

**The Moving Hand of Desire –
Levinas in the Consulting Room:
A Case Study of Ethical Interventions
With a Client Family**

Introduction

Working with families and children that each will call for a certain sort of intervention. Working with disaffected teenagers discussions around Heidegger's concept of authenticity and their challenges to their *being-in-the-world* were a natural intervention. Solution focused, non-directive, and narrative approaches have seemed appropriate to intervene in the lives and situations of clients. The present case is alone in calling from the very beginning for a style Levinassian. I will call members Mark, Connie and Vinnie. All were terribly wounded and acted toward one another in self-centered and mean-minded ways. They did not see one another. To bring them to an awareness of each other, to see that face-of-the-Other would be the way to healing.

This is a case in how I ethically intervened and how their ethical posture toward one another changed as a result of this intervention. In the four sections of this paper I examine episodes from the therapeutic sessions and then comment on each from the view of the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. His basic concepts of totalizing, the face of the Other, therapeutic desire, dwelling, justice, dialogue, and love indicate how these concepts have come into play in a clinical setting with my client family.

I.
I Meet the Client Family

Mark was a seven-year-old boy. My fondness was despite his very difficult nature—his diagnosis read “oppositional and defiant.” I was fond of his mother,

“Connie,” and her new partner, Mark’s new stepfather, “Vinnie.” My fondness for them was despite their arbitrary vacillations between being ineffectual and brutal in parenting of Mark. This family had “fired” two other therapists and was assigned to me.

Vinnie said when we first met, “We want to get Mark’s problems stopped: What’s your program?” I had no program, I replied. I just talked to people about what was “up.” Undaunted Vinnie and Connie went on: “He can’t follow directions and getting in trouble at school. We don’t want meds, and are not looking for therapy. We don’t need anybody getting in and trying to fix our problems.” This was my opening—my “shrink moment”—in an otherwise seamless wall of defensiveness and rejection of all help, all medication, and all therapy. While denying problems, they wanted them to go away. “Problems? What problems?” I queried. “Did I say anything about problems? Do you even have any problems?” I asked disingenuously and paradoxically, feigning astonishment that they could have *problems*.

As this family had collectively and separately lots of problems. Mark may have had some bona fide neurological challenges. He responded well to Adderall, a stimulant prescribed to treat ADD/ADHD. He had a DSM-R-IV diagnosis of, 309.4, Adjustment Disorder, NOS; 313.8, Oppositional Defiant Disorder; and 314.00, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Both Connie and Vinnie come from dysfunctional families including arbitrary and violent discipline, shaming, alcoholism and drug abuse, as well as physical violence.

Despite the specificity of these official diagnosis of Mark, and my impressions of the legacy of family dysfunction for both parents, I never quite saw them in these terms. I looked back through the chart and saw that I had failed even to create a treatment plan,

though I have seen them weekly for six months. How could this have happened?! I could never conceive of my work with this family in terms of “symptom reduction.”¹

In one of our early sessions the problem of Mark’s recalcitrance in taking direction and helping out around the house was raised with particular bitterness and anger by Vinnie. I reviewed what sorts of expectations Connie and Vinnie had of Mark, how they requested compliance, how they modeled respect, and how they disciplined him. Their response was a picture of demands made to keep order and to be self-motivated in a ways that at his age was entirely impossible. In response Mark squirmed in discomfort, became peevish, angry and “oppositional.” With every piece of “oppositional” behavior, tempers flared. Connie and Vinnie came down with heavy disciplinary consequences. Vinnie felt utterly ineffectual and disrespected as Mark accused him of being “mean.” Each described scenes of escalated confrontations at home, at school and in public.

As I offered a gentler style of modeling, respectfully requesting compliance, and following through with age appropriate choices and consequences, Vinnie became frustrated and angry. “Just tell me what to do!” he yelled at me. I gently answered, “I can’t tell you what to do—ever—but I can help *you* figure out what to do.” Furious Vinnie jumped up and stormed out. When he returned twenty minutes later I thanked him for the courage to come back.

Later in the session Connie and Vinnie described “parenting lessons” that they taken at a local agency. Each had being fitted with ear-phones and a transceiver.

Through this electronic hook-up came explicit instructions on what to say to Mark and

¹ In fact when I created a treatment plan just a week ago there were two goals which Connie, after a bit of discussion, dictated to me: #1.) “We want to change Mark’s oppositional behavior by not being so angry and oppositional ourselves.” #2.) “We want our family to be based on friendship, love and respect and not anger and scolding.” Wow!

how to interact with him. These instructions from a social worker with a microphone and transmitter behind a one-way mirror watching them play with Mark. Connie and Vinnie explained why they came to our agency: these “parenting lessons” had done no good, and their social worker coach had suddenly quit for a better job.

Commentary:

It would be hard to find a more arrogant demonstration of what George Kunz meant by characterizing modern psychology as an “egology” than the so-called “parenting lessons” for Connie and Vinnie. This melioristic, psychological engineering demonstrated what Gans described, “the ego’s self identification and reduction of difference (the not me) to the same (the for me) is the totalization process par excellence which Levinas undertakes to critique in *Totality and Infinity*” (1988, p. 84).

The totalizing demonstrated in these parenting lessons is a staggering coincidence of inauthenticity and psychology as egology. The very image of wired parents being fed instructions on how to interact with their child – in real time – should serve as an iconic warning to us practitioners of therapy who might at times be tempted to substitute some theory or bit of rote learning for a genuine, human response in a therapeutic situation. We, as therapists, should be reminded by the image of Connie and Vinnie being animated in their attempts at parenting by this ghost in the machine, and we should always be leery of this closed circuit of reason and praxis which we may always be tempted to pick up

and use as a readymade technique in our work with the Other and his or her very human problems.

This sort of technique is always used in the service of some preconceived end. At worst, the use of such technique is an attempt to penetrate, manipulate and control the Other for our own ends and for the satisfaction of seeing some situation turn out according to our prognostication. At best, the use of such techniques and preconceived ideas substitute for a true dialogue with the Other. Any real dialogue would have to be an endless responsiveness to the Other and his or her needs and by its nature would have to be impromptu, resilient and tireless. The use of technique presupposes a truth which the Other has had no hand in creating. It is therefore doomed to fail just as the parenting lessons failed for Connie and Vinnie. This sort of technique is also bound to arouse an instinctive defiance and opposition in the Other who is totalized by being subjected to its dehumanizing means and its utilitarian ends.

Ultimately, therapy can succeed only when egoic needs and utilitarian ends are transcended. This would mean that prognostications derived from theories or conversational trajectories steered by predetermined goals must be jettisoned. To enter into a truly ethical dialogue which can be a response to the need of the Other, we must enter a dialogue steered by desire for the Other and inspired by a response to him or her in an immediate face-to-face encounter. Here the Other with all of his whims, difficulties and ironies is the only guide in the search for Truth. Only here in this uncharted territory with history and theory behind us and under the gaze of the Other can we be truly involved in the “therapeutic.” The therapeutic is, then, attention to and satisfaction of the ever present need of the Other. Gans says that the work of the therapeutic endeavor “is to

move the client from the position of need to desire, able to meet, give to, speak to and love an Other” (1988, p. 86). Vinnie’s demand that I tell him what to do to fix the situation with Mark and his storming angrily from the consulting room because I could not tell him was a dying gasp of some egoistic need in him, some part of him that desperately hoped for a programmatic – and “easy” – solution to the family’s dilemmas.

Some further movement in Connie and Vinnie towards a genuine capacity to meet, give to, speak to and love the Other was to come in our meeting at Mark’s school.

II. The School Meeting: The Evocation of the Face of the Other

I attended a specially convened meeting at Mark’s school. His elementary school is in a cute, Depression-era brick building in the suburbs of Bellingham. I used to be a school teacher and so I recognized a certain feeling at this school as soon as I spoke to the secretary at the front desk. It has a feeling of light, order and cheerfulness that, in such a well-maintained older building, puts this school above the run-of-the-mill public school. The meeting – an Individualized Education Plan meeting – was also a cut above the ordinary meeting of this sort. Present were the vice-principal, the classroom teacher, the school and district special education coordinators and the school nurse. I was in attendance as Mark’s therapist, and of course, Connie and Vinnie, the parents, were present.

I have been to dozens of such meetings and I immediately felt the sincerity and commitment of the staff that were present. The vice principal chaired the meeting and wrote a running summary of the proceedings on three giant mark-up boards at the front of the room: “Strengths,” “Challenges,” and “Plan of Action.”

I spoke early on in the meeting and tried at the outset to set a very high standard for how the proceedings would unfold. From the beginning of my work with Mark, Connie and Vinnie I was very enamored of them and committed to helping them and so I found it easy to deliver passages of idealistic oratory, which I used to highlight Mark's feeling sensibility, intelligence, capacity for compassion and sensitivity to issues of fairness. This note that I sounded I used to tune the orchestra, as it were, and to introduce the themes of respect, fairness and the need to reason with Mark about the moral and ethical meaning of any matter of discipline that he became involved in. I genially aimed these remarks at Vinnie and Connie, gently chiding them about how I did "Chinese water torture therapy" with parents, as well as with children, because I knew they could hear this humor by now. I also knew that my remarks would be heard by the school staff and that they would help to illuminate, in an indirect way, how Mark's behavior and discipline could be better handled in the classroom.

It was gratifying to see that the tone of my remarks had their intended effect. I cannot, of course, take credit for the fullness of goodwill in the meeting room – all present were there genuinely to be of help. Perhaps where my "orchestration" had its greatest effect was in conceiving of the challenge of helping Mark as a community effort – one which would take constant, unflagging commitment and cooperation on the part of the involved parties. And it was amongst these involved parties that I wished to present the idea that Mark should be seen, welcomed, and helped to grapple with his challenges in a benign and gentle way. I felt that this was crucial to avoid a kind of institutionally sanctioned pathologizing and the consequent punitive attitude that often sets in around kids such as Mark. In my experience this programmatic attitude on the part of involved

parties creates in the child a dysfunction which is recalcitrant and tragically often has the following course of “morbidity”: age 10 – ADHD; age 12 – conduct disorder; age 18 – antisocial personality disorder. My effort was to stop that fateful transit from ADHD to conduct disorder by calling on those present to gentle Mark down and to welcome him back into the community with an attitude that would cater to his true needs and demonstrate how to be a compassionate and caring member of the community.

Although the classroom teacher was initially and understandably defensive, I worked to understand her position and to soften any perceived implication that she was either callous or arbitrary. I succeeded in this, such that at the end of the meeting I was genuinely able to say to her that it was the most productive meeting of this kind that I had ever attended. Everyone genially chatted at the end, shook hands warmly and bade each other farewell. In the parking lot I reiterated to Connie and Vinnie that it was the warmest and most cordial such meeting I had ever attended. We all parted to meet later that same week at the agency with Mark.

Commentary:
The Essential Ethical Involvement of the Other Others

Sayre (2005) argues for a radical reexamination of the entire therapeutic endeavor in light of the radical ethical insights and observations of Emmanuel Levinas. All therapies, says Sayre, have as their centerpiece the “good of the client.” Sayre argues that humanistic psychotherapies, in particular, therapies of the individual, have at their core a notion of healing that place the client and his or her emotional needs at the center of an effort by the therapist to see, understand, care for and meet these emotional needs. The client in this paradigm is actually insulated from any pressure or obligation to care for or to meet the needs of others in his or her life. In fact, implicit in the humanistic

psychotherapeutic paradigm is the idea that the client can regress and be as narcissistic and self-focused as he or she feels is needed at any given point in the therapy. Sayre argues that this theoretical allowance for the client to be spontaneously self-absorbed is yet another way in which psychology, as conceived of in humanistic circles is, in Kunz' term, an "egology."

Levinas' ethics, integrated into the client-centered paradigm, would introduce into this egology the idea that the fundamental precondition for what is ethically good is to put a priority on the needs of the Other over and above the needs of the self. From the vantage point of this Levinassian ethics, Sayre argues that psychology as often practiced is a betrayal of the individual's highest good - namely, to have the capacity to meet, speak to and have the desire to fulfill the needs of the Other. Sayre says pointedly in this regard:

If, as a psychotherapist interested in the implications of Levinas' insight for therapy we return to our assumption that it is psychologically healthy to be ethically good, and the traditional ethic of therapy is an ego-logical one in which the client is primarily self-centered, then we are confronted with the conclusion that therapy as traditionally conceptualized may well be psychologically unhealthy for clients" (Sayre 2005, p. 39).

But Sayre suggests that this experience for the client will not be the safe, feel-good experience of client-centered therapy: "In alterity Levinas describes not 'safety,' but the horror of the 'there is.' In the face of the infinite Other we experience not only caring, empathy, and joy, but also responsibility and the terror of their claim upon us" (p. 39).

Sayre proposes that one response to the traditional practice of individual psychotherapy is to do much more family and couples work. But further, he says that this work would have to challenge the current paradigm that such group therapy is meant to

increase the satisfaction of the individual units of the group. Rather, the individuals within the group would need to be called and awakened to the task – the uncomfortable and never ending task – of attending to the needs of the others in the group and working to alleviate *their* suffering.

Sayre refers to this process of shifting away from the client-centered paradigm, with its holding and empathy, toward the capacity to experience the world as greater than ourselves as “de-centering” (p. 41). Working toward this goal involves the therapist facilitating clients’ capacities to have a “true lived response to the Face of an Other.”

My efforts at the meeting at Mark’s elementary school were towards this goal of “de-centering.” This meant facilitating in those present – parents and staff – a true lived response to the “Face-of-Mark.” The meeting ended on the high note that it did, I believe, because all of us who attended had had that experience of the Face of the Other, and all were awakened, as Levinas would say, to a Desire to Serve the Other. It was a glorious feeling, and, I think, shared by all present.

III.

“I’d Like You to Do Therapy with Me”

Following the school meeting, which was on a Monday, I met with Mark, Connie and Vinnie on Thursday. In the waiting room Vinnie solemnly approached me and said in hushed tones, “I’d like to see you a minute before we meet – *alone*.” I was a bit startled and found myself scanning his face for signs of anger or disapproval. There were none. We left Connie and Mark in the consult room and went around the corner to another empty one. We sat down and for a brief minute Vinnie was there opposite me looking almost shame-faced. With a discontinuous jerk he pulled his chair closer to the table and put his arms on its edge. He leaned over to support his weight on his elbows in

a sort of weight-of-the-world-on-his-shoulders gesture. Then he spoke: “You know, I’ve been thinking...” He paused and then went on, “I’d like you to do therapy with me.” I was thunder-struck. This was – truly – the last thing in the world that I had imagined he would say. Vinnie explained, “After I saw the way you talked about Mark at the school meeting I knew I wanted you to be my therapist.” This from a man who five months earlier had no problems and did not need or want therapy! Some sort of miracle had taken place – that a man so hardened, desperate and defended had let his armor down. I was speechless. This moment defied all categories. All I could do was to feel completely overwhelmed by a kind of reverence and love that from the beginning I had felt with this family. I thought that this moment of Vinnie’s “conversion” was a gift of that love. Beyond feeling personally flattered at this moment I felt that some greater, more fundamental tribute should be paid to the power of compassion inspired by Mark – his youth, his vulnerability and his need, in a word, his “Face.” I felt a kind of awe that seven-year-old Mark, notwithstanding all of his irascibility, anger and defiance, had had the power to generate a kind of collective love and concern that had so flowed through me and through us all at the school meeting and which had, in its flow, so dissolved Vinnie’s hardness and defenses.

Commentary:
The Face of the Other

Helen Douglas (2005), special editor of *Janus Head* journal introduced the special issue of the journal devoted to philosophical practice by making a call for papers. It deserves quoting because it is such a wonderful evocation of the sort of philosophical practice which would result if a Levinassian ethics were to be integrated into the practice of psychotherapy. In fact, this call for papers could be the credo of the

Phenomenological-Existential practice that all students in Seattle University's MAP program are encouraged to develop:

Philosophical practice could be any endeavor undertaken in a philosophical spirit. To philosophize suggests an engaged exploration and examination of self and world and all our relations.

It is to quest after truth or meaning, to "think deeply in order to act strongly" (Cabral), to "have the courage to leave no question hidden" (Schopenhauer).

Or, philosophical practice could be seen as the return of an age-old desire to offer some consolation and relief for human suffering (Boethius, Epicurus): it could be philosophy as an ethical practice, "the wisdom of love, in the service of love" [Levinas] (p. 410).

This is a quotable passage, as well, for the reason that it highlights the deeper meaning of Vinnie's simple statement to me: "I'd like you to do therapy with me." This is his signal that he is ready to enter into "an engaged exploration and examination of himself and his world and all his relations." It is a signal that he is ready to "think deeply in order to act strongly" and to "have the courage to leave no question hidden." In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas wonders about the surfeit of desire, which, when added to Being, produces the question that is a restless search on behalf of the need of the other: "How is it that the 'what?' is already steeped in Being so as to open it up the more, becomes a demand and a prayer, a special language inserting into the 'communication' of the given an appeal for help, for aid addressed to another" (Levinas in Douglas, 2005, p. 24).

Helen Douglas argues that the question is an "anticipation of being heard, understood and assisted by another" (2005, p. 414). This is the initiation of a dialogue in which he who inquires enters into a relationship with another around a question about his or her life that he or she seeks to clarify. It is an admission by she who asks that the

question cannot be answered by recourse to self alone, that the help of another or other Others is needed. This questioning and the seeking for answers in community, says Douglas, is the basis of a Levinassian counseling practice.

It was Vinnie's admission of his dependence and his interconnectedness that so awed me that day in the consulting room. It was Vinnie's "*hinani* – "here I am." With reverence, I felt this as his signal of his own vulnerability, as well as a call for me to be responsible. It is exactly in this moment, Levinas would say, that he who hears the call comes into contact with what he can never encompass. Even in spite of the fundamental infinity of the need and the pitiful incapacity of the called one to ever entirely meet the need, it is, nonetheless, in this moment of answering, that one begins to be essentially what one is – *responsible*. Insofar as one is interrogated by the other, so one IS. If one is a psychotherapist in the Levinassian way, one is "*questioned into being*." Together – Vinnie's call and my attempt to answer – create an ethical universe.

Soon after this encounter both Vinnie and I would be called upon again to "an engaged exploration and examination of self and world and all our relations" (Douglas, 2005, p. 416). As soon as Vinnie and I rejoined Mark and Connie in the next room, we would both be called upon to be there – all of us together – in our Levinassian "I-ness." This would mean being present and responsive and responsible to all Others there before us, asking further questions which would shock with their novelty and discomfit us with their problematic nature. We would again be called to the "practice of ethics and the wisdom of love (Douglas, 2005, p. 417). While doing so we would honor our relatedness and interdependence with each other. Let us see how this unfolded.

IV. A Difficult Conundrum

After Vinnie and I rejoined Mark and Connie a very difficult topic immediately came up. It brought up the shadow side of the terrific awe and elation that I had only a moment before felt for the trust Vinnie had shown me in letting down his hitherto impermeable guard.

The problem was this: At school Mark had stabbed another boy in the face with a pencil. Although the boy was not hurt badly, the explosive violence demonstrated by Mark was alarming. As alarming was his inability to see what he had done and to understand that it was wrong. “What do we do?” Connie asked me, sobbing quietly. Mark shouted out, “Its *her* fault – *she* made me do it!” Connie confessed, still sobbing, “I get too angry with him – I always have. I yell. Maybe it is my fault!” I was as dumbfounded as I had been minutes before by Vinnie’s trust and vulnerability. What to do? What to say? I felt hollow and stupid, and the question echoed within me. I simply did not know. In response to this kind of violence and in keeping with principles of compassion, love and respect, how does any person answer this violence and aggression? I had no pat answer. I sat silently – not knowing. While these questions hung heavily in the air and we could all hear the clock tick, Mark writhed and squirmed on the floor – his back turned to us all. Connie sobbed and Vinnie glared – thrown back into his default moral response, a kind of brutal *lex taliens*, “an eye for an eye...” “That’s what I’m gonna do! Take him to Juvenile Hall and show him where they lock kids up!” Vinnie’s voice dripped with contempt and disgust at the idea that Mark could be *so bad*. That was

not the solution and I quietly but firmly told Vinnie that. But still, there was silence. I was speechless.

As I sat silent, Mark had maneuvered himself underneath a small coffee table across from me. He was completely obscured from Connie and Vinnie, but as he lay between us on his back, he stared right up at me – unflinchingly – waiting for what I would say. If ever I had had an encounter with the Face of the Other, this was it. What could I say that would respect this face which stared up at me and which would also respect the face of the boy whom Mark had stabbed? What could I say that could respect The Face of *all* Others? Whatever it was, it would have to be in accord with the principles of both justice and clemency at the same time. It would have to be something which nurtured the vulnerability of both Mark and Vinnie and something that nurtured the brand new, fledgling sense of mutual respect only recently hatched out within this family. This was a family problem – not Mark’s problem alone. Anything I said would reverberate throughout this family and have many layers of consequence.

It was a long moment of my own moral agony during which I felt skewered on the horns of a moral dilemma: justice vs. clemency. How could I say something that honored all – equally? Finally, I said the only thing that I could say: “I think that you all should treat each other as if you were parts of the same body – parts of the same whole. Would any of you do anything hurtful to another when they were really parts of you? You must not try to squelch violence by using violence. Your job as parents is to embody and model for Mark principles of both justice and clemency. When you remove his privileges of going out after school you must also not be punitive, but do so in a spirit of searching meditation. This time of restriction must be dedicated to helping Mark to come

to a moral understanding of what he has done – how he has hurt another. When he stops denying what he has done and when he shows ownership and contrition – which you must help him find – then the restriction and moral searching will have served their purpose. Furthermore, you should contact Mark’s teacher and have the two boys sit together, face to face, in order that they understand and apologize for the harm each has done to the other. Then the healing will be complete. The process of helping Mark find the meaning of his injury to the other boy and find within himself the capacity to show compassion and contrition will heal you – as parents – as well.” Having said this, just before the family left I saw a sense of relief settle over them all. Mark was still; Connie had stopped crying and Vinnie’s glare had turned to a questioning gaze. It seemed that they had all finally come home after a long and rough trip.

Commentary:

The Family as a Unit: Dwelling as a Place of Justice and Love

When Vinnie had asked me to do therapy with him he told me that he felt like he was “breaking up,” and that he felt like he was “outside himself.” He seemed soft and present when he told me these things. He was clearly vulnerable but not weak, rather, he seemed imploring, hungry for an answer he did not have.

This new-found softness and questioning in Vinnie was lost as soon as the difficult topic of Mark’s aggression at school came up. He immediately reverted to his brutal, primitive self who knew all the answers and was ready to take action in behalf of these convictions. It was, I believe, this rigid, brutal and totalizing self which Vinnie had experienced as “breaking up.” His move away from this default personality made him feel like he was “outside himself.” He had never been without this certainty and total conviction. He had grown up around this sort of brutal certitude and it had had an

impact on the formation of his personality. He did not know how to be otherwise. He had not yet learned to dwell in the uncertain, questioning place of *not-knowing*. He could not yet tolerate the ambiguity of gazing, empty handed, on the needs of the Other. He did not have the experience of being questioned by the Other into his own existence as a responsible person.

This was a family which had no experience of what it was like to dwell with one another. They could not quietly be with one another and feel their mutual love. Dwelling is the ability to find a welcome place in a quiet opening where one's auditor has stilled their own need for expression and self-assertion. To find dwelling is to find a place where ambiguity can be tolerated and there are no expectations. Dwelling is a place of welcome where there can be a true meeting with the Others and where a true dialogue, inspired by desire and love and in search of Truth can unfold. This experience of habitation, where one can dwell is a necessary precondition for the heart to settle and for healing to take place. When one enters a dwelling, collective and personal history can be left on the other side of the threshold. This abandonment of the "said" also carries with it the possibility that old modalities that are narcissistic and fetishistic can be left behind. Within the dwelling, then, there can be vulnerabilities shown and tenderesses exchanged.

In this shared world of dwelling which unfolds in accord with the ethical precepts of face, desire and dialogue, we can find a respite and a buffer against the harsh outside world of animal needs and getting, consuming and surviving. Here in dwelling we can be islands for each other of humaneness and caring. We can be for each other a home to retreat to in order to replenish our strength in order that we can sally forth anew to

encounter and engage the ontological world of “I can,” “I need” and “I will” – the world of *Being*.

I was guided in this session by a real need to create a sense of dwelling for this family so that some solution to a very difficult problem could be created which was just and mild. It was the first time this family had ever experienced this phenomenon of dwelling and the gentleness with which this state of dwelling yielded its solution. In the very next session Connie told me of the effects that this experience had had for them as a family.

Afterthought and Conclusion

When last I saw this family, Connie spoke in glowing terms of how “a lot has happened over the last week.” She described Mark’s great week at school – how even Mark’s classroom teacher had shown a change in heart toward him. She told me that Vinnie apologized to Mark for his harsh and condescending attitude toward him. She told me that she caught herself as she began to escalate because she knew that this would be hurtful to Mark. So she took a self timeout until she could return to handle the interaction with Mark in a respectful way – minus any sort of emotional reactivity. She had perhaps had a glimpse of the idea that her capacity to be hospitable and to dwell with Mark would help him realize his own capacity to be responsive and respectful.

These little reports of incremental improvement, if they continue day after day, bespeak a family that is on the path to healing and happiness. It especially bespeaks a family that is on the way to relinquishing actions towards and reactions to Others based solely on their own narrowly conceived personal needs. It signals that this family is capable of experiencing motivations based on a desire-to-see-the-Others in the family, to

know their needs, to speak openly with them and to love and respect these Others (Gans, 1988, p. 86).

I have felt throughout this work with Mark, Connie and Vinnie that some force bigger than I and more powerful than any sort of therapeutic acumen I may possess – a force quite beyond my control – has flowed through me. I have had moments in working with individuals and with families when the stars were aligned, but I have never had the feeling of being so consistently guided in my every move by the ineffable *Desire-to-Endlessly-Serve-the-Needs-of-the-Other* as I have in working with Mark, Connie and Vinnie. And, of course, it is Emmanuel Levinas who is the patron saint of that *Moving Hand of Desire*.

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