



DVD Review

Behind Closed Doors: Two Therapy Sessions with Moshe Lang

Moshe Lang, PsychOz Publications, Australia 2012

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I watched the two sessions with great interest and pleasure and I believe both will be a valuable and enjoyable teaching aide. Students and therapists from all disciplines would greatly benefit from watching and discussing the DVDs as well as undertaking the exercises suggested in the training manual. Moshe's comments offer insight into his thoughts and feelings about what is happening in the session. He shares with us some of the cues and intuitions, which lead him to make comments and ask questions, as well as postulate areas to be explored in the future. He does not hesitate to critique some of his interventions, 'suspending all memory and desire', thus allowing new and unexpected interactions to emerge in his conversation with the participants.

The therapist and the actors did a great job and I found myself relating to the enactments as if they were real therapy sessions.

'The Affair'

The pace and rhythm of the session was comfortable and credible, from the phase of welcoming and engaging with the couple to establishing the reason for coming, defining, and tracking the problem from each partner's point of view. Moshe establishes a collaborative spirit from the outset inviting their views and needs on how he could help. He creates a respectful and hopeful atmosphere, which allows the couple to begin therapeutic work. They talk about improving communication and trust, allow feelings of ambivalence, and express a desire to stay together. This achieved, Moshe ventures into the past. He retrieves positive memories of their relationship and elicits moments of strong attraction for each other, dwelling on what Alex meant to Andrew and on the strength of his feelings for her. He reflects to the couple what he heard from the past, and how he hears it in the here and now, reinforcing the positives in their narrative. Attentively and thoughtfully, Moshe enquires about how they got to this difficult and painful point in their life. This allows the disclosure of a miscarriage (prior to the pregnancy and birth of Lilly) and the high level of anxiety Alex suffered in relation to her ability to have a child. Moshe tracks their individual experiences, styles, and meanings attributed to these events. Once again he summarises each of their experiences, allowing them to get in touch with the sadness and the unity they felt at that time, and establishes why the pregnancy became such a difficult experience. He acknowledges and empathises with Alex's anxiety, tuning in into Andrew's feelings of rejection at the same time.

Throughout the dance of the session Moshe engages empathically and attentively tuning into important messages and signifiers. He perceives Andrew's difficulty in coming to therapy, Alex's need and anxiety about being a good mother, her

somewhat exclusive relationship to the baby and her ambivalence towards Andrew as a father ('not good father material'). He invites the couple to give the affair a name, thus allowing them to symbolise verbally what it meant to each of them.

I feel that Moshe's exploration of the affair/'betrayal' in the session was neutral and balanced. As a woman, however, I believe I would have addressed the miscarriage, the grief that followed and how it was expressed in each of them. At the same time I would have been mindful to engage Andrew, as carefully as Moshe had done, without any perceived judgement. Moshe was able to introduce some risqué humour, lightening the atmosphere in the room, when Andrew brought up his need for masturbation. I wonder if a female therapist would have been given the same opportunity?

'Coming Home'

The second DVD introduces 21-year-old Dan who has come home 'to crash' whilst he sorts out his life and finances, which is not working well for him or his mother Meg. Meg initiates therapy having had a positive experience of it during the breakup of her marriage. Dan appears much more tentative and uncertain. Moshe tracks their difficulties with one another as well as paying careful attention to their individual needs. Meg values her space and personhood. She wants friendship, understanding and respect. The silent, withdrawn Dan wants to be left alone to come and go as he pleases. Moshe encourages them to tell him and each other how they feel and reflects to them that Meg feels used whilst Dan feels criticised and put down. He engages Dan further by asking him how could Meg do the 'the mum stuff' better, allowing him to express his needs for autonomy and privacy.

Moshe normalises much of their interaction as that of mother and son but does not shy away from highlighting Meg's conflicting needs of being on her own as well as helping Dan. He tunes into their sadness, gently exploring issues, which led up to the divorce and its consequences on mother and son. It is at this moment in the session that Moshe draws parallels to the relationship with Dan and asks what characteristics father and son have in common. He skilfully elicits memories of the abuse and conflict in the marriage and asks for Dan's most painful memory of that time. This lays bare Dan's sadness as he tearfully describes his aloneness, withdrawal and lack of support, during his parents' preoccupation with one another. There is a palpable shift in the room as he expresses himself, with great difficulty, probably for the first time in his life. Meg is taken aback; she feels guilty but blames Dan's secrecy for not knowing how he felt. Dan says he is not secretive but finds it hard to verbalise how he felt then and how he feels now.

Moshe, masterfully, brings the absent, a verbal father into the room, allowing mother and son to express what they believe he would say to his son in moments of pain and distress. They establish that father would not encourage or validate the expression of emotions, clarifying why it is so hard for Dan to do just that. Putting their presenting problem to the side, Moshe poignantly engages Dan in a real and meaningful conversation with his mother. Skilfully and seemingly effortlessly he gives each one of them what they both need and desire; attention, understanding, respect. He does not blame, criticise or offer a solution but encourages the conversation to continue in therapy, individually and together, to allow their thoughts and feelings to flow thus preventing history repeating itself.

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Moshe's gentle, caring and interested approach to mother and son models the husband/father figure they both missed out on. He is able to engage Meg from the outset but has to work hard to engage the wary Dan. Bringing the father into the room is a successful intervention, which I would like to think I would have used myself. I wonder, however, how much more difficult it would have been for me to engage Dan, given that he may have found it even more stressful to contend with two 'mothers' in the room. At the same time I would be extremely mindful not to undermine Meg's somewhat shaky maternal self-esteem and respond to her ambivalence about helping out Dan as neutrally as Moshe had done.

Moshe demonstrates his great skill as a therapist by being attentive, empathic, respectful, collaborative, neutral and above all human. Watching him is like observing a great artist at work. To look behind his closed doors is a privilege and a joy.

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