

Tribute to Sidney Blatt, Ph.D.

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I first met Sid when he interviewed me for a postdoc at Yale. As part of my application I had submitted a paper that linked social theory and psychoanalytic perspectives. Sid told me that he liked the paper so much he wished he had written it himself. You can imagine what it meant to me - a female student having just completed my internship and on the cusp of deciding how seriously to take myself as a professional - to hear this from a Renaissance man in our field - a distinguished theoretician, a prolific empirical researcher, a personality theorist, an analytic clinician who wove seamlessly among practice, theory and research. When I went over this tribute with my husband, he said, "Do you think that he meant it?" and I replied, "Yes because he gave me paper that he had written on the same topic and said, 'Even if you don't accept the postdoc, we can write back and forth. Let's collaborate.'"

That first dialogue introduced me to the spirit of generosity and generativity that characterizes Sid's role as mentor, and that is what I want to focus on today. Sid recognized that a true leader trains other leaders who will carry on one's vision while becoming themselves.

That interchange was my first experience of being "*panim el panim*" with Sid. *Panim el panim* is a phrase from the Torah "*denoting... a presence to another presence without an intermediary, as is said: Come let us look one another in the face.*"

Relatedness and self-definition - the two lines of development so fundamental to Sid's life and work - also guided his relationship with his students, colleagues and collaborators. When Joan Criccia, his devoted assistant, sent me his vita after his death, I noticed that he had listed not only the names of his dissertation students, but also the names of those he had mentored over the years, a number of whom are here today. He saw his work with us as fundamental to whom he was just as his mentorship of us has been fundamental to whom we have become.

Panim el Panim

Another transformative moment occurred when I told Sid with some trepidation that being in my mid 30s I had to devote self to starting a family, and therefore felt I should leave after one year, the two year research postdoc that followed the one year clinical postdoc. He was very empathic to my situation, but reminded me that there are different types of creativity, and that he would not be satisfied until he saw my creativity come to fruition on several fronts, assuring me that he would adjust the postdoc to accommodate a pregnancy. He also shared his experiences of his own daughters, and his support of their decisions sometimes to put family before work. In that dialogue I saw what a devoted, even passionate, father and grandfather Sid was. Indeed he stated that he learned about the power

of the unconscious and developmental issues from being a parent and a grandparent. Sid had an extraordinary impact on the world around him, while he created an extraordinary family life for himself.

I'm not sure I would be speaking today if it weren't for those early dialogues with Sid. Such attitudes were not so prevalent in 1980s when women for the first time were entering the professions *en masse*, when neither the female body nor procreativity were common topics of discussion, particularly with male mentors. Emboldened by Sid to "lean in" to my professional life while starting a family, I did go on become a parent not long after I started my first job at *Cornell Medical College*.

As his son David has told us, Sid's commitment to diversity and concerns about gender, race and social class arose in part from his own experience growing up in a poor family in South Philadelphia with a father who couldn't understand why he would want to go to college. He knew first hand what it meant to struggle to define a self through meaningful work in a context that wasn't always supportive. It was Sid who encouraged me to join the faculty in the doctoral program in clinical psychology at the *City University of New York*, a psychodynamic program dedicated to diversity where the training clinic in Harlem serves a high-risk underserved population.

Panim el Panim

Sid created mentoring relationships that made independent thought possible - differentiation within relatedness. At the beginning of my research postdoc Sid convened a group which included Rebecca Behrends, Nadine Kaslow, John Auerbach, Susan Bers and myself among others to develop a new scoring system for the *Object Relations Inventory* (ORI), a narrative technique he had developed that involved asking patients for spontaneous descriptions of self and significant others - one of the most important of Sid's contributions toward bridging the gap between sensitive clinical thinking and empirical research. Sid said with some humility - he could be imperious but also humble - that he felt his Conceptual Level or CL scale, based on Piagetian developmental theory, did not adequately capture either the severe boundary disturbances in psychotic disorders or the complexities of self definition and empathically attuned relatedness, at more mature representational levels. Sid asked me to collaborate with him in developing this new scale and the result was the Differentiation-Relatedness, or D-R scale, that has been used to distinguish the characteristic mental representations of different clinical groups as well as to track significant change in quality of mental representations over the course of treatment.

Indeed in a recent article on the DSM-5, Skodol and Bender, citing Sid's work on the CL and D-R scales, stated: "Maladaptive patterns of mentally representing self and others serve as the substrates for personality psychopathology common to a wide range of conceptualizations (e.g., psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, interpersonal, and trait) of core impairments" (Bender & Skodol, 2007, p. 333).

You can imagine how moved I was when as part of a panel on at a personality disorders conference in Rome last month (*European Society for Personality Disorders - ESSPD*), I heard two young Italian psychologists present their findings showing that a lack of a differentiation-relatedness (or consolidated, integrated and individuated sense of self and significant others) as measured by the D-R scale on the ORI was a marker of a maladaptive personality functioning on the new Personality Inventory for DSM-5. They dedicated their research to Sid and concluded their talk with a picture of him. That encounter brought me again face to face with Sid in the sense of recognizing how he is an internalized presence for many of us and will continue to be a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Panim el Panim

I was finally finishing my postdoc and Sid said to me aren't you ever going to get a job? I replied, "I would but I don't know what I want to do when I grow up - clinician, researcher, theoretician," and he replied, "Neither do I".

We were face to face, but this time in a moment of experienced incompatibility. I wanted to stay at Yale (I had been offered a job there, but my husband's work was in New York City). Sid helped me to leave, but remained a primary mentor who went on inspiring me to envision and develop a professional life where each aspect - the clinical, the research and the theoretical enriched and inspired the other. Sid said with some humility that he was probably not as good in any of these spheres as he might have been if had devoted himself to only one. But remarkably he worked at all three areas almost till the end of his life. And he continued to act as a public intellectual dedicated to informing citizens about research and treatment of psychological disorders, writing in a letter to the *New York Times* in 2013, entitled "Are Depression's Causes all Biological?" in which he said: "Constructive interpersonal experiences, as can occur in psychotherapy, are also important factors in understanding the etiology and treatment of mental illness" in addition to "the actuated biological and genetic factors" (*New York Times*, Sept. 8, 2013).

But there was a sea change in his last year. Last January he agreed to be a discussant in a symposium on the ORI and Differentiation-Relatedness Scale at the *American Psychoanalytic Association* meetings. When I checked in with him several days before, he said that he didn't want to leave Ethel and couldn't imagine walking with his walker across the massive lobby of the Waldorf Hotel where the conference is held and where he used to hold court. He said, "I'll be there in spirit," but I felt that his spirit was moving on. We, his students and mentees were holding onto him but he was living on another plane - one that involved communion with Ethel through his devoted care of her, communion with his family, his children and grandchildren, and I think preparation for his own death.

Remarkably Sid got very high ratings from our standing room only audience who refused to accept that he was not actually present for panel. I think of this as a consecration of his ubiquitous presence and influence in the field, and a testament to how much he is an internalized figure for many of us.

When I learned of his death - this passage from one of his papers written with Rebecca Behrends came to mind. In reflecting on how the cycle of gratifying involvements and experienced incompatibilities with others catalyze internalizations over the life cycle, they wrote: "This process continues over and over again, until the ultimate separation in death. Thus, the anticipation of death and dying is the final experienced incompatibility, and the ultimate internalizations hopefully allow one to die in peace" (Behrends & Blatt, 1985, p. 34).

Panim el Panim

Let us continue to draw on the ways that Sid brought us face to face with ourselves and each other - now that he is face to face with eternity.

I will end with a quote that his children (Susan Schwab, Judi Casey and David Blatt) sent me for his obituary: "We are so appreciative of the stories, statements, and observations about our father. He was a remarkable man who touched so many people's lives in multiple ways. For us, his family, his passing is a profound loss, leaving a void impossible to fill. We are deeply comforted by the fact that it is not simply us and our children, but several generations of students and collaborators, who will constitute his legacy and carry on his life's work."