

Research & Development

See with Your Heart, Live Your Purpose & Love Your Life:

Integrating Ancestral Consciousness & the Sacred Earth

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Dan Booth Cohen, PhD is an internationally known psychologist, author, trainer, and Systemic Family Constellations facilitator. Dan specialises in caring for wounds in deep personal spaces. His practice model incorporates the three Dimensions of Consciousness to actively release the legacy of historical trauma, often accessing archetypes and mythical characters to stand with members of the family system. Dan Booth Cohen holds a PhD from Saybrook University and an MBA from Boston University. He is author of *I Carry Your Heart in My Heart: Family Constellations in Prison* and numerous scholarly articles and book chapters.

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In his Introduction to Bert Hellinger's seminal work: *Love's Hidden Symmetry*, Hunter Beaumont writes:

"Because the systemic forces that constrain love in intimate relationships are invisible to the naked eye...we need to amplify our powers of perception in order to study them." (Hellinger, Weber & Beaumont, 1998, p. xi).

As Constellation facilitators, we easily embrace this simple and self-evident suggestion for diving more deeply into our work. Yet, in practice, amplifying our powers of perception often brings us into confrontation with harshly enforced social codes and taboos.

Most English-speaking Constellation facilitators work in countries where evidence-based therapies are sanctioned by healthcare, academic and government institutions. Within these professional settings, a practitioner who amplifies their powers of perception to reveal otherwise invisible systemic forces is likely to encounter considerable resistance and scepticism. Within scientific psychology, any particular individual's subjective reality is considered inherently unreliable, even illusory.

There is inherent tension between our desire to immerse ourselves in the Knowing Field and our need to survive within a scientific-technological society, which denies the very existence of a Knowing Field. When we step into the Field, we encounter grandmother's enduring blessings, recognise hidden ancestral imprints and release long-standing burdens, blocks and restraints. We feel the warmth and comfort of belonging to an infinite continuum of life. But this movement towards belonging ignites corresponding feelings of guilt, as we step outside the boundaries of conventional scientific and religious belief systems.

There are many creative ways to hold this tension. Constellators are like the person with one foot on the boat and the other on the dock. Each

of us, in our own way, attempts to sail into waters where love flows freely in intimate relationships, while holding a place on land for others who know little or nothing about invisible systemic forces.

Broadly speaking, our community has adopted three main pathways to mediate this tension. Most of us, from one time to another, use combinations of the three:

1. **Black box.** We can mask the phenomenological aspects of Constellations by using ambiguous language.
2. **Mainstream.** Some trainers have stripped the mystery and spirit out of the process. They explain representative perception and systemic entanglements pointing to recent scientific discoveries in brain science and epigenetics. Others refute that Constellations need be outside mainstream borders at all, e.g. referring to ancestors as 'so-called ancestors'.
3. **Sail away.** We allow the consciousness that comes through the Knowing Field, the representatives and our own inner knowing to move us beyond the 'can'ts', 'don'ts' and 'shouldn'ts' that bind us to materialism.

We have sailed away. In this article, we will share how opening the doors of perception in our hearts has influenced the form of our Constellations and our relationship to ancestral and spiritual consciousness.

Readers of *The Knowing Field Journal* are likely to be familiar with the work of co-author, Dan Booth Cohen, PhD. Since training in Family Constellations with Bert Hellinger in 2001, Dan has been active in the international Constellations community as an author, facilitator and trainer. This is Emily Blefeld Volden's first byline in this journal. Emily is an experienced psychotherapist who possesses a rare ability to 'tune in' to the hidden information contained within hearts and familial lineages.

We have been standing in the Knowing Field together since 2012.

We have allowed the consciousness of ordinary reality, ancestors, divine presences, and the Earth and ocean to merge in our awareness, to move us, to carry us. Our experiences with Constellations in individual sessions, with couples and in large groups have challenged our own belief systems and the medical paradigms to which we once subscribed. What is possible? What is allowed? Do we belong?

In this article, we will share how opening the doors of perception in our hearts has influenced the form of our Constellations and our relationship to ancestral and spiritual consciousness.

We frame our understanding of Constellations from a model of three dimensions of consciousness: personal, ancestral, and spiritual. The first dimension of consciousness is the ordinary. The second dimension is the consciousness that survives death and remains in relationship with the living. The third dimension is the consciousness that is beyond human scale: the Earth, ocean, trees, Jungian archetypes, divine presences, astrological aspects and mythical creatures. These distinctions have been used by many Constellation facilitators, though often under different names. For example, Ursula Franke and Thomas Bryson refer to these three dimensions as the individual, the systemic and what

is beyond, similar to the metaphor of a drop of water, the wave and the ocean.

Our group processes evoke Sneh Victoria Schnabel's Chaos Constellations. We create the container for third dimension consciousness to enter the circle by creating a symbolic altar in the room (see *Illustration 1*) We invite participants to bring drums, rattles and other instruments. We welcome observers to become representatives of their own accord. These processes are often colourful and rhythmic.

Working individually and in groups, we structure the Constellation process in a series of three rounds: tuning-in, mapping the Systemic Field, and healing. In our Constellations, we always ask the client to articulate a clear intention for the work. In the first round, we quieten our minds, close our eyes, and connect with our breath. Then, we open the doors of our heart to the gates of the client's heart. In just a minute or two, we begin to feel. Emotions arise and memories stir. We bring our attention to the client's presenting issue and intention to create a context for understanding the block, burden or restraint that we seek to release. In this tune-in, we feel for the threads that trace from this moment into the distant past.

In the second round, we work with standing representation... We always walk the Knowing Field ourselves before having the client or group members stand in. To our understanding, a Constellation is not something the client sets up. Rather, the Constellation, everyone's Constellation, is always already present. When we enter a room, our Constellation comes with us.

Setting an intention and agreeing to work opens the Field. By walking the Field, we make first contact with the presence of ancestral consciousness and its relationship to that which seeks to be healed. This helps to orient us as the Constellation unfolds. Occasionally, the ancestors who arrive in the Field come with different intentions from



Illustration 1

their living descendants. At times, we have experienced dissonance between what presents in the Field with what the client has asked to address or is ready to explore. The client's intention grounds the work and sets a boundary for the work, which we honour and respect.

Our experiences with Constellations in individual sessions, with couples and in large groups have challenged our own belief systems and the medical paradigms to which we once subscribed.

During the second round, we focus on the hidden ancestral wounds that remain active in the client's heart. We start by asking the client to stand in the Field and find a place that feels most comfortable. We notice the position of the client in relationship to the systemic landscape we mapped prior to that. This informs our selection for representation. The client may be represented by another throughout the process, but we always invite the client to stand during the second round to provide them with an embodied awareness of how ancestral consciousness and hidden patterns and habits live inside them. They often report feeling the presence of an ancestor whose trauma may reside at the root of their disturbance.

The third round is marked by the point in the constellation where the healing messages from the ancestral dimension of consciousness are received and the burdens and blocks evaporate like white noise. As in a traditional

Constellation, when the ancestors are seen, acknowledged and honoured for what they endured, the thread of trauma dissolves. In its place comes a feeling of love and connection.

Making direct, embodied and even visual contact with the ancestors who occupy the second dimension of consciousness influences our understanding of the healing impact. The ancestors that come through the Field are actively engaged in the healing process. They literally arrive when called in by the client's issue, substantiate the root of trauma and make embodied contact with their living children. When the root is identified and the healing has occurred, they retreat into the Greater Whole, taking the burden, block or restraint with them.

Coming into contact with the Greater Whole in this manner has opened a channel to a more distant shore. We understand this as the third dimension of consciousness, that which is beyond human scale and form. In the silence and stillness that accompanies standing in the Field, our hearts remember those who gave us life, those who gave us love, and those victims or perpetrators whose fate is entangled with our birth. Our hearts hold tender love and blessing, but suffering and grief as well. The human heart retains ancestral memories of the orphan's grief, the exile's lament, the soldier's guilt, the widow's anguish, the slave's humiliation, the mother's anxiety, the father's emptiness, and the child's loneliness.

For the living descendants, the pull of the heart is to repeat or atone for past injustices and losses. These imprints strongly impact one's capacity to feel safe and comfortable, opening the heart to be vulnerable in loving relationship with another. As representatives meet resistance or difficulty in opening to healing messages or movements, to connecting to that which has been disconnected, the 3rd dimension portal appears and opens a field of infinite, universal love.

In this Field, we hear the call of the Earth to humanity. The Earth is asking us to feel the soles of our feet on her naked ground and hear the message of her waters. We are not alone in this. Many others hear the Earth calling humanity. The call is for humans to realise the potential of our birthright – to become the living, breathing edge of the evolutionary process. We feel the earth's cry – amidst the environmental degradation and human suffering – to find tribes and community, to deepen our acceptance of ourselves and others, and to live with greater balance, calm, and grounding. We hear this as a call for an end to violence, to the oppression of the feminine and the repression of human sexuality.

We create the container for third dimension consciousness to enter the circle by creating a symbolic altar in the room.

Here is an example of a large group Constellation we facilitated recently that illustrates how we work with the three dimensions in practice. In a large group setting, a man M asked us for help in finding forgiveness for himself for what he had done to his parents and for his parents for what they had done to him. His parents had died within one year of each other, both in their 90s. He had held such extreme anger against each of them that he refused to visit them on their deathbeds. As background, he shared that when he was 4 years old, his father's brother was killed by a drunken driver. From that time forward, he experienced that his father was present physically, but absent emotionally; he never had a dad for the rest of his life. His anger circled

around the statement: "I am your only son. Your brother's gone. I'm here."

Though these deaths had occurred more than 15 years previously, he was still torn apart by feelings of guilt for his rejection of them and anger for how they had treated him as their son. In sitting with us, asking for a forgiveness process to be relieved of his guilt and anger, he shared: "It's been with me a long time."

In the first round, we closed our eyes and opened the doors of perception in our hearts to tune in to the client's heart, intention and family system. Sometimes, we wait beside the doors of the hearts until they open and we can enter in. This gives us a lot of awareness of whether there is permission and where it extends. Once this connection is made, we become open channels to the consciousness of the three dimensions that inhabit and surround the human body. As our hearts attuned to M's, we felt his heart with ours.

In Dan's tune-in, he reported a felt sense for how rough it was for the members of M's family over the generations. Many of the men felt rough and tough. The women felt beaten down. It seemed like those were the two main categories of people: rough and tough, or beaten down.

In Emily's tune-in, she reported imagery that came present during the silence... The first image was a man wearing a short brimmed hat with feathers in the band. M immediately had a look of astonishment on his face and burst into tears. He said, "My father always wore a hat with feathers in the band." Emily responded. "Yes. I thought it was your father. He expressed how much he loves you. And that you're being way too hard on yourself."

Emily reported four more images in the first round. They were of a train set circling a Christmas tree when M was a boy, M's father pulling a tie around his neck evermore tightly, M's mother being the tooth fairy, and the tension between M's father

and sister-in-law following the death of M's uncle. M replied that each of these images had resonance.

For the second round, we stood and walked the field for several minutes. We stood in the places of the family lineage: client, father, mother, grandparents, and uncle. Before asking M to select group members to stand and represent, Emily offered, "The feathers that your father showed me in the brim of his hat are a significant message. This is part of his medicine. What did the feathers in his hat mean to your father?" M replied, "My father was half Cherokee. He always had feathers in his hat."

Through our standing in the Field, we felt the landscape of M's lineage. We asked him to stand in representation. First he stood as his paternal grandfather's grandfather, a man who had been a doctor during the Civil War. As M tuned in to this representation, he felt both the horror of the countless amputations he had performed on battlefields and the remorse of the many lives he could not save.

In a heartbeat, the feelings of anger and guilt that M had been holding in his body for more than 15 years, left.

Moving on, M stood with his father's maternal lineage, representing an ancestor from before the days of the Trail of Tears in the 1830s, when the Cherokee were forcibly evicted from their traditional lands in the Carolinas and driven to a new reservation in Oklahoma. Standing in representation, M reported the awareness of the movement of people.

In that moment, the Field spontaneously moved the Constellation forward. A man sitting as an observer raised his hand for the microphone.

Taking it, he spoke three words to M: "Tsa La Gi." We did not understand the words, or even recognise the language. The man offered: "It's Cherokee. From the Trail of Tears." On the second dimension of consciousness, the Cherokee ancestors of M were present in the Field.

M felt them moving in front of him, but he was reluctant to step forward into the space where they resided. "I don't want to intrude on their passage." Emily offered this encouragement, "They are here. For you. With you. To help heal the part of their heart that lives in you." M stepped forward. Dan invited the man who stated that he had spoken in Cherokee to stand up and step into the Constellation, "Just be with what is present in you, as a support. Just find your place."

It is not unusual in our Constellations for observers to become representatives while in their chairs. We encourage them to stand in and find their place.

M felt his Cherokee ancestors in his body, in his consciousness and on the empty patch of carpet where they moved. Because the systemic forces that constrain love in intimate relationships are invisible to the naked eye...we need to amplify our powers of perception in order to study them. M said, "I feel the tug of back and forth. I want to stand with them and I don't want to intrude on them." Emily reflected on this, "This is the back and forth you feel in your life."

Dan asked M to turn his head and look at the representative who had stated he was speaking Cherokee, who was now standing nearby. When M looked, his expression turned to a quizzical astonishment. "You look just like my grandfather. I never knew him, but I saw pictures." The second dimension consciousness of the Cherokee grandfather was with this representative. They faced each other and without any prompting or words, they opened their arms and fell into an embrace. The man spoke again, "Tsa La Gi." "You are one of us."

A second man, also sitting as an observer in his chair, was in representation as M's father. Dan invited him to stand in. The first movement was to have the father and grandfather face each other. In strong and heartfelt representation, the two men embraced each other. M offered that his father and grandfather had been estranged from each other, just as M and *his* father had been. After some time, the representatives opened their arms to M and the three men held an embrace that had been deferred for nearly a century.

We asked whether any of the women sitting as observers felt in representation with M's mother. A woman stood up. She took a step from her chair and stopped, seemingly unable to move further or come closer. We asked if there was another woman who was able to represent M's grandmother and other women in the maternal lineage. Two women stood and went to the representative for the mother. She moved with trepidation and hesitation towards the men. We invited others to come and stand in support. "Do it slowly. Really tune in. Find your place with her."

In about a minute and half, ten more women had stood in. "As the women move in, as the generations come in to support her, the mother's body language eases and she can step and make warmer contact with her son." More women stood up and moved in. "Was it easy being the wives of these men? Or their daughters?"

We asked for men who felt moved to be in representation to come into the Field. In just a few minutes, the Constellation progressed from M standing on his own, to a large piece with more than 20 representatives. In a heartbeat, the feelings of anger and guilt that M had been holding in his body for more than 15 years, left. He fell into a loving embrace with the representative for his mother. Without words or further active facilitation, a movement towards forgiveness, or perhaps better said, a movement towards something beyond forgiveness occurred.

The chairs were nearly empty with more than 60 people standing in celebration of healing – in celebration of what connects us all.

We invited representatives for third dimension elements to stand in as so moved: the trees that held these tribes, the land that the warriors and soldiers fell on, the wind that moves the spirits, spiritual archetypes named or unknown. Another ten representatives stood up and moved in.

A man acknowledged that he was in representation for the uncle who had been killed by the drunken driver. A woman felt herself in representation of the wife of this man. A representative for the drunken driver who had killed the uncle came in. We did not force a movement or suggest healing sentences. Wordlessly, the representatives felt grief, love, acceptance and a movement towards reconciliation. There were more than 40 people standing in representation at this time.

Several members of the group came with drums and felt moved to sound them. The drumbeat filled the space.

Emily spoke this poem during the Constellation:

Hear the Earth beneath you.

The sound is the heartbeat of the Earth.

It can release all shame, all pain.

It can release all blame.

The Earth holds it for us.

When you breathe and stand on Earth,

When you open to love one another,

You can release through the soles of your feet

Whatever needs to be absorbed by the heartbeat that connects us all.

The last movement was to ask M to stand in his place before his parents, grandparents, all his ancestors and the representatives for consciousness beyond human scale. To receive his life and to turn towards his future. His partner in relationship was in the room and stood in the place of M's future alongside a representative for a third dimension archetype we have come to know as the Divine Gender-Queer, a companion of the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine. It is the gender principle for LGBTQQ people.

The drumbeats sounded and the representatives offered support as these two men, not representatives, but loving partners in real life, stood before each other and made contact with

their hearts and the love connection between them. The chairs were nearly empty with more than 60 people standing in celebration of healing – in celebration of what connects us all.

Amplifying our powers of perception is actually restoring the in-born qualities of the human heart. Someone once observed that you can understand the power of something by the force it takes to suppress it. Bringing ancestral consciousness into everyday life and becoming aware of the consciousness beyond human scale is not super-natural. Rather, chastising, rejecting and persecuting second and third dimension consciousness is the force that makes us sub-human. It brings humanity closer to the doors of extinction.

There is an emerging global movement of artists, healers, visionaries, and spiritually-oriented entrepreneurs who feel called to serve the world in a bigger way, while aligning their everyday life, work and relationships with their heart's desire. Many people are hearing the call, but often feel held back by blocks and obstacles that resist clearing. Constellations, in our understanding, are a powerful tool for teaching awareness of how to interact with second and third dimension consciousness while staying firmly grounded in ordinary, first dimension reality.