

***In Treatment* – An Israeli Viewpoint**

Phil Yitzhak Bloom

We have this need to think of ourselves and our world as being reasonably orderly and governed by rational laws. The difficult reality is that we and our world are more like swirling smoke, amorphous forms spreading, fading, and suddenly coalescing in unpredictable, complex, and unidentifiable ways. Haunting strains of enigmatic music raise questions that hang suspended, never resolved. These are, appropriately, the graphics and the musical background that introduce each episode of the Israeli Channel 3 TV series *In Treatment*.

Reuven Dagan is a psychotherapist. He receives patients in the living room of his apartment which doubles as his clinic. He shows considerable devotion, empathy, insight, and intuition in understanding his patients. He is a competent therapist, but he is also visibly tired and worn-out. He is lonely, divorced, middle-aged, and rather overweight. His slow, heavy dreary-toned manner belies interventions which are really very perceptive and helpful.

At the close of the workweek, we see him in supervision with Gila, who was once his therapist — and elements of that therapy pervade the supervision. There we learn at the end of the second series that as a child he had to look after his depressed mother after her husband, Reuven's father, walked out on her. He is a parental child who became a therapist for his mother at a tender age and later turned this into his life-long profession. Sometimes Reuven slides in the direction of wanting to be the patient himself by revealing too much about his personal life to his patients and intrudes with his own ideals, hopes, and fears. Sometimes he fails to maintain an interpretative stance and dissolves into giving direct advice. But somehow, and more often than not, he is available to enter into his patients' world and withhold himself appropriately. Altogether he is engagingly human.

CASTING LIFE INTO ART

Israel is a very small country, and everyone knows that Assi Dayan, who plays Reuven (Dagan), is the son of the legendary Moshe Dayan, famous more as a the heroic army general, minister of defense, and public figure rather than as a family man and father. Assi has his own personal difficulties, but he has developed into a first rate actor—a troubled artist, who is one of a new generation of Israelis, a generation who have the benefit of having room to have personal difficulties and get help in psychotherapy. A huge contrast to the ethics of the pioneering founding fathers.

Reuven's therapist-supervisor is played in the series by Gila Almagor, one of Israel's best known and loved actresses. Not by chance she is also called Gila in the series. Now again, everyone here also knows that Gila Almagor's mother was a Holocaust survivor whom Gila spent much time looking after. It is all there in her book, *The Summer of Avia* and in the film based on that book.

The second series of *In Treatment* begins with Reuven being charged with a malpractice suit. This complaint against him has to do with a young man who was his patient, became a pilot in the air force and was killed in a plane accident. The father blames Reuven for not taking the danger of a suicidal element in his son seriously enough. Shades of the guilt and fear that Israeli parents feel for sending their sons for army service in combat units. Or the guilt of parents who are so heavily invested in their careers that they cannot give their children enough of the care that they need.

But maybe the most telling scene is in the final supervision session with Gila. Reuven reveals that he is indeed worn out by a lifetime of caring for others. He cannot go on and wants to take a break from his work as a therapist. He cannot really explain why, except to say that he wants to "re-discover his passion." Gila

clearly has difficulty understanding this, so Reuven jumps at the opportunity to give her some therapy. He offers her the interpretation that maybe she herself is really afraid--that she, too, may feel the same way and want to end her professional career. She does have the courage to acknowledge that he may well be right, and she does also collude in his taking care of her.

So we are left with some sobering thoughts. Maybe there are many of us who come to the profession in a similar way. Where we are blessed with enough sense of success in healing our patients, our passion for healing and helping can last a little longer, enough to see many patients through to the conclusion of their therapies and to see us through to the natural end of our professional lives. But failure can equally lead to tragic results for ourselves and our patients.

This is an excellent series—one of the most mature portrayals I have seen of the agonies and ecstasies that go on between therapist and patient. We can now perhaps hope that someone will go further and produce the next series--to be called *In Analysis*.

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