

# Psychological Strategies

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This column focuses on counseling, clinical issues, and psychotherapy, including innovative strategies for aiding clients. Potential contributors are encouraged to submit manuscripts to Paul R. Rasmussen, Department of Psychology, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Hwy, Greenville, SC 29613 USA.

## **Advice from the Masters I: Mica Katz**

**Rachel Shifron and Paul R. Rasmussen**

Readers of this journal are most typically grounded in the Adlerian model of therapy. With this grounding is a common appreciation for what Bugental called in 1987 "The Art of Psychotherapy." In this statement, Bugental recognized that effective psychotherapy cannot be based on a collection of techniques applied according to theoretical premises and rules. Indeed, effective therapy emerges from the skill of the therapist, which rests on a firm foundation of theoretical understanding that guides the observations and responses of the therapist. As Mosak and Rasmussen (2002) suggested, effective therapy can be described as a dance between client and therapist in which one partner helps to teach and guide the other toward a more harmonious interaction with others. With this understanding is an appreciation for the lessons and examples provided by masters of the discipline. To be sure, one of the great benefits of attending our various annual, regular and periodic meetings and conferences is the opportunity to watch one or more of the masters at work. I (PRR) have personally been amazed and enlightened watching the various masters as they enter the lives of clients and bring out in those individuals renewed understanding of their place in the world and ways to better not only their own lives but the lives of others. To be sure, it

is my own disappointment that I am not one who has a memory of sitting in the audience to watch Dr. Adler or Dr. Dreikurs, but I listen intently as I have the opportunity to hear the stories of those who did.

Some time ago, the editors of this column sent letters to a list of Adlerians who we viewed as masters of the discipline and asked that they share with us observations from their years of practice and mentorship so that we could share those insights with the readers of the journal. While we remain anxious to receive more responses, we now have a sufficient collection of responses that we will be summarizing in columns to come. We use this issue to present the first of an anticipated series of columns that we will refer to as "Advice from the Masters."

In this column, we are also happy to introduce Dr. Rachel Shifron as one of the co-editors of the Psychological Strategies column. Dr. Shifron is known well by many Adlerians and has contributed in many important ways to the teaching of Individual Psychology. To be sure, she is one of the "Masters" and we are very pleased to have her personal and international involvement. In this column, Dr. Shifron provides an interview with Mica Katz that took place in August of 2007.

### **Rachel Shifron's Interview with Mica Katz**

Mica Katz is well known in Israel and throughout the rest of the world for her profound contributions in the field of Individual Psychology. Professionally, she is known for the analysis of the individual's lifestyle and the use of early recollections. Mica has conducted workshops all over the world as well as training and supervising professionals in Israel. I was fortunate to be Mica's trainee and supervisee years ago. I know that Mica Katz contributed to my professional growth.

I met Mica at her home. She wasn't sure about the idea of being interviewed; however, once we started she became creative, energetic and tried to be very accurate in her choice of words and sentences, as she always used to say: "It is all about what you say and how you say it."

*Rachel:* Since you weren't "born" an Adlerian, could you please tell us how you discovered the Adlerian theory and practice?

*Mica:* I used to work as an educational psychologist in the Tel Aviv Psychological Services for many years. Adlerian theory and practice was considered as a "superficial" approach. Those who chose to be "real" professionals stayed away from working with the Adlerian theory.

One day in 1959, I was invited to a lecture by Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, who came to Israel with his wife, Tee. He lectured in one of the schools in Tel Aviv. The audience was Israeli psychologists and other professionals.

The lecture was unexpectedly challenging and very direct. How can a professor sit on the table, shake his legs and say: "Psychologists build their knowledge about the individual through tests and instruments? What is it? What can they learn from these tests about the person from 'factophilia'?" At that time instruments and testing were the major way to evaluate the patient's abilities.

In the psychological services where I worked at that time, his statements were considered sacrilegious. How could a prominent professor claim that a test score of an individual is not enough in order to understand this individual? Dreikurs stated that what is important is to understand that every individual is a unique human being, who believes in his right to make decisions and be free to choose. These very basic Adlerian concepts were rather difficult, revolutionary ideas for me. I couldn't relax and was stimulated to learn and to hear more.

Following the lecture, Dreikurs suggested forming a workshop for professionals in order to train them to conduct psychotherapy according to Adler-Dreikurs approach. I decided to join the group with my friend Judith Elul (who later became very active in Israel's Adlerian Center). Both of us influenced several friends and colleagues and a group of 18 professionals started the workshop with Dr. Dreikurs and his wife, Tee. It was an overwhelming experience. We worked for long days. The team, Dreikurs and Tee, was unbelievably effective in creating a group of enthusiasts who continued later working and training others.

For me, meeting Dreikurs and Tee was the beginning of a long journey in getting to know and appreciate the genius of Adler. It provoked my curiosity and opened an entirely new world for me. I don't know why, but from the very early stages of the workshop Dreikurs offered that I would become a co-therapist during the sessions with clients. *[Rachel: Those who know Mica probably have the answer why Mica was his choice.]*

Dreikurs wanted me to continue his work with his clients while he returned to the States, and so I did. Several months later, Dreikurs and Tee came back and since then established a routine of coming to Israel at least twice a year. In addition to my training where we worked on lifestyle analysis and the use of early memories, I worked with Dreikurs as co-therapist in "Double Therapy" with individuals and couples. This was one of the most significant experiences I had as a professional. The idea of consulting among us as therapists in front of the client and sometimes with the client was a new concept in psychotherapy. I was fascinated by this approach. Later I have used the concept of Double Therapy as a model in training therapists. It became more and more obvious that the client has the right to be part of the therapeutic process. The client can express his/her ideas and corrections about assumptions made in therapy.

I wasn't a "yes woman." Dreikurs used to ask for my feedback after every "double session." I always said it was good, efficient and useful but asked him why does it have to be so aggressive? His answer was that he liked our "doubling" in therapy because when I am present he can continue to allow himself to be aggressive! My role was to be the empathic therapist. In order to elaborate even more and make sure that I'll get full answers to my questions he told me the following story: A man went with his donkey which suddenly stopped walking and lay down. He begged the donkey to get up, explained why it is necessary to get up, showed his love and care, served food and water, but the donkey didn't move. Another man who was watching the process approached and asked if he could help. The donkey owner appreciated the offer and agreed to receive help. The man hit the donkey very hard, the donkey got up immediately and started to walk. The man looked at the donkey owner and said, "You see, you have to make sure that the donkey understands that you are darn serious!" I have learned from Dreikurs the power of using stories and jokes, and used it in my work. I never became aggressive but knew that it is important to know how to convince the clients that I am serious.

For 10 years, from 1959 to 1969, Dreikurs and Tee came to Israel twice a year. Their goal was to establish an Adlerian Society in Israel and to contribute to the social development of the young country. Through the involvement of Dreikurs and Tee in the establishment of the social environment of Israel I feel that Tee fulfilled her needs to identify with the Jewish state since she grew up in a very warm Jewish family. I believe that in spite of the fact that Dreikurs established Adlerian centers all over the world, his work in Israel was the most significant one for him because he became instrumental in creating a new social approach in the entire country. He did it by establishing new parent education centers all over the country. The idea of counseling a family on stage was completely new. For me, as a professional who worked with him and with Tee in her art therapy classes, it was an eye opener.

Whenever Dreikurs left Israel he made sure that the group had a moral commitment to continue the work and to establish the Adler Institute. The Adler Institute in Israel has his name. It is a very active center for education and therapy and has branches all over the country. All of Dreikurs's books were translated to Hebrew and you can find at least one of his books in almost every home in Israel.

*Rachel:* When did you discover the use of Early Recollections (ERs) as your primary tool of psychotherapy, for which you became known worldwide?

*Mica:* When I worked in Double Therapy with Dreikurs, whenever he wanted to understand the client better he asked for an ER. It wasn't only during the intake session. Therefore, my conviction is that ERs are the keys

to understand the person here and now. I found ERs to be very helpful to understand unclear situations in therapy. I am convinced that every ER is like a metaphor for the present situation. In his early visits to Israel, Dr. Dreikurs announced that we will have a special ongoing workshop in order to train us in the use of ERs. Dreikurs asked me to organize the workshop and it became my responsibility since that time. For years I conducted lifestyle workshops for professionals where I was training the use of ERs.

*Rachel:* What attracted you to the use of early recollections as a major tool in therapy?

*Mica:* What was attractive to me was the validation that the ER is the ultimate creation of the individual. In each ER there is thorough integration of the person's creativity, a precise and condensed expression of who the person is, what are his/her choices, goals and fears.

The ER expresses the integration between the person's perception about the world and human beings. Working with ERs enables the therapist and the client to convert the minus to a plus.

*Rachel:* How do you work with your client on this process, converting the minus to a plus?

*Mica:* I always prepare with the client a summary of the ER. The summary includes the information of the individual's perception about human beings, the world, oneself and how life should be for this individual. When we succeed to integrate all the factors that I mentioned earlier, there is a whole, clearer picture of the person. This integration enables a more optimistic attitude because it allows questions like:

- What can I do?
- Where do I lead my life?
- What are the strengths in coping with obstacles?
- What are my abilities?
- What is my goal in my life?
- How can I actualize my wishes to achieve my goal?

Sometimes, to invite changes in the ER might stimulate new creative ideas about how to change. At times I invite a positive ER and that also triggers new ideas for change. The process of full cooperation between the therapist and the client enables both to move from a minus to a plus.

Traveling in the world and working with people from so many different cultures validated for me the effectiveness of using ERs. It was always exciting to find out that people become more aware of their strengths, their movement and creativity through working on their lifestyle and ERs.

*Rachel:* Could you specify the way you work, is there a method in your work?

*Mica:* In the intake session I get general information about the client. I clarify the client's expectation from therapy. Then I start to collect information about the client's family constellation. Understanding the family constellation discloses very important and crucial information about the client. Therefore, it is crucial to take all the necessary time for a thorough understanding of the family constellation.

I ask for at least three ERs from a very early age till the age of ten. ERs are memorized events that the person can visualize, feel and focus. The rationale for at least three or more memories is to enable the person to obtain a wider spectrum of self. When I write in details the ERs I ask for the vivid moments in the memory and the feelings associated with the picture. I prepare a summary of each ER with the client. It enables the client to correct misinterpretations and it increases the accuracy. I write the entire summary in the presence of the client which he/she can take home with him and think about it.

The process of collecting the memories is an open dialogue for questions and reactions between the therapist and the client. I think that this dialogue is the essence of Adlerian psychotherapy. When all ERs are tragic I allow myself to ask the question: "Do you remember any pleasant thing from that time?" It is a suggestion for new options and for new thinking.

It is a very long process. When I read recent articles with new ideas about quick short term analyses of lifestyles I am annoyed. I believe that the analysis of lifestyle and working with ERs is a long process which is associated with the interaction between the therapist and the client throughout the therapeutic relationship. We have to remember that we work with human beings and working with ERs is part of the client's process of change. Therefore I am not recommending cutting corners in the treatment process.

*Rachel:* Do you have a few tips for the beginner therapist?

*Mica:* To read! To read! And to read! To fill the brain with the theory and research that was done in the field of Adlerian psychotherapy. To join workshops where the theory is formed into practice. Supervised experience is essential. To find an experienced therapist who is known for his/her integration of Adlerian theory and practice and work in Double Therapy and personal supervision for a long period. To develop group supervision in order to have ongoing group consultation. From my personal experience working with professor Rudolf Dreikurs in workshops, Double Therapy and supervision was the highest contribution to my development as an Adlerian psychotherapist. It also helped me to develop special skills in using ERs.

*Rachel:* To sum up the interview, my hope is that this interview will encourage professionals' investment in long term training from masters like Mica Katz.

**Note**

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The interview was conducted in Hebrew and was translated with the help of Gal Shifron.

**References**

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