



MOSHE LANG

**INTERVIEW BY
PETER
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2ND FEBRUARY, 1995

In 1994 Moshe Lang was awarded life membership of the Victorian Association of Family Therapists for his exceptional contribution over many years. At the National Family Therapy Conference in Sydney in 1994 he was also given a special award for distinguished contribution to family therapy by the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy.



Peter: I remember you telling me some time ago that you left home at age fourteen to join a Kibbutz. Has that experience stayed with you?

Moshe: Of course it has. I left the Kibbutz but it never left me. So sometimes I think I am trying to recreate a Kibbutz around me, perhaps such as Williams Road, but others would disagree.

Peter: And you were in the Israeli army for some years and became a sergeant and a tank commander. How would you summarise your experience in the army?

Moshe: What I've learnt from two and a half years of service in the army is that I don't like giving orders and perhaps more importantly I don't like taking them! Secondly, that life is paradoxical. I was counting the days and hours until my service would finish. As soon as it did, I started thinking of it as the best years of my life.

Peter: So why did you come to Australia?

Moshe: Because it is a wonderful country. I read the book On the Beach which proposed that Australia was going to be the last country on earth so immediately I came here.... In truth when I was about to finish my service in the army in Israel I was in my twenties. I decided that I wanted to study overseas in an English speaking country. I had some family in Australia and when they heard they immediately wrote and invited me to come here. I had wonderful memories of Australian soldiers during the war and all that I knew about Australia sounded good so I came.

Peter: Why did you choose to study psychology?

Moshe: In retrospect I'm aware that primarily I studied psychology because I wanted to understand myself and my family. But that's not what I thought at the time. From a very young age I was interested in teaching. I was a terrible student at school, awful, I never studied, I mucked around, I went to the beach played basketball, anything and everything apart from study. Yet around age eight I started to earn some money from teaching. My first pupils were twin girls whose father owned a dolls repair workshop! He would let me come and watch him work on dolls, which I found fascinating.

Peter: So teaching was an early interest!! What about psychology?

Moshe: Well, I became a leader in a youth movement when I was about fifteen. And then in the army I became interested in human relationships. I also read Freud and Adler at a young age. I remember thinking that psychology is what I wanted to study. I am an only child and growing up in Tel Aviv as far back as I can remember I loved to sit on the verandah and just watch people walk past. I would make up stories about what's happening with them and I was fascinated by people and their customs. Of course living in a block of flats I knew what was happening with the neighbours. I heard them fight and cook and make love and so I had this interest in people. To me, my interest in teaching and psychology is one and the same. That is, I'm interested in people, what makes them tick and how best to work with them.

Peter: So you came to Australia to study psychology?

Moshe: I arrived in Australia on September 3, 1961 and started at the University of Melbourne in 1962. I was at Melbourne University from 1962 to 1964. At the end of a three year course I had a B.A. with a double major in psychology. I thought at that stage that I would continue to study. I was thinking probably I would go to the States. But then there was a lecturer at Melbourne University, Alan Jeffrey, who said there was a job going at the Bouverie Clinic and maybe I could be interested. That was in January 1965.

Peter: It is almost thirty years since your first job as a psychologist!

Moshe: And interestingly enough almost exactly fifteen years at Bouverie and fifteen years at Williams Road.

Peter: Bouverie was your first job? I think you once told me that you planned to stay for just a year.

Moshe: I told Geoff Goding in all fairness that I wanted the job but I wouldn't stay for more than a year. I wanted to continue my studies. As it happened I stayed for fifteen years.

Peter: In Bouverie in those early days family therapy strictly speaking wasn't practised. How did family therapy come to be practised in Bouverie?

Moshe: We simply didn't know about family therapy at that time. When we eventually discovered family therapy it appeared at the time the most radical and revolutionary thing. But in retrospect we were

preparing for it all those years. The way the clinic functioned before family therapy was like this. The psychologists of which there were two would see the children for individual psychotherapy. That was always my job, to see the child in individual psychotherapy. I also ran two or three groups for children. The psychiatrist and the social workers would see the parents but we would get together regularly and talk about the family. Often we saw every member of the family. So in that sense we were a family clinic. At a later stage but before family therapy Geoff somehow discovered the technique of making a family assessment by seeing the whole family together and observing their interaction.

Peter: How did the shift happen from informal to formal practice of family therapy?

Moshe: I think it was in 1970 Geoff went to an International Conference in either Greece or Turkey and came back and said: I've seen the Light, Family Therapy, that's the thing! We immediately started seeing families. A number of members of staff left because they didn't agree with the change. They couldn't come to terms with it. For me personally it just felt terribly comfortable, it made a lot of sense.

Peter: It sounds like the seeds had been there and Geoff's finding the light was more a step than a massive revelation.

Moshe: Well it was both. At the time it felt unbelievable, radical, exciting, fantastic. It removed inordinate constraints. We were primarily thinking psychodynamically, so at one level we were committed to long term therapy. To get rid of the idea of long term therapy was wonderful, to play with the idea that some people, some families can be helped in a short time, that a short cure is not flight into health, that it could be a real cure, a real change, was exciting beyond belief.

Peter: So it did feel like a revolution!

Moshe: The other terribly exciting thing was that the therapists were able to see people change before their eyes in the way they interacted with each other, the way they were with each other. That was inordinately exciting. It was wonderful.

Peter: You've mentioned Geoff quite a few times. Your relationship with Geoff is well known and your mutual respect is very well appreciated. What stands out for you as you think of your relationship to Geoff?

Moshe: Of course many things. You know we were together for about thirteen years.

Peter: Yes it's a long time.

Moshe: We saw each other every day and worked together. Many, many things stand out. But if I have to reduce it to one, I think the thing that stands out the most for me is the commitment, his profound, deep commitment, number one to his patients, also to public service, to his staff, to ideas.

Peter: So it was like a vocation rather than a job that he was doing?

Moshe: No doubt about it. Geoff was one of the people who promoted the multi-disciplinary team which at one level pre-supposes equality between the professions. But at another level Geoff was very authoritarian And I liked that. Looking back one of the things I liked was that he was very tough on himself and his staff, but mostly on himself.

Peter: So he demanded high standards.

Moshe: Very high. I mean staff were scared of Geoff at the beginning. We used to have three case conferences a week. I remember my first presentation was when I was asked to assess a child. Friday morning I would do the psychological testing and write it up on Friday afternoon and then present it at the case conference. The big one was on Tuesday from 2 - 4 p.m. I remember the amount of work and anxiety that I experienced in my first presentation because I knew that Geoff would smoke a cigarette and ask very tough and pointed questions. He knew his stuff, he was very very well informed. So he could have asked me why did I score 2 rather than 1 on the WISC.

Peter: So they were happy years at Bouverie. What made you decide to start your own institute, what was your dream behind starting Williams Road?

Moshe: Well, let's talk about leaving Bouverie first of all. Geoff had left by then. Often I used the word 'retire' and he always corrected me. He didn't retire, he resigned from his position as superintendent in 1978. He left Bouverie in 1978, and so did Brian who had worked there for about two years. When Brian left the two people I was most closely associated with had left.

So that was one reason why I wanted leave. But beyond that, when Geoff left another thing that I saw was that Geoff had no say and no control in what happened to his life's work and I didn't like that. I was worried about it for Geoff and I didn't want it to happen to me. I could see the possibility of some petty bureaucrat or some politician - because they had a bad night - just doing terrible things to one's work. So the decision to leave Bouverie was from my point of view an attempt on the one hand to retain many of the very positive things that I experienced at Bouverie but get rid of some of the problems.

Peter: So what was your dream?

Moshe: What I was thinking about was a centre with a number of features. Like Bouverie, patients and clients would be seen. It would be multi-disciplinary, so there would be psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists and so on. And we would have a training program, there would be teaching and supervision. It would be also a place where research and writing would take place. All of these have occurred to varying degrees. How successful has it been? On the whole I think it has been very good, we have over twenty people working at Williams Road.

Peter: Yes, I think it was twenty-two last year.

Moshe: It allows for continuity that you can't have in public service. What I mean by that is people can leave for a while and then come back. They go for different reasons, they don't have to resign because they go away. They could drop the number of sessions they do and then pick them up. We could have a training program where people who teach do so because they want to. Because nobody's contracted, it's not part of your job description to teach. That also makes it difficult for me and Brian because we don't know from year to year who will be teaching.

Peter: So was Williams Road one of the first private institutes of its kind in Australia?

Moshe: Probably I was the first family therapist in Australia who took that step to leave the public service and attempt to start a private centre. It was not done before and there was no model for how to do it. I spent many

sleepless nights thinking it through, how and what to do. Everybody I spoke to said nobody would pay for training if they could get it elsewhere for free. There was no precedent of people paying for training in family therapy. I was scared out of my wits. Not only did it work but I think it showed the way. In very quick succession a number of people from all over Australia came and talked to me at length about how to do it. And other people did it, including Michael White, Malcolm Robinson, Max Cornwall and Andrew Ralph. So it was innovative in some ways, not in others. Similar things had been done overseas.

Peter: Any other parts of the dream?

Moshe: One of my original hopes was that, apart from family therapy, Williams Road would provide other services. To give an example, I thought that we would run parents' groups, and adolescents' groups. There would be dance, play and art therapy and things like that. Some groups happened but haven't taken off.

Peter: So as you look back on the 15 years do you have a sense that the dream has basically come alive for you?

Moshe: The simple answer is yes. On the whole it has eventuated, come true as it were. On the whole it has been very good.

Peter: I was wondering whether there were any hard feelings between Bouverie and Williams Road or between Geoff and yourself.

Moshe: My relationship with Geoff has gone through a number of phases. Phase one was until we discovered family therapy. Until then, Geoff was my first boss, my first supervisor, my main teacher, a huge support to me and the research I did at Bouverie. He would help me with statistics, with the writing and everything. What happened was when we moved to family therapy our relationship changed. Why? We were both beginners. We became equal. He was still my senior in status and in age and I always felt that, I was comfortable with it. But we were now collaborators. And I would like to give a lot of credit to Geoff. He was not a young man by then, and in a sense to give up a life of skills and status to start something new took a lot of courage. Anyway that started a relationship of a different sort where we were collaborating, working very closely together in developing something new, and we were in daily contact. Shortly after he resigned he went overseas. When he came back I was already at Williams Road. We didn't have that day-to-day contact, and that affected our ability to deal with our disagreements.

Peter: In recent years when you have given votes of thanks for Geoff, what stood out for me was a strong sense of respect and affection.

Moshe: I was always confident that Geoff had the best of intentions for me, that he had affection and respect for me as I had for him.

Peter: To come to your clinical style. What sorts of people in the family therapy world do you think have been most influential in the development of your own professional style?

Moshe: I think the people I work with. I learn more from direct experience and conversation than from books and things.

Peter: So people like Geoff and Brian?

Moshe: I think Geoff and Brian are the main two. Peter McCallum and I worked and wrote together, and I appreciated the rigour of his thinking. He helped me when I started Williams Road and was one of the first teachers in the training program. I have collaborated with Miriam Tisher on Childhood Depression and the Children's Depression Scale.

In a different way I was influenced by my wife Tess. I shared my working life with her on a daily basis. She has always helped me with my writing. She told me I should be a family therapist before family therapy was heard of in Australia, because she felt it didn't make sense to talk to one person and not to the others involved. She pushed me into leaving Bouverie and starting Williams Road. She helped me to find the building and to set it up.

I'd like to come back to Brian. I first met him in 1976 after I spent a year in Israel. At first what I liked most about Brian was the intensity of his commitment and his willingness to fight for his beliefs. In contrast when we saw families together he was very caring and gentle, and I liked that very much. Brian is probably the most serious professional I have worked with, his scholarship is prodigious, whenever I need a reference all I do is ask Brian and he always knows. We have worked closely together since 1976 and have been partners since 1981, and we still talk. Not only have we worked together at Williams Road. we have written together, and were active in the early days of the VAFT and the Journal. At a different level of the

people who have influenced me in the family therapy field, Minuchin stands out.

Peter: He came to Bouverie, didn't he?

Moshe: Yes, he was very generous. He left us with a huge library of tapes. When Minuchin came to Australia I didn't sleep for I don't know how many nights because he blew my mind. I thought at the time I had not seen a better therapist at work. There was a quality of magic, he was so impactful, so powerful, the way he intervened with families, that was very exciting to me. I think that structural family therapy is a very crude map, but its crudity is its strength.

Peter: Eminently workable, useable.

Moshe: You know when the going gets tough and you are totally confused, the simpler the map the better. But also his way of thinking and working was so very different to mine. When I watched tapes of my work when structural family therapy influenced me I can see clearly the influence but also the difference. For instance when I made a structural move I explained to the family why I did it and inquired about their feelings. I would probably have been thrown out of his school for doing it.

Peter: So Minuchin has been a powerful influence. Have other gurus or masters of family therapy had an impact on you?

Moshe: Yes, the other one who influenced me a lot was Haley. I liked some of his earlier writing very much.

Peter: I remember noticing when I was a student that some of the ways you went about the early part of the first interview struck me as being very much like Haley.

Moshe: I think Haley made a lot of sense. He proposed something very simple in problem-solving therapy. He said: look, therapy is sequential. And of course it's not but then again it is. When a family comes for the first interview it makes sense to go in some sequence and to ask them all the questions as he proposed and it made sense and to some degree I followed that. I follow it but I also don't follow it. So Haley influenced me a lot at the time. As did the Palo Alto group.

Peter: Any other influences?

Moshe: Yes. In 1975 I worked for a year in Israel and a number of people impacted on me. The most outstanding was Franz Brull. He was regarded by

many as the father of psychiatry and psychotherapy in Israel. He was a psychoanalytically trained psychiatrist who changed to an existential psychotherapist. I was keen to convert him to family therapy. After he watched me work he said: "You may think of it as family therapy, but from my point of view you understand each person's subjective experience and articulate for the family their options." With the passage of time I agree with him more. He worked extensively with Holocaust survivors and introduced me to many useful ideas, particularly that of the psychotherapist being their emotional and psychological G.P.

Coming back to family therapy, I liked the work of Carl Whitaker very much, particularly his awareness of how theory may blind. Milton Erickson knew how to tell a good story and I certainly loved that. But my therapeutic life did not start with family therapy. I was profoundly influenced by Freud and Adler. I was influenced by Dreikurs and other people of that school like Sullivan. There was a period when I was very influenced by Rogers. When I went back to university to do further studies I experienced encounter groups and things like that. I may not say this to other people but to you I have to say it. There was a period when I was very influenced by the practice though not necessarily the thinking of the Gestalt movement..... Having said all the above, the main influence on my work has always been my patients. I learn from them ninety-nine percent. One percent from everybody else.

Peter: I was going to say that good therapists always learn from their patients. Do any particular patients jump out at you when you think of people that have really had an impact on your own therapy style, your own thinking about therapy?

Moshe: I think probably it would be the Black Family and what I call the Lamb family. It wasn't because of the therapy. The families gave me permission to videotape and study and write about them. I spent a few years studying the tapes of my work with the Black family. I spent time thinking through this work with Peter McCallum and other therapists and eventually a book came out of it. That whole process influenced me a lot. On the whole very few therapists know their own strength, or

weaknesses, but particularly their strength. If we are useful to families, what is it that makes us useful, what is it we bring to the therapeutic encounter that makes a difference? Studying those tapes helped me to really understand much better how I work.

Peter: Was it partly the generosity of the family in allowing you into their lives not only as therapist but also as a collaborator with them that really enabled you to do a micro-analysis of your own style and to see how you functioned?

Moshe: That's right. Its both at the level of the small detail as well as the global picture. And that learning continues. I saw the family fifteen years ago. But to revisit it regularly once or twice a year and show the tapes and have a new generation of therapists ask me different questions makes me rethink that process again and be challenged again. It is a wonderful learning process. It's tough, it's hard, but it's also very good.

Peter: Well how would you describe your own style? You say you've learned from the people you work with. You've learned from Haley and Minuchin. You obviously do something different because the students always comment that there's a certain elegance about the way you do therapy.

Moshe: I aspire to simplicity. I value being simple. I've always thought that therapy is a conversation. But it becomes a banality to say therapy is a conversation. It's a conversation, but it is not a conversation.

Peter: It's a very specific kind of conversation.

Moshe: It's an exchange with somebody who is presumed to be an expert. And my view is that you need to be comfortable and happy as a therapist to acknowledge not-knowing. But, equally, it's important at times to be able to say 'I know'. False modesty is inappropriate and a failure to take responsibility and to state that I know is also irresponsible at times.

Peter: Yes, I think that we have an ethical obligation to be experts. Maybe the issue that you are talking about is how we use our expertise. Do we use it to dominate the client or to bring something out of the client. Your style comes over as a way of eliciting something.

Moshe: Fundamentally the way I would like to think of my therapy is that on the whole I prefer to draw something out of people. I believe that on the whole people have the answers to their own difficulties. The

job of the therapist is to draw it out of them. But in drawing it out.....

Peter: There's a very big art in drawing something out of a person. It's not as simple as it looks.

Moshe: It's not just that. At times I need to be there fully and bring my own expertise and my own knowledge. Knowledge of life is not the sort of thing that we think of as part of therapy, that draws the patient out and brings out things. I spoke yesterday to a patient and she talked to me about her experiences in meditation. She tells me amongst other things about her Kundalini experience. Now I know that to lots of therapists it would mean nothing.

Peter: Kundalini? You will have to explain that to me.

Moshe: I don't know if I can because it's a concept in Yoga and meditation. The Kundalini is the power that lies dormant in the lowest psychic centre of the human body. The ascent of this power to the crown of the head brings about a temporary state of ecstasy. But because I'm interested in Eastern traditions I

know I listened to her with a different ear. I know she is testing me for a while, to see whether she is going to go on and talk about things to me or not because they are exceedingly private. And I know and she knows that if she is going to tell some therapists about these experiences she would be laughed at and be ridiculed either overtly or covertly. Instead she talks to me about her meditation experience. The Kundalini is represented by the serpent and she talks to me about how in the meditation experience she in fact sees the serpent. I can draw her out because I am both interested and I have some knowledge. My knowledge and interest and willingness to go into her very unique world connected us with other things which are very deeply related to her family. So we found the snakes in her family, not just the snakes that came as a result of her Kundalini experience.

Peter: So there is a very appropriate knowledge and expertise which helps the connection which you have with the client. The question is how we use that knowledge and expertise.

Moshe: The way I would like to think of it is that I don't want to come across as an expert in the sense that I put somebody else down. We work together and I am

willing to give the relationship everything I've got, all my knowledge, all my experience.

Peter: It's almost like your expertise helps to bring out the expertise of the client. Coming back to your style I remember you saying a couple of years ago that if people saw you doing therapy today they might think your style boring. I remember translating 'boring' as 'becoming a bit more simple', a bit less showy, a bit less smart over the years. Do you think your style has

them simplicity means that it's not complicated, that it's not difficult. I remember once being in Japan and I saw a vase. It was monochromatic, it had nothing, just the simplest of vases left by itself in this place. I liked it very much. I thought, "I'll buy it". I asked how much it was. It was about a million dollars, because it was the acme of simplicity. Only a great master could make a vase as beautiful as that. So the point was that to the Japanese to achieve that level of simplicity takes the lifetime of a practice.

changed in that direction as you've become a wiser therapist?

Moshe: What I did mean is that probably the way I work is less obvious, there is a simplicity about it. So that if you sit like we do now, just sitting and talking with people, there is nothing that is out of the ordinary. It's very ordinary, it's very simple. I think I aspire to simplicity. Very often people have gotten angry with me when I say that it's very simple, because to

Peter: I often compare the work of a good therapist to a ballet dancer. It looks simple but there's been hours and hours of practice and study and theory and supervision for that precision to occur.

Moshe: One of the things that happens is that very often there is a technique behind it but the technique is hidden. What I mean by that is this. At one stage I was influenced by the Milan school, they had some very interesting ideas. For example, rather than warn the family by saying: 'you know you're changing too

fast', I may ask them, 'do you think you are moving too fast?'. I open up the subject for discussion. Now that question at one level may be informed by Milan strategic therapy, but to me it's just ordinary genuine concern, I know that when people change too fast they have problems with it. So I will raise it as a question rather than make a statement..

Peter: Behind the elegant simplicity is thirty years of experience?

Moshe: But it's often because I slow things down, I'm very interested in the details, the sorts of details that other people miss. I don't know why it comes to mind but some years ago a guy came to see me with all sorts of problems. I said to him what are your strengths, what are your interests. One of them was he was very keen on Tai Chi. So I asked him to tell me about it in great detail. Eventually I said to him: do you get a tingling feeling in your fingertips? And we started talking about him not getting the tingling feeling in his fingertips. Now what happens is that in Tai Chi you are supposed

Moshe: Being at it. Yes but I think I'm slow, I'm terribly slow, probably I'm retarded!

Peter: I've often seen you as fairly quick in your work. Quick in the effect of the work.

Moshe: Maybe the impact is fast. But the way I work is very slow.

Peter: That's what I think is a bit deceptive. There's a lot happening which is not obvious in the way you work.

to meditate and when you meditate, when you put your finger tips almost touching, you should experience the flow of energy from one finger to another. As I was drawing his attention to whether he was experiencing the energy flow or not, for the first time he was paying attention to the fact that he was biting his fingernails. And so the result was that after our conversation he stopped biting his nails. There was a contradiction which in a different way I was drawing to his attention: that he was committed to Tai Chi which is so relaxing, so protective of the body while at the same time he was mutilating his body. Now anybody watching may have found it boring because

I was just having a conversation with him about Tai Chi.

Peter: You've done a lot of training at Williams Road over the years. One of the reasons I train others is to learn myself. What have been some of the gains from your students over the years?

Moshe: Number one, I became a close collaborator with Geoff after he was my teacher. In the same way a good number of the people who became very close collaborators and friends of mine have been people I originally taught. It has always been a very good experience for me to change from the relationship of, if you wish, student/supervisor to colleagues and collaborators and friends. My first student at Bouverie was Miriam Tisher. She is working now at Williams Road and is somebody I've worked with for many years. For that matter I derive a lot of pleasure that you Peter and Sophie Holmes now coordinate our training program so capably after doing the course with us at Williams Road. But after working for over thirty years you may become bored and blase, students keep you on your toes with their constant inquiries, interests, and criticism. It sustains you, and sometimes things that you don't even notice are drawn to your attention.

Peter: So the students help you to keep inquiring, growing, changing.

Moshe: And challenged!

Peter: To change the topic for a moment, a major preoccupation of your own personal and professional life has been the holocaust and we've just celebrated fifty years since the liberation of Auschwitz. On the personal level how close to your own family did the horrors of the holocaust come?

Moshe: I was born in Israel just before the second world war. I grew up believing - and that belief was I think encouraged indirectly and unconsciously by my parents - that I was not affected by the holocaust and that my family was not affected by it. I have to say that compared to people that I have known, close friends of mine, the impact of the holocaust on me is very minimal. But in saying that, the reality is that three of my grandparents perished in the holocaust. My mother, who

came to Israel in 1924, lost a father who went back to Poland and got caught in the war and was killed. As well as this many cousins were killed, and so on. My father just escaped from Vienna and came to Israel but both his parents were taken to a concentration camp. My grandfather died very quickly after he arrived there, a combination of starvation and disease. My grandmother, in spite of the fact that she was very advanced in years, survived the war until she was taken to Auschwitz six months before the end of the war where she was gassed to death. My father died when I was young, my mother remarried, and the man she remarried lost his first wife and three children in the holocaust. When I came to Australia I came at the invitation of my aunt and I stayed with them. She was married to a man who also lost his wife and children in the holocaust. My wife's parents came to Australia in 1926. She thought her family was not affected by the holocaust at all. She only recently found out that her father's parents also perished in the Holocaust. We presumed her parents did know but preferred to protect Tess from that knowledge.

Peter: So it's been very close to your immediate family. How do you think your experience of that whole horror has shaped your way of being a family therapist?

Moshe: I can't begin to do justice to this question but I am sure the impact is greater than I am aware. My belief in co-operation, collaboration, at one level is predicated on the experience of the holocaust. The experience of the holocaust has many dimensions, but one of them is that some people assume that they are superior to others. The assumption of superiority is unacceptable to me. At another level - and that is as a therapist working with holocaust survivors - I believe in reality and the holocaust is a gruesome reality. Family therapy has been struggling around the issue: is there a reality out there that's real! I think there is a reality and the holocaust is one such reality. Family therapy on the whole has avoided issues such as the holocaust. Family therapists have not written about the holocaust. They have not seen many holocaust families. It is an interesting question to ask why? My own view is that it is a combination of issues. If our theory is of a quick fix, that people can respond quickly or that there is a quick cure, you cannot cure people of the holocaust ever, neither should you try. You can help them, but to help them you need to spend a lot of time with them and you need to be willing to bend your theories.

Peter: So it's like a horror that's gotten into their bones and you don't just change that overnight.

Moshe: That's right. It also involves the therapist in having to cope with and confront awful feelings, and family therapists are maybe not so good at staying with awful feelings. Most of the work that was done with holocaust survivors - and other brutally traumatised people - has been done by psychodynamically trained therapists. The literature on the holocaust has been primarily written within the psychoanalytic literature, not family therapy or humanistic psychology.

Peter: What do you think the world can learn from the horrors of the holocaust? What do you think are the lessons for us today?

Moshe: There are different lessons at different levels for us as citizens, as human beings, and as therapists.

Peter: How about for us as therapists?

Moshe: Psychology did very well in Nazi Germany, it flourished. Psychologists and doctors collaborated, cooperated with the Nazi regime. Jung supported the Nazi regime. So we need to stop and think about that

at one level. At another level I spent I don't know how many years at Melbourne University, seven, eight, ten years. One of the things that came up was human aggression. But in the discussion of human aggression the brutality of something like the holocaust was never mentioned. Is that an example of psychology itself not confronting the reality of human aggression? Without confronting horrors like the holocaust we develop sort of Mickey Mouse theories.

Peter: And some of the thinking today is pointing out how political systems have disregarded or not faced up to the holocaust. The same thing could happen in therapeutic work.....

Moshe: If you read what happened in Townsville, the mental hospital there. Psychiatric abuse is parallel to what happened in the Holocaust. It allows some people that degree of power over the life of others. The patients were disenfranchised and awful things happened to them. Therefore one of the issues or lessons for us is not to disempower people. Once you disempower them you have a totalitarian regime like Nazi Germany with all its instrument of repression and suppression. It is impossible for other people to resist the regime. The time to resist is when you still have some power.

Peter: Is there anything in particular that you keep in mind when working with the families and victims of the holocaust?

Moshe: Many things, that's the point. I can never reduce this, that's why I frustrate so many people because I can't reduce this to one catchy line. I keep in mind many things, such as that the people I'm working with are extraordinary people, really resilient, to have survived and lived no matter how damaged they may be. The ability to be here today and to be able to talk to me is a great achievement. It's a testimony to human courage that is unimaginable and I stand in awe. It's not fake positive connotation stuff, it's a very genuine awe at people and their ability, resilience and strength to survive and make a life. So that perhaps is the number one.

Peter: And what is number two?

Moshe: The number two is that silence like talking is interactive. When people are silent as many holocaust victims are, a lot of the psychiatric literature attributed that silence to intrapsychic processes. I think it's not correct. There are obviously inner reasons for silence, but there are outer reasons too. There are huge outer reasons. When the holocaust survivors went to therapy, the therapists did not want to hear about the war and they found many ways to let them know that they didn't wish to hear. I guess they couldn't cope with that or didn't wish to. Survivors on the whole confronted a society that said: don't tell us. And when they did tell us, those who were told often made comments suggesting, implying or stating that it was the survivors' own fault that the crimes were committed against them. So the victims would be ignored or condemned. Sometimes it's subtle and sometimes it's gross. To give an example. Even the therapists who worked with the survivors and were committed to them, when they wrote in the literature about therapy with survivors they used the term 'conspiracy of silence' to describe that interactive process through which survivors, their therapists, and society avoided the holocaust. When you use words such as collusion, conspiracy, and part of the equation is the survivors themselves you are using derogatory language to describe people who for some reason or another choose not to talk. And I'm asking the question. Why use such language? I think it's totally unjustified and I think it's an example, a subtle one, of again the victims being blamed for the crimes committed against them and for the response that they make to that crime. So the lesson is that you need always to consider to what degree others including yourself blame the victims for the crimes committed against them.

Peter: I would like to shift our discussion to the written word. I was wondering on a broad level what books have influenced your development as a therapist, your professional growth. Are there some books that stand out?

Moshe: I guess it's a repetition of what I have already said.

Peter: You mentioned people like Minuchin, Haley.....

Moshe: That's in family therapy. I'll answer the question differently. The more we come to recent times the less I am influenced by books. The earlier I look back the more influential the books. I read much less now. Direct experience has become increasingly more important to me and the books less. Having said that, what books have influenced me? Freud's writings

were very significant, as were Sullivan, Adler, Freda Fromm Reichman, Guntrip and at a later stage Carl Rogers. Of course when I started work my job was primarily to do play therapy. There were only two books about play therapy. One was by Anna Freud and the other by Virginia Axline.

Peter: You obviously enjoy writing yourself. You've written books, articles. What do you most enjoy about writing? Lots of people don't write. I presume you get some satisfaction out of putting the written word down.

Moshe: The first word you use is enjoy which is a problem word. There is some enjoyment but there is more agony, struggle, pain. It's a bugger, it's terrible. Why do I do it? So that it will leave me alone.

Peter: So it's a way of clarifying your own thoughts sometimes?

Moshe: Cleansing.

Peter: Cleansing, that's an interesting reason to write.

Moshe: Getting rid of stuff. But there are also moments of pleasure in writing. The pleasure for me is being able to put with some clarity things that are difficult for me to articulate. It's the pleasure of clarification, the pleasure of feeling that the fog lifts and you are able to see clearly and state clearly. So that has been a source of pleasure. The other pleasure for me is that most of my writing has been collaborative writing. I've written with other people and I've enjoyed that process of sitting

together with people and really talking things through. You know it's one thing to talk, and another to talk to a point where you can agree on what sentences to write, what sentences to express, and what not. It's a level of commitment of each other to the writing. It's much more difficult to achieve than going solo.

Peter: You've got an accountability to someone else. What piece or pieces of writing have you enjoyed the most or have given you the most pleasure?

Moshe: All in different ways. I enjoy the fact that I've written in many areas to express different parts of me, and in different styles to suit the subject. Before becoming a family therapist I did research with Miriam Tisher. We studied school refusing children. We wanted to study childhood depression among school refusers and there was no test of childhood depression. So we developed a scale or test for measuring childhood depression which eventually went into print and got published by the Australian Council of Educational Research. It's known as the Children's Depression Scale. Later as a family therapist I felt uncomfortable about constructing such a scale because it did not sit well with my newly acquired piety. Now I feel very good about it, I feel a sense of pride. I think it's a very good instrument in that it allows the user an opportunity to get in touch with a child's experience that otherwise could not be tapped, and it opens up communication between children and parents. It was first published in 1978 and one of the things that happens is that regularly there are major studies done using and examining the scale. The latest was a few weeks ago. I saw a major study done in Iran, of all places, using a sample of seven to eight hundred children. The point is that unlike family therapy there is something about writing within that scientific model which is very important and useful. mainly the fact that

things get replicated and are being looked at continuously.

achievements. I think you were the foundation president of the first Board of the Journal.

I also published in the Australian Journal of Family Therapy an article which is based on that research of school refusing children where I tried to combine an empirical study with system analysis. I think it's something that people have not done on the whole and I don't know if anybody has ever read this article.

Moshe: Guilty in the first degree!

Peter: Guilty! What do you think the Journal has done well and where do you see the journal going? When I was overseas the Australian Journal was seen as one of the significant journals, one that people look forward to receiving.

Peter: I haven't, I have to be honest.

Moshe: Well the most obvious thing is that it is there. The very fact that there is a journal provides people in the field opportunity to communicate with each other.

Moshe: It's a good article. I struggled with a very interesting notion for me, to what extent empirical research can be integrated into systemic thinking in a way that makes sense. I think this article demonstrates this point at least to my satisfaction.

Peter: It's been a very professional publication.

Peter: And you've written books, A Family in Therapy, Corrupting the Young and you have a new one coming out. Have you got a title for the new one?

Moshe: Personally I like the fact that it has always had a wonderful mix. It has a different mix. It has its component of network news, it has more serious professional articles, it has a story corner etc etc. And I like that mix very much. The journal provided me with the opportunity to publish, to write things that have been very very important to me. You mentioned books that I have written. The two books that I have had published to date would not have come into being if not for the journal. A Family in Therapy was first published as a series of articles in the journal. The first stories of Corrupting the Young also appear in the

Moshe: I have a title, but my publishers haven't accepted it. I want: The Long Shadow: Stories of a Family Therapist, but it will be called: Resilience: Stories of a Family Therapist.

Journal. That first opportunity to publish is very important. Writing became a very important part of my life and I hope that it does the same for other people. Michael White was the foundation editor of the Journal and I enjoyed working closely with him in the early days. I'm grateful to him because he had the courage to publish my writings even though they did not conform to conventional standards of professional publications. Not only that, he was interested and encouraged me.

Peter: So it's a collection of stories. I've read some of them and it sounds like another really interesting text. What I like about your writing is that I can read it and take something useful away.

Moshe: That's an interesting choice of language. You call them case studies. I don't. To me they are stories. To me there is more dignity, more value in stories. It's a much longer and much more honourable tradition.

Peter: Coming to some of your professional

Peter: Any final comments about your writings?

Moshe: There are a few more things that I wanted to add to the question about my writing. What I've said was that I enjoy the variety. In something like *Corrupting the Young*, I've tried to write in the main tradition of story telling, bringing my experience of family therapy to people just as if we sitting around the campfire telling each other stories. It has always struck me that what we all experience is people coming and telling us inordinately fascinating and interesting stories and they are worthy of being preserved in the tradition of story telling rather than that of case studies.

Peter: It sounds a more human way of describing them as stories rather than case studies. Case studies sounds a bit clinical.

Moshe: It is and this is a different tradition and it's an appropriate tradition. Which brings me to the other form of writing that I have done. Both *Debbie and Her Slurping Stomach* and *A Family in Therapy* are case studies par excellence. *A Family in Therapy* is a unique book, maybe the only book of its kind, in which the totality of the therapy is being offered to the reader. Every word that was uttered throughout therapy by both family and

therapist is there for the reader. And I think to me it is very important because it has many issues. One of them is - and maybe it connects with the Holocaust - that it's a way of telling things and not imposing an ideology. What I want to do is to say to the reader: look, this is what actually took place. These are my views about what took place. I'm leaving you the basic information so that you can make your own judgement, make up your own mind. When I first started in family therapy what was exciting was the showing of the videotapes. Why? To me it wasn't an attempt to show how good one is but rather to open to immediate and direct inquiry so that the truth can be told, warts and all.

Peter: It's often said that family therapy is the first therapeutic tradition to really allow people into the therapy room, rather than bringing out a watered down version of what happened.

Moshe: That's right and to me it was very exciting and I was faithful to that tradition when I wrote both works. Then I did the next thing which I think was unusual, that is I've invited a number of people from different backgrounds to look at the written words and videotapes and offer comments. This amongst other things was my way of highlighting that in a way there is no one truth. There are different ways of seeing.

Peter: You were the second president of VAFT after Geoff. Have you any reflections on where VAFT could go from here.

Moshe: When I was involved with VAFT it was about the time that family therapy was a terribly exciting new movement, rebellious. In joining the mainstream VAFT needs to struggle with how it can retain the initial excitement, that initial network of friends working together retaining, that commitment which I think is very important. That commitment is in the first place to help our clients, not to further our own career or ideology. How to do it? I don't know. I have some ideas but I don't think this is the time or place to talk about it. What I do hope is that VAFT does struggle with the question of how to retain that initial excitement and commitment.

Peter: The fact that family therapy has been accepted into mainstream psychology in one sense is really good but the question is how to maintain that adventurous spirit that early family therapy had.

Moshe: Time will tell you if it's good or not. I think the jury is still out on that one.

Peter: So coming to the future. What lies ahead for you? What directions do you see for the next thirty years?

Moshe: Probably I'll do more of the same (in spite of the fact that family therapy gave a bad name to doing more of the same). I do enjoy my clinical work very much. In fact you asked me before about changes to my practice. I think one of the changes is that I enjoy it more. Why? I guess I feel more comfortable. I feel that I'll be able to make it work for the patient, make the time with me more useful for them. So I can become more relaxed and softer and kinder. At one level I think it's wonderful, sometimes I think I'm terribly privileged. People come, they pay money, they come on time and tell me wonderful stories. It's a rip off, it's wonderful. So I think I'll continue with my clinical work. I may do less teaching I imagine. There's a lot of writing that I want to do.

Peter: So what do you feel best about over the thirty years, what sort of achievements do you think have been significant?

Moshe: Perhaps the most important is my clinical work. I think it gives me the greatest degree of pleasure, without doubt more than

anything else by a long shot. The knowledge that I've been able to help many people.

Peter: Many people over thirty years.

Moshe: I feel in a way very privileged that many people have been willing to trust me with their stories, with their life, with their well-being, and I just hope that I've done them justice.

Peter: I was just thinking that it must be a comforting thought to think of the hundreds, thousands of people whose lives are a little bit different in one way or another because you have been with them.

Moshe: That beyond doubt is I think why we are all here. That's why we are therapists, that's why we should be there, and I've done it to the best of my ability. As I say that I know it's not true because sometimes I think I've fallen below my ability. With some I don't think I applied myself properly. The other thing I am pleased about is that I also failed well.

Peter: Yes! I think the therapist who doesn't fail well misses out on life.

Moshe: By which I mean, when I've failed, on the whole I think I've been able to fail and take the responsibility rather than blame my patients for my failures. I have managed to maintain dignity. It's important to be able to say: I'm sorry but I'm unable to help you ... and still leave them with a sense of their own dignity. In that sense I think that I failed well without blaming or accusing them. This is what I hoped to do.

Peter: Do you have any regrets of dreams not realised, goals not achieved?

Moshe: Yes, there are two or three main ones that come to mind. One is that I have regrets about some of the fights and fallouts that I've had with some people, and that we don't have contact any more. It's sad for me. Related to it is another disappointment. I'm sorry I didn't start writing earlier. Some wonderful experiences got lost because I didn't write them at the time..

Peter: Yes, that's something that comes through in your training programs.

Moshe: And that is one of the reasons why I didn't write earlier because I wasn't encouraged.

Peter: Even though you have many years ahead, what would you like to be remembered for at this stage of your life?

Moshe: Recently I read an interview with Kirk Douglas and he said : I tried, I tried damn hard. But I'm not ready to write.....

Peter: Not ready to write your epitaph yet but you'd like to be able to say that you tried.

Moshe: I could also say that I'd like to be remembered as someone who thought that there is a place for humour in family therapy. I think you were there at Williams Road when one of our students said he learned not circularity but jocularity!

Peter: Yes, that's one of Brian's phrases too.

Moshe: I'd like to be remembered differently by different people. By my patients I'd liked to be remembered as somebody who listened to them intensely and tried to do my best to help them. Students! I think it's different. I'd like them to think of me as a very open teacher. I've tried to share my thoughts, feelings, experiences with my students, to let them see the way I work.

Peter: So it depends on the context.

Moshe: Different memories for different contexts.

Peter: When you interviewed Geoff you said the interviewee should have the last word. I think that's always appropriate in an interview. Is there something you'd like to say before we finish today.

Moshe: No. Thank you.

Peter: Thank you for your time.

