

THIRD EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF BRIEF STRATEGIC AND SYSTEMIC THERAPY

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SECOND DAY

RELATION/DEMO: "THERAPEUTIC CONVERSATION WITH THE FAMILY"

Mony Elkaim (2.18)

ROLE PLAY of an initial interview in a family therapy:

Is the family ready? Please sit. So, first of all, it is very interesting how they came, those who came first, who came second, who entered for third and is also very interesting to note how their bodies move. You will see very interesting dances that all of them develop during the session.

Repetitive movements of dance, do you see how they move? They interact with their body and we will make comments about this. It is very interesting to see a family and understand these things, which it's true: they are like dance movements (2.20).

I remember when I was in the U.S., I was working on a family therapy session with Albert Esklin (?) a person who was of particular interest in non-verbal language and had seen a family with the mother and daughter on one end, the grandmother on the other hand, the therapist and the patient and I saw that his mother had been in a position (the narrator mimes the mother), I must say so seductive to the therapist. When the mother did this, the daughter and the grandmother would put her legs in a determinate way and then she would recompose. So, you can see again that, each time she did this, the husband moved his legs, the therapist moved his tie, the grandmother and the child moved her legs and consequently she recomposed the position. Then once again, every time she did this, the husband moved his legs, the therapist moved the tie, the grandmother and the child moved his legs. The interesting thing is that this has happened 4 times in twenty minutes. So this non verbal behavior is very interesting, because it shows how does the family dynamic work, even when there is no evidence, there are no words, no mention of what happens. This type of dance is interesting.

Let's see what happens! Mony moves himself towards a participant of the role play (there is a hypothetical family: MMFFMM): "Welcome, what can I do for you?"

Mony: (be the first person who speaks on the left) we have decided to call because with Alessandra we have, you know? We have a certain age and we can almost never talk with our children (2.21) and therefore we felt we should have a person give us a hand because we need this "**Mony**," Who is she? "" The father, then the presentation: [Father, (Mark of 70 years)], [son (Charlie)], [wife (Alessandra 60 years)], [daughter, Carmela], [son, Junior] [son, Max]. Mony refers to Charlie: "So it is interesting that this beautiful boy continues to be in the middle seat between Mom and Dad (2.22), why not sit together with the others? And 'interesting - we do not know. I apologize, I still don't understand why did you come here?. The father speaks again: "Because the last time we met at Christmas, everybody wanted to escape, because only Junior lives with us. Charlie lives abroad, Massimo does not ever come and see him (2.23), and Carmela has returned home because she is separated from her husband and so we now have houses, we need to divide and can't come to an agreement, then, perhaps, with your help it will be easier.

Mony: "I'm really sorry! I do not understand why you came. "

Father: "Let's listen to Alessandra and hear if he has something to say because then"

Massimo "Actually, I don't know why we are here. I'm not interested"

Charlie "I'm not interested in being here. The problem is to divide the money. We can deal with it among ourselves at home. Only that the last time we met to divide the money it all went to hell because no one agreed. So this is the problem. He (turning to father) finds it very difficult to express it. "

Mony (turning to Charlie), "Who should give the money to whom?"

Charlie "My father must distribute the money and other things because he feels old and feels the need to do this before dying, to give something to each one of us (2.25). Also preferably equally, but fairness can not be measured, then there are other things around, but nobody speaks. Mostly silence. "

Mony (addressing the mother): "Madam, can you help me?"

Alessandra (mother): We decided to ask for help because my husband and I have the feeling that our family is a disaster. We can't make any agreement with our children, they come and go, some are divorced and now have come to live with us. The little one lives with us and the others come and go, so we decided that since we are in retirement age and we are not having the best health, we decided to write a will. My concern is that our children will end up fighting when we won't be around anymore, then (2.26) we would like to hold a fair debate. But there is so much tension and conflict regarding this issue and I feel impotent, I can not explain what we want to make with this will.

Mony speaks:

"So if I understand what you are telling me, you prefer that your children fight here rather than in some other place? Well Thanks! Then. Can we listen to the reasons of this discussion? Can you begin?"

(Son) Junior speaks: "All my life I have been with my parents and now that the time of dividing money has come, I find myself with these strangers (looking straight towards his brothers) because he (turning to Max) left home at fifteen, twenty years ago, slammed the door and was no longer seen, even when my grandparents died, which means that he was not around during hard times. Now he is back, we are two strangers, he (turning to another brother) has spent his life traveling, he would send a Christmas card or he would stop by for a few days to take a shower and some sleep and then leave for two years. She (the sister) is perhaps the one that saw a little more, but she appeared now because she doesn't have a house anymore and then I have based my life on helping their parents and doing what I could do to stay close, so I think it is too comfortable to come back now to get the money, isn't it?"

Mony:

Well, Mony Elkaim has the impression of reading the Bible (2.28), the return of the prodigal son (LAUGHTER). Well, could you help me a little bit more Mother? Then, other than your little son who has always lived with you, who else has lived with you at all the time?"

Mom: "Only him I would say. My daughter came back just because she had divorce six months ago."

Mony contacting Junior:

"Your sister has the right to return to share the inheritance? Junior, legal right or right ... she can come back but she has not made a good impression because when she was with her husband, she would call once in a while and that was it. Now she has returned, but not because of the love she feels towards her parents; however, if she wants to stay, she was the only one who, for good or wrong, would appear once in a while"

Mony to Charlie: "What would you say?"

Charlie: "I think he is a little leech because he (turning to Junior) wants everything and I think we are all their sons, even though we haven't been much around, we have gone and then come back, that's the way life is. Children are made to leave home. That does not mean we are not sons anymore, yet because me and my brother left, then my sister came back after a disgrace, if you don't come back home after a disgrace, then were? According to me, family exists for this purpose, when it's useful you must be able to find your family.

Dad: The misfortune is yours.

Charlie: We all have contributed in other ways.

Mony

"Here, this is one of the wonderful moments during a family therapy, one of those moments when people come with a problem (2.30) and there is nothing that can be done in regards of what they are saying - just the pleasure of seeing them discuss, argue. So there are two important things to do:

The first important thing to do is to try to understand them, try to see what they're saying, what's going on; how to establish an alliance with all and only then, we should think about how we should rephrase the question in a way in which they may operate differently. So dear friends I need your help. Who can help me with this family?

A person from the public speaks up - Now talk of a public 2:31

I would create order, such as, the father and mother together, and children based on their birth age.

Mony

Yes, it is interesting. In our field Minuchin (2.32) is one of the founders of the Life Institute (?) and he would do this kind of restructuring, that is, he would tell the boy to go and sit next to his parents and then, he would do what she said (referring to the woman from the public who spoke up). My problem, however, is that if they are seated in that way, it's because this way of sitting has a function. So first I'm trying to learn what they are teaching me through their way of sitting and speaking. So you are raising a very interesting aspect of family therapy because some people like Minuchin say that we must restructure the family in order to be more simple. But others, like me, will say, however, behave as if there is a utility in this, in their behavior. How can I understand this utility prior to restructuring there order? Or do I just try to do something without getting results, who else can help me?

Intervention by a member of the public

I would like to understand why the child has never left the house and if the parents share the same point of view of the child, regarding to division of property.

Mony: Well. You are telling me you need more information
Dear Charlie (turns to his son Charlie): Apparently you left and returned?

Charlie: "I returned because it was Christmas and because my father and mother have decided to make this meeting to discuss this dilemma, that is their dilemma, not mine. I personally do not care about the money. I was away but I'm back because it is right to be with the family at Christmas and I really like being with my family.

Mony "Well, so according to you, what is the utility of this meeting?"

Charlie: "I don't know, but we could have done it at home. The problem is that Junior gets really mad and upset, then leaves home, comes out of the room, and I do not feel good with this so we begin to fight.

Mony "So, in your opinion, what is the purpose of this meeting?"

Charlie: I think it's to have someone from the outside that can control this for a moment, control the situation, control the emotions that can appear in the discussion about money.

Mony (turning to the daughter): "Madam what do you think of control?"

Daughter: "I believe that we are here but my parents have to agree with each other because maybe they are the ones who do not know where to leave their legacy, then control depends on them; it's them that have it. My brother has never gone away from home because basically we have a collaborator, he enters and leaves when he wants during the day. My parents can have their health problems, but he is still 60 years old and in this moment, it's not that this matters a lot to me, is it?"

Mony to the daughter: "So you are telling me that you would like your parents to decide for you guys, that you would like for them to get control of things? Perhaps Mr. Elkaim can check if they succeed there?"

Daughter: "No, I do not think that you can control us, nor our parents, because in the end, we have never agreed in anything, not even when we were at home. If not, my brother would have never left home 20 years ago, the other one hadn't gone to Malta and I wouldn't have married a guy who doesn't even care about me.

Father: "Then we have done everything wrong in life, we have not been able to give you anything.

Mony always to the sister: Tell me what can you do?

Sister: "Remove me from this debate, because I don't know what to do with the money if they want to distribute it in the way they define as fair. I am not interested in money, I am interested in something else.

Mony: "What else are you interested in?"

Sister: "Probably in seeing some harmony between me and my brothers and between us and my parents.

"What is harmony?"

Sister: "Being able to share moments that are even those of conflict but in a constructive way and not always <<but you took this, the other took that, why did this one leave>>.

Mony to son Junior: "Do you trust her? (sister). "

Junior: No

Mony: Can you explain to me why don't you trust her?

Junior: Because my parents do not understand that they are three liars. Because when there were other misfortunes, they never came, they never called

Dad: "Make Massimo talk, why he's never around"

Mony still to Junior: Who are the liars?

Junior: "In different levels, all three of them. They say that they are not interested in the money but they came here when they heard that we were going to talk about the will...when they are at home, they ask for the country house key, for the car's key

Father: "But those are not money?"

Junior: "But you use a house that you haven't earned. They go with friends, for 2 weeks, they enjoy, then they leave and come back two years later "

Mony: "What is pleasure? These people so animated, it's nice to see this. And you (Massimo) what do you think of this whole story? "

Massimo: "Other than what he is saying here, he doesn't know my story, doesn't know what I've been living, my experience. He doesn't even imagine what I have endured, and now he comes saying <<I'm not interested, I am not interested in money>>. Where was he 35 years ago, alone. I do not care "

Mony: "Why don't you leave your legacy to someone else rather than your family? It would be easier. Why don't you leave your legacy to a club? Like to the club that I founded? That would solve all the problems "

Dad: "Let's make a club. But they arrive only when needed. They will come only when they need it, when they need something.

Mony: "In reality, they say they don't care anything about the money, they say the only important thing is harmony. So why don't you all decide to leave everything to a good cause. One that you like, so it will be represented by the harmony between you. We remove the problem of money. Everyone says that they are not interested in money. Where is the problem?"

Junior: "I'm not saying that I am not interested in money. I do care about money. But they are vampires and they are only turn up when we speak of will. "

Mony asks the others and no one is interested in money. She addressed to the father and suggests: "Then divide the money in 4: give a quarter to the children you want, while the rest you can give it a way to the Nardone's Club."

Mom: "I want to ask my son if he would be satisfied with $\frac{1}{4}$. You would be satisfied?"

Junior: "Not much. I would be satisfied with my part but not with the fact that the other part went to strangers. Then they say they do not want it to but at home ... She (sister) when she's at home, wants a house because now she doesn't have one anymore".

Mony: "How much do you want? Say a digit"

Junior: "There is not a digit. I just want them (parents) to give the money to whom has been a son and not to strangers "

Mony to the public: "I was saying that it is like a gospel in the gospel, the people receive not based on their work. Maybe a person works and earns and another person works less but gets the same. Here is a similar situation. There are people who come, others that go, there are mixed reactions. I love this family, where there are relations which speak of justice, equality, inequality, of impropriety. We want to be treated so as to understand that we are important to them".

Daughter: "There is something we can do: we can propose something to my parents. He is the smallest. We evaluate how much time has he been in the house, we evaluate how much has he cost economically speaking and we pay him for what has been his workforce; how many medicines has given to my parents, how much did he spend assisting my dead grandparents, because it means that the my parents have not have been good in attending my grandparents and we leave (2.45). Since we have not been present, we pay him and the rest is shared equally.

Mony (to the father): "You told your daughter that when she speaks it seems that you haven't done anything for her. Then you say, let's see what we have done for you in life. Now I ask you, who has done something for you?"

Father: "Nobody, if it wasn't her (turning to his wife).

Mony (to the spouse): Who has done something for you?

Wife: My parents, my parents-in-law

Mony (to the spouse): Has he done good things for you?

Spouse: yes

Mony (to the husband): And you just told me that no one has done anything good for you?

Father: I do not know, sometimes I wonder. Obviously, if we are here it's because what we have done is not a great thing. All together, the fact that we need to call another person to discuss this, it means that perhaps we haven't done the best out of things.

Wife: (to husband): I do not agree with you

Mony: This is a classic situation, common in family therapy. He moves the problem elsewhere. The problem is not who did what: what did the son do for parents, but the problem is in the parents. The father says no one has done things for him, the wife says yes, he has done things for me so there is an interesting moment when man says no one has done anything for me. Then there is a kind of mirror image of these relations within families.

Mony (to his wife): "How do you feel when your husband says that no one has done anything for him?"

Wife: A discomfort, because in reality I have done a lot in this family for him.

Husband: "It is true".

Mony: "So she has done things for you"

Husband: "There is a problem here, and that is that I have worked and done a lot of things, I always tried my best to do everything for them"

Mony (to the husband): "So, if I understand, you're telling me Doctor. Elkaim, she is creating problems (2.49). 'I know that there are some problems with my children, and she is here for me ... but in short, in the end, who did something for me? Nobody.' Then there is this woman here who says: 'How can he say something like that', then you say: 'She has done a lot for me'. This, Doctor, gives you more problems than you had before.

Husband: "Yes, it is true" (2.50)

Mony: "Ok, so now let's see what we can do considering this new problem that I am causing, provoking".

Father: "At this age, what do you want me to do?"

Mony: "How old are you?"

Father: 70.

Mony: "For how long do you think you will still be alive?"

Father: 20 more years.

Mony: "Ok. Now I will tell you what I think. I am astonished by the fact that it seems like money matters, but it's not just money. It's like if one of you said: "I want that the others recognize what I have done, that they recognize there contribute to our life. That the others will accept what I have given, what I'm giving". Some of you transfer this to money affair, others talk about harmony. What really amazes me Marco (husband) it's what you say:

"It's true, my wife has done a lot of things for me but at the same time, I have the impression that no one has done anything for me". So Marco, could you please clarify this concept for me?

Husband: "As I was telling you before, I have worked all my life and, at the beginning, she had to take care of their four children because I didn't have much time to dedicate to them. Then, suddenly he went away, she had a husband. What have they done for me, actually I haven't had a great relationship with them."

Mony: "Before you met your wife, had someone done anything for you?"

Husband: "No, my father (fourth file) said: 'you have to work, work and that's it'"

Mony: "The funny thing is, you see, I am here in front of 4 different children and there is a great loyalty in those children against the father. This man tells me, 'I found myself in a situation where I had the impression that I had only duties to be performed and then there I had the impression that nobody gave value to my things, that no one made me feel important. These 4 beautiful children are here today, we want to know, and we want to ensure that our parents recognize us and that that they will tell us we are important. Some talk a little more about money, some about harmony, but in the end, they are all telling me they want to be recognized because they don't feel that way. Then there is a husband who tells me 'I can not deny you my wife has done things for me but at the same time I feel that I have not received anything'. So I am impressed, I am very touched by all this, perhaps she is the only person who feels differently, but when I listen to all the others saying that all they want is to be recognized for what they have done, I have the impression that this is not what happened, what would you say about this, in short".

Mother: "I do not feel fully recognized in this family; I have the impression of not being fully recognized within this family, especially when my husband says what he said, in short."

Mony: "This is a very typical therapeutic method during a family session. There is one thing that is seen in a positive way by all of them, so you try to create a situation where each member of the family is loyal, compact on a common problem. In this case, the common problem is: I do not feel recognized for what I have done. I asked the lady as if she was the only one to be recognized, and not even does she feel recognized, she says.. Then this system goes from a problem of struggle and dispute within the children, to another situation where all discuss about the recognition of the person because everyone wants to be recognized but there is the general impression that this does not happen. Therefore, observe the particular mood when there is no tension between them and this because there has been a problem over another, with a little bit of irony, if we want. I said to the father: 'You came to me and I have added an additional problem to those that you already had, then, dear Mark (father) now I have to tell you what I think. I think that this is an extraordinary family, work with Mark, work with this father figure, help her understand how important they all are; help her understand that this wife is a fantastic figure as well as her children. Maybe if he is able to understand and accept that he can receive from all of us, perhaps we will have a lower request from what we can receive from people".

Dad: "Well, it would certainly be nice if all recognized, if we all worked together to stay together, at least for the years we still have".

Mony: "But I have a problem Marco, my problem is that I can not make this change because you have 70 years, you have worked for others all your life and you have never asked anything to anybody, and today I am asking you that maybe you can also begin to accept something from others, even 70 years later, but we can..."

Father: "That they sustain themselves, on their own, that we will be able to go away, travel and that's it. That they will sustain themselves for the rest of their lives".

Mony: "No. Marco I am able to help you just if you can accept something. Can you live well without receiving anything?"

Mark: "And also this, also with you Mony, it seems to me that every time it's just me that has to decide what to do. You see, now also you are asking me, but you don't even ask her because in the end, I have to done everything by myself".

Mony: "Yes, I'm asking you Marco. Maybe you can accept the idea that you will not receive anything? I can't do anything, I can just be close to you and tell you that you will be able to do it. I can't help you in any other way".

Mark: "So who helps me?"

Marco: "So I just have her (wife) and a Junior left , who has cared little. Then the others, at the end, here we are and that's it, it's not like they are going to recognize what I have tried to do for them".

Mony: "Marco, you're telling me that the only way to give me something is to do what others have received from me: my wife works for me, the youngest son is doing things for me, then we can say as if, slowly, I am getting something from them".

Marco: "And what should I do?"

Mony: "I don't know". There is a moment of silent and Mony continues. "Marco where are you?"

Marco: "I'm here.."

Mony: "And what does that mean?"

Marco (again): "It means that in some way I am here, it's my family".

Mony: "You accept? You will stop working and that's it? "

Marco: "I have to work, but it is certain that I am here, if not we wouldn't of called you".

Mony: "I can be next to you, but I can't do anything else".

Mony: "Ah! So you have been working for them?" then turning to each child "Did you know he was working to look after you?"

Massimo: "No, he has never been there for us and he (father) knows is perfectly"

Father: "But how? Who has paid for everything?"

Maximum (to the father): "Here, we are listening to the boss's father. Then you say that it was grandpa who has beaten us up. But you keep quiet and this pivello (junior). I went away and no one that ever went to look after me, no one would ask 'but what does Massimo do?' Nothing. It's true, I didn't search for them either, but I was 15".

Mony: "Marco, there's something funny. I feel that Massimo is telling me something, then I feel that Mark is telling me something, the same things as before. He is a loyal son. He is telling me: 'I behave with my father as my father behaved with his parents. It's a legacy that I have in my family. I had to think of them all". And what did you discover? You discovered that all act in a different way. They all have their own way of living, of acting, of thinking. Madam, (the wife) I haven't forgotten about you, make us hear your beautiful voice".

Wife: "I was thinking, as I was listening to the conversation, that recognition in this family would be a positive feeling if it was towards me and my husband. The fact that I could see and feel from my children that I have given them my love, my care, at times in a difficult situation, I'd like them to be more positive in their discussions, in their way of affronting our familiar problem. I would feel better because I would have the impression that they support us".

Mony: "Ok, I should finish the session telling you what I think. I think (3.06) that you and your husband have done your best. Your husband, in a certain sense, was fair, respectful of his parents, thinking that his behaving worked and he didn't expect to receive anything in return. As if his life was a life of continual give and apparently -at a different level- you also had the same feeling towards this. And apparently this is something that can be discussed between you. From my point of view, it's as if each child or yours, in a different way of course, has fallen in the same contradiction. I want to receive and I'm afraid of not being able to receive. So for me you came here to meet me in a situation of struggle and tension. We talk about money and what I saw was a common element of people who ask themselves "How can I get if I do not think I am able to receive?" And I think that the question goes beyond the children and it is also important for you. I think that loyalty in your family right now is: 'I don't receive enough' and I would like this to continue in the same way until our next session. Then, maybe in our next meeting I will make your parents come so we can talk in front of them, but for now and until our next meeting, I ask you not to change, to stay with this feeling, a feeling of desiring more than what you actually receive, because you deserve it, each of you. You are loyal not only in the confrontation of your parents, but also in the confrontation of your parents parents".

Mony asks each participant: "How did you feel during this session?"

Husband: "I think that, certainly, the beautiful thing is that this is a real situation, which can happen and that the ability of the therapist is to transmit calm and to restructure to each one of the members something specific. There, I think this is the key: to turn the attention to the individual while being all in the same environment".

Charlie: "I felt good and understood by you, even a little changed. I was able to resonate with myself, with my first personal experience, also as a clinician. I felt calm and fair, you were moving your head from one to another and, as Marco said, you gave something to each one of us, this is very important".

Mother: "I had a very positive attitude in this session because my experience has made me live the experience of elegance of the movements. The way the problems were presented, there was also a resonance inside myself".

Daughter: "I felt uncomfortable for a mother who was not there. In the sense that she is very far away and not protecting the children, perhaps closer to her husband, which perhaps, had also treated her very badly but who is still there. This I felt in a very strong way".

Junior: "I felt a sense of being in a protected area, so it's a positive effect. I have confirmed the theory that this family wouldn't have lasted more than 40 minutes talking around a dinner table and a lot of things regarding anger wouldn't have been said. Therefore I confirm that being in this protected space has been pleasant and helpful. The only thing I confirm is the impression I have that, if I had been really the son, a lot of boxes would have been open and that the situation would have been long. This family would be due to at least a year to be able to have a peaceful evening. My impression was that, as each box is open, there are others that have to be opened as well".

Massimo: "My feedback was double. As for the way you carried it forward, you treated me a little bad and I felt stuck the label of another father. But at the same time I started to think I wanted to participate, I completely did the role playing and I began to participate in things I never imagined, in an atmosphere that was not imagined, and I began to do many questions even though I felt a complete stranger to the problems of the family. I also saw the mother far away, which made me feel a lot of anger".

Mony: "You see the interesting thing is how everyone reacts in a different way even if everyone says the same things in some ways. He said that I was nice in restructuring some things that I have behaved as the father but at the same time, he recalled some things of the past, perhaps you have not shown enough respect to children. This shows that people choose from what they are told according to their way of seeing the world. Then when they return, it's important to be able to give them their space to grow. Interesting is that we move from where the problem was to another way of seeing the problem that perhaps can open the door to other solutions".