

## HISTORICAL NOTE: ERIK BLUMENTHAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY IN SWITZERLAND

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Two years ago, we published a brief history of Individual Psychology in Switzerland (Mansager & Borboa, 2014). We intended to introduce English-speakers to Adler's influence on our tiny country. We noted Adler's direct impact, but mainly indicated the legacy of Adlerian Psychology as it was taught and still practised here. Given the broad overview of the article, we did not deem it appropriate to highlight any one of the Adlerian educators. Now, in a separate brief account, we would like to revisit the gift of one of the primary Adlerian educators in Switzerland, Erik Blumenthal (1914-2004).

Erik and his twin sister Erika were born in Stuttgart, Germany. Their father was a physician and department chief at *St. Mary's Hospital* in that town and their mother was the daughter of Albert Hert, an engineer and inventor. Blumenthal was open to becoming a physician like his father, but by the time he reached the age for developing a professional career, his Jewish background barred him from higher education. He was sent to England due to the repression against the "racially impure". Nonetheless he returned to Germany near the end of the WW II – when such purity standards had been abandoned – and volunteered for military service. He was only briefly at the front before becoming a prisoner of war.

After the war, he married Delores Klose and with her raised four children. At the age of 38, he was able to fulfil his dream of higher education and studied psychology at the *University of Tübingen*, Germany. It was there that the process of becoming a psychotherapist began to emerge as he learned the concepts and theoretical principles of therapy. The next step would be his learning about the technical aspects of conducting psychotherapy. Blumenthal first studied Jung's Analytical Psychology, which brought him to Switzerland. But after

becoming introduced to the Baha'i faith, which promoted the harmony between science and religion, he became attracted more to Adler's Individual Psychology. With this background, he initiated a move towards personal integration and *being* a psychotherapist.

Blumenthal held faculty positions both at the *University of Würzburg*, Germany, and at the *Institute for Applied Psychology (IAP)*, Zurich, Switzerland. He studied with the notable Adlerians Alexander Müller (1893-1986) and Rudolf Dreikurs (1897-1972), a background that contributed to his eventual teaching the Adlerian courses at IAP, along with his colleague Victor Louis (1911-1991). These two also became the engine for the *Alfred Adler Institute (AAI)*, the teaching arm of the *Swiss Society of Individual Psychology (SGIPA)*. Furthermore, Blumenthal led SGIPA on-and-off as President from 1964 and for many decades henceforth. Under his direction, SGIPA grew and entered into new areas of community work and the growth and expansion of the AAI's curriculum. The training of both professional counsellors and therapists became the main goal of the Institute. As a collateral activity, the Institute provided the necessary education and supervision of the "*Lehranalytiker*" [training analysts], which the qualified faculty selected and fostered. Blumenthal was one of the mentors of this particular group at the AAI and this activity enabled him to expand Adlerian teaching and practitioner groups across the country.

Blumenthal's experience and disposition to teach Adlerian principles and practices was demonstrated in becoming a member of the *International Association of Individual Psychology (IAIP)* and a director of the *Rudolf Dreikurs Summer Institute*. This Summer Institute allowed him to continue working closely with Dreikurs and many of other colleagues from around the world. In 1972, Sadie "Tee" Dreikurs (1900-1996) had asked Blumenthal and Achi Yotam (1932-1994) to continue the Summer School Dreikurs had begun. She believed he and Yotam knew best the direction Dreikurs would have gone in teaching Individual Psychology as an approach to develop Social Interest and thus mental health of the global population (Linden & McAbee, 1995). Through this *International Committee of Summer Schools and Institutes (ICASSI)*, he created working possibilities relationships with mental

health professionals in Germany, such as Theo Schoenaker, Albrecht Schottky, Michael Titze and Hans Josef Tymister among others. In Switzerland, Blumenthal became the mentor of several psychotherapists and specialists in pedagogy, such as Jürg Rüedi. At the same time, he strengthened the Swiss ties with ICASSI, committing some of his students in supporting the Summer School and assuring that the teaching of Dreikurs, his mentor, would be strongly anchored in the Swiss psychological landscape. He did this at a time when the terrain of Swiss psychotherapeutic work was mainly under the influence of psychoanalysis, a fact that continues to colour the Germanic Adlerian world.

Blumenthal (1980; 1981; 1984), ahead of his time in many ways, introduced into his practice of Adlerian Psychology a sense of spirituality and religion. He understood human nature as existing on three levels similar to the work of Jean Gebser's (1949) work. He recognised the *organic* level, but took the *symbolic* ability of humankind as a motivator of social equality that elevated it to the *spiritual* level. He also applied this understanding towards its application in his work as a psychotherapist.

This moved his practising at the mental and cognitive levels to aiming at the integration with the spirit or mind (*Geist*). He attempted to transcend the human characteristics of courage and Social Interest by condensing them into an "active belief in God" (Blumenthal, 1981, p. 27).

In this way, as an avid practitioner of the Baha'i religion, he was able to interweave compatible religious constructs with his psychotherapeutic practice and writing.

Blumenthal also saw the education of children as vitally important for the advancement of humanity, but the core and most significant foundation of all education, he believed, was their mental and moral development.

As with Adler and Dreikurs, Blumenthal also saw the potential of education to facilitate children's becoming well-functioning human beings. That is, those who can identify with others and thus can engage in the service of humanity. For Blumenthal, this was the true purpose of education.

Encouragement was another pillar of his work (1981). He introduced in the German-speaking countries *Selbsterziehung*, the concept of (self-development). He considered encouragement to be the most important condition for self-development because it means: "That someone else has seen in me what is of value" (p. 70). This is the reason he stated that people need encouragement, adding: "When I decide to love people ... their faulty behaviours cannot stop me from loving them" (*ibid.*, p. 86).

The approach to psychotherapy, as learned from Dreikurs, allowed Blumenthal to establish his practice as a psychotherapist. He then integrated his spiritual/religious approach, believing that therapy included moving beyond social conditioning and cultural adaptation into a world of acceptance of others. Blumenthal nurtured the gift of unconditional positive regard to which Carl Rogers (1961) had pointed as a necessary condition for successful therapy. His basic belief, however, was that humans are made in the image of God. This belief guided Blumenthal's work and shaped his life and social community.

After the premature death of his first wife, Blumenthal decided to relocate into the town of Immenstadt in the Bodensee area, Germany. Here he came to know his second wife, Marianne Hilger, whom he married in 1959. She supported his work and became an Individual Psychology practitioner, specialising in art therapy and continuing the ICASSI work. Two of their children are today psychotherapists and the youngest daughter continues to honour her father's work further.

Blumenthal's legacy is available through his work as an author. Some of his work has been translated into various languages and they offer a clear understanding of his vision of humanity.