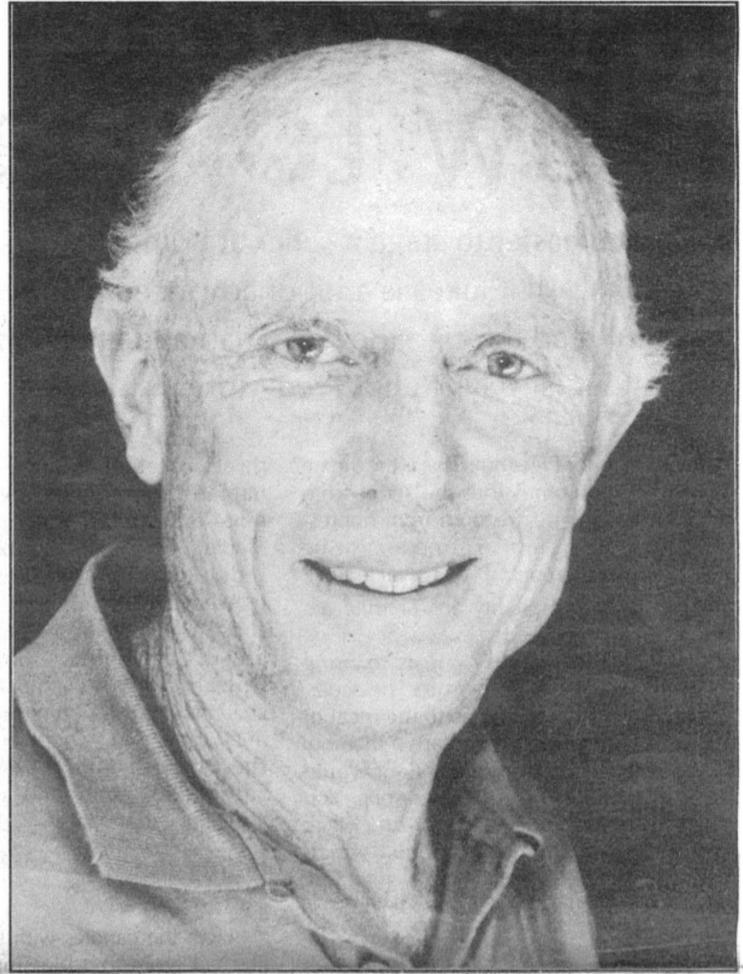


Professor Sidney Bloch (left) and Moshe Lang.

Photos: Nigel Clements



Jewish psychotherapy

SIDNEY Bloch: My current view as to whether Jewishness affects my practice of psychotherapy is a decided "yes".

Twenty-five years ago my attitude was the opposite. Originally I wanted to contribute to the science of psychology. I then began to see that there was very little science and more art; subsequently I have also discovered there is a lot more ethics.

I began to look at what the famous therapists had said about the spiritual dimension. Freud's attitude was negative: "I stay as far apart from the Jewish religion as from all other religions. They are of great significance to me as a subject of scientific interest but I have no part in them emotionally. On the other hand, I have always had a strong feeling of solidarity with my fellow people"

Though not a blind devotee, I thought Freud must be right: psychotherapy had to be separated from religion. Jung had a diametrically opposed view, in which religion was central, but my judgment was that Jung was going away from my field of psychiatry and psychotherapy. Not Jung, but Freud the scientist was my model.

Being young and at an age when one is looking for "gurus", I wanted to see what other experts said. For three years I worked at the University of Stanford, California, with Irvin Yalom, whose work represents a "humanist existential" tradition in psychotherapy. I discovered that he was a non-believer, irreligious — not anti-religious — believing that humanism was a good substitute for religion. From Yalom I came to the feeling that one could have a religion but not put a "name" or "brand" to it.

In the mid-70's I went from Stanford to Oxford. Five years later a paper was given at my College by Allen Bergin, a Mormon Professor of Psychiatry in Utah who had written a major textbook on research aspects of psychotherapy. Steering beyond what he called "clinical pragmatism" in medical psychotherapy on the one hand and "humanistic" psychotherapy on the other, he wanted to propose a third therapy, which he called "theistic realism". He argued that since over 70 percent of Americans are religious in some fashion or another, and this was the reality of most people with whom he worked, one should explicitly invoke a religious or spiritual dimension. Meaning and purpose must ultimately derive from a spiritual source.

At meetings of the Group on Psychotherapy and Judaism, Associate Professor Sidney Bloch and Moshe Lang — two prominent, ostensibly 'secular' Jewish psychotherapists — were asked to reflect on the role of Jewishness in their practice of psychotherapy. **Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen** reproduces their responses — with a little editorial license.

His words had a great impact, polarising the audience. I "sat on the fence". I didn't think one could expect all patients to believe in a Creator, but I did think there was something in forgiveness. How could Judaism inform me?

I became interested in Buber, whom I see as a combination of the secular and the Chassidic; this made me think of Maimonides who could draw upon Aristotelian and Judaic thinking and not find them contradictory. Buber quoted the Ba'al Shem Tov: "Everyone has within him something precious that is in no one else". So I say to each patient: "we will find something precious in you".

Secondly, one can be "ordinary" and stay on one's own rung while doing wonderful things there. On his deathbed, Zusia was full of remorse. When asked, "Why are you upset — did you expect to be Moses?" he responded: "I wanted to be Zusia". One should live to one's own potential.

Thirdly, there is a concept of renewal: one must be ready and able to experience and grow every day.

MOSHE Lang: I was born and grew up in Israel (then Palestine) and was educated in the socialist school of the Histadrut. My earliest teachers were Russian ladies — pioneers and socialists. Yet even there religion had a place. When I misbehaved, I was told off by Morah Malka in biblical terms: "Lo tehiye tifartecha al haderech asher ata holech bah" which translates: "Your glory will not come on the path you are taking".

I joined Hashomer Hatzair, which was fiercely anti-religious. We danced the Hora, but there was no instrumental music. So we sang our own songs. What were they? "El yibaneh haGalil" — "God will build the Galilee".

My Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz was called Merhavayah — again a biblical name. My life experience was "Proletarian Israel

(Eretz Yisrael haovedet)" — but while its profoundly Jewish background was not acknowledged, it was certainly there.

Religious themes permeated my life. The street I grew up in was called *Rechov Geulah* — "Redemption Street". To the south, was a street called *Rechov HaRav Kook*, after the first Chief Rabbi of Israel; to the north was another called *Yona Hanavi* (the Prophet Jonah). And so it goes on.

"One must recognise that there is an archaeology of ideas. In that archaeology of ideas, my Jewish experience plays a very important part."

Socialistically brought up in Israel, with what books did I come to Australia? The Tanach, a Hebrew dictionary, the complete writings of Sholem Aleichem, and a collection of Chassidic tales by David Cohen, which I was given by my socialist aunt when I was 10.

The most important professional decision I made upon arrival in Australia was to retain my name, Moshe. There was pressure to become Maurice, Moss, Mark. For a while I was "half" Maurice, but I couldn't come to it, so I stayed Moshe. Those of us, who in Herman Wouk's terms, have the same "inside" and "outside" name, are making a statement.

When I studied psychology in Melbourne, the ruling attitude was that psychology was a science. Was there anything

Jewish about my interest in the phenomenon of childhood depression? It seems to me now that this is so. The Mishnah states: "I have learned more from students than from anyone else". I would translate this, in my case, as "more from my patients". The textbooks said that childhood depression was impossible. By listening to the children I found the contrary to be true. In this case, I felt I had to respect the opinion, the voice, of the children themselves rather than respect the professional opinion that childhood depression doesn't exist.

Part of the Jewish experience is one of *tachlis* — pragmatism. This was the appeal of family therapy vis-a-vis psycho-dynamic therapy: dealing with and resolving human problems. Family therapy allowed more creativity, spontaneity and recognition of the interdependency of human beings, qualities which are a very central part of the Jewish experience.

Family therapy has a positive connotation. Resilience and strength has made it possible to go through what survivors of the Holocaust did, and raise families. In Abba Eban's words: the history of the Jewish people is one of resilience.

The recognition of the uniqueness of the individual and the family is very much part of the Jewish experience. We have to make ourselves small — not to be there — in order to listen. Humility is important in therapy. You can be arrogant in your humbleness and humble in your arrogance. And then there is the idea of forgiveness.

This is the intensely contradictory nature of my background: between, on the one hand, being brought up in an atheistic, antireligious, way, and at the same time being brought up with Jewish tradition and religion. My socialist primary school had six hours of compulsory bible study per week.

One must recognise that there is an archaeology of ideas. In that archaeology of ideas, my Jewish experience plays a very important part.

▲ Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen is director of the Institute for Judaism and Civilisation. The group on Judaism and Psychotherapy has since held a symposium on "Chassidic Stories as a source for Psychotherapy" which included a critique of Buber's relationship to Chassidism, of which it is hoped to publish an account in the future.