

The Word of Light

The Word of Light:
Piercing the Veil of Chaos

By

Shlomo Giora Shoham

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Word of Light: Piercing the Veil of Chaos, by Shlomo Giora Shoham

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Although there is a tendency in modern writing to capitalize pronouns substituting God's name, we have decided to use all lower-case pronouns when referring to God. This decision has been made for editorial reasons, particularly our adherence to *The Chicago Manual of Style* and the usage found in the King James Version of the Bible. Disrespect was therefore not intended.

Furthermore, in accordance with the usage of the Hebrew Bible, masculine pronouns are used in relation to God (he, him, his), although the *Shechina*, referring to the presence of God, appears in the Bible in a female form. Similarly, our usage of "man", "child", and "neonate" in the male form also applies for women unless noted otherwise.

As indicated, Bible quotations are all taken from the King James Version. The translation of other holy scriptures and religious texts, particularly those originally written in Hebrew, was made by the author unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

Myths are seldom simple and never irresponsible.

—Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*

Nothing dies until it is lived out.

—H. G. Baynes, *Mythology of the Soul*

When the Ba'al Shem Tov had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer, and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the Maggid of Meseritz was faced with the same task, he would go to the same place in the woods and say, "We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers." And what he wanted done became reality. Again, a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said, "We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs and that must be sufficient." And sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said, "We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done." The storyteller adds the story that he told, and it had the same effect as the actions of the other three.

—A Hassidic Tale as told by S. G. Agnon to Gershom Scholem.

Gershom Scholem's interpretation of this Hassidic tale portrays the decay of the Hassidic movement and the transformation of its values; the interpretation offered in this book, however, is different. This book holds that the Ba'al Shem Tov (the Besht), the charismatic founder of the Hassidic movement, taught that the optimal performance of man's tasks in this world is a combination of action, meditative prayer, and spiritual concentration. Indeed, the Besht, the "doer," interprets his thoughts with the overt action of the kindling of the fire, thus bringing about the performance of the task. The quietist, inner-directed Maggid of Meseritz does not act, but prays. The Besht reaches out to the object, whereas the

Maggid focuses on his thoughts, and transforms them into a solipsistic reality all his own. The Rabbi of Sassov anchors his efforts on a spatial location where he can perform his task. The Rabbi of Rishin has no action, no spiritual concentration and no location. All he has is a story, a mythical narrative that generates the task¹. The Hassidic tale above highlights the main subject of our present work: the relationship between generative myths and the realm of living and existence.

The link between subject and object remains one of the single most relevant psycho-philosophical problems from times immemorial to the present day. Salomon Maimon, the imbibing disciple of Kant, metaphorically stated that, "To find a passage from the external world to the mental world is more important than to find a way to East India, no matter what statesmen may say." Our concern, nonetheless, is more pragmatic; we wish to understand how the mental revelation of an Archimedean "eureka" is structured into an objective creation. We hypothesize that mythogenic structures effect this creative linkage. We propose to dwell now more extensively on this hypothesis.

Andrew Lang, a pioneering student of mythology, stated towards the end of the nineteenth century that myths are not just fairy tales, nor are they cautionary tales to frighten young children into eating their porridge. Myths are rather causal explanations of phenomena that take place in historical reality. He therefore denoted mythology as "proto-science."² Freud claims, "Myths are the distorted vestiges of the wish fulfillment wish-fantasies of whole nations...the age-long dreams of young humanity."³ Raising his intra-psychic interpretation of dreams to the group level, Freud states that a myth is an expression of a tribe's "social-character," an aggregate of the wishes and visions of a nation or society. Surely the myth of the Flood, for instance, was not merely wish fulfillment, but a projection of real experiences of disastrous inundations, especially in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Myths are therefore also a projection of experiences and spectacular events undergone by a group, before written history in *illegit tempore*.

Bachofen writes, "The mythical tradition may be taken as a faithful reflection of the life in those times, in which historical antiquity is rooted. It is a manifestation of primordial thinking and immediate historical revelation and consequently a highly reliable source."⁴ Eliade further claims that since myths reflect an occurrence of events on a high level of abstraction, they also reveal principles, designs, and underlying events. He writes:

[T]he myth discloses the eventful creation of the world and of man, and at the same time the principles which govern the cosmic process and human existence...[T]he myths succeed each other and articulate themselves into a sacred history, which is continuously recovered in the life of the community as well as in the existence of each individual...What happened in the beginning describes at once both the original perfection and the destiny of each individual.⁵

This brings us to Jung, who regards myths not only as means of individual psychic expression, but also as the archetypal contents of a “collective human unconsciousness.”⁶ Myths, in short, are a projection of wishes and experiences both on the individual and group levels. We explicate this view in *Salvation Through the Gutters*:

Our methodological anchor is the conception of myths as projections of *personal* history. The individual is aware of his personality as the sole existential entity in his cognition. This awareness of existence is the only epistemological reality. Myths cannot, therefore, be divorced from the human personality. Whatever happened to us in the amnesic years and even later is projected onto our theory of the creation of the universe, magic, and other human beings. The events that happened in the highly receptive amnesic years have been recorded and stored by the human brain. Events that happened after the amnesic years may be recalled cognitively, but whatever happened within these first years of life is recalled *inter alia* by myths of cosmogony. Myths as personal history may therefore be regarded as the account of some crucial developmental stages in the formative years. Moreover, human development, in the early formative years, passes in an accelerated manner through the whole evolutionary phases of the species.⁷

Consequently, myths are also a projection of the development of the species as inherent in the development of the individual. Interestingly, the conception of myths as a projection of personal history may be inferred from the Apocalypse of Baruch, which states, “Every man is the Adam of his own soul.”⁸ One might interpret in this expression that every human being experiences Original Sin.

Karl Abraham expressed this view as early as 1925 in *Character Formation on the Genital Level of Libido Development*:

In the two phases of development...we are able to recognize archaic types of character-formation. They represent in the life of the individual recapitulations of primitive states that the human race has passed through at certain stages of its development. Hence, in general, in biology, we find the rule holding good that the individual repeats, in an abbreviated form,

the history of his ancestors. Accordingly, in normal circumstances, the individual will traverse those early stages of character formation in a relatively short space of time.⁹

We hold, therefore, that myths structure meanings of human behavior, and serve as motivation and prime movers for both individuals and groups. As myths are projected models of human behavior on all levels, they are records of past experience, as well as structures for future longings and goals. Myths are also expressions of overt behavior, of covert dynamics, of the here-and-now, and of transcendence. The dimensions of myths may also greatly vary, from micro-myths, like names of persons and places, which express meaningful experiences or quests, to meta-myths such as the myths of Sisyphus¹⁰ and Tantalus,¹¹ which represent two polar types of human behavior. We shall seal with these myths later in the book in extent.

Myths vary with time and place, and every society and culture has its own indigenous mythology. Myths move in time, from the sacred myths told before recorded history, to modern myths which include the master detectives Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and John Le Carré's Smiley, or Superman who implements the dreams of omnipotence in the downtrodden, henpecked inhabitants of Metropolis. Myths can also relate to individuals, such as in the offerings of Isaac and Iphigenia, signifying the sacrificial enmeshing of the young within the normative system of society. There are also group myths, such as the adventures of the Olympian gods and the tribal exploits of the German *Aesir*. The Nazi movement may indeed be studied as having been triggered and sustained by a collective myth.¹²

We tread in the giant footsteps of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who claimed that myths are a connecting structure between divergent polarities like the raw and the cooked.¹³ We, however, attribute wider and deeper functions to mythology. Myths as structures function, as Piaget explains:

[As a] system of transformations characterized by the laws of this system [in contradistinction to the attributes of its individual components]. The system is preserved and enriched by the actions of these transformations, but they do not lead to outright components which are outside the [structured system]. In short, a structure is characterized by holism, transformation, and self-regulation.¹⁴

Myths, as holistic, self-regulating structures that function regardless of their historical veracity, are therefore ahistorical. Moses and the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, which have no independent corroboration outside the

Bible, generated monotheistic Judaism (still strong today, irrespective of whether Moses actually existed or not). We are also told that myths link subject and object, individual and society, consciousness and matter, revelation and creativity, and history and transcendence. These links function in a feedback cycle, since man projects myths, for instance, onto metaphysics that are structured into religion, which in turn feeds individuals' faith. The creative myth, or in our denotation, the mythogenic structure, is not only a self-regulating mechanism, but is also self-recharging and dynamic. Man turns the myths that refuel him into role models, creative muses, ideologies, and religions. Hence, myths are our prime movers, which lift us by our own bootstraps, *à la* Baron Münchhausen, powered by a self-energizing *perpetuum mobile*.

My interest in structuralism arose during almost three decades of interest in the theory and practice of labeling. When someone is stigmatized as a homosexual, a criminal, or a madman, the facts that the homosexual is also a good pianist, the criminal has a sense of humor, or the madman a good heart, melt into the halo effects of the stereotypes of a pederast, a jailbird, and a lunatic. The stigmatization of the deviant, the "other," and the outsider, is just one instance of the omnipotence of structure. Of special importance to this context is Piaget's exposition on structures common to both psychology and physics:

[The] positivists believed that there was no consensus between language and designed objects, but an accord between human operations and objects creates a harmony like the one between the body and spirit of human beings. This is also the preempted harmony between the monads of Leibniz, if these monads were not closed but open. The latter would then be a good example of the adaptations of biological entities to their physiochemical and cognitive structures.¹⁵

We find an instance of this preempted harmony in the monads of Gottfried Leibniz, except that these monads are in enclosed units. Yet, if these monads were open, they would indeed be the adaptable biological structures seeking a rapport with their physio-chemical and cognitive layers.¹⁶ Piaget also assures us that children start thinking in structures. This might account for the fact that the most basic structures are ingrained in us in our oral phase of development, together with the acquisition of our first mother tongue. Structures are therefore independent entities with internal transformations; yet these transformations do not change the structure because its self-regulation keeps the structure intact.

It is important to note that once the structure is formed, we become accustomed to it through feedback processes. The longer one retains a

structure, the greater the structure becomes normalized, mythologized, and cherished through cognitive dissonances. Established structures lend security, familiarity, and confidence, hence normative upheavals and ideational revolutions are painful and relatively rare.

The durability and longevity of “mythogenic structures” is subject to natural selection and to functional adaptability. In this domain, as in so many other Sisyphean dynamics of creation and entropy, Darwinian evolution reigns supreme.¹⁷ Once the mythogenic structure has been generated by projected experiences and yearnings, forming a self-regulating configuration, it has a life of its own; thus a mythogene is ahistoric.

As we stated, there is no independent evidence, outside of the Bible, for the existence of Moses or of the Exodus. A study by an American archeologist even claims that all the events and personalities recounted in the first ten books of the Old Testament have no historical veracity.¹⁸ Hence Moses, as well as Saul, David, and Solomon, are fictional characters. This notion, however, is unimportant to our present context. The mythogenic structure obeys W. I. Thomas’s basic theorem of social processes, according to which if a man defines a situation as “real,” it becomes real in its consequences. Therefore, if a mythogene is projected, structured, and legitimized by a given group, it motivates men to generate cultural patterns through a process of revelation and creativity.

Lévi-Strauss describes how the mythic structure links nature and culture together; we shall also try to show how mythogenic structures are generated, how they grow, and how they decline. Indeed, mythogenes are generated, developed, and destroyed in a manner distinct from the growth and decline of historical entities. Leon Festinger demonstrates how belief in prophets and their teachings increased just when their historical prophecies failed.¹⁹ Likewise, the followers of Christ began serious proselytizing only after his crucifixion, and the followers of Shabbetai Zevi, a seventeenth-century self-proclaimed Jewish Messiah, began to proselytize their creed only after he converted to Islam. The mythogenic structure moves itself and us (its creators) in a feedback cycle of virtual reality. When we impute to the feedback cycle historical veracity and insist on enacting it in our real lives, we court disaster.

The numerous Christs, Napoleons, and Elvis Presleys in insane asylums are individual examples of the deranging effects of historicizing myths, whereas the Nazi revival of the *Elder Eddas* and the *Nibelungen Ring* are actually catastrophic instances on the group level. Our first step in the study of mythogenes is to explore their role in the development of the human personality.

The Two Vectors

We propose to recapitulate the two opposing vectors that form the core of our personality theory.²⁰ These vectors are “participation” and “separation.” We define participation as the identification of the self with a person, with an object, a life form, or with a symbol outside itself. In the participation process the self strives to lose its separate identity by fusion with external entities: another person, life form, object, or symbol. Separation, the opposite vector, is the self’s effort to sever and differentiate itself from its surrounding life forms and objects.

The opposing vectors of participation and separation, the main axis of our theory, are co-developed with two major developmental phases. The first is the process of birth, an abrupt propulsion from cushioned self-sufficiency in the womb into the strifes and struggles of outside life. Birth represents a major crisis and is undoubtedly recorded by the newborn’s psyche. This crisis accompanies further physical pressures that birth imposes on the cranium and may have resultant effects on the various layers of the brain.

We build our premises on these universal separating effects of birth. These effects, in turn, initiate the opposite vector of participation, which is a directional driving-force that harnesses a diverse assortment of psychic energy towards a union with objects, life forms, or symbols. The newborn, who is physiologically and psychologically capable of recording these birth-incidental crises, is therefore driven into a lifelong quest for congruity and unification.

The second process of separation is the crystallization of an individual self through the molding of the “ego-boundary.” The infant shrieks and kicks his way into the world, but still feels part of his surroundings. This holistic bliss is gradually destroyed, however, by the harsh realities of hunger, thirst, discomfort, physical violence, and the presence of hard objects in his surroundings. The bliss is further destroyed by a mother who is mostly loving but sometimes nagging, apathetic, hysterical, overprotective, or even rejecting. These factors push the infant to form a separate identity – to leave the common fold of unity with his environment and to crystallize an “I.” This individual self knows at that point that it is not *part of* and *with* everything, but rather *against* its surroundings. This realization of a separate self, resulting from a coerced departure from the security of engulfing togetherness, is registered by the developing psyche as a Fall from Grace.

The process of separation continues in full force as a corollary of socialization, until one reaches a post-adolescent stage. In this

developmental phase, the self adjusts to the mandates of the normative systems of society. The making of a “responsible person,” or a “stable human being,” is achieved through constant indoctrination of various socialization agents: family, school, church, etc. Using some rigorous initiation rites, socialization agents convey the harsh realities of life, urging one to “grow up”. The desire to overcome the separating and dividing pressures never leaves the human individual. The endeavor to partake in a unifying whole is always present and takes many forms; if one avenue towards its realization becomes blocked, it surges out through another channel.

The various pressures towards separation in each developmental phase can be traced. The newborn registers each stimulus as a disturbance that must be overcome. Before and after the separate self crystallizes, the various demands of the newborn’s mother and the others around him are also perceived as disquieting events, which the self must learn to cope with and to accept. Later on, the various demands of the socialization agents, to fit within the boundaries of the normative system and thus to gain social identity and responsibility, serve as the semi-final or final separating pressures. After this period, the individual is on his own, ontologically lonely, and desperately trying to regain the togetherness of his lost fold. In this uphill battle, the individual may choose both legitimate and illegitimate paths, both acceptable and deviant avenues.

After the primary biological separation of birth has taken place, the subsequent processes of separation and the ensuing developmental stages are affected by the deprivational interaction of the self with its surrounding objects. Following birth, the self-preservation instinct protects this new creature from extinction by inducing it to cry out for food and comfort. Yet, as we have pointed out elsewhere,²¹ the crystallization of the separate “I” is effected by the interaction with the nipple that does *not* always spurt milk, and a mother who does *not* ease all pain or alleviate all discomfort. In other words, if a neonate had all his needs immediately gratified, he will not emerge from the feeling of unity with his surroundings. This process is denoted early orality and it marks the infant’s first year of life. Thus, the release of tension through the satisfaction of the biological needs is not the separating agent; rather it is the conflictual interaction with a depriving object which serves as the separating agent. Consequently, the primary separation of the self is not a corollary of instinctual need satisfaction, but an interactional phenomenon.

Isaac and Iphigenia

Social separation is not effected, as Freud and Erickson have postulated, by psychosexual developmental phases, but rather by conflictual normative indoctrination, and by deprivational socialization within the family.²² These factors are exemplified by the numerous rites of passage, studied by anthropologists, and by the lonely burdens of responsibility imposed on post-adolescents in every human society.

In most cultures, the father, or his surrogate, is the doctrinaire figure, playing an instrumental role in imposing norms and duties on his sons and daughters, thus preparing them for their social roles. We denote a father's normative impositions on his son as the Isaac Syndrome.²³ Whereas the first victimization of the child, at the oral stage of development, is maternal (a process that blocks the free expression of the child's incestuous desires), the second victimization is paternal, coercing and harnessing the child into the normative system of society. This coercive and normative victimization is usually backed by the absolute authority of God, the Fatherland, or a secular political deity. As in the model of the Offering of Isaac, there is usually a symbiotic relationship between the stern doctrinaire father and a metaphysical source of absolute authority. It is important to note that the continued victimization of the child by his parents, from early orality onwards, is an integral part of the developmental socializing separation process. Paternal victimization leads to a "separant" insertion of the pubescent individual into the normative pigeonhole, sanctioned by society.

The mother, however, serves as the symbol of grace. She represents carefree, participant longing for the forgiveness and irresponsibility of children within the family fold. In some tribes, rites of passage from childhood to puberty are presided over by the elders, while the mothers join in the wailing of the circumcised, suffering sons.²⁴ A mythological corroboration of the mother as the image of grace in the eyes of the pubescent son is found in the angel who orders Abraham not to slaughter Isaac. The angel is invariably depicted as female in the iconography of the offering of Isaac.²⁵ It is not far-fetched, therefore, to regard the female angel as a representation of Isaac's mother, Sarah.

The essence of the myth of the offering of Isaac lies in the sacrificial enmeshing of the young into the disciplinarian boundaries of the normative systems of society.²⁶ All normative socialization involves, to a varying degree, curbing the well-being and freedom of the pubescent young for the benefit of the collective. Literature abounds with examples for the sacrificial coercion of children into the carnivorous exigencies of

the normative system. Kafka's letters to his father reek with the agonies of a son, who was abused by his father in the name of bourgeois morality. Kafka's relationship with his father most likely filtered into *The Metamorphosis*, where the petit bourgeois father degrades his misfit son in order to ingrain in him shame and fear of social norms. Similarly, in his play *The Awakening of Spring*, Frank Wedekind portrays a father who justifies the commitment of his son in a notorious institution of juvenile delinquents with his conviction that the institution stresses and enhances Christian thought and logic. The boy's mother prays for grace and forgiveness as in archetypal image in the iconography of Isaac's offerings. The mother laments that their son, a good boy in essence, is bound to become a hardened criminal in the institution. Stern paternal judgment prevails, however, and the boy, Melchior, is confined to an institution for the heinous crime of having sex with a girl. Wedekind's play focuses on the sacrificial coercion of parents, mainly the suppression of sexual manifestations in the name of social propriety, morals, and religion.

Paternal sanction and raging admonition also burst forth from Francis Bacon's *Study after Velasquez* (i.e., "The Screaming Pope").²⁷ In this painting, Bacon takes Velasquez's serene portrayal of Pope Innocent X, seated in full regalia on his throne, and covers it with a transparent projection of a frozen scream. The Pope's mouth is wide open and it appears to emit shrieks of horror, howling curses, and screams of damnation. One might interpret these howls to represent Bacon's authoritarian father when he learnt that his adolescent son was a transvestite. Here, we also recall the modern televised interviews with the late Pope John Paul II, whose benign, good-natured face became hard and stern whenever he confirmed the Church's proscriptions of married priests, abortion, and homosexuality. Indeed, sex remains one of the normative strongholds of the Church, perhaps because the Church sees God's programming of humanity in sexual roles. The persistent proscription of free manifestations of sexuality, especially between consenting homosexual adults, induced John Money to label official authorities, both secular and religious, as sexual dictatorships hunting sexual heretics.²⁸ Money's label is an extension of the Isaac Syndrome to societies and collectives, whereby the authoritarian figure of Abraham permeates the power structures of society and religion.

Mothers usually warn their children when they are naughty, "Wait till Daddy comes home and I'll tell him all about your behavior today." By such a statement, the mother implies that she does not wield the normative rod; rather it is the role of the authoritarian figure in the family, the father, to impose due sanctions. The doctrinaire role of the father is equally

directed towards sons and daughters. The contents of social norms imposed by paternal authority vary, however, with the sex of the child. In most patriarchal societies, the son is often coerced, to undertake the burden of social responsibility, whereas the daughter is harnessed into her feminine roles of marriage, childbearing, and keeping household duties.

A partial feminine counterpart to the sacrificial rites of passage inherent in the Isaac Syndrome may be inferred from the Greek myth of Demeter and Koré. Zeus, Koré's father, was instrumental in her abduction, ejecting his daughter from the family and the protective fold of her mother and delivering her to his hellish brother, Hades.²⁹ The implication here is that Koré was taken away from the care of her mother through the devices of her father, who exposed her to the trials of matrimonial servitude to her husband. The experience was registered by the pubescent Koré as coercive and infernal. Yet, this experience is the social essence of the betrothals of daughters throughout most of history and in traditional societies today. Daughters are given away in marriage to the appropriate husband who is mainly chosen according to their fathers' political calculations, social expectations, and economic needs.

The most striking feminine parallel to the Isaac Syndrome, however, both in its gory, sacrificial details and profound socio-normative implications, is seen in the sacrifice of Iphigenia, as dramatized by Euripides. In the play, Iphigenia was to be sacrificed to the gods by her father, Agamemnon, for the glory of the collective and its patriotic honor. The authoritarian agency of Agamemnon served the exigencies of socio-religious commands, in the same way that the normative authority of Abraham was the extension of Divinity. Unlike Abraham, however, who never doubts God's commands, Agamemnon waivers and rages against the need to sacrifice his daughter for the glory of the army and the honor of the mob. The divergence between the two myths stems from differences between the Judaic and Greek conceptions of Divine authority. For Abraham, God's commands were the epitome of justice, neither doubted nor questioned, whereas the anthropomorphic Greek gods made no pretence of being just.

In the case of Iphigenia, the Greeks knew that their gods were the arbiters of necessity and fate, the prime movers of the Greek religious and normative systems. Despite these differences, both the Greek and the Jewish fathers made the same decision, each of them willing to sacrifice his son or his daughter to the Divine projections of socio-normative mandates. According to the Midrash, the traditional and mythological interpretation of the Bible, Isaac runs joyfully to the altar and binds

himself to it.³⁰ Iphigenia, however, is not so willing a victim. In one of the most shattering monologues in world drama she pleads with Agamemnon:

Had I the voice of Orpheus, O my father,
 If I could sing so that the rocks would move,
 If I had words to win the hearts of all,
 I would have used them. I have only tears.
 See, I have brought them! They are all my power.
 I clasp your knees, I am your suppliant now,
 I, your own child; my mother bore me to you.
 O, kill me not untimely! The sun is sweet!
 Why will you send me into the dark grave?
 I was the first to sit upon your knee,
 The first to call you father.³¹

Eventually, however, she accepts her fate and goes to the altar, patriotically announcing, “Bid my father come and touch the altar, which will this day bring victory and salvation unto Greece.”³² Like Sarah, Isaac’s mother, in the myth of the Offering of Isaac, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia’s mother, is the figure of grace. Clytemnestra condemns paternal cruelty as expressed in the Divine mandate to sacrifice her daughter for the glory of Greece.

The father presides over the vicissitudes of social separation, the cruel rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, the harsh coercion into the delimiting social norms, and the sacrificial horrors of the Isaac and Iphigenia syndromes. These acts induce children of both sexes to long for the cushioned forgiveness and lenient protection of their mothers. For the homosexual Proust, this longing became so intense that he shut himself in a padded, womb-like room and wrote volume after volume idealizing his beloved mother. For Camus, who was ardently heterosexual, his great love for his mother may have turned into a longing for the grace of womanhood in general, rather than for a specific woman. Thus Camus undertook a lifelong quest for the tender friendship of women.³³

In the original Hebrew of the Bible, as well as in Aramaic and Syriac, the word for “grace” is *hessed*, which also means “incestuous” or “sinful.” This illustrates, etymologically at least, that the son’s longing for the mother’s grace appears to have sexual and incestuous undertones. This longing, of course, is a corollary of the suppressed, incestuous desire of the son for his mother at the oral stage, and the relation of this suppressed desire to his subconscious. Primarily, this might explain boys’ attraction to girls who remind them, directly or symbolically, of their mothers, since the amatory and sexual longing for their mothers is blocked by the deep internalized prohibition of their very early incestuous desires. The parallel

attraction of daughters to men who resemble their fathers might also be related to the dynamics of complementarity. The pubescent daughter, through identification with her mother, is attracted to a complementary authoritarian figure linked to the normativeness of the father. Of course, these relationships vary in families in which the father is soft and benign, while the mother is harsh and authoritarian. The various combinations of identifications and permutations of complementary points between parents and children are virtually endless, and tracing their effects on the choice of sexual partners remains outside the realm of the present work.

The Tantalus Ratio

We conceived of our participation vector as the individual's quest at every particular moment of his life to revert to an earlier developmental phase - to the irresponsibility of pre-puberty, to the grace of the mother and the protection of the family fold, to the omnipresence of early orality, and to the pre-natal bliss of non-being. This pull is countered by the instinctual and deprivational interaction vectors of separation which always have the upper hand, except in death. Yet, the quest for participatory non-being is ever present; we tend to agree with the hypothesis which states that if man possessed a special master-switch, and could end his life at will, he would be bound to press it at one time or another. While the quest for participation manifests itself in numerous sublimatory substitutes – both institutionalized and deviant – actual participation is unattainable by definition. Proust could sensitively revive a lost childhood and a graceful mother through the hazy memories triggered by the taste of a Madeleine cookie, but even he could not recapture the actual sensations of things past. We are forever searching for our lost childhood, for our narcissistic paradise, but no one can actually revert to pre-puberty, reconstruct the omnipresence of early orality, or revive the sensation of blissful suspended animation in the amniotic fluid of the uterus. Participation is a *fata morgana*, shining hazily before our craving eyes, but forever receding and never achieved.

Countering separation vectors, both instinctual and interactive, augment the impossible objective of participation. At any given moment of our lives there is a disjuncture, a gap between our desire for participation and our subjectively defined distance from our participatory aims. We denote this gap the "Tantalus Ratio", after the Olympian demigod who had fruit whirled out of his reach whenever he tried to grasp it. If he succeeded in scooping up some water in his palm, it dripped through his fingers before he could cool his parched lips.

The Tantalus Ratio creates a strain, a tension between the longing for participation and the distance from it, as perceived by the individual. The intensity of this strain is determined by the factors comprising the Tantalus Ratio, the motivating force that underlies the individual's action. Based on a rather low level of abstraction, we might imagine this tantalizing strain as the rabbit lure moving in front of racing dogs, or as the proverbial carrot dangling before a donkey's nose. This tantalizing strain is inherently different from the opposing vectors that comprise the Tantalus Ratio. Generated within the synaptic junctions of these opposing vectors, this strain is released by the individual's motivational movement towards some participatory goals or towards their sublimated alternatives. In other words, the participatory and separating vectors provide the crude psychic energy, whereas the Tantalus Ratio and the strain it generates provide the motivational directions for the individual's actual behavior. This tantalizing strain may be either conscious or unconscious, and its operation is checked and regulated by the norms acquired by various internal personality mechanisms. Our hypothesis is that the psychic bases that underlie these mechanisms are generated by the anxieties registered at each consecutive stage of separation. Since each developmental stage, from birth onwards, is experienced by the individual as a painful separation accompanied by deprivational interaction, the personality clings to its present stability, in reaction to a developmental change for the worse, which leads to more radical separateness. These mechanisms are "Devil I know" defenses, which cause the personality to adhere to stable states as lesser evils.

Since the actual reversion to previous developmental stages is a practical impossibility, all the techniques of participation, both institutionalized and deviant, cannot quench the intense longing for participation, which is fueled by the individual's memories of his earlier participatory developmental stages. Therefore, the Tantalus Ratio produces formidable energies, which are augmented and kindled by the impossibility of slaking the individual's thirst for participation.

The essence of this premise is that the Tantalus Ratio is the most powerful at the outset of life, decreasing in potency with each developmental phase, until it wanes in old age. The strength of the Tantalus Ratio is primarily related to the enormity of the separating forces in early childhood, which cause the participation vectors to muster contrary pressures of corresponding potency. Second, the closeness in time of the separating developmental events makes for vivid memories and sharply focused images of the lost participatory bliss. The child's frantic efforts to regain his lost bliss are therefore marked by a desperate surge of

power, aimed at reversing the raw grief of the recent developmental calamity. These efforts are not yet mellowed and weakened by the sad knowledge, brought about by experience, that direct participatory reversals are impossible. The separation of birth, which is registered by the neonate as a catastrophe,³⁴ is marked by frantic efforts to survive. The mouth-ego of the infant constantly searches for a nipple, or anything that would provide nourishment. This factor, together with the other enormous pressures of growth at this hectic stage of development, leads to the formation of the biological vectors of separation, which are at the height of their potency. And yet, this is also the stage at which the neonate experiences the strongest craving to revert to his mother's womb, from which he was so brutally expelled. This craving is in keeping with what Schachtel denoted as the law of embeddedness,³⁵ which states that the more complete the state of embeddedness of the organism, the less the organism wishes to stir from a state of quiescent equilibrium in relation to the environment. In our terms, it means that the more violent the separating disturbance is, the more powerful the corresponding struggle for participation becomes. What can be more violent than the separating expulsion of birth? Indeed, we claim that what Bowlby has denoted as the "instinct of clinging"³⁶ of the primate to its mother, as well as the less corporeal attachment of the human infant to his mother or surrogate, can be linked to the neonate's desire to regain physical union with his mother in her womb. This instinct may provide the motive underlying the clinging and attachment behavior of both primate and human infants, apart from the "functional" desire of the young to be close to the source of their nourishment and protection.

The second major phase of separation, the coagulation of the distinct "I," is marked by the introduction of the deprivational interaction with an object into the battling forces of the Tantalus Ratio. At the oral stage, these objects are the mother, the breast, and the nipple. The ego-boundary, which separates the self from the totality of early orality, is nothing other than scar tissue that surrounds the individual self, as a result of its deprivational interaction with its surrounding objects.³⁷

The Fixation of Personality Types

Personality traits and types are centered on the key concept of "fixation," which is undoubtedly Freudian in origin. Unfortunately, neither Freud nor his disciples sufficiently clarified the mechanisms of fixation, as far as uninitiated outsiders are concerned, although it is to be a central concept in psychoanalytic theory and practice. According to the original

Freudian formulation, psychosexual energy is directed towards the erogenous zones that also represent the major psychosexual developmental phases.³⁸ When parents or their surrogates overindulge or severely deprive the infant at any given developmental phase, he musters a relatively large amount of psychosexual energy to overcome the frustrations thus created. Additionally, the infant will also harness such energies to create alternative defensive outlets, which are his developmental growth processes, the “normal” manifestations of psychosexual energies that have been blocked. Consequently, at any developmental phase, the growth processes may be arrested or injured, since the psychosexual energies have been expended to erect defenses against the conflictual interaction with the parents, instead of building the infant’s personality.

Freud himself was not clear as to the nature of fixation and took much for granted, claiming:

The unconscious knows no time limit. The most important, as well as the most peculiar, character of psychic fixation consists in the fact that all impressions are, on the one hand, retained in the same form as they were received, and also in the forms that they have assumed in their further development. This state of affairs cannot be elucidated by any comparison from any other sphere. By virtue of this theory, every former state of the memory content may thus be restored, even though all original relations have long been replaced by newer ones.³⁹

The Freudian unconscious psyche appears to be the perfect database, one that stores all impressions, with all their possible past and future interactions in a timeless progression. Fixation functions as a type of anchor on a given context of these impressions, and yet Freud does not state how this anchoring comes about. We therefore propose an explanation based on our exposition of the developmental phases of the personality core.⁴⁰

If the transition from one deprivational developmental stage to the next is more painful at a given phase than the average harshness as perceived by the individual’s own experience, a rupture or developmental wound is formed, which psychic energies then rush to mend. To be more precise, we envisage the developmental processes as an interaction between the separating forces of growth and the participating urge to revert to an earlier developmental phase. The energy resulting from the dynamic interplay between these vectors is the Tantalus Ratio. However, if the separating effects of the deprivational interaction are too intense or violent at any given time, the developmental process is temporarily disconnected. The separating injury “blows a fuse” and short-circuits the developmental

process. The participation vector and the energies of the Tantalus Ratio repair the injury by surrounding and covering it with developmental scar tissue, not unlike the scar on a wound. Yet the wound itself, and the tender coats of scar tissue, are still exposed to conflict and more pressure, since the deprivational interaction of the nascent ego with its surroundings is a continuous process. Consequently, the ever-thickening layers of the scar tissue, which result from the traumatic fixation, are like a corn on a toe. The psychic energy centers on the traumatized developmental area, covering it with excessive mental imprints very much like the whorls and loops of a corn, which form a lump protruding from the texture of the skin. The corn is painful, not only because of the pressure, but because the excessive scar tissue makes it more vulnerable to trauma.

This metaphor illustrates the nature of fixation. It is the combined outcome of the traumatizing injury, and the excessive and frantic patching of layers of developmental scar tissue through the psychic energies of the Tantalus Ratio; therefore, the harsher the trauma, the thicker the layers of defensive scar tissue. The separate ego emerges from non-differentiated early orality through its deprivational interaction with the mother's breast and surrounding objects. The resulting boundary around the self is another example of developmental experience, which is more conspicuous, more sensitive, and consequently more vulnerable than the rest of the developmental texture of the personality.

Our conceptualization of fixation, in distinction to the Freudian usage, is not related to pathological regressions, but to the crystallization of character traits and personality types. We further hold that regression is not conditioned by fixation, but is rather the quest of a defensive flight to an earlier developmental phase, the longing to which is ever-present in the participation vector of our personality core. When the dynamic balance of the Tantalus Ratio is disturbed by the separating pressure of growth, or the individual's interpersonal relationships suffer a disrupting blow, the counter-pressures of released participation energies catapult the individual to visions of pre-pubic havens and to blissful dreams of early orality. Fixation is therefore a developmental dam, which traps both the disrupting blows of traumatizing interaction and the countering defenses of the Tantalus Ratio. The anchoring of the personality traits to the fixation is the result of this massive concentration of painful experiences and the heap of defenses in frantic disarray. We only become aware, for instance, of a hand or a tooth only when it is painful, and in much the same way, a blow to a bruise is much more painful than a similar blow to a healthy tissue. Consequently, the severity of fixation is related to the magnitude of the

developmental trauma and the corresponding intensity of defenses mustered by the Tantalus Ratio.

The Sisyphian and the Tantalic

Birth is no doubt an explosive event, whose archetype in mythology is the act of creation itself. Yet this colossal event is not registered by a separate awareness. A separate self emerges from a non-differentiated mass, only later in orality, when the “I” is confronted by the surrounding objects. This process is the baseline from which the self emerges out of the total being of early orality, and the non-self defines the circumference of the self. This outcome is an existential revolution, registered by the individual as a separating catastrophe.

We propose, therefore, a personality typology anchored on this developmental dichotomy of pre- and post-differentiation of the self. This molding process is expressed in the nature and severity of the fixation and determines, in turn, the placement of a given individual on the personality type continuum. However, the personality types themselves are fixated by a chronology of development, i.e., whether the fixating trauma occurred before or after the separation of the self. We denote a personality that is fixated before the formation of the self as the “participant-Tantalic personality” type. If the traumas fixate a personality after the crystallization of the self, the “separant-Sisyphian personality” type is bound to emerge. The Tantalic personality type is participation-bound, incessantly visualizing and longing for the all-inclusive early orality, while the Sisyphian personality type is always entangled with the vicissitudes of the object. The separant-Sisyphus anchors on the inter-relationship with an object, whereas the participant-Tantalus seeks the blissful fruits of mystical union. These concepts are the passions kindling the vectors of our polar personality types. However, Sisyphus’ stone-object keeps rolling downhill and Tantalus’ mystical fruits incessantly recede before his eyes. This captures the essence of the Tantalus Ratio; its strength is measured by the unachieved goals, because their fulfillment is not only impossible, but tantamount to impotence.

The *Ani*, *Atzmi*, *Ity* and the Self

The concept of the self involves consistency and continuity, so that the same self is felt and defined by an individual from the moment his separate awareness coagulates until his death. The exceptions to the principles of the continuity and consistency of the self are cases of

madness, or the temporary dissolution or weakening of the self in extreme situations of hallucinations and mystical experiences.

The self, therefore, is the consistent and continuous inner sameness of the individual *vis-à-vis* his environment. This “inner sameness” element of our definition of the self has, no doubt, an Eriksonian flavor to it. But for Erikson, “ego identity” is the meaning of this inner sameness to others,⁴¹ whereas for us, the self is the structured barrier between the separate individual as conceived by the individual himself, and the flora, fauna, and inanimate objects that are excluded from within the confines of this barrier.

We denote the participant core of the self with the Hebrew word *ani*. The etymological meaning of *ani* is “I,” but in Kabbalist doctrine *ani* and *ain* (“nothingness”), which have the same Hebrew letters but in different order, are interchangeable and synonymous. Consequently, the *ani*, which longs for participant non-being, is the Tantallic, objectless component of the self. We denote the interactive object-related component of the self with the Hebrew word *atzmi*, which may be translated into English as “myself.” Its root, however, is *etzem*, “object” in Hebrew, making it appropriate for its definitional task. The self is the essence that defines its being both for itself and for others. The *atzmi* is the interactive, relational self that reaches outward towards the object, whereas the *ani* transcends spatio-temporality and reaches inwards towards the pre-differentiated unity.

It is important to note that the *atzmi*, the interactive self, must have a subject and an object, a perceiver and a perceived. There is a continuous flow of perception to the *atzmi* from flora, fauna, and inanimate objects. The *atzmi* may also perceive the body and the *ani*, the ontological self, as objects. The *ani*, on the other hand, need not have an object. In some situations – concentrated meditation, mystical experiences, some forms of madness, drug-induced euphoria, and sometimes in orgasm – the *ani* has no awareness of itself as a separate being from its surroundings. The boundaries of the self may also dissolve and thus temporary, objectless unity may be achieved.

The *atzmi*, by definition, is a relational entity; therefore, its interaction with its surroundings may be studied in terms of stimulus, response, association, and correlation. These terms may not be practical to the *ani*, because it is objectless and non-relational in pure form and, therefore, measures of logic, deduction, and inference do not apply to it. If we wish to study the human being in whole, and not only in fragments, we must rely on intuition, introspection, and even meditation in order to grasp the *ani* component of the self, and thereby to understand fully the dual nature

of our personalities. Our study of the human personality is therefore holistic and synthetic, and not analytic. This, no doubt, is contrary to the main thrust of contemporary behavioral sciences. The crystallization of the self from the non-self is, in effect, a process of tearing away region after region of the original omnipresence of the neonate. This process continues until the separate *atzmi* is placed within the specific boundaries of its spatio-temporality and the confines of compelling social norms.⁴²

The essence of the *ani* precedes the existence of the *atzmi*. The non-differentiated entity in the womb and at early orality is an omnipresent, timeless, and infinite essence; an essence that is then separated and confined within spatio-temporality by the deprivational interaction with its surroundings. Consequently, when embedded within the separate individual, this timeless essence is not a metaphysical but a *natural* phase of human development. Our conception of the *ani* is in line with Husserl's later writings, in which he postulates a "pure ego," and claims that the knowledge of possibilities (inherent in the pure ego) must precede that of actualities.⁴³ In a similar manner, the logically unverifiable essence of the objectless *ani*, which has the potential and possibility of interaction, must precede the *atzmi*, which comes into being through interaction. However, our *ani* differs from Husserl's "pure ego," because it relates to experience and not to theoretical, *a priori* transcendence. The contents of the *ani* and the *atzmi*, as well as their relative preponderance within a given personality, relate to the core vectors of the participant and separant personalities, the developmental fixations, and the culture in which the individual is socialized.

Finally, we present the *ity*, which is the Hebrew word for "with me." The *ity* is the synthesizer of the dialectical conflicts within the self, of the unity-bound *ani* and the interactive *atzmi*. The *ity* is the structured Tantalus Ratio within the self. Its synthesizing function makes the *ity* the coordinator of human action, and, as such, it has much in common with Freud's ego.

The relative magnitude and preponderance of the poles of our self-continuum are related to the developmental factors of the personality core. A violent oral fixation at the first year of life, a quietist participant culture, and a Tantalus preoccupation at old age will contribute to the predominance of the *ani* within the self-continuum. Conversely, a separant fixation on the object during a period of vigorous growth of the individual at later orality in an active-Sisyphean culture will make for an overpowering *atzmi*. The strength or weakness of the coordinating *ity* will then determine its ability to maintain the self within a dynamic system-in-balance.