

CHAPTER 3 b

HAIM HARARI

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As Haim Harari recalls, “Sid Drell, age 36, an internationally famous theoretical physicist, visited Weizmann Institute in Israel and gave a seminar. I, Haim Harari, as a 21-year old PhD student, attended the talk and was introduced to Sid.”

#### *AN UNLIKELY SITE FOR PROPHET-MAKING*

“A year later, on my first trip abroad as a scientist, I traveled to Erice, Sicily. Erice later became a well-known center for such international meetings in all fields of science. But, back then, at the first meeting, all students, myself included...at age 22...and lecturers flew into Palermo and were taken by bus to the center. Halfway to our destination, on a beautiful, sunny day, we see in the distance one single mountain, its top covered by the only cloud in the sky. A booming voice resounds: “*That’s where we’re going!*” says Sid Drell. At the time it was a great joke, but that was where we went and stayed in that single cloud for two weeks. That’s where Sid gained the status of a prophet.

“Then, in August of 1965, I’m a 24-year old, fresh physics PhD from Israel, accompanied by my wife and baby daughter, and we’re landing at the SFO airport. We’re here because I’m embarking on a two-year post-doctoral fellowship at Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). The center has just opened, but the accelerator is not yet operative. Sid Drell is deputy director of SLAC, and the leading light of its theoretical physics group.

“Sid’s secretary meets us at the airport, apologizing for Sid’s absence because of the birth of his daughter, Joanna, the day before. This, to us, is an extraordinary act of good heart and friendship afforded an unknown young colleague.

#### *FROM POSTDOC TO COLLEAGUE?*

“It was from 1967-87 that Sid’s invitation to me, first to become a professor at SLAC...and when I kindly refused it...was extended to accept a permanent invitation to sabbaticals, summers and other visits undertaking research at SLAC. In those twenty years, I would become a professor, a department head, a Dean of the graduate school and later president at the Weizmann

Institute. During that time I would also spend a total of seven to eight years at SLAC as a visiting professor in the theoretical physics group, with Sid as leader.

“Then, Sid became a member of the board of governors of the Weizmann Institute, and we, in the process of this evolution, developed a close family friendship.

#### *MOURNING THE LOSS OF LIKELY FAME*

“In 1970, we hit a milestone when two others young SLAC professors and I turned 30. We are bemoaning the fact that, unlike those in the pantheon of great physicists, we have not enjoyed important breakthroughs by this, our 30-year mark. Einstein’s relativity breakthrough was at age 26; Heisenberg’s quantum mechanics, at 26, along with other discoveries, almost never do breakthroughs happen to theoretical physicists after age 30. Because of our shared misery, Sid invites the three families for a “wake” in his house, complete with a mock declaration of the end of our careers.

Need more be said about Drell’s wonderful sense of occasion and sense of humor?

But the world isn’t wasn’t always on board ...

#### *LUCK FETCHED FROM FATE, yet again?*

“At my invitation, Sid and Harriet flew to Israel in 1972 to deliver a major public lecture. They landed at Tel Aviv airport at 9:00 p.m., where we met them by the plane, only because I secured special permission for the occasion. A short time later, Japanese terrorists (in service to the Palestinians), landed, too. They picked up their luggage at the same carousel where Sid and Harriet had waited for their bags an hour earlier, and took from their baggage submachine guns, which they used to open fire and murder a large number of arriving passengers, a distinguished professor from the Weizmann Institute among them.

“Now, everyone at Weizmann Institute knew that we were to meet the Dreells at the airport when they arrived, so when news spread about a Weizmann scientist having been a victim of the attack, they presumed that we were among the victims. Needless to say, as soon as he could, Sid called his family and folks at Stanford to calm all down.

#### *A RARITY, SID, IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE ADVISING*

“From the late ’60s to the early ’70s, Sid began his work with a variety of US government agencies on science and on science policy advising. He impressed everyone with his broad horizons, his no-nonsense approach to problems, and all with confidence but a total lack of arrogance – traits rarely found among top scientists.

“Sid’s perspective – a lifelong connection – is that scientists are people who, like other citizens, and perhaps even more so, owe it to their community, to their country, and to humanity to do their best to alleviate science-related problem. Their goals: to anticipate crises and prevent them;

and to provide the public with the best, current knowledge, wisdom and experience that they've acquired in their professional practice. Sid maintained this conviction throughout his life.

#### *PERSONALLY & PROFESSIONALLY: Sid, the Extraordinary*

"In more than fifty years of our acquaintance, which includes at least ten years of daily contact, I have never seen Sid act in anger or overreact; I have never witnessed him advocating an extreme position, whether politically left or right (which is a practice common even among outstanding scientific minds); but I have observed him in his preference for applying common sense to rules which may be inapplicable to a given situation. Sid knows that logic, if misused, can take one into all sorts of wild provinces; he's unjustifiably modest, never boasts, never claims to have the only wise position, and always tries to look at every angle of a problem, even if some eventually lead to dead ends.

"Sid is one of the best teachers and mentors to young aspiring scientists, whether his own PhD students, postdoctoral fellows in his vicinity or other young researchers. Though Sid is an excellent physicist with many remarkable achievements, others have contributed more to the field. Still, none can compete with Sid's record of training absolutely outstanding students, and with the eagerness in which the best students were drawn to him and the environment he facilitated.

"Within management positions, Sid has always been a no-nonsense director and manager. He's fair, well organized, efficient, hates bureaucracy, and is willing to cut corners when the latter reaches ridiculous proportions. Despite these stellar traits and efficiencies, Sid never really wanted positions of power; an example is when his name appeared on the short list for president of MIT. Sid declined even to be considered because he was "*unwilling to spend most of [his] life spoiling prima-donna colleagues.*" Nevertheless, he was always available to serve on boards and committees dealing with subjects close to his heart.

"A moment of paradoxical dimensions (and Sid's ability to think outside the box) happened when an oversight group came from Washington to look into the organizational chart of SLAC. They found that Sid, the manager, held the title of deputy director of SLAC, and, as such, he was above the head of the theory group. But, as a working physicist, he was 'subordinate' of the same head of theoretical physics hence he was the "Boss of his own Boss." They could not understand how this was possible; but Sid could not understand how they did not understand.

#### *CREDOS & NOT*

"Sid is proud to be an American, even when he's opposed to one policy or another, or to one or more of American politicians. I have heard him criticize this or that, but he always returns to his heartfelt belief that his country is a great nation, and, as such, he, as a citizen, should do his utmost to contribute. He is a true loyalist, but without a single ounce of nationalism in him. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, and, although not a believer in any religion, he always cherishes his Jewish roots. He holds a great affinity for Israel; and, so long as you promise not to reveal me as the source, I suspect that he mostly loves Jewish humor.

“Like a bee, flower to flower, Sid has spread his love of learning and love of life, along with his commonsensical approach to every endeavor, to all who have been fortunate enough to encounter him. Like a bee, flower to flower, he has enriched every field he has pollinated.”

[1,495 words]