

Tribute to Bert Freedman (1923-2011)

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Bert's passing is an irreplaceable loss to his many friends, patients, students and colleagues, in America, Europe and beyond. He was a much admired and beloved friend, mentor, role model, educator, clinician, and collaborator.

In addition to his substantial research work and collaboration, Bert was an innovative and generative force for excellence and integration in psychoanalytic training, especially at the *Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research* (IPTAR), and also at the *New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*. He was, for a number of years (from 1990 to 2001) Co-chair, with Morris Eagle, of the *Rapaport-Klein Study Group*, as many will remember. He was invited to serve on important research and conceptual committees of the *International Psychoanalytic Association* (IPA), where he made meaningful contributions. Bert was also a founding member of the *Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies* (CIPS). At IPTAR he was the most senior of its senior members, and was consulted publicly and privately, on matters large and small, for his wisdom, balanced judgment and fair-mindedness. Also at IPTAR, among other contributions, he co-chaired for many years the Investigative Committee with Doris Silverman.

A 2002 book of tributes to Bert by 26 colleagues was titled *Symbolization and Desymbolization: Essays in Honor of Norbert Freedman*, ably edited by Richard Lasky (New York: Other Press, 2002). In a moving and informative introduction, Lasky, a longtime member of *Rapaport-Klein Study Group*, detailed Bert's remarkable life and career. On the back cover Bert is described by Wallerstein as "...now at the zenith of his undiminished and astonishingly productive research career," and "I see Bert Freedman as a major figure, an empiricist and conceptualizer, in psychotherapy research."

Beyond the 49 publications indexed by Lasky, there are half a dozen subsequent ones, including two books that appeared in 2011.

In one of these, Bert was an editor, along with A. Druck, C. Ellman, and A. Thaler, of *A New Freudian Synthesis: Clinical Process in the Next Generation* (London: Karnac, 2011), in which he summarized, in 15 pages, the views of ten colleagues from a 264-page book. His masterful integration sharpened and clarified the implications of each position, and demonstrated his interest in "bringing divergent views under one umbrella."

Only a brief overview of Bert's research is possible here. His post-doctoral work, begun at *Downstate Medical Center*, was first in the area of psychopharmacology. In addition to the usual questions, Bert explored such issues as the role of transference, subjective somatic experience, and personality structures with regard to psychopharmacologic therapy. He also studied the construction and deconstruction of meaning and splitting in depression. He further explored distinctions between symbolizing and desymbolizing countertransference responses, reflecting, as Lasky

has pointed out, one of the ways patient and analyst mutually regulate the psychoanalytic process. With Irv Steingart he explored relationships between kinesic action and syntactic structure, and with Wilma Bucci he reported on the first study on referential activity. Then, in 1977, Bert collaborated with Stanley Grand on the book *Communicative Structures and Psychic Structures* (New York: Springer, 1977). During the Downstate years, Bert collaborated with a number of other colleagues.

Together with IPTAR colleagues, Bert assessed process and outcome aspects of long-term psychoanalytically-based psychotherapy. His work then focused on the place of symbolization in psychoanalytic treatment and change, where he delineated four levels of dynamically related symbolization, as well as the associated concept of defensively driven desymbolization.

Bert's many studies, including those utilizing psychotherapy recordings, culminated in a recently published book, *Another Kind of Evidence: Studies on Internalization, Annihilation Anxiety, and Progressive Symbolization in the Psychoanalytic Process* (London: Karnac, 2011). Bert was the originator, organizer, collaborator, main contributor and first author. With regard to this book, Peter Fonagy wrote: "It is a massive contribution that repays careful study and opens a new vista on psychoanalytic research, retaining the highest standards of empirical and clinical rigor." Bob Wallerstein and Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber wrote comparable laudatory comments.

In addition to new contributions to the concepts of symbolization, and desymbolization and their relation to other variables, Bert's central interest came to be focused on transformation, considering the latter as a major consequence of progressive symbolization. While affirming the continuing importance of conflict resolution, Bert viewed transformation as leading to re-integration that is based on, but also goes beyond, conflict resolution. An example of Bert's creative formulation of these concepts was his Proposition: working through is repetition transformed.

Collaborating with Bert on writing was a satisfying, sometimes heated, labor-intensive adventure. My sense is that he established a somewhat different way of working with each colleague, which, for the most part, brought out the best in each of them, and in himself. Sometimes Bert tended toward bold formulations and overviews, but encouraged his collaborator to challenge him to elaborate and justify his ideas. He excelled in clarifying and extending the central features of his collaborator's views, and then contrasting with and building bridges to his own views, which often led to a joint endeavor, where the input of each enriched the finished product. Frequent phone messages, and conversations, often late at night, kept the ideas flowing, and added to the next in-person "bull session." There was always time for personal issues, and the discussion of local politics, along with meals and snacks lovingly provided by Joyce.

Bert was a caring, loyal and satisfying personal friend: available, attuned and responsive. Many benefited from his warmth, generative ideas, engagement and guidance... When he greeted you with a "Good to see you," you had the feeling that he really did see you... The likes of Bert will not soon again pass this way. May his memory be a blessing.