

REVIEWS

Behind Closed Doors: Two therapy sessions with Moshe Lang

Reviewed by Helena Phillips (Sept 2012)

Psychoz Publications, 2012. 2 DVD set. RRP \$99.95

Moshe Lang is one of Australia's best known therapists, a director of William's Road Family Therapy Centre. He has been practising and teaching for over 47 years, and he has published extensively. This 2 DVD set is a demonstration of his skills with two couples; a couple struggling to relate after an affair, and a mother and her 21 year old son who has recently moved home.

Being always in a hurry, I viewed the DVDs, deciding they were excellent resources, made copious notes for this review, and **then** discovered the set of notes in an obvious position inside the front cover! These include the entire transcripts of the sessions, together with Moshe Lang's comments on key moments/aspects of the work as it progresses. Lang suggests that on first use in the teaching environment, the sessions be allowed to run all the way through without stopping for commentary. I agree heartily that the flow of the work is essential, and it would sacrifice some important elements if interrupted by discussion and teacher's/students' points of view. I imagine it will be utilized at all stages of the therapist's journey: beginning with eager enthusiasm, continuing to develop skills in questioning and pacing, through times of uncertainty. It is most certainly designed to be used as a teaching tool for Family Therapy.

Moshe Lang performs in these DVDs with the graceful expertise of the master. It reminds me of those treasured films accessed in the previous century (and still in the current one), where Fritz Perls and Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and Albert Ellis, demonstrated their skills to the beginning therapist. I remember watching these early Masters, deciding they were interesting and okay. I thought I should be able to replicate their work without too much difficulty; just needed a little practise. I was 26 at the time. Now I am clear that the mastery demonstrated by Moshe Lang is the result of decades of trial and error, masses of case work including major failures, teaching (both received and given) and supervision (input and output). Only after all this does the work appear effortless.

The highlight, I think, is Lang's capacity for asking the right (and carefully framed) question at exactly the right time. He begins by connecting with the clients through the use of a name. As the session develops, this becomes not just about the name of each member of the couple, but the names they give to events such as "the affair". As he does this he draws out, without effort or criticism, the nature of the damage done to each other and to the relationship. He asks the very important question '*what are you here for?*' in a way designed to elicit attention and respect. He says to the son who has returned home "if I could be as helpful as possible, what issue would you want us to talk about?" He speaks to the mother and son about their ideas and beliefs in this way: "You feel that it is perfectly reasonable to ask your Mum not to..." and to the mother "You feel strongly that what you are asking is perfectly reasonable". To the son "For your life to be as good as it can be, what changes does your Mum need to make?" and "What's your take on this?" Well framed, very clear questions/interventions that do the therapy all by themselves.

Lang subtly and skilfully steers the conversation towards the son's experience of the divorce of his parents and here elicits the pain of the young boy hearing his father's abuse of his mother. He draws out the mother's feelings towards her son as the offspring of his father. He asks "In what way is Danny similar to his father? In what way is he different?" He gives permission for the mother to not want her adult son to live with her, and reframes this for him.

In *The Affair*, he pulls together the strengths and weaknesses of the couple. "What are you attracted to in him?" He makes interventions such as these: "I am very interested in your viewpoint about this." "How did you get from that to this?" Suddenly he has drawn out the information about their sex life. It is a delight to watch, and totally absorbing. I did reflect that it is a shame that both sessions are first meetings. We learn about his way of getting to know the couple and about his way of gathering historical information, but not about how he manages the warring, blended family, or the couple unable to express warmth of any kind towards each other. I would like to see a DVD about this part of therapy - when you are in the middle of chaos and wish you weren't!

Setting is helpful in illustrating the nature of the man/therapist. I personally loved the bookends seen behind Lang's head. Words in large letters say: "Very Wrong, Very Right / Right. Another delight was the pile of case notes on the coffee table between him and the clients, on top of which is the ubiquitous box of tissues. These small insights form the function of humanising the master, whilst giving the impression of years of dwelling in his room.

The actors wrote their own scripts and Lang was unaware of the content of these, although he knew the subject. This makes the sessions realistic and appropriately removed from ethical considerations. The actors may have been a little less engaged from the inside, but as a teaching tool their stories evolve in a realistic and appropriate way.

It would be beneficial watching these DVDs, for any therapist, and they are a good buy for a clinic or organisation wishing to invest in a timeless resource, as well as adding to teaching tools. I think Moshe Lang has gifted us by leaving this part of 'himself in action'!

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