

## **ATTACHMENT & BONDING WITHIN FAMILY & COMMUNITY: The Interrupted Reaching Out Movement & Alcoholism**

*“...so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us,  
reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man”  
(Plato)*

Barbara Morgan’s discussion about community and kinship, parenting and family breakdown touched my soul and set me thinking (“The Knowing Field” January 2008). I would like to start with the Truby King advice on parenting. I was a Truby King baby!

**How To Be a Mother:** My mother would talk about Truby King, and his advice was that you fed your baby every four hours during the day and laid her down in the pram and left her until the time for the next feed. You never fed your baby during the night; only bottled water if absolutely essential. You “handled” your baby as little as possible. You must not get into the habit of “spoiling” your baby; if you picked her up when she cried you would spoil her and encourage her to be demanding. You put the pram down the bottom of the garden so that you could not hear if she cried. You established your routine from the first and your baby would get used to this and be a “good” baby. Funny how we define a “good” baby and a “bad” one, isn’t it?

Not surprisingly, Bowlby’s theory of bonding and attachment with mother has always interested me, as well as the “Interrupted Reaching Out Movement” - the child’s interrupted reaching out to mother who is not available (Hellinger, *“Loves Hidden Symmetry”*) *“Reaching out to our mother and the experience of being accepted by her is the most fundamental and intensive experience of relationship we can have”* (p.278).

**Interrupted Reaching Out Movement** A Truby King baby would soon learn her cries went unanswered, and gave up, resigned. I can’t say I remember but I believe I was a good girl. I was an only child and learned it was “good” not to interrupt my mother – to be by myself, playing quietly on my own. Even now, reaching out to people creates anxiety still. *“The child decides never again to try to establish a close, deep relationship, but rather to do everything alone”* (Ursula Franke, *“In My Mind’s Eye”*, p.45). Taking is difficult. From early on I had problems taking in food. Belonging and bonding were conditional on certain behaviours, and I was a good girl with the exception of taking in food to please my mother which was impossible for me.

**Separation** Ursula Franke, *“In My Mind’s Eye”* pp.46 & 109 observes the effects of separation, and interrupted contact that can lead to chronic tension, anxiety, fear,

dread, panic, resignation, anorexia and addiction. Quite early on, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, with my father away in Africa for four years, my mother got into the habit of drinking with her friends and became alcoholic. I became her confidante and at times her parent, moving into an inflated position of “parentification” –

*“In her relationship with her parents, the role of the child consists of her giving more than she receives in exchange”*

(Ursula Franke, *“The River Never Looks Back”*, pp. 77-8 and Bert Hellinger, *“Loves Hidden Symmetry”*, p. 103).

It was just my mother and me; I protected her secret drinking from the rest of the family who I thought did not know; no-one ever talked about it. After the war was over, my father continued working abroad and as a family we lived as three separate individuals, miles apart.

When I reached the point of leaving home to study in London, my mother had her last drunk and I got her into a nursing home for treatment. She never drank again, and wanted to mother me then, but sadly it was too late. I could not let go of my inflated position, I could not or would not take from her, and was intently trying to make it on my own in London which needed all my attention. I could not manage being close to my mother during the transition of preparing to become an adult (Ursula Franke, *“The River Never Looks Back”*, p.126).

**Becoming a Mother** When I was having my six babies, I read Dr Benjamin Spock. I was going to have a *REAL FAMILY*, and I was going to do it very differently from my mother; I was not going to make the same mistakes. Needless to say, my mother disapproved wholeheartedly of Dr Spock. I came in for severe criticism. This did not help our already fractured relationship. My already ambivalent love-hate relationship with my mother became much worse after I became a mother and gave birth to my children. I had post-natal depression. I avoided her as much as possible, though I yearned with all my heart to love her. I cried, and suffered anguish, guilt and insomnia. I came in for severe criticism because I did not love my mother. I yearned to love my mother, but she drove me up the wall. I tried very hard to mother my children differently, and for that reason suffered conflict because of my “disloyalty” and became steadily more entangled. *“The most emotional pain is interrupted love.”* (Ursula Franke, *“The River Never Looks Back”*, p 99 & Hellinger, *“No Waves Without The Ocean”*, p.161) Counselling was not helpful. I got further and further stuck in the problem. I was encouraged to express my (secondary) feelings of anger and rage, and I could not. I was encouraged to look at how much I loved my mother, and I could not. My mother died, and I grieved and sobbed.

Why had she gone and left me before I had been able to reach out to her and take fully from her? By now I was more mature and understanding, but she went too soon.

During psychotherapy training, in the study of Object Relations the subject of attachment patterns was discussed, and the effect of a child reaching out to her mother and being ignored or rejected, not being able to bond and become securely attached. The child gives up, turns away from attachment to people and becomes attached to objects instead as being more reliable (Josephine Klein "*Our Need for Others and its Roots in Infancy*", pp 98,160) and Bowlby, "*Attachment & Loss*" vol II, 1973 mentioned in James Masterson, "*The Search for the Real Self*" 1998, p59, says –

*"He becomes increasingly self-centred, and instead of having desires and feelings towards people he becomes preoccupied with material things that won't let him down, such as sweets, toys, and food. He will no longer find gratification in relationships and will settle instead for immediate self-contained gratification."*

**Family Constellations Workshop** Then I attended a constellation workshop and without knowing anything about the work, was the first to stick my hand up. Such yearning. I placed my mother and my father at opposite sides of the room and as soon as I walked into the middle place my shoulders heaved and I sobbed. I reached out to my mother and she held me. Peace. Pain and anguish and guilt dissolved. The interrupted reaching out movement was finally completed.

Further reflection on the attachment to objects, however, leads me to wonder if a symptom of what has been termed our "broken society" is that family breakdown has created the acquisition of possessions, and people feeling judged by what they own and the clothes they wear rather than who they are. And indeed, vice versa. Relationships and marriages are insecure and can be dissolved like chucking out an old sofa. We are encouraged to make our houses "perfect"; a new kitchen, a new sofa, new bathroom, new curtains, new carpets, new .....; persuaded that we need that last precious desirable possession to make us perfectly happy and complete. Of course it does not. Commercially we are exploited. We remain unsatisfied and incomplete. Instead of bonding with friends and community, we are set in competition and "impression management".

The destructive loyalty caused by a lack of bonding and attachment manifests itself within current relationships or against ourselves "... *demonstrated in emotional disorders, psychomatic illnesses, addiction, depression*" (Ursula Franke, p.78). The interrupted reaching out movement; the turning away, preferring to trust objects.

**Addiction** Which leads me to my next thinking about the entangled history of alcoholism within our family. Four generations of women; my great-grandmother, my mother, myself and my daughter (*my grandmother was lifelong teetotal*). For whatever reason, in a state of enforced, fearful, stubborn independency, we reached out for alcohol, instantly available and 'reliable'.

The separations caused by two World Wars, breakdown of marriage, early death of our soldiers, illness and early deaths of family members are part of our history. When only 10 years old my mother experienced the sudden traumatic death of her older sister. She told me she always worried so much that the people she loved were going to die. In 1939, not long after my rather premature forceps-assisted birth, she faced a four-year separation from my father when he was posted to Africa. During his long absence, my mother fell in love with someone else and had an affair, then her lover was killed in action. When my father returned from Africa after four years away, my mother said it was "*harder to get back together again than to stay apart.*" My father in fact did not stay – although they remained married he worked abroad for many years. The people she loved always left her.

In my own history, the severe illness and near-death experience of my husband as a young man at his peak, then his early death fractured the experience of family bonding and security.

The attachment object that appears to promise all is alcohol. Emotional insecurity is instantly if temporarily soothed and comforted by it. Having vowed that I would not repeat my mother's mistakes, I first reached out for alcohol in my late 30s in a moment of trauma after a car accident, caused by my husband suddenly becoming very ill, passing out at the wheel of the car and crossing the central reservation of the motorway, slicing another car virtually in half that was coming in the opposite direction, killing the driver. I was alert and conscious throughout, shocked and traumatised; my husband was unconscious as a result of a sudden epileptic seizure. Our five months' old son was on the back seat. How we got out alive I shall never know; truly a near-death experience.

Someone handed me a brandy that evening. I had never been in the habit of drinking alcohol because of seeing my mother's downfall and agony, for agony it had been. But by this time I thought I was safe – and alcohol hit the spot! Instant attachment and bond.

My husband almost died that night, not because of the accident but he suffered status epilepticus. They believed he had developed shingles and viral encephalitis, causing the sudden severe form of epilepsy.

We were moving house because he had changed jobs; we sold our home where we had been very happy, and with six children were moving from our secure North-country roots. Barbara Morgan's reference to the security of one's roots was painfully demonstrated when my 13-year old eldest son came downstairs one evening, sat in an armchair with tears streaming down his face, saying "*I don't know where I belong!*"

It started to occur to me on a daily basis that a bottle of wine would be nice. Straight away, I was drinking and insatiable, seemingly. My bottle became my comfort, my soother, my replacement mother, my instant attachment object that I could not let go. I was warm and cosy, relaxed and sufficiently detached from all the anxieties, difficulties, problems, worries, angry confrontations, terrors, sleepless nights, when I reached out for my bottle, never far from my side. I was repeating the experience of not being there when my children reached out and needed me. My husband, their father, necessarily became detached and inaccessible because of his illness.

Fortunately life moves on. I got sober after an almighty struggle thirteen years later, when I finally let go of my attachment object, and now I prefer sobriety. It takes some learning, to start again; facing anxiety and terror, financial insecurity, anger, grief, bereavement – sometimes even managing happiness! - and coping with life on life's terms, as they say.

**Another Community** I reached out to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous; I was made welcome and became attached. The community of others who know exactly how it feels, the shame and vulnerability, newly weaned from this powerful mood-altering drug that promises all and in the end boomerangs back to leave you on your knees. The community and fellowship of AA (the kind of community mentioned by Barbara Morgan) was there as support when I needed it, encouraging and befriending me, re-parenting me, when I reached out to be held.

#### **THE PREAMBLE**

*(read before each meeting)*

*Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics or organisation; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.*

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I would like to describe more about the community of recovering alcoholics. Scott Peck, *“Further Along The Road Less Travelled”*, p.150) believes that the greatest positive event of the twentieth century occurred in Akron, Ohio, on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1935, when Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith convened the first AA meeting. He writes that it was not only the beginning of the self-help movement and the beginning of the integration of science and spirituality at a grass roots level, but also the beginning of a community movement.

The light-hearted psychology heard in meetings; “Don’t take yourself too damn seriously”, “Don’t expect to be perfect by Tuesday!”, “Easy does it – But Do It!”, “Don’t put off till tomorrow what you can do today”, “One day at a time”, “Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday”. The personal sharing that helps you learn by example, how to manage difficulties and problems, passed on to you by those who are just a little further on in the business of “living life on life’s terms”. The Twelve Steps as written down by Bill Wilson in 1939, based on early Christian principles of honesty, unselfishness, purity (meaning fidelity) and love.

Carl Jung referred to alcoholism as being the “search for the spirit” (*spiritus contra spiritum*) and “the alcoholic’s craving for alcohol equivalent to the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness”; the need for a spiritual experience in recovery from alcoholism (described by William James in 1902 as ‘a personality change of the educational variety’). Sober alcoholics understand the spirituality of constellation work – movements of the soul or spirit – and the beauty of being in community. The concept of a Greater Power is already part of their programme, and they know about spiritual experiences that come from the Greater Soul (Hellinger, *“Love’s Hidden Symmetry”*, p.28).

The principle of living in the day, accepting the things you have no control over but responsibility for the things you can (your self and your life) (Step 1), one of the things that you have lost control of being alcohol – “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference”. Learning to reach out to each other for help; a strength greater than just yourself, not being alone (the reaching out movement) (Step 2). The completing of “the interrupted reaching-out movement”, and moving forward (Step 3). Honestly examining old behaviour and actions, and unmanageable emotions, deciding what and how to change them, reviewing Personal Conscience (Steps 4 & 5), beginning to make personal change (Steps 6 & 7). Steps 8 & 9 are the amends steps – the dignity of making amends and restitution where possible (not about forgiveness) to those you have abandoned, let down, and hurt during your progression through the illness of alcoholism; the

attachment object that had to be bought at any cost, clinging to the acquisition of alcohol before relationships, friendships, belonging and conscience. The object you believed offered more security than human beings could.

When Steps 8 & 9 are completed, maturity and autonomy become apparent. Restitution is made as far as possible. Steps 4-9 are a once-only journey; a new start can be made, living sober, responsibly and honestly, mature enough to be able to live life on life's terms. A spiritual awakening; a movement of the soul.

Steps 10, 11 and 12 are about living in the present. Step 10 is to review your day, deciding what was done well, what was not so good, what we might prefer to try to do differently another day. Have we hurt someone in any way? Do we need to say sorry? Examination of personal and systemic conscience.

Step 11 is to meditate and open up to the conscience of the Greater Whole, more usually called the Higher Power, or Power greater than oneself; the relationship with God as we understand Him or whatever Higher Power we may believe in. The prayer of St Francis of Assisi is written into Step 11.

Step 12 is living this spiritual life day-to-day, carrying the message, helping others, keeping a balance of giving and taking in the spirit of community, fellowship and love. *(Author's interpretation of the Twelve Steps).*

**The Community of Constellation Facilitators** Barbara Morgan asks if the formation of International Systemic Constellations Association will give us a new sense of community? Will its formation be able to help us support each other more fully? It is an important question, with the Constellation movement growing so huge. Now that Bert Hellinger is growing older, I was interested to compare his position with that of the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, when he began to draw back as he got older and the Fellowship grew internationally (Dr Bob Smith, the other co-founder, died in 1950). There are some similarities and some important differences.

Bill was beginning to feel concerned about his own part in AA's future as the fellowship grew. A friend (Dr Jack Norris) commented –

*"To few men has it ever been given to be the 'Father image' in so constructive a way to so many..... fewer have kept their stability and humility, and for this you are greatly honoured."* (AA World Services, *"Pass it On"*, p 376).

I think of Bert's position and the emergence of ISCA.

Bill W was aware of how he was seen as leader of AA, and said

*“The problem is not how to get rid of parenthood; it is how to discharge mature parenthood properly”.*

It was becoming a problem – his right to lead his own life vs AA's claim on him. *“The father symbol will always be hitched to me,”* to which a friend replied, *“You cannot escape being ‘Bill W’ – nor would you, even though at times you will rebel.”* (Dr Jack Norris, *“Pass it On”*, p. 372-3).

Originally when the AA fellowship was small, nine Foundation Trustees were appointed with headquarters in a general office. By 1944 the movement was international so the future care of the fellowship had to be considered. In 1946 Bill wrote a document entitled “12 points to assure our future, necessary for the unity of our Fellowship” – later named “A Suggested Code of Traditions” - and sent it to AA Headquarters for consideration by the Trustees. One of the most important traditions ensured that no one person could be seen to speak for AA as a whole.

Another tradition is that each group has autonomy, and every person who regards himself as a member of the group has a vote at the regular business meeting, called “The Group Conscience” meeting. Group Service Representatives then attend quarterly Inter-Group meetings, and delegates are elected to attend the General Service Conference. It is “bottom up” participation in decision-making at national level.

Despite the layers of organisation described above, the organisation of AA is minimal and has no power to prescribe how individual members or groups are to behave. In particular, no-one has the power to exclude anyone from membership of AA. There are offices – very few – and a very small number of paid staff but there is no Chief Executive.

In April 1951 the First General Service Conference was held in New York. It was a historic moment and held out promise for the Fellowship's continuing unity. By now the “Twelve Suggested Code of Traditions” had been re-named “The Twelve Traditions” to ensure the unity of the fellowship, and Bill was able to step back, demands easing on him. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Convention, Bill was able to give AA its formal release into maturity. One of the most important volumes published after the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Convention in 1957 was “AA Comes of Age”. It relates the history of the fellowship and its place in society, with sections given over to the vision of AA as held by those in society at large, men of industry, doctors, ministers and trustees.

Bill's comment following the Convention, when he finally handed over the stewardship of AA to the General Service Conference, relinquishing his own leadership and acknowledging AA's responsibility for its own affairs, was "*Clearly my job henceforth is to let go and let God; Alcoholics Anonymous is at last safe – even from me.*"

We hope that the International Systemic Constellations Association will flourish and grow along the lines of its Mission Statement: to serve to gather together the tremendous excitement and creativity this approach is activating throughout the world, seeking to embody the values of co-operation, dialogue and honest conversation, inquiry and love of truth, and service to the common good. A network of very diverse persons systemically pulling together (as in AA) towards a better future, dedicated to the quest that opens the constellation field, and the community of all our constellators. May we all be guided by the Greater Soul.

#### *Bibliography*

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**Biography:** Christine Wilson was introduced to Constellations in 1995 and immediately became an enthusiastic and committed student, training in Bristol and London from 1999. Having grown up as a solitary, independent only child, she had always been interested in families and Constellations work was what she had been searching for. She attended workshops with many facilitators and was able to heal the broken relationships with her family of origin and grieve her first husband who died in 1986, as well as her eldest son who died suddenly in 2006. She was able to be close to her father for the first time during the last months of his life, when he told her many stories about their ancestors - which she wrote down - as he moved towards a gentle death, witnessing the movement of his soul.