

In Memorium

Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1920-2007

Family therapy lost another of its major pioneers recently with the death of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, MD. A Hungarian-American psychiatrist who emigrated to the United States in 1950, Nagy developed the contextual approach to family therapy, which emphasizes ethical dimensions of families and relationships including fairness and justice. As did others, including Lyman Wynne and Murray Bowen, he sought to understand and work with serious mental disorders through dealing with destructive patterns of family interaction which often span several generations. Contextual therapy promotes trust and mutual understanding and dialogue among family members, thus making change possible. It specifically involves an attempt to balance the “ledger of merits and demerits” that prevail through establishing a sense of mutual responsibility. Nagy emphasized that contextual therapy is fairness rather than value based, a lived balance in motion which oscillates between the mutual debts and merits of partners in relationships. He determined that by working to balance ethical obligations and loyalties among family members, he could improve and sometimes help to heal the symptoms brought by patients. Contextual therapy became one of the major approaches used in working with families.

Major and widely influential publications regarding his work were the following books: *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects* (1965, 1985) with James Framo; *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy* (1973, 1984) with Geraldine Spark; *Between Give and Take: A Clinical Guide to Contextual Therapy* (1986) with Barbara Krasner; and *Foundations of Contextual Therapy: Collected Papers of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy* (1987); along with book chapters and journal articles. *Invisible Loyalties* especially was a strong and continuing influence on the understanding and practice of large numbers of therapists.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, May 14, 1920, into a family containing several prominent jurists, he died January 28, 2007, at age 86 at his home in Glenside, PA, following complications from Parkinson's disease. Dr. Nagy's first wife, Maria, died in 2001. He is survived by his wife, Catherine Ducommun-Nagy, MD, who is also a psychiatrist, and by a son, Stephen, from his first marriage.

After moving to the USA, Nagy established the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in 1957 and served as co-director with social worker Geraldine Spark, remaining there for 20 years. Subsequently he headed the family therapy department at Hahnemann University (now Drexel University) and founded a private family clinic in Ambler, PA, the Institute for Contextual Growth, which is now run by Dr. Catherine Ducommun-Nagy.