

## **In Memoriam Professor Iván Böszörményi-Nagy**

Please allow me to start this memoir with some personal remarks. Since the first time I met Iván Böszörményi-Nagy as a young doctor in 1980 in Budapest, he had encouraged me to study family therapy, and it was his influence that made me become a family therapist. I was a visiting scholar in 1986 at University of Pennsylvania, and it was there that I got to know Dr. Böszörményi-Nagy. He did not only become my tutor, but despite of our age difference we became colleagues and friends over the years.

We regularly had long telephone conversations about the current trends in family therapy, and about the important events going on around the world. I will never forget those conversations after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 in which he tried to think about the possible mediation between cultures and religions, using the contextual philosophy. He suggested his approach for conflict resolution to UNPO<sup>1</sup> (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization). In spite of his Parkinson disease, his thinking was very clear and always future focused.

Iván Böszörményi-Nagy undoubtedly belongs to the World famous Hungarian born scientists on the field of psychotherapy and psychiatry which includes Sándor Ferenczi from the Budapest school of psychoanalysis, Lipót Szondi inventor of Szondi Test, Mihály Bálint inventor of the Bálint group, László Meduna known as one of the father of the ECT, Thomas Szász the anti-psychiatrist and Ferenc Mérei, the psychologist.

“Unlike Freud, who was interested in our inner self and the unconscious world, I was primarily interested in the relationships between human beings,” he said, in an interview in 1991.

He believed that human health, evolution, and survival were all dependant on human relationships and on the strength and sincerity of those relationships.

According to Dr. Böszörményi-Nagy, starting with the mother-child relationship there is an invisible yet undeniable connection among family members that exists over generations and even expands over one’s lifetime. Thus, there is no escape from our web of connections, even if we traveled to the other side of the world. For Dr. Böszörményi-Nagy, the balance of our important connections depends on our ability to pass on and appreciate how people care about us. If we do not “return” this caring, or if we give too much of it, it will create an unjust relationship which could – even across generations – not only damage and poison our relationships, but also harm our health and potentially even threaten our existence.

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<sup>1</sup> **UNPO** is a democratic, international organization. Its members are indigenous peoples, occupied nations, minorities and independent states or territories which lack representation internationally. UNPO aims to protect the members' human and cultural rights, preserve their environments, and to find non-violent solutions to conflicts which affect them. UNPO provides a forum for member aspirations and assists its members to participate at an international level. UNPO members are generally not represented diplomatically (or only with a minor status, such as observer) in major international institutions, such as the United Nations.

Böszörményi-Nagy believed that his theory applied to all relationships: to couples and family relations, as well as to small communities and societies as a whole. As early as in the 1980s, Dr. Böszörményi-Nagy projected some of the unjust processes that would affect our planet. He expressed his deep concern that by polluting the earth, we exhaust our future, meaning that as human beings we are not being conscious of our responsibilities to future generations. It is from this unfair inner relationship that relationship conflicts are reproduced. So if we exhaust our energy reserves, and we do not take into consideration global warming and pursue killings based on principles of “eye for an eye”, Böszörményi-Nagy warned that we would negatively affect future generations and cause irreversible harm.

To bring relationships into balance again – achieve conflict resolution – which Böszörményi-Nagy called healing therapy process, there need to be honest dialogue between family members and between generations. In general, this healing process requires the compromise of individual self-interest, the acknowledgement and respect of each other, and the re-establishment of deserved trust.

Dr. Böszörményi-Nagy never broke off his connection with his motherland, Hungary. He helped and encouraged the development of Hungarian psychotherapy and family therapy. From 1978, he did workshops and talks in Hungary pro bono. Though he was given a number of major awards, his personal favorite was the Hungarian Republic Gold Medal, which he received in 2000 on his eightieth birthday from Dr. Árpád Göncz, the president of Hungary.

It was a great honour and experience to organise and to participate in all of his activities in Hungary for the past 27 years. I also managed to publish his famous book *Between Give and Take* (written together with Barbara Krasner) in Hungarian, and edited teaching Video cassette of his workshops during his visits. He influenced a lot of Hungarian colleagues and trainees, including Mária Koltai M.D., Ph.D., (currently the president of the Hungarian Family Therapy Association), Gyula Kapusi Ph.D., Gábor Kelemen M.D., Ph.D., professor Béla Buda M.D., Ph.D., professor János Füredi, DSc., Ilona Székely from Hungary and California, András Stark, Miklós Kovács (just to mention a few) who are the leaders of the field in our country.

Our loyalty for him will be to continue the practise of his extraordinary discoveries. We can only do it in an international collaboration. Thus, I hope we can continue to work with the widow of Iván Böszörményi-Nagy, Catherine Ducommun-Nagy, M.D. who works very hard to get together the contextual therapists around the world.

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(This text was also read at Memorial Celebration of Ivan Böszörményi-Nagy at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania State, USA, on April 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2007.)