only" construct things? "Look, there is a tree over there!" And the constructivist Heinz von Foerster replies, "How do you know that?"

CORRESPONDENCES and DIFFERENCES in detail

The outer form of shamanic healing vs. family constellations is rather different. But does this apply to the essence of the two processes as well? Let us discuss a few points:

1. The systemic method deals with living as well as dead persons. In a very similar way, even in the proceeding, the "ritual of the shields" is a possibility to work with the Medicine Wheel, a native American method. The shamanic view takes into consideration not only people, but also other elements, just as in structure constellations and similar methods a "depressive" house can be represented. Thus, in a shamanic healing work, a medicinal plant may be asked, "What can you do for me?, but also, "What can I do for you?" They are indeed all relatives of us.

As Galsan Cheenag, a Tuvan from Mongolia, puts it: "The spirits of my ancestors are all around me, it's the wind, it's the

sunbeam, it's the earth, it's the stones, the trees, the people, the animals, all that surrounds me is part of the spirits of my ancestors. Actually, the best known healing method here is touching Mother Earth, touching Brother Tree, touching our friends the stones, touching Sister Water. When I sit or lie on the ground, I feel a stream passing through myself, and I believe this to be the powers of the spirits." (quot. from Scharfetter/Rätsch, pp. 210f)

2. The shaman as well as the practitioner of systemic solutions falls back on hidden knowledge and sees himself, his clients or representatives as part of a "knowing field" (Albrecht Mahr). Access can, according to Hellinger, be reached by means of concentration, and in the shamanic traditions by means of trance, where a person lets himself temporarily be possessed by good powers, and acts as their earthly instrument (in addition, many and diverse forms of divination, etc., are also part of the shamanic techniques of problem solving). In a similar way, the client is also led by the spirits (in the shamanic language) or by the the clan transcending great soul ("die große Seele" in Bert Hellinger's term), when he selects representatives and sets them up. This is a matter not of thinking, but of sensing, and can even be done with closed eyes.

Here I would like to state that, in my opinion, we can learn a lot from indigenous peoples (one of the most important things is that they remind us of our own ancient capacities), but they can also learn from us: isn't it remarkably quick and easy: a group member is asked to take over a role, and from the very moment of his consent, his statements must be taken seriously as statements of the represented person (even if they are given casually and for fun): no drumming or rattling, no complicated trance technique, no guided meditation, not even Autogenic Training or Jacobson's progressive relaxation are necessary. In my opinion, thousands of years old traditional forms of trance induction, like drinking horrible juices that give you a thick head for days, or inflicting pain, etc., could maybe be replaced by simpler ways of letting go of one's thinking and of becoming more susceptible to the spirits messages.

On the other hand, systemic solutions and trance methods could be applied in many more ways than we do in the western world. In indigenous cultures, the shaman also often finds good pastures and the right place for the winter camp, he contacts the animal that will give his life for the survival of the clan, he senses which plant will grow especially well in which soil, he is also responsible that the family clan stick together. We, too, could use these methods in order to solve economic problems, to find technical solutions, to further the sense of belonging together within societies or among peoples (in our "Alpha Consulting" company in Vienna, we advise organizations and companies with the aid of these ancient techniques).

3. Both methods make hidden fields of power perceptible and put them in order by means of rituals. In constellation work usually a disorder of human relationships is diagnosed, whereas in shamanic healing (see above) a lack of harmony with nature is also perceived as cause of problems/ diseases/ disorders. Hoimar von Ditfurth's overall critique of the philippine healers - that they were charlatans since the extracted tissues turned out to be chicken livers - shows that he did not understand an essential aspect of shamanic healing: that it is a matter of show, which means to make invisible processes perceptible (in the same way, priests could be called swindlers as they claim bread to be the body of Christ).

4) The fact that a role player can make true statements about a represented person, would in shamanic thinking be seen as messages from the spirits, as temporary possession - by way of activating the connecting channels to the living or dead person concerned. The representative, just like the shaman, volunteers his services for a human soul. A more complex explanation is presented by the soul concept of the Tuvan people of Siberia. There it is believed that every human being has got several souls (this can be compared with the concept of man having several bodies, a view held in a number of spiritual methods), souls nearer to the body and souls more distant, which can, e.g., go somewhere else while the shaman is asleep or working. In this way, one of the souls of the represented person could temporarily join forces with the soul of his representative during constellation work.

From a shamanic point of view, not only people can be charged with a certain energy, but also anything else, like for example crystals, the drum, etc. (Christians know this shamanic technique of transubstantiation, when bread and wine are charged and thus become the body and the blood of Christ). Something similar happens when, in systemic work, people

are represented by a chair, a doll, or another object, or by wooden pieces on the so-called family-board.

The question why trustworthy statements about other persons or things can be made, could be answered in the following way: If every human being contains all his ancestors, even everything (as stated above) within himself, then everything and everybody can, so to speak, be activated within himself and personified by him (so this fact it is sometimes described by professional actors too).

From experience I can say that the person setting up a constellation frequently chooses a representative who knows the problem concerned in a similar form in his own life. And he or she, by taking the role, obtains increased self-knowledge, and sometimes can even make a step in the direction of his own healing. When, e.g., a group member suddenly is no longer chosen for the role of a person oriented towards the dead, this for me proves that this representative herself has undergone a healing transformation and that this has already been observed instinctively by the group members.

How can we be sure that a role player does not represent himself? You can sense it, if somebody is mainly busy with thinking and explaining instead of sensing and letting himself be led by inner impulses or the present spirits.

The information given by the actor always contains a personal tint, exactly as a melody can be played on different instruments; e.g., it sounds different on a piano compared to a flute, but it is still easily recognizable. In the same way, the message from the otherworld is expressed by the role player (as by the shaman) in his own way, and often with images from his own experience, but still it remains a message of others. The actor has to take distance at the end of the session and to go back into his/her own soul.

Years ago I experimented with family reconstructions: at different times, the same family system was represented in a nearly identical way by completely different role players, and, to my great surprise, in several instances the same sentences were used as in the earlier reconstruction. In a reconstruction session, a group member wanted to play a trick on us, saying just the opposite of what he felt. It then turned out that the person represented by him had also done this, a fact that was known to the client.

In my experience, an absent person is already present in the very moment his name is pronounced, and even more so, when he is intensively thought of, or when he is represented by another person, a mask, or some other object.

Besides verbal and nonverbal communication, there must be more ways of information between everything that exists, and I think that physical prove of this will be given in later years or centuries. Interesting case studies and first empiric studies on this issue were presented by Larry Dossey.

In either method, it sometimes is not clear what time the information from the otherworld is valid for. For example, sexual abuse made out in constellation work need not necessarily have taken place in the generation concerned. In my opinion, the fact and especially the effect on the attending client appears evident, since in my experience the essential feelings are always right, although details of events may be incorrect.

Let us not overlook the fact that the main thing is not to achieve knowledge, but to set in motion or support a healing process. For example, I (unlike some colleagues) am usually not told at what age or why a piece of soul was disconnected. Maybe I am too curious, or I would otherwise become too arrogant. In any case, I often got the answer, "You needn't know that". Therefore I don't ask any more, but if it is essential for the client, I am shown the answer anyway.

If you don't trust in the messages of the spirits, then they may not tell you anything for a while. I know this kind of experience from the advanced form of Autogenic Training.

5. Many variables of the therapist's proceeding are the same in both traditions:

- First interview/questioning are frequent, but not a prerequisite ("covered" work is also possible, and there can be an excess of information, where words and thinking make sensing and hearing more difficult).

- An explanatory talk and instructions after the session are not necessary in either method, but are often practised.

- Observation of verbal and nonverbal manifestations. In shamanic work, long distance healing is also possible. But we know long-range effects of therapeutic work, too: If somebody, after intensively processing his issue, upon return to his familiar surroundings experiences them differently. This can be seen as a consequence of the change of his inner images, as a self-fulfilling prophecy, but often there is also some "objective" proof of this change. E.g., when a father after many years tells his daughter in a letter that he is very sorry for all harm he has done her, a letter that was proved to have been written after the daughter's session, without prior personal or telephone contact with her.

- The connection with the resources is provided by means of "concentration", "not knowing" (Varga von Kibéd), "the blank centre" (Hellinger) or "the hollow bone" (Lakota). - Both are guided by their intuition or the spirits respectively - Both alternate between active intervention and letting things develop.

6. When we honour the dead, they look friendly upon us, we are connected and blessed. To honour the ancestors is a matter of course in any tribal society, where (see above) not only human, but also animal, vegetable and inorganic ancestors are revered. In spite of the connection ("you have a place in my heart"), it is made sure that the dead can really be dead and need no longer fix their attention on the living, so that the living can turn towards the abundance of life and can really "take" it - in constellation work this is achieved through loving respect for the ancestors, disentanglement, and giving back the burdens: "I'll live for a while, and then I'll come, too."

For the shaman, "psychopomp work" is an essential task: he must conduct the souls of the deceased and make sure that they safely arrive in the otherworlds, e.g. by ritually attaching the soul of a deceased person onto a goat and driving it into the wilderness (Nepal). When the souls of the deceased get stuck in this world, they are not redeemed and irritate the living.

In many tribal societies, a serious illness or a near-death experience are thought to be characteristic for a shaman's vocation, because in this way the future shaman already knows the way how to journey between the worlds of the living and the dead; this capacity is a prerequisite for conducting deceased people to the other world, who, e.g., due to sudden death in an accident don't know they are already dead. Usually, the shaman makes sure they understand this and hands them over to their ancestors or to a higher force.

7. Sometimes, the same things are seen from different sides. Whether, e.g., a dead person possesses a living person, steals his soul and lures him into death, or the living person out of love follows him into illness or death - this, in my opinion, is only a matter of point of view. Popular tradition also knows this: if, e.g., a father and a son die one after the other, it is stated, that "he has fetched him", but also that "he has followed him". Traditionally, the shaman will rather ask the dead and persuade him to let the living person free, which also frees the dead, who often needs healing himself: usually he must be helped, sometimes forced, to fit in with the order of nature. Just like in family constellations, it sometimes happens that an ancestor first has to confess his guilt and accept responsibility for it, or that he just needs to be seen by his offspring and to get respect in order to be able to retire to the realm of the spirits.

We know similar issues from therapeutic reconstruction of the reality of the ancestors wishes: if, e.g., my grandparents receive the abundance of affection and appreciation from their parents, then they can let the abundance of their happiness overflow onto my parents, and the stream of happiness then flows onto me. In this case, the ancestors are

healed, too, so that I can live freely. The therapist mainly works with the living person, in order to achieve disentanglement, as for example, "I'll leave guilt and its consequences with you". But in difficult cases the representative of the dead must also be obliged to look into the descendant's eyes and to tell him whether he really wants to pass his unhappiness onto him.

8. In medicine as well as in psychotherapy and the shamanic concept, a person's problem consists either in having too much of something (e.g. stress, virus, or other people's burdens) or in lacking something (e.g. vitamins, disconnected pieces of his soul, etc.).

Healing also happens in a similar way: the missing thing is searched for and integrated: in the shamanic tradition, a power animal, e.g., or the piece of soul that for safety's sake has withdrawn from a traumatic situation; and, in constellation work, forgiveness, e.g., or resources that a person gets from a newly discovered and honoured family member that up to then had been excluded.

Just like in the gestalt therapy concept of the "open gestalt", the point is the reintegration of disconnected pieces of soul. The shaman, guided by his spirit helpers, journeys into the land of the stolen or lost souls or power animals, invites them to come back (out of fear they often don't want this) and breathes them into the client's body (or the field, house, tool, etc.) in a ritual way.

In each method, the phenomenon of initial aggravation is well known - a fact that in the shamanic tradition can be explained in the following way: after the retrieval of the soul, feelings stemming from the traumatic situation - for instance from sexual abuse - awaken in the client, the very feelings that caused the disconnection of the soul (see Ingerman, p. 154).

In shamanic healing, the disturbing excess is often seen as some matter in the body that doesn't belong there, e.g. as a nail or as some poison, which is, e.g., sucked out in the healing session and then discharged into water or soil. In constellation work, the heavy burden is given back in order to be free again.

9. I've even found correspondances in several approaches: In some shamanic traditions, "word doctoring" is applied, that is healing through words: The shaman enters into a state of trance and asks his helpers, e.g., to tell him healing words for his client, or a healing song (or maybe a healing dance). This he then tells the client, or he sings it, makes the client repeat it and thus anchors (or embodies) it. It can be found that certain words are always used for healing certain problems.

This reminds us of Bert Hellinger's "words of power". In fact, in the times of the Celts (who are our ancestors) the training of the bards (who were poets and singers), and of the shamans and the harp players was nearly identical.

10. Most shamanic societies have the concept of "acknowledging the prior", just like Hellinger's order of precedence. On the other hand, the shaman's calling has absolute priority, e.g., Galsang Cheenag reports that a 19-year-old Tuvan demanded that her mother pay her the traditional honours and call her "mother" or "grandmother", after the spirit of her recently deceased grandmother in visions had called her to be her successor as a shaman (Scharfetter/Rätsch, pp.193ff).

11. During one of my visions, in which I was initiated, I received among other things the gift for taking over suffering - as a psychotherapist I had always thought this questionable because of the danger to get a "helper syndrome", although "empathy" according to Rogers has something similar in view. In fact, during two thirds of the shamanic healing sessions I give, immediately after starting trance by closing my eyes, I feel the symptoms of the patient in my body and my soul, the task being that the problem will be solved, if I can solve it (or let it be solved) within myself.

Not only the shaman, but also other people, such as, e.g., attendants of a Native American sweat lodge, can temporarily take over the suffering of the patient and after that return to themselves, just as representatives do in constellations, where

the experience of the roleplayers great pain sometimes triggers change in the client.

Here, too, the actor detaches himself from his role afterwards, which is necessary for health and psychohygiene. If a good solution is found during the constellation, detachment happens automatically in most cases. If not, little rituals can be done, like taking it off, shaking it off, washing or moving. You can, like an actor after performing, bow to the audience's applause, then mime getting changed and taking your make-up off in the cloakroom, until you definitely recognize yourself again in the mirror. Or you bow deeply in front of the represented person and ask him to leave now. In order to completely return into this world after a shamanic healing session, it is helpful for me to regard attentively something natural, like a tree, a meadow, or the veining of wood. Constellation work I usually end with music.

12. I see one essential difference in the fact that in several tribal cultures black magic is practised as well, not only against enemies, but sometimes even against their own kind, like the bush people in the Kalahari cast those out who steal from group members - an attitude that may be understood if you think of the poor food supply there (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, pp. 42ff). In family constellations, too, a person can have forfeited his belonging to the family, in which case the relative "must let him go". But recently, in dealing with perpetrators of severe crimes, the rarely practiced biblical saying seems to gain more acceptance: "Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you" (Matthew 5,44).

According to the conception described above, these perpetrators, too, are parts of us that also need peace and therefore must be transformed, and thus, we, too, can find peace. And, incredibly, perpetrators and victims can peacefully come together in death, a most touching experience during constellation work.

13. Success cannot be guaranteed in either method. Sometimes a solution can be found, sometimes not. Psychotherapists using constellation work often warn against trying to reach a solution under any circumstances. In shamanic work, you may act as a healer only if you are entrusted and allowed to do so by your spirit helpers.

Both methods are aware of the fact that a client may not be able to take the necessary step at the given moment (or this may not be obvious), or that after the session he may break off a step already taken towards healing, e.g., if the new experience is so much opposed to his former point of view that he cannot accept it. It is not easy, if someone, who all his life together with his mother has acted against his "bad" father, discovers how much his father loved him. "We rather maintain the status quo: rather stay in the status quo of an average marriage & an average vitality, than pass this bottle-neck." (Frederick S. Perls, p.47). "It's easier to suffer", Bert Hellinger says sometimes.

At least the client has obtained a new point of view, which he has not had before, and he can now accept it or not. In my opinion, it sometimes makes sense to support the process of integration with additional sessions. In shamanic healing sessions, I sometimes get the order to tell the patient that she has to keep her disease - at least in the near future - as it is one of her tasks in this life to accept this problem and to learn to live up to it.

Bert Hellinger, who is right to warn against staring too much at results, assumes that processing can take up to two years. He sometimes says, "I entrust this to your good heart," when a client can't keep up at the moment. In fact, the images from a shamanic session or a constellation session often stay alive for years and come to one's mind over and over again. I am sure that all the good that is done to a person will somehow reach him and become effective.

14. Finally, one thing that should not be forgotten: therapists just like shamans don't think they are almighty, but believe to be servants of something greater, which transcends them. As a rule, the shaman, unlike the therapist, cannot simply decide to take up this profession, unless he has been chosen to do so by the spirits.

Shamanic healing or family constellations should not be approached in an irresponsible manner, because you'll have to

deal with enormous forces. But as a messenger of the Most High, of guardian spirits, or the Great Soul, you can without risk expose yourself to the worst of situations, you are always protected.

In fact, in both methods the active therapeutic force is neither the patient nor the therapist, but a third party, however you may imagine it. Thus, Varga von Kibčd (p.155) is right, when he calls not-knowing, helplessness and confusion the three great helpers in constellation work, which warn you against taking charge and interfering without authority.

CONCLUSION

In this way, I see a lot more correspondencies than differences, in spite of the different outer form of the rituals, where often the same phenomenon is given a different name and is experienced in a different way.

Finally, I would like to tell you a story
(which was inspired by the Dutch-British colleague Van Deurzen-Smith):

Once upon a time there was a high mountain, and on top of the mountain there was a wonderful, big precious stone. Around the mountain, various clans had set up their tents in all directions, and each clan went by the name of the stone. One clan said, "We are the family of the red stone," another one, "We are those of the blue stone." A third one said, "We are the family of the stone, and it is green!" Whenever they met, they quarrelled about who was right and which family was the only one to bear the right name. What is the truth? Who is right?

One summer evening, they were again quarrelling fiercely, and just about to draw their daggers, when an old man raised his voice and suggested to examine the stone more closely. So young men from each clan set out, and the following evening they returned silently and thoughtfully, having gained new knowledge. "The stone is precious and very beautiful," they reported, "and it is - white. It reflects the light that falls onto it. That's why we all see the same stone in different colours."

The clans continued to call themselves by the colour the stone had shown to them for generations, but they knew: on the other side of the mountain, people saw the stone - their stone - in completely different colours. And when they met, they all took pleasure in the beauty of the precious stone, and told each other of the wonderful colour they saw it in. Instead of quarrelling, they henceforth were united in reverence of the miracle of the Stone.

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This was a lecture at the 2nd International Symposium on Shamanic Studies in August 2003 in Kyzyl/ Tuva/ Siberia/ Russia by August Thalhamer. I am a catholic theologian, psychologist and urban shaman and work as a psychotherapist in my free-lance practice in Linz on the Danube /Austria. For several years I have been researching into common features as well as differences between Christian, psychotherapeutic and Shamanic healing methods and their explanations.