

To Test the Limits of Our Endurance



# To Test the Limits of Our Endurance

By

Shlomo Giora Shoham

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**P U B L I S H I N G**



To Test the Limits of Our Endurance, by Shlomo Giora Shoham

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2068-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2068-4

For Igal Vardi, a graphologist, a physiologist, a wonderful artist, a writer, a philosopher, and above all, a trusted and sensitive friend. As Euripides said in *Hydra*, “The meeting of a friend is a God on the Olympus.”



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my editor, Frances le Roux, for her attention to detail and constructive criticism. Without her help, this book would not have been published. I also wish to thank Amanda Millar at CSP for her technical assistance.

The book has been published with the generous help of the Zefat Academic College.





## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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.



## FOREWORD

Our college is one of interdisciplinary studies with a strong affiliation to sociology, religion and culture. *To Test the Limits of our Endurance* is a volume that complements our ethos of learning. It is an important work presenting a new theory of personality and social characters, and relates these theories to the genesis of myths and religions.

Our College is situated in a city distinguished by education and spiritual exploration since the 16th century. Our aim is to preserve ancient cultures in the Galilee by integrating old with new and serving as a stepping stone towards a creative and innovative society. Professor Shoham's volume reflects this too. His innovative theories combine the old and new – from Egyptian mythologies, through Kabbalistic teachings, to the 20th century European cultural patterns.

We are honored at the Zefat Academic College to have on our faculty an author of such standing as Professor Shlomo Giora Shoham. We believe that together we can test the limits by being innovative and always challenging our students and readers.

—Professor Aharon Kellerman  
President, Zefat Academic College, Israel



# INTRODUCTION

The classification of cultures along a continuum and their relationship to a given personality structure necessitate two basic assumptions. The first assumption is that cultures possess generalized traits that may be measured and ranked on a predetermined typology or scale. The second assumption is that these traits may relate to characters of the individuals. By adopting these assumptions, we find ourselves in either good or bad company, depending on preference or value judgment. Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee have adhered to both these assumptions in their separate works on the growth and decline of cultures. Indeed, Spengler compares the ages of cultures to the ages of man. "Every culture," he writes, "passes through the age phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age."<sup>1</sup> Spengler and Toynbee thus introduced the dynamic temporal dimension into the study of culture.

The anthropological conception of culture as a "superorganic"<sup>2</sup> pattern of symbols, generated by the interaction of groups and individuals and transmitted by learning, lends itself to abstract classifications. The crucial question is whether the patterns are Platonic ideals; abstractions projected by the mind of the anthropologist onto the rarified ether, or generalized descriptions of processes that actually take place in societies? If culture is "what binds men together"<sup>3</sup> by means of "symbolating" human interaction<sup>4</sup> (through relating forms and appearances to qualities and attributes), then it already involves, by definition, the structuring and ordering of gestalts.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the processes of cultures are manifested in arranged patterns.

These processes may also be gleaned from some of the key concepts in the definition of culture. A symbol is a value or meaning-laden sign,<sup>6</sup> and meanings and value judgments are readily expressed in generalized patterns. The *superorganic* is manipulated by tools, and the means chosen to achieve cultural goals are regulated by norms. Yet rules and norms are constructs that are choice objects for paradigms and classifications. Therefore, contrary to the vehement objections of some ethnographers, we accept the feasibility of ordering cultures into generalized configurations and patterns, or in Spengler's decorative language, "painting the portrait of cultures."<sup>7</sup> Ruth Benedict and her cultural-relativist colleagues have demonstrated how patterns may be identified by the direct observation of cultures. Furthermore, Claude Lévi-Strauss and his structuralist school of

thought have shown that cultural processes in “savage” societies coincide with the classificatory passage from things to symbols, notably the totemic generalizations that shape the shift from the concrete to the abstract.<sup>8</sup> The structuralists thus identify not only patterns in societies, but also whole systems of functions underlying overt cultural processes. For Benedict, cultural patterns stem from “unconscious canons of choice that develop within the culture<sup>9</sup>... so that it selects some segment of the arc of possible human behavior and, so far as it achieves integration, its institutions tend to further the expression of its selected segment and to inhibit opposite expressions.”<sup>10</sup>

These habits, symbols, values, cultural goals and the means by which to achieve them, crystallize into “total culture patterns,”<sup>11</sup> by which cultures may be identified. Ordering cultural patterns into schemes, paradigms, continua, and matrices may vary according to the purpose or theoretical orientation of the observer. There can be no universal criterion for measuring the validity of the classification of culture patterns. The value of a classification should be determined by the specific aims and needs of a given theoretical concern, as aptly stated by Lévi-Strauss:

The real question is not whether the touch of a woodpecker’s beak does in fact cure a toothache. It is rather, whether there is a point of view from which a woodpecker’s beak and a man’s tooth can be seen as “going together” (the use of this congruity for therapeutic purposes being only one of its possible uses) and whether some initial order can be introduced into the universe by means of these groupings.<sup>12</sup>

We observe in the literature a vast array of classifications of cultures that serve as an *ad hoc* aim of the researcher. On the micro level, we find Francis L. K. Hsu’s classification of cultures by their dominant dyads. Japan, according to his criteria, is a father-son-dominated society, whereas American culture is dominated by a husband-wife dyad.<sup>13</sup> On the macro level, David Riesman and his associates identified the traditional, inner-directed societies within a scheme related to transitional growth and economic development.<sup>14</sup> The typology that is the closest in its general objectives to our own is, of course, that presented by Benedict, following Spengler’s cultural relativism. The cultural-relativist method of identifying dominant social characters within a culture, a method that may be arranged between two poles of a continuum, suits our methodological purposes. With this method, we can characterize a culture according to its position on the continuum. Never static, this position shifts with time and social change.



Next, we address the nature and viability of a common social character. To Eric Fromm, a social character does not consist of those peculiarities that differentiate people, but of “that part of their character structure that is common to most members of that group.”<sup>15</sup> The social character is, therefore, a common attribute of individuals, ingrained in them by socialization agents, which display the characteristics of a culture.

Riesman, who uses Fromm’s definition of social characters, *mutatis mutandis*, relies on Erik Erikson for the sources and genesis of the social character. Erikson claims, “Systems of child training ... represent unconscious attempts at creating out of human raw material that configuration of attitudes which is the optimum under the tribes’ particular natural conditions and economic-historic necessities.”<sup>16</sup> Erikson’s blending of social Darwinism with Marxist material dialectics is, in our view, too concrete and harsh to explain the volatile concept of social character. We prefer to see the social character through Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s<sup>17</sup> “*collective representation*”, in which acts, symbols, and transitions – from the concrete to the abstract – are displayed in the interaction of groups with their individual members or with other groups. This collective representation involves the transmission of the social character from the group to its young, and from generation to generation, through a process of learning and socialization, and not through heredity as Carl Jung<sup>18</sup> postulated. Yet, when the group implants this social character into the individual, it provides the necessary link between the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic bases of the personality structure.

## The Two Vectors

We propose to describe the two opposing vectors that form the core of our personality theory. 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 a symbol outside the self. In the participation process, the self strives to lose its separate identity by fusing with external entities. Separation, the opposite vector, is the self’s attempt to sever and differentiate itself from its surrounding life forms and objects.

These opposing vectors of participation and separation, the main axis of our theory, are co-developed with three major developmental phases. The first process of separation is birth, an abrupt propulsion from cushioned self-sufficiency in the womb into the strife and struggle 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 various layers of the brain.

We build our premises on these universal separation effects of birth. These effects, in turn, initiate the opposite vector of participation, which is a directional driving force harnessing a diverse assortment of psychic energy towards a union with objects, life forms, or symbols. The newborn is physiologically and psychologically capable of recording these birth-incidental crises, is traumatized by them, and is driven into a lifelong quest for congruity and unification.<sup>19</sup>

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." At this point, the individual self knows that it is not part of its surroundings but a separate entity: the self is not *with* his surroundings but rather *against* it. 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 post-adolescence. In this, the third 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 rites of passage, these socialization agents convey the harsh realities of life, urging the child 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 toward 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 others around him are also perceived as disquieting events, which the self must learn to cope with and accept. Later on, the various demands of the socialization agents to fit within the boundaries of the normative system and so 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, desperately trying to regain the togetherness of his lost fold. In this uphill battle, the individual may choose both legitimate and illegitimate paths, acceptable or deviant avenues.

After the primary biological separation of birth, the 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, the crystallization of the separate “*I*” is effected by the interaction with a nipple that does *not* release milk, and a mother who does *not* ease all pain or alleviate all discomfort.<sup>20</sup> In other words, if neonates had all their needs immediately gratified, they would not emerge from the feeling of unity with their surroundings. This feeling 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 that 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

Similarly, we claim that social separation is not effected, as Sigmund Freud<sup>21</sup> and Erikson<sup>22</sup> postulated, by psychosexual developmental phases, but rather by conflictual normative indoctrination, and by deprivational socialization within the family. 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 order to prepare them for the vicissitudes of adult life.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

The initial 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 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 symbolic 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 the *separant* insertion of the pubescent individual into a normative pigeonhole, sanctioned by society.

The mother, however, serves as a symbol of grace. She represents carefree, participant longing for the forgiveness and irresponsibility of children within the family fold, before they are harnessed to the normative burdens of society. In some tribes, rites of passage from childhood to puberty, such as circumcision, are presided over by the elders, while mothers join in the wailing of their sons.<sup>25</sup> A mythological corroboration of the mother as the image of grace in the eyes of her pubescent son is found in the angel who orders Abraham not to slaughter Isaac. In the iconography of the Offering of Isaac,<sup>26</sup> the angel is invariably depicted as female. It would not be far-fetched, therefore, to regard the female angel as a representation of Isaac's mother, Sarah.

The Isaac Syndrome represents the normative paternal aggression of fathers, aimed at their sons.<sup>27</sup> The essence of the myth of the Offering of Isaac, however, lies in the sacrificial boundaries of the normative systems of society. All normative social indoctrination involves, to a varying degree, curbing the well-being and freedom of the pubescent for the benefit of the collective.

Literature abounds with examples of the sacrificial coercion of children into the carnivorous exigencies of the normative system. Franz Kafka's letters to his father reek with the agonies of a son abused by his father in the name of bourgeois morality.<sup>28</sup> Kafka's relationship with his father was the most likely inspiration for his portrayal of Mr. Samsa, the petit bourgeois father in *The Metamorphosis*,<sup>29</sup> who 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 committing his son to a notorious institution for juvenile delinquents. The father is convinced that the institution stresses and enhances Christian thought and logic.<sup>30</sup> The boy's mother prays for grace and forgiveness, as in the archetypal image of the mother in the iconography of Isaac's Offering. The mother laments that her son, in essence a good boy, is bound to become a hardened criminal in the institution. Stern paternal judgment prevails, however, and the boy, Melchior, is confined to the institution for the heinous crime of having sex with a girl. Wedekind's play focuses on the sacrificial coercion of the

parents, mainly on the suppression of sexual manifestations in the name of social propriety, morality, and religion.

Paternal sanctions and raging admonitions burst forth from Francis Bacon's portrait *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (the *Screaming Pope* series).<sup>31</sup> In this painting, Bacon takes Velasquez's serene portrait of Pope Innocent X, seated in full regalia on his throne, and covers it with the transparent projection of a frozen scream. The Pope's mouth is wide open, and it seems to emit shrieks of horror, howling curses, and shouts of damnation. Could these represent the howls of Bacon's authoritarian father when he learned that his adolescent son was a transvestite? By way of free association, we may also recall the televised interviews with Pope John Paul II whose benign face, that of a good-natured Polish peasant, became hard and stern whenever he reconfirmed the Church's proscriptions of married priests, abortions, and homosexuality.

Indeed, sex remains one of the normative strongholds of the Church, perhaps because of the Church's programming of the manifestation of humanity's sexual roles. The persistent proscription of free expression of sexuality, especially between consenting homosexual adults, induced John Money to label official authorities, both secular and religious, as sexual dictatorships hunting sexual heretics.<sup>32</sup> Money's label is an extension of the Isaac Syndrome to societies and collectives, where the authoritarian figure of Abraham permeates the power structures of society and religion.

Mothers often warn their children when they are being naughty, "Wait till Daddy comes home and I'll tell him what you were up to today." By saying this, 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 toward sons and daughters. The contents of social norms imposed by parental authority vary, however, with the sex of the child. In most patriarchal societies, the son is coerced to undertake the burden of social responsibility, whereas the daughter is harnessed into her feminine roles of marriage, childbearing, and 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.<sup>33</sup> Zeus, Koré's father, was instrumental in her abduction, ejecting his daughter from the family fold and the protection of her mother, delivering her to his hellish brother, Hades.<sup>34</sup> 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 is the social essence of the

betrothals of daughters throughout most of history, lingering in traditional societies today. Fathers give their daughters away in marriage to the appropriate husband, who is mainly chosen according to their father's political calculations, social expectations, and economic needs.

The most striking feminine parallel to the Isaac Syndrome, 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 Greece, his fatherland with the tell-tale implications for the Isaac Syndrome. The authoritarian agency of her father served the exigencies of socio-religious commands, in the same way that the normative authority of Abraham was an extension of Divinity.

Unlike Abraham, however, who never doubts God's commands, Agamemnon wavers, and rages against the need to sacrifice his daughter for the glory of the Greek army and the honor of Hellenic society. 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, the outcome was the same: Isaac and Iphigenia were to be sacrificed 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.<sup>35</sup> Iphigenia, however, was not so willing a victim. In one of the most shattering monologues in 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.<sup>36</sup>

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.”<sup>37</sup> 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 mother within the family fold. For the homosexual Marcel Proust, this longing became so intense that he shut himself in a padded, womb-like room writing volume after volume, idealizing his beloved mother. For the heterosexual Albert Camus 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 in search of the tender friendship of women.<sup>38</sup>

It is possible that the chevaliers’ adoration of women and the troubadours’ odes to ladies’ graces during the Middle Ages, were spurred by the insane trails of the hordes of cross-bearing warriors sacrificed to the waging of impossible wars by a stern absolutist God. The graceful, tender image of the mother-woman was the vision of everything that had been warm and merciful back home, in stark contrast to the squalor and death, which were ordained by a graceless, unforgiving, and uncompromising father-God.

In the original Hebrew of the Bible, as well as in Aramaic and Syriac, the word “grace” is *hessed*, which also means “incestuous”, or “sinful.”<sup>39</sup> This demonstrates, etymologically at least, that the son’s longing for his 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 the subconscious. Primarily, this might explain the boys’ attraction to girls who remind them, directly or symbolically, of their mother, 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 that 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 is outside the scope of the present work.

## The Tantalus Ratio

We conceived of our participation vector as the individual's quest at every particular moment in 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 that states that if man possessed a special master-switch which 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 ever 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 by a gust of wind whenever he tried to reach it. If he bent down to drink from a seemingly fresh and sparkling stream of water, he discovered it to be black mud. 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 distancing from it, as perceived by the individual. The intensity of this strain is determined by the factors comprising the Tantalus Ratio, the motivating force underlying the individual's actions.



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 developmental change for the worse. This leads to a more radical separateness. The mechanisms are "the Devil I know" defenses, which cause the personality to adhere to stable states as lesser evils.

Since the actual regression 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 stage, until it wanes in old age. The strength of the Tantalus Ratio is primarily related to the enormity of the separating forces of 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, is marked by frantic efforts to survive.<sup>40</sup> 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. Yet, this is also the stage at which the neonate experiences the strongest craving to return to his mother's womb, from which he was so brutally expelled.

This craving is in keeping with what Ernest Schachtel denoted as the law of embeddedness.<sup>41</sup> The law 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.<sup>42</sup> 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 John Bowlby has denoted as the "instinct of clinging" 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup>

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 the surrounding objects.

We have relied elsewhere on the oralist offshoot of psychoanalysis to describe the mouth-ego of early orality as aiming to empty the object mother's breast, and hence to destroy the non-obliging object (mother).<sup>45</sup>

## **The Fixation of Personality Types**

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

psychosexual energy is directed toward the erogenous zones that also represent the major psychosexual development phases.<sup>46</sup> When parents, or their surrogates, over-indulge or severely deprive an infant at any given developmental phase, the infant musters a relatively large amount of psychosexual energy in an effort to overcome the frustration generated. In addition, the infant will also harness these energies to create alternative, defensive outlets, which are normal manifestations of psychosexual energy that has 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.<sup>47</sup>

The Freudian unconscious psyche seems to be the perfect database 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 explain how this anchoring comes about. We therefore propose an explanation based on our exposition of the developmental phases of the personality core.<sup>48</sup>

If the transition from one developmental phase to the next is more painful at a given developmental phase than the average harshness perceived by the individual's own experience, a rupture or developmental wound is formed, which psychic energies 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 participation vector and the energies of the Tantalus Ratio repair the injury by covering it with developmental scar tissue, not unlike the scar on a wound. Yet the wound and the tender layers of scar

tissue are still exposed to conflict and more pressure, as the deprivational interaction of the nascent ego with its surroundings is a continuous process. Consequently, the ever-thickening layers of scar tissue, which result from the traumatic fixation, are more like a corn on a toe. The psychic energy moves around the traumatized developmental scar, covering it with excessive mental imprints, very much like the whorls and loops of the skin texture of a corn. The corn is painful, not only because of the pressure, but because the excessive scar tissue makes the whole area more vulnerable, and sensitive.

This metaphor illustrates the nature of fixation. It is the combined outcome of the traumatizing injury and the excessive and frantic patching of developmental scar tissue layers by the psychic energies of the Tantalus Ratio; the harsher the trauma, the thicker the defensive layers of the protective 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 the 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 for which is ever present in the participation vector of our personality core. When separating pressures of growth disturb the dynamic balance of the Tantalus Ratio, or when the individual's interpersonal relationships suffer a disrupting blow, the counter-pressures of released participation catapult the individual to visions of pre-pubic havens and blissful dreams of early orality. Fixation is, therefore, a developmental dam, that traps both the disrupting blows of traumatizing interaction and the countering defenses of the Tantalus Ratio. The anchoring of personality traits to the fixation is the result of this massive concentration of painful experiences and the heaping of defenses in frantic disarray. We only become aware, for instance, of a hand or a tooth when they are painful. In much the same way, a blow to a bruise is much more painful than a similar blow to a healthy part of the body. Consequently, the severity of fixation relates to the magnitude of the developmental trauma and to the corresponding intensity of defenses mustered by the Tantalus Ratio.

## **The Sisyphean and the Tantallic**

Birth is undoubtedly 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-image emerges from a non-differentiated mass only in later orality, when the *I* is confronted by the surrounding objects. This process is the baseline from which the self emerges from 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 fixated before the formation of the self as a “participant-Tantallic personality” type, after the mythical Greek demigod, Tantalus, whose punishment we have already described. If the traumas fixate the personality after the crystallization of the self, the “separant-Sisyphean personality” type is bound to emerge. The Sisyphean personality type relates to the mythical Greek demigod, Sisyphus, condemned to roll a stone to the top of a hill. Whenever he neared the summit, the stone would roll down and Sisyphus had to start again. The Tantallic personality type is inward-bound, ever visualizing and longing for the all-inclusive early orality, while the Sisyphean personality type fixated at later orality, is ever entangled with the vicissitude of an object. The separant-Sisyphus anchors on the inter-relationship with an object, whereas the participant-Tantalus seeks the blissful mystical union. These concepts are the passions kindling the vectors of our personality types. Sisyphus’ stone-object, however, keeps rolling downhill and Tantalus’ mystical fruit incessantly recedes before his eyes. This captures the essence and the irony of the Tantalus Ratio; its strength is measured by unachieved aims, because its fulfillment is not only impossible, but also tantamount to impotence.

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

The concept of the self is anchored on consistency: an individual feels and defines the same self from the moment the separate awareness coagulates, until death. The exceptions to the principles of consistency and

continuity are cases of madness or temporary dissolution or weakening of the self in extreme cases of hallucinations or mystical experiences.

The self, therefore, is the consistent and continuous inner sameness of the individual *vis-à-vis* his environment. The “inner sameness” element of our definition has, no doubt, an Eriksonian flavor to it.<sup>49</sup> For Erikson, “ego identity” is the meaning of this inner sameness to others, whereas for us, the self is the structured barrier between the separate individual as conceived of by the individual himself, and flora, fauna, and inanimate objects that are excluded from 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 the Kabbalist doctrine, *ani* and *ain* (“nothingness”), which have the same Hebrew letters but in a 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 as a 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, therefore, to fully understand the dual nature of our personalities. Our study of the personality is, therefore,