

## SOME SOUTHERN AFRICAN VIEWS ON INTERCONNECTEDNESS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

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### ABSTRACT

*The Global Coherence Initiative (GCI) conducts pioneering research into interconnectedness in order to promote global coherence, consciousness and health through heart-focused care (Institute of HeartMath, 2013). A global network of ultrasensitive magnetic field detectors are being installed strategically around the planet, one of which is established on a private game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, which provides various local research opportunities. Southern African indigenous knowledge themes on interconnectedness are discussed in order to provide a relevant, local and conceptual grounding for the initiative. As this knowledge is invested with human spirituality, communality, mutuality and other local meaning, the presentation speaks of relationships. Although certain themes have been singled out for instructional purposes in this presentation, as local indigenous knowledge represents a coherent whole that is continuously changing. These themes should be considered from an integrative and transformational perspective.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous knowledge, South Africa, divine healing, Shaman, spirituality, ancestral consciousness.

### INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples across planet earth have traditionally lived in a way that honours life as a deeply interconnected whole. Many spiritual traditions recognize a non-duality or oneness, which underlies material existence and interlinks the manifest diversity of forms. Various descriptions have been advanced under such explanatory terms as Spirit, God, Brahman and Tao. Global travel, telecommunications and the internet have facilitated the scientific study as well as theoretical and practical integration of such knowledge, wisdom and spiritual traditions. Contemporary scientific theories of the interconnectedness of everything typically extrapolate what the perennial philosophy traditionally called the Great Chain of Being to include some form of integral, dynamic and systemic holism (Bohm, 1993; Gidley, 2007; Huxley, 1958; László, 2007; Lovejoy, 1936; Wilber, 1995). Although a given for the advanced meditator, for most people the apprehension of interconnectedness may emerge as an eternal, infinite moment breaking into everyday awareness. Such events are typically associated with contexts such as sleep, dreams, birth, death, sex and/or communal ceremonies, associated with heightened consciousness, insights, morality and ethical behaviour (Hountondji 1983; Nsameng, 1992; Wilber, 1977; 2000; 2007). Such consciousness facilitated Credo Mutwa's mission to document and preserve

African indigenous knowledge, Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga and the founding of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, by Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell in 1973.

More recently, several independent lines of evidence have provided support for the existence of an interconnecting global information network facilitated through the earth's magnetic field (László, 2007; McCraty, Dehle and Childre, 2012; Nelson, 2011). The Institute of HeartMath, Global Coherence Initiative (GCI) is conducting pioneering researching into this interconnectedness in order to promote global coherence, consciousness and health through heart-focused care (Institute of HeartMath, 2013). In pursuit of this mission a global network of ultrasensitive magnetic field detectors are being installed strategically around the planet. It may be argued that never before have holistic, interconnected theories been as scientifically grounded as in the case in the Global Coherence Initiative. South African research collaboration has led to the establishment of the African Global Coherence Initiative magnetometer on a private game reserve in Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edwards, 2015). This is one of 12 to 14 monitoring systems that are planned for planet earth, six of which are currently in operation in providing valuable data on relationships involving physical, animal, human, planetary and cosmic ecologies. The aim of the present study is to explicate some Southern African concepts of interconnectedness, in order to provide a relevant, local, conceptual grounding for this initiative.

### **SOUTHERN AFRICAN VIEWS ON INTERCONNECTEDNESS**

Indigenous knowledge systems throughout Africa have long recognized the profound interconnectedness of everything, where plants, animals, humans, ancestors and all creation interdependently coexist. Such knowledge seems to have been passed on by such giant scholars as Imhotep, Plotinus and Shankara. More contemporary writers (Wilber, 1995) recognize South African, Jan Smuts (1926), whose work on holism and evolution established a scientific basis for subsequent systems theories on interconnectedness. This article focuses on Southern Africa, with special reference to Zulu cultural groupings. While these groups are not representative of African or Southern African cultures in particular, the available evidence points to such similar patterns in other indigenous cultural groupings that some transferability of findings can be assumed (Gumede, 1990; Edwards, 2011). This is not surprising in view of obvious evidence that such traditional, indigenous knowledge, culturally embedded, local systems provided foundations for all contemporary science (Gidley, 2007; Wilber, 1995). The circular orientation of indigenous African communities which is exhibited in their material culture and behaviour, roundness of huts, cattle byres, homesteads, diurnal rhythms of day and night and related colour symbolism in healing circles lead to the naming of this journal *Indilinga*. Linguistically the terms *indingiliza* and *isidindingilizi*, which denote, the circularity, roundness of spherical objects accentuate the emphasis on wholeness, wholesomeness and the whole, health and healing, as conveyed by such terms as *philisayo*, *philile* and *phelele* (Edwards, 2011; 2013; Mutwa, 2003; Ngubane, 1977). In an indigenous Zulu context profound interconnectedness becomes especially evident in such

themes as *ubuntu* (humanity in all communal and spiritual interrelationships), *ubudlelwana*, (interconnectedness), *ukuhlangana* (coherence), *indaba* (coherent communication), *ubunhlobohlobo* (diversity in all its relatedness), emphasis on order (*uhlelo*), balance, harmony (*ukulungiso*), dignified movement and rhythm (*isigqi*), balanced ecological relationships and, ultimately, non-dual unity (*ubunye*).

In fact, as this knowledge is invested with human spirituality, communality, mutuality and other local meaning, it seems more appropriate to speak of relationships rather than interconnectedness. The following discussion unpacks some of these themes, with particular focus on people, ancestors, ecology, dance and healing. To the extent that local indigenous knowledge, including that on interconnectedness *per se*, especially in its phenomenological reality, represents a coherent whole, these themes should be considered from an integrative perspective. In terms Wilber's (1995, 2000) terms, they are holons (part-wholes or whole-parts) of infinite interconnectedness. It should also be remembered that during collective human lifecycles, such interconnected wholeness, which is apparent in all spheres, is continually differentiating and integrating as new wholes are included and transcended in an ongoing process. Thus any apparent reification or absolutizing of this phenomenology is completely illusory.

### COMMUNAL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The demise of formal Apartheid heralded South Africa's transformation from political polecat to political showcase. The slogan "we are one" (*simunye*) conveyed a timeous realization of the oneness (*ubunye*) that can result from peoples' problem solving. Despite ongoing political struggles, violence, illness, corruption and crime, transformation continues in the experience of new generations of people growing up together from childhood in freedom. Beneficial human relations continue amongst people of integrity (*ubuqotho*). The mutuality underlying such essentially human and humanly essential interrelationships relationships is aptly conveyed in the idiom "*isandla sigeza esinye*" which literally means one hand washes the other.

Human interconnectedness implies humanity (*ubuntu*) and respect (*ukuhloni-pha*). Etymologically, *ubuntu* is the abstract form of the terms *umuntu* (a human being) and *abantu* (people), derived from the root (*ntu*), which has various connotations, such as African, way of life, human nature, language, one with human feelings and diaphragm (Doke and Vilakazi, 1972). Through its emphasis on essential humanity and human essentials, *ubuntu* is thus concerned with fundamental structures of being human, without which our human species would not survive in its present form, that is the giving, receiving and sharing of human care, support, companionship, help and healing. This is the essential theme of all the caring, helping professions such as nursing, medicine, psychology, social work and theology. It is also the basis of all other academic and professional disciplines, from biochemistry through law to sociology, however much such knowledge becomes differentiated, specialized, and abstract and loses the

original experience of this lived world of care, help and health promotion as encapsulated in the term *ubuntu* (Edwards, 2011).

*Ubuntu* also refers to the interconnected sense of community. It encompasses all social relations and communal spirituality. Special emphasis is on humanity in modes of being both human and humane. As explicated above, *ubuntu* is enormously valuable as concept and as lived inter-human dialogue, precisely because the meaning it conveys is at the heart of all human, helping relationships. *Ubuntu* implies fundamental existential questions as to the meaning of life in general and human existence in particular. It implies that meaning in life is only possible through human relations as poetically expressed in the saying '*umuntu umuntu ngababantu*', which literally means that a person is a person through others, resonating the inter-human mutuality theme of philosophers such as Martin Buber (1958) and John Mbiti (1970). 'I am because we are'. 'Only through you do I become an I.' *Ubuntu* thus also implies that meaning in life is dependent upon the quality of human relationships as revealed in everyday meeting and lived dialogue.

### ANCESTRAL RELATIONSHIPS

Ancestors are addressed in many ways and various terms are used. The theme of respect (*ukhlonipha*) is central and ancestors may be given special respectful names. Generically they are typically referred to as *amadlozi* (spirits), *abaphansi* (those underground), *amakhosi* (chiefs), *izinyanya*, *izithutha*, *abangasekho* (those who are dead). Various special sacrificial ceremonies (*umsebenzi*) are also typically performed, for example for thanksgiving (*ukubonga*), "scolding" ancestors for misfortune (*ukuthetha*), appeasement (*ukushweleza*), homestead fortification (*ukubethela*) and reintroducing the spirit of a relative to the local ancestral body corporate (*ukubuyisa*). Emphasis is both on recently departed ancestors and the unbroken line that links all ancestors directly to ultimate Being (*ubuKhona*), the Creator (*uMvelinqangi*) or God (*uNkulunkulu*). Family and communal spirituality are inextricably interconnected through communal rituals and sacrifices (*umsebenzi*) in ancestral remembrance, especially in the case of revered ancestors. This fundamental spirituality has infinite energy, for example as revealed through dreams and the extended African and family unconscious (Ngubane, 1977; Bynum, 1984; 1999). Being alive and healthy (*impilo* is used for both concepts) implies healthy relationships with the source of being, ancestors other people and the natural environment/world (*endaweni/emhlabeni*). There is thus a collective responsibility to harmonize such relationships by finding the right tune or path (*indlela*) towards the ideal of beneficial humane relationships filled with dignity and respect (*ubuntu*).

Indigenous views on survival, life and health are inextricably related in the emphasis on ensuring proper relationships with the body of ancestors, Creator and/or God. People work at this relationship through ceremonial and ritual gatherings to prevent illness and promote health. The term *umsebenzi* connotes many meanings including work, love, ritual, and ceremonial gathering. Such

gatherings generally constitute communal, spiritual labours of love in order to appropriately remember revered ones as well as facilitate their provision of spiritual protection and social support for the collective. Thus there is honouring of the inextricably interlinked and continuous relationship between life and death at all levels, matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Distinctions are made with regard to burying the 'living-dead' (*abaphansi*). *Ukufihlwa* means burying an ordinary citizen while *ukutshalwa* means burying a member of a royal family. Symbolically, *ukufihla* and *ukutshalwa* also relate to rebirth. The actual burial service/process called *umsebenzi wokumlanda* signifies the beginning of a new life as an ancestor who will always be present in guiding the living. These concepts provide definitive descriptions of the continuity of life in the Zulu context, which is metaphorically likened to sowing and watering seeds of corn that will produce crops to feed both family and community.

Ancestral consciousness, visitations and/or communications may be as threatening or reassuring as these personages had been, or perceived to have been, in their former physical existences. Such consciousness may be amplified and corroborated by familial and sociocultural belief systems and, after the death of such elders, may assume gigantic proportions. This may manifest as *abaphansi basifulathela* (ancestors have turned away), which may require appropriate appeasement rituals, or *abaphansi banathi* (ancestors are with us). In any case appropriate ceremonies are believed to ensure continued health, protection and prosperity have been performed. Ancestors are typically regarded as custodians of the lives of future generations. They usually occupy a position of dignity and awe among their descendants. As living-dead, they are perceived as omnipotent, omniscient and omni-present. Spiritual relationships with ancestors thus provides a sense of security, anchoring and confirming their descendants' identity, sense of belonging and purpose in life. Bynum's (1984; 1999) views on the family unconscious and collective unconscious explicate different levels and dimensions of this ancestral connectedness.

## ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Ngubane (1977) and Gumede (1990) have extensively described how traditional Zulu cosmology is permeated with beliefs and practices related to ecological influences on community life. Families and communities have an ongoing responsibility to strengthen themselves in ceremonies against such ecological hazards as lightning (*ukubethela*) and various forms of social conflict, jealousy and sorcery (*ubuthakathi*). Indigenous healers, including diviners (*izangoma*), doctors (*izinyanga*) and faith healers (*abathandazi*) are extensively consulted in order to balance and order the environment (*ukulungisa endaweni*). Ordering and harmonizing ecological relationships are viewed as critical for preventing illness and promoting health. Specific examples of disordered environmental relationships include *umkhondo omubi* (a dangerous track or ecological health hazard such as lightning). Various practices such as covering water and mirrors during a thunderstorm, and planting lightning conducting rods rather than trees near the home are followed to prevent being struck. Traditionally, *ukubethela*

ceremonies were performed by heaven herds (*izinyanga zezulu*), to protect the home and promote health (Berglund, 1977; Gumede, 1990). *Umnyama*, which refers to darkness, contagion or pollution, is associated with stresses of major life and death events e.g. birth, death, menstruation, sexual intercourse and fatal accidents. The power of communal life and cultural practices are evident in the belief that people who do not respect such taboos stand much greater chance of illness, trauma and crises. Flouting of cultural norms is referred to as *ukudlula*, which is thus culturally construed as an obsessive compulsion. Consequently health is promoted and illnesses prevented if moderation and abstinence is practised during a bereavement. In this way stress is minimized and social support enhanced.

Slaughtering of a beast in a ritual family ceremony called *ukubuyisa* plays an important role in linking the deceased with the body of ancestors. In the case of a person who has died away from home, a traditional practice involves carrying out the removal and cleansing process from the precise spot where death occurred in order to allow the spirit (*umoya*) to be released and/or prevent the deceased from becoming a wandering ghost who may cause danger to family and community. In such a case symbolic use may be made of a special type of twig called *ihlahla* from a tree known as *umlahlankosi*, which acts as a communicative link between the living and the deceased. A family elder will take the twig to the place of death to collect the spirit of the deceased, then, while in dialogue with the deceased, drag the twig back home on a small cotton-like thread. Knowledgeable, fellow travellers and observers will recognize the custom as respect for the completion of a process that links the living and the living dead. In addition to signifying respect for the deceased and his/her recognition of existence after death as an ancestor through bringing home and ceremonially integrating the spirit of the deceased with the body of ancestral spirits, this traditional *ukubuyisa umsebenzi* (ritual bringing home ceremony) therefore has the additional symbolic purpose of clearing and cleansing the environment so that it becomes accident free for other users. Elderly people will tell stories (*izinganekwane*) about places where such accidents happened, where the deceased were not properly removed and brought home to rest and become good spirits. There is a special purification ritual (*inhlambuluko*) a month after the burial of the deceased. A special herb is used for cleansing and a goat is slaughtered. Traditionally only the immediate family members were expected to attend *inhlambuluko*. Nowadays, church members may sing throughout the night as a sign of acknowledging the transition from ordinary life to the life of the living dead.

Ecological relationships include a wide variety of treatments including massage, steam baths and poultices as well as herbal medicines used in a ritual and symbolic context. Indigenous doctors (*izinyanga*) typically classified medicines by color to be given in serial diurnal and nocturnal sequence. *Imithi emnyama* refer to black medicines given at night, e.g. *ubulawo* is a liquid medicine used as an emetic or purgative; *imithi ebomvu* are red medicines given at dawn or dusk e.g. *insizi* or powdered herbs rubbed into incisions; *imithi emhlophe* are white medicines given in the day e.g. *intelezi* or general liquid medicine used to free



one from imperfections after sickness is taken out by red and white medicines. The interconnectedness of everything is thus recognized and honored.

### HEALING RELATIONSHIPS

This theme has already been extensively documented, especially in relation to the work of divine and naturopathic healers, *izangoma* and *izinyanga* respectively (Edwards, 2011; 2013). Practices include, ritual purification, indigenous medicines, sexual abstinence, appropriate observance of other cultural and moral requirements, dream messages, ancestral dancing, bone throwing, and a host of other divining practices, skilled meditation and/or contemplation may be practised.

The authentic divine healer typically works at tuning in to ancestral consciousness, atmosphere and source of Creation or God until the divine message is clearly apprehended. Mutwa (2003) describes the skill of *umbilini* cultivation as follows: "...to breathe softly and gently like a whisper until you feel something like a hot coiled snake ascending up your spine and bursting through the top of your head – a fearsome thing that is known as *umbilini*... This *umbilini*, my grandfather told me, is the source of the sangoma's powers. A sangoma must be able to summon this *umbilini* at will through the beating of the drum and through meditation, very, very deep meditation."

Divine healing typically includes a transcendence consciousness and/or atmosphere where the presence of the divine is profound apprehended. This transcendent message must be clearly felt, experienced and understood so that this sacred ancestral communication transferred can be clearly communicated to clients, their families and/or other relevant community stakeholders. Although everyone can contribute to GCI with heart focussed care, the genuine divine healer train to tune to such levels of calling (*vumissa*), in order to very clearly communicate the truth (*iqiniso*), beauty and/or excellence (*ubuhle*) of the message to optimize the healing effect, quality and value. The genuinely gifted healer intuitively discerns the sacred communication as authentic to the extent to which it is as transpersonal in origin and conveys clear, holistic and/or integrated healing messages from the transpersonal and/or spiritual realm. This is also the yardstick used to assess progress along the path of calling to be a healer. It implies continual spiritual growth and moral discernment not to abuse gifts received as a result of divine calling (Mlisa, 2009; Edwards, 2013). It is also one of the qualitative measures that the community of diviners will use to assess the progress of the (*ithwasa*) apprentice diviner.

Healers' intuitions are supported by empirical research in South Africa (Edwards, 2013) as well as the HeartMath Institute in the USA, which has provided significant electrophysiological evidence of intuition as a holographic, system-wide, energetic process involving a non-local realm outside the space time world, which is mediated by the heart, before the brain (McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasino and Bradley, 2009), as discussed below. Traditional Nguni culture provides a process for auditing ancestral claim calls for their authenticity (Bojuwoye and

Edwards, 2011; Mpofu, 2011). Intuition can be incubated and matured with the help of a professional *isangoma* (*ithwasa liyathwasiswa*), through an initiation/apprenticeship towards becoming a divine healer. This calling (*ubizo*) into apprenticeship knows neither heredity nor genealogy. The experience is personal and essentially spiritual in nature. In the process, spiritual-intuitive energy is mediated. The resultant energy reflects the power and spiritual nature of ancestral work. The energy takes different forms as ancestors breathe through the diviner (*ukububula/nokubhonga kwedlozi*). The energy is strengthened by healing and good deeds, and is weakened by evil spirits and abuse. Women tend to be more involved in divine healing than men, possibly owing to their superior intuitive abilities (Edwards, 2013).

In contemporary Southern Africa many traditional practices of the *izangoma* and *izinyanga* indigenous practitioners have been integrated with activities of Christianity in the African Indigenous Churches (AIC). Members form spiritual healing groups that can be found at any time and place throughout Southern Africa. In their brightly symbolically coloured clothing, such spiritual communities gather wherever convenient, at the river or the mountain, near the sea, at a vacant plot in town or at the bus stop, where inspirational, spiritual energy (*umoya*) is invoked through Bible reading, praying, singing and dancing in a healing circle while invoking the Holy Spirit through chanting "*woza umoya*" (come Spirit). In more formal meetings held in churches, community halls or houses, faith healers or prophets (*abaprofethi*) may close windows and doors to keep out distractions and amplify spiritual energy for an evening, day or weekend of intense individual, family and community healing and spiritual purification (*ukuhlambuluka*) in a religious ceremony which includes rituals, music, drama and dance. As in countless other examples of spiritual healing, illusions of a separate, individual identity are shed as such empathic experiences and practices facilitate enhanced transpersonal collective consciousness and shared healing. Such churches and their faith healers (*abathandazi*) have become increasingly popular in modern times as they are able to provide their local community with a communal-spiritual circle that addresses many needs; traditional ancestral reverence, Old and New testament inspirations, a substitute extended family, assistance with employment contacts, caring psychological experience of family and sense of community. Healing rituals are accompanied by music, drama and dance. This is a marvelous form of communal spirituality where community development, healing and education are harmoniously integrated. As the largest organized religious group in KwaZulu-Natal and in Southern Africa, such groups are responsible for most local, everyday spiritual healing and practical help (Edwards, 2011). Their proclivity to heal with circular forms of indigenous rhythmic dance invites special discussion on this theme.

### DANCE RELATIONSHIPS

Mthethwa, (1989) has noted that there are basically two types of traditional Zulu dances, spectacular and spiritual. *Indlamu* refers to a spectacular dance involving much rehearsal by a particular group, with steps not easily learned by new



members. Original, ritual, ceremonial, sacred, original and/or wedding dances (*isigekle, ukugjya, ukusina*) have to be simple and slow to cater for all, young and old, living and living-dead ancestors in the link to God. Zulu speaking people are deservedly famous for their rich singing voices and sense of rhythm. Dance in Africa, as many other forms of behaviour, is not an event in itself, but a connectedness with others and the external world (Mkabela and Luthuli, 1997). Zulu dancing is very energetic when performed by men and unmarried girls, dancing in separate groups, singing, clapping and whistling. Men incorporate battle and hunting movements in their dancing, banging their shields and sticks to great effect, while women dance more modestly. Married women ululate as they watch the dancing. In contrast with the western dance forms, the Zulu dance has a downward directedness that ties the dancer to the life-giving energy of the earth. Men's dances may demonstrate a warlike nature and regimental structure in choreography. In the old days, soldiers (*amabutho*) would have a special song and dance for their particular regimental division. This collective movement energy provides sustenance and strength (Mkabela and Luthuli, 1997). Through the rhythm of the dance, energy is mobilized, motivation sharpened, communal spirituality stirred and the ongoing spiral of life and health amplified. Dancing was, and is currently, a very popular pastime activity wherever people gather. Dancing represents different styles and life to be found in both rural and urban areas, from different parts of South Africa. In earlier days, courtship, war, hunting and initiation dances reminded workers of home. Zulu dancing and stick fighting are currently two of the main tourist attractions at Zulu heritage villages such as Shakaland, near Eshowe. Zulu Rickshas, who array themselves in feathers, trappings and other traditional Zulu garb, are currently still entertaining visitors to Durban.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of the article was to explicate some Southern African concepts of interconnectedness, in order to provide a relevant, local and conceptual grounding for the Global Coherence Initiative, which has established an African site on a game reserve in Zululand, South Africa. Some themes on interconnectedness were singled out for instructional purposes. Emphasis is on the dynamic interconnectedness of all life given through the ancestors and related human and ecological relationships, experience and behaviour. The following writing serves as reminder that local indigenous knowledge, like all other indigenous knowledge, represents a coherent, continuously transforming whole.

**Reality**

A thing is itself.  
But it only exists,  
In relation to something else,  
Therefore life's search  
Is one of relation.  
In the beginning  
There is relation,  
In the middle,  
May be integrity  
At the end,  
Another beginning  
Begins

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