

Review

The Answer Within: A Family in Therapy Re-Examined

*Moshe Lang and Peter McCallum,
Melbourne, ACER, 2000*

Maybe book reviews and readers as they converse with the text are like therapists conversing with a family.

The Answer Within is a complete transcript of five therapy sessions with the Black family – a family in crisis after two attempted suicides. The text is interspersed with comments by the authors and with a number of other commentaries by Moshe, including some ways he might now work differently after over 20 years since the original therapy. As I read through this book and compared it with the original papers published in the *ANZJFT* between 1982 and 1985 I kept thinking about what I could say in this review. Sometimes I thought up what I considered were clever statements, questions or critiques; always as I read on Moshe had preempted these ideas cutting across or through them in his quiet, authoritative, wise manner. When I reached the end I was left wordless with admiration.

Objectivity is not my strong point, I am usually taken over by a family, a theory or a book. A few days will give distance perhaps.

This is not a glamorous book, it does not deal with the newest recipes for success. Instead, it is about work at the coal face with all the excitement, drama and humanity of the therapeutic relationship and the family dynamics. This is an important book by a courteous, sensitive, thoughtful therapist. It is a timely book when the treatment of depression, suicide attempts and hyperactivity is becoming more medicalised. It is timely when the family is in danger of fading out of family therapy. It is timely because it emphasizes the most important, unchanging aspects of therapy – its humanness, its contact and its intimacy as opposed to today's valuing of technology and technique.

In the face of the beauty and truth that shine out of this book a few questions are carping. Why, out of all Moshe's work, did he choose the Black family for this intensive, public inspection? We learn something about the reasons but, perhaps, not enough. Why were the original commentaries by others, published with the original papers, not included? I found they added to the tapestry of ways of understanding the family and the therapy. Perhaps, though, Moshe considered they would add to the tendency 'to pigeonhole' and 'reduce complex thoughts to some label' (263).

It is said that if one can sit with a family and contain one's uncertainty for long enough meaning will emerge, These interviews show Moshe sitting with uncertainty, working hard to appreciate the issues and in his collaboration with the family meaning and a way forward emerge.

This is a book for all therapists and teachers. Furthermore many 'ordinary' readers will find it moving and more importantly, it may inspire hope.

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