

## The Regular COLUMN

Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar

asaf@imt.co.il



Last week a colleague told me she heard a rumour in the college I teach that I have made a sexual proposal to a client (interestingly, I haven't even started seeing clients in Israel). It sent me on a really unpleasant ride. At first, it made me really sad, then very angry, then sad again. My first inner response was wanting to stop working for that college, my second – wanting to be protected. Although I know that I am a safe therapist, and that I have never transgressed the therapeutic alliance, I cannot maintain my professional integrity on my own. I need people to support me, to remember me and remind me of myself. People that know me professionally and can challenge me and support me without positioning themselves as superior to me. I need it not only in order to remain a safe therapist, but also to exercise my responsibility. If the state regulates our practice, such shared-responsibility becomes impossible and irrelevant, not to mention the therapist's safety.

Many years ago, I used to be a member of the Israeli communist party. Aside from the humanistic declaration, this membership represented my naïve yearning for social involvement that was clean from bureaucratic politics. As you can probably guess, it wasn't.

The UKCP elections, which received very high profile, could be seen as a similar endeavour: the release from the medico-legal enforcement might have been an a-priori failure, but it certainly ignited social activity. I leaves me wondering: socially, clinically and personally. Perhaps our role is to allow for a bit of naivety, with the full knowledge of our likely failure: and still claim our human, complex, responsive and responsible rights.

And here we go again: in face of change and fear can we stand proudly and risk the pain that comes with it, or do we shrivel and nod. I fear that although I always want to do the former, I frequently find myself nodding.

I'm reminded of Mr. Savage's conversation with Mustapha Mond, the world controller in Aldous Huxley's (1932) *Brave New-World*:

'We don't,' said the Controller. 'We prefer to do things comfortably.'

'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.'

'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'All right then,' said the Savage defiantly, 'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen to-morrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.'

There was a long silence.

'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last (p.219).

Huxley, A. (1932). *Brave New World*. London: Flamingo. 1994.