

# 1 "The Jewish Offensive"

## The Reception of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* in Mandatory Jewish Palestine

Eran J. Roitnik

Freud has an assured place in the history of ideas and of science as a man of intellectual courage who turned his back on essentialist views of humanity and on the Darwinist, biologicist, and racist theories that reigned supreme in the psychiatric thinking of his time. He founded a science of subjectivity based on investigation of the unconscious dynamic but universal psychology. Logical mechanisms that lie behind human differences and mental diversity. Paradoxically, in the 1930s, just when the explosive political potential of ethno-psychological and neo-Lamarckian views became apparent, Freud once again took up the idea of the hereditary transmission of character traits, leaving his heirs an enigmatic legacy in the form of the eerie theory of Judaism that he offered in his book *Moses and Monotheism* (1939a). Few texts in his oeuvre have proved as enduringly controversial as the work in which he applied the psychoanalytic tools he had developed over 40 years to an examination of the iconographic representative of the Jewish ethos – Moses, the greatest of the prophets.

In my book *Freud in Zion: Psychoanalysis and the Making of Modern Jewish Identity* (Roitnik, 2012), I searched for the mental and historical conditions under which the reception of Freud's teachings and the practice of psychoanalysis as therapy became possible in Jewish Palestine/Israel during the first half of the twentieth century. My study hypothesized and laid out the particular set of cultural and historical conditions, hopes, and anxieties which made it possible for psychoanalysis to emigrate from Central Europe and flourish in the *Yishuv* – the Jewish society of Palestine under British mandate.

In engaging with Darwinism, Nietzscheanism, socialism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis, Zionist thinking ranged far and wide across the field of modern science and philosophy. These intellectual movements played an important role in the process of secularization that European Jewish society underwent, and provided (sometimes incompatible) justifications, arguments, and values that were appropriated into the Zionist movement's variegated ideological arsenal. Works by Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Freud were widely discussed and debated within the Jewish

community as Zionism was beginning to shape the discourse on the political legitimation of this community and its self-understanding.

Zionist discourse deemed especially important those scholarly works that could offer alternatives to the traditional religious explanations for the existential plight of the Jewish people. Translations of Freud's essays into Hebrew were only second to those of Theodore Herzl and Max Nordau in the four decades that preceded the establishment of the Jewish state. Many of Freud's critics in Jewish Palestine had a penchant for speculating on the relationship between the Jewish origins of the creator of psychoanalysis and his theories. Some even went so far as to claim that his concept of repression should be viewed as an acknowledgment of his faith. The local debate over the Moses essay conflated a number of debates of historical significance. It could therefore be regarded as a particular case study for an interpretive community debating a new Freudian text; without hindsight, refracted through differing historical, ethical, and ideological sensibilities.

The members of the committee that in 1942 awarded the Tchernikovsky translation prize to the Odessa-born Zvi Wislavsky for his Hebrew rendering of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* emphasized that the excellence of his translation of Freud's book lay in its use of the language of the Mishnah and midrash, creating an illusion that "one of our ancients" wrote the original.<sup>1</sup> The committee's statement displayed the prevailing tendency of local *intelligenza* to view Freud's theory as a manifestation of his Jewish origin (Rolnik, 2012). The desire to impart Freud's teaching to Hebrew-language readers in a prophetic-biblical style, and to turn him into a kind of ancient prophet, reached its climax during the 1940s, a formative period for Hebrew culture. The purpose was to make Freud's works part of the Hebrew literary canon, rather than something created outside it. True, since the publication of *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud's works were read eagerly but were not given easy acceptance, even after being "converted" by their translators. In fact, to Hebrew readers, it seemed that the doctor from Vienna who coined the term "repression" had already given away, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, his neurosis regarding his Jewish descent. When the translation came out, the poet Shin Shalom (Shalom Yosef Shapira) published an angry article with the headline "Freud's repressed Judaism." Shalom wrote of Freud's "repressed fundamental experience," manifested in his theory of self-disclosure and confession. He described how he himself broke free of the "initial intoxication" he had felt upon making an acquaintance with Freud's theory, which gave the concept of repression a central place. Shalom related that he had eventually reached the conclusion that he had to judge Freud according to his own standards. Was it just a coincidence that the creator of psychoanalysis was a Viennese Jew of the generation of assimilation, who hoped to find a solution for his own ills in the obliteration of his Jewish self? Shalom had no doubt that the repressed Judaism of Freud and his generation was the root experience behind his theory:

The generational cry of the Jew, who is compelled to repress and conceal his identity and its mission, in order to survive in the world and all the broad wings of this world, and a party to his fate, the great redeemer of that world, himself, originator of the

Herzl and Freud, each in his own way, experienced by the Jewish people, Jews from being ruled by gentiles, is an expression of the way in which Freud's text *Shalom* found its way to the entire Diaspora, which "is of the Nile."

Shin Shalom's angry tirade was written at the height of the Second World War. The Yishuv's leaders and intellectuals, with a tolerant attitude toward the Jewish diaspora, felt a need to leaven their diasporic identity with an amount of condemnation for those who had assimilated into German culture. The Yishuv's intellectual circles, in the latter's last great work, felt a need to be aimed at reminding Freud of his horizons of the originator of psychoanalysis, fellow Jews, whether Zionists or not.

### Impossible Confession

From the moment of its publication, Freud's theory of repression was read by readers – analysts and non-analysts – as a psychology of religion and a confession. It was a myth, a historical work on the origin of monotheism, as well as a political manifesto. It was a monograph on the origin of the Jewish people, as well as a political manifesto. It was a daydream." Edward Said's book with a musicological subtitle, *On the Kind that the composer is himself*, leaving incomplete, unfinished, unpolished. Interest

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The generational cry of the anguished Jewish nation that was compelled to repress and conceal its birth and its explicit name, its desire and its mission, in order to give in to the forceful ruling gentile reality of the world and all that is in it is what gave rise to the crushing and broad wings of this theory. Herzl, a member of Freud's generation and a party to his fate at first, was in fact the great discoverer and great redeemer of that depressed fundamental experience that Freud himself, originator of the theory of repression, could not comprehend. (Shalom, 1942, p. 318)

Herzl and Freud, each in his own way, were products of the repression experienced by the Jewish people. But while the former emancipated the Jews from being ruled by gentiles, Shalom maintained, Freud's theory was an expression of the way in which the Jews repressed their true desires. In Freud's text Shalom found the tragedy of the Jews of the West and of the entire Diaspora, which "is compelled to repress its connection to itself, to fear both the priest and the warrior ... and to cast the newborn son into the Nile."

Shin Shalom's angry tirade about Freud's repressed Judaism was written at the height of the Second World War, at a time when many of the Yishuv's leaders and intellectuals found it difficult to shed their ambivalent attitude toward the Jewish immigrants from Central Europe. They felt a need to leaven their display of empathy and solidarity with no small amount of condemnation for the extent to which German-speaking Jews had assimilated into German cultural life. But the watershed in the way the Yishuv's intellectual circles of the 1930s and 1940s related to Freud was the latter's last great work, *Moses and Monotheism*, a volume that seemed to be aimed at reminding Freud's Jewish readership that the intellectual horizons of the originator of psychoanalysis, and the pressing needs of his fellow Jews, whether Zionist or non-Zionist, could never sit well together.

### Impossible Confession

From the moment of its publication, Freud's book on Moses has taken its readers – analysts and non-analysts alike – by surprise. It addresses the psychology of religion and biblical criticism. It is also a novel that rewrites a myth, a historical work on the emergence of the psychoanalytic idea, a monograph on the origin of neurosis in the individual and in society, as well as a political manifesto and a metaphorical biography. Noting all these elements in *Moses and Monotheism*, Ilse Grubrich-Simitis (1997) termed it a "daydream." Edward Said (2003), for his part, aptly characterized the book with a musicological term, calling it a *Spätwerk*, a late composition, the kind that the composer leaves incomplete and which he writes largely for himself, leaving incompatible elements as they are – temporal, fragmentary, unpolished. Interesting testimony that has not yet been cited in

the large body of work on Freud's Moses' essay can be found in an article published in 1950 in a Hebrew journal by Chaim Bloch (Blach), who studied Hasidism and kabbalah.<sup>2</sup> Bloch reported a meeting with Freud 25 years earlier at which they discussed Moses's origin and what might happen should Freud publish his thoughts on the matter:

Twenty-five years ago I told Sigmund Freud, the eminent scholar, that his study of Moses and the Torah are abominable sacrifices to the anti-Semitic demon. I pleaded with him not to mow down what he had already planted, that the life of the Jewish people depended on him, and I warned him that the end would be that our people's enemies would place him among the traitors and informers.

(Bloch, 1950, p. 101)

This was Bloch's opening to an account of his two encounters with Freud, during which Freud initially expressed his willingness to write an introduction to a book Bloch had written. But the first meeting ended in a major altercation, with Freud stalking out of the room in anger. Their conversation had turned to Judaism and Hasidism, Freud impressing Bloch with his knowledge. The former then produced two typewritten manuscripts and asked for his guest's opinion. "My heart went hollow and my hair stood up," Bloch recalled, "when I saw the headings 'Moses was an Egyptian born and bred,' 'Moses's Torah is the creation of Egyptian magi,' 'The Jews killed Moses,' no less. I read a few pages and my eyes filled with tears" (ibid., p. 102).

Bloch's account of his meeting with Freud around 1925 suggests that Freud already had in hand a manuscript that included the thesis that Moses was an Egyptian who was murdered by the Israelites. If true, this is evidence that *Moses and Monotheism*, the composition of which has always been dated to the years 1933-1938, was, in fact, written some time earlier. Bloch wrote that he told Freud that publication of the manuscript would be disastrous for the Jews, and Freud replied that "The truth causes neither a disaster nor danger." Bloch iterated that "Every man creates whatever truth he likes for himself and that there is no truth in the world as great as silence. The anti-Semites will lick their fingers when they read your studies." Freud responded that "he was repelled by the idea that we are chosen and superior to other nations," and held forth on his negative opinion of religion. To support his claims, he quoted from Theodor Herzl's Zionist novel *Altneuland*. He also cited the claim made by the writer Max Nordau, Herzl's partner in the founding of the Zionist movement, that the Holy Scriptures are a pile of superstitions and traditions from Egypt. Freud linked his manuscript with Nordau's writings:

I will not deny that when I read [Nordau's] book on consensual lies and his sentence on the Holy Scriptures, I decided to take up this problem.

After all, it can be the best of my life and honor to have a proof of his state rather based his conclusions on

At this point, the argu- ment repudiated his state- ment himself to be carried- out. Nordau had never- the- less claim, a conversatio- nal- istic and critic, du- ring taken. Freud produ- ced the latter congratula- tion. Moses and his Torah- istic rumor that he had t- he Holy Scriptures. In t- he Freud also showed- ed *Conventional Lies of C-* on author had not revis- ed scrip- tion of the conv- iction some time. Bloch ex- pressed with him to file awa- y. argu- ed that his new- ly the type cited by the- on new evidence tha-

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After all, it cannot be claimed that Nordau harmed our nation! To the best of my knowledge the Jews admired Nordau when he was alive and honor his memory after his death. Nordau did not offer any proof of his statement that the Torah contains Egyptian traditions, but rather based his arguments on common sense alone. I have based my conclusions on evidence that no eye has yet seen.

(ibid., p. 105)

At this point, the argument grew heated. Bloch claimed that Nordau had repudiated his statements about the Bible and had regretted allowing himself to be carried away by gentile biblical critics. Freud claimed that Nordau had never recanted. Bloch adduced evidence in support of his claim, a conversation Nordau had with Reuven Breinin, a Zionist journalist and critic, during which he acknowledged that he had been mistaken. Freud produced a letter he had received from Nordau in which the latter congratulated him for "your courage to uncover the truth about Moses and his Torah" and complained that the newspapers had spread a rumor that he had told Breinin he regretted what he had said about the Holy Scriptures. In the letter, Nordau denied the allegation categorically. Freud also showed Bloch the most recent edition of Nordau's book *The Conventional Lies of Our Civilization* (1913) to demonstrate to Bloch that its author had not revised his critical attitude toward the Bible. Bloch's transcription of the conversation indicates that the argument went on for quite some time. Bloch expressed his reservations, censured Freud, pleaded with him to file away his study of Moses – all to no avail. Freud even argued that his new findings were not based on vague ancient sources of the type cited by the Hebrew author Micha Josef Berdichevsky, but, rather, on new evidence that could not be denied.

Max Nordau's *The Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*, which condemns religion as a falsehood, was published in 1883 and was a great success (Gilman, 1993). The title does not appear in the bibliographies of Freud's works, nor was it in the library Freud brought to London. Yet, if we take Bloch's report at face value, Freud was acquainted not just with Nordau's book but also with Berdichevsky's writing on the subject. This is a new and interesting claim, especially in light of the fact that neither is cited anywhere in the writings of Freud published so far. Freud was almost certainly referring to Berdichevsky's great work *Sinai and Grizim*, in which he sought to prove that a critical reading of the Bible, Mishnah, Tannaitic, Talmudic, and rabbinic literature throughout the ages reveals an unending conflict between centers of power and spiritual leaders. It is hard to resist the temptation to speculate about why Freud chose not to cite Nordau's and Berdichevsky's studies in support of his ideas. The most obvious answer is that the writings of these two men were part of a scholarly discourse of a particularistic Jewish nature debated within the context of the Zionist movement. Citing them would have directed the debate over the

figure of Moses from its innovative psychoanalytic context and restricted it to its traditional theological and historical aspects. Freud certainly must have known, however, that, in the final analysis, this strategy would not safeguard his book from a "Jewish offensive."

When Bloch saw that his claims had been countered, he tried another strategy. "The measure that a man uses to evaluate others is used to evaluate him," he told Freud, quoting a passage from the Mishnah. "Thousands of years from now some investigator will appear who will provide murky evidence that Prof. Sigmund Freud, originator of psychoanalytic science, was an Egyptian and his teachings are Egyptian, and the members of his generation killed him." Freud was not alarmed by the possibility that some future scholar might similarly conjecture that the founder of psychoanalysis, was not really Jewish. "And so what if they do?" he replied. "May it be - the principal thing is that my theory endure." Furthermore, in his earlier work *The Moses of Michaelangelo* (1914), it is already apparent that one thing that attracted Freud to the figure of the prophet and to identify with him was the fact that Moses reached the highest spiritual level within reach of humankind: the ability to set aside his personal emotions for the good of, and in the name of, the goal to which he had dedicated himself. Freud's equanimity induced Bloch to offer a less scholarly and more sarcastic rejoinder: "Have you also examined the list of births and deaths in Egypt so that you have unimpeachable evidence that Moses was of Egyptian extraction and that the Jews killed him?"

Freud felt the sting. "I won't write the introduction to your book and I don't want to see you again," he snapped and strode out of the room. Bloch was left in shock. When the two ran into each other on the street a few years later, Bloch was surprised to discover that Freud had forgotten the episode; neither did he even recall that they had ever met. He asked Bloch to remind him what their conversation had been about and why it had ended so badly. Bloch recounted the story and Freud recollected the conversation. "I remember your insolence, and I indeed don't want to see you again," he said, and walked off." (ibid., p. 107.)

Much of the literature on *Moses and Monotheism* mentions that a draft of the manuscript included a subtitle: "A Historical Novel." Freud's letters to Arnold Zweig and Max Eitingon show that the subtitle was Eitingon's suggestion, one of many he offered as "safety measures" intended to minimize the uproar that the book could be expected to set off among its Jewish readers:

Since we live at a time so close in its spirit to the time of the Inquisition, it would be legitimate to take the same precautions taken in that time. Let's equip Moses with a subtitle that will appease its dangerous opponents, such as for example "A Historical-Psychological Novel." We know, after all, the amount of truth that novels conceal. One thing is certain - as opposed to Arnold Zweig's advice, I believe

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that publishing this work privately or anonymously will not provide sufficient protection. And another thing about which we can undoubtedly be certain: the work must come out in the framework of the [psychoanalytic] publishing house. ... Still, the idea of publishing a book by you in Palestine, privately, is a wonderful and entertaining idea. Unfortunately, however, I must oppose the idea. It is simply not practical.

(Eitingon to Freud, October 14, 1934, in Freud & Eitingon, 2004, p. 881)

Eitingon was apprehensive about how reaction to the book would affect the acceptance of psychoanalysis in the Yishuv. Rumors about Freud's plan to publish a book about Moses had already spread through Palestine's Jewish community. Yehuda Dvir-Dwosis, who had translated other works by Freud, wrote to him to ask: "In light of the great travails of the Jewish people in these times, has the time not come to answer the question with which you concluded the introduction to the Hebrew edition of your Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis: What is it that makes me Jewish?" (Dvir-Dwosis to Freud, November 30, 1938: courtesy of Ora Rafael)

In his reply to Dvir-Dwosis, Freud dispersed some of the clouds of mystery that surrounded what he had written eight years previously:

I have nothing to add or revise in what I wrote then. The mysterious sentence to which you refer relates to the question about the way in which our common tradition manifests itself in our psychic life – a complex problem of a purely psychological nature [...] My next book, about Moses and monotheism, will be issued at the beginning of the year in English and German. Of course its translation into the Holy Tongue will gratify me greatly. It is an extension of the subject discussed in Totem and Taboo, applied to the history of the Jewish religion. I ask that you take into account that the material in this work is particularly likely to offend Jewish sensibilities to the extent that these [sensibilities] are not interested in submitting themselves to the authority of science.

(Freud to Dvir-Dwosis, December 2, 1938: AFM)

And, on June 28, 1938, Freud wrote to "Meister Arnold" (Zweig), arguably his favorite émigré interlocutor during the 1930s, who was living in Haifa: "Could you imagine that my arid essay could, even if it were to fall into the hands of a man whose heritage and education had made him into a believer, unsettle his faith?" (Freud & Zweig, 1970, p. 163).

The responses to *Moses and Monotheism* from intellectuals and psychoanalysts around the world spanned the spectrum. But the book clearly reverberated particularly strongly in the Yishuv years before it



became a popular subject for debate in the historiography of psychoanalysis. The reactions came in the form of letters and critical articles written by scholars, personal letters from psychoanalysts to Freud, and a lively public debate carried out in the Hebrew press. There was even one public letter written by a citrus grower, which he published in the country's most important literary magazine. Yisrael Doryon, a Jerusalem-based writer and physician who was then working on a book on the Austrian philosopher Josef Popper-Lynkeus, immediately wrote to Freud to report that he had discovered an identical idea – that Moses was an Egyptian – in Lynkeus's book *The Fantasies of a Realist*. Freud related to Doryon that it was a great honor to discover that he owed his idea about Moses's Egyptian origins to Lynkeus. He was unable to tell Doryon with certainty "exactly how Popper-Lynkeus's *Fantasies*" had found its way into his work, but he reminded Doryon that the innovativeness of his book on Moses lay not in its conclusions, but in the way he reached them (Doryon to Freud, September 15, 1938; Freud to Doryon, October 7, 1938; FCLC).

Indeed, the matter of Moses's true identity is not central in the work. Its principal contribution lies in the role played by Moses in bringing the monotheistic doctrine to the Hebrews, and the way that that belief shaped Jewish identity through the mechanism of "inheritance of memory-traces of the experience of our ancestors, independently of direct communication and of the influence of education by the setting of an example"; the "assertion that the archaic heritage of human beings comprises not only dispositions but also subject-matter – memory-traces of the experience of earlier generations." Without using the term *Nachträglichkeit* explicitly in the Moses study, Freud used the historical riddle concerning the origins of Jewish monotheism in order to make a revolutionary link between the psychoanalytic clinic and the theory of history, individual and group psychology. The results, however tentative, are far reaching for both the theory of history and psychoanalysis. The development of Jewish monotheism over the generations is akin to the clinical course of traumatic neurosis over the life of an individual, where dual temporality of the trauma and the latency period are the crucial moments (Rolnik, 2001; Eickhoff, 2006). Equally sophisticated is the essay's contribution to the understanding of anti-Semitism as a trans-historical unconscious and overdetermined social phenomenon. Freud used the figure of Moses to iterate his claim that racial and intellectual differences, not Jewish religion and practices, stood between the Jews and their Christian environment. These differences kept the Jews distinct from all other nations in a way that does not permit complete integration, but only superficial cultural assimilation (Rolnik, 2016).

Why did Freud devote his final strength to a speculative thesis about the extraction of the leader of the Hebrews and the implications of Moses's life for the destiny of his people? One of the answers to this question can be provided by another Jewish thinker, perhaps not so well known

to psychoanalytic as a critical nexus. In many ways, Freud (Asher Ginzburg), that religion and to uncover the deeper imagination. If this we will be able to times, revealed to Moses, like Freud's his creative power ology and history. In the truth Freud saw the figure of Moses show view, it made no difference leader named Moses who reflected the Jewish not an archaeological tremendous influence fixed in the nation's aeological figure. I

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The most salient is that he is a "man he is a person who believed in, and with sublime values. The objectivity, the fact world. Divine truth of an individual, provided a Freudian revelation at the very voice of God, was

to psychoanalytic readers, who also viewed Moses, in his 1912 essay, as a critical nexus of mythos and logos, rationalism and religious faith. In many ways, Freud's answer is surprisingly like that of Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginzburg), the founder of spiritual Zionism. Both men maintained that religion and tradition should be examined scientifically in order to uncover the deepest levels of the human psyche's thinking, feeling, and imagination. If this is done consistently, without anti-religious prejudices, we will be able to uncover the depths of human truth that were, in ancient times, revealed to humankind as divine truth. Ahad Ha'am's essay on Moses, like Freud's work on the same figure, shows him at the peak of his creative powers.<sup>3</sup> It opens by making a distinction between archaeology and history. In his view, archaeology is the study of "material truth," the truth Freud sought in his book. But, wrote Ahad Ha'am, the biblical figure of Moses should not be seen as a "true" archaeological figure. In his view, it made no difference whether or not there actually was an ancient leader named Moses. The Moses of the Bible was a mythological figure who reflected the Jewish nation's ideal view of itself. The fact that he was not an archaeological figure did not in any way diminish the figure's tremendous influence. The prophet as portrayed in the people's imagination, fixed in the nation's collective consciousness, was more real than any archaeological figure. It shaped Jewish experience and its historical path:

Surely it is obvious that the real great men of history, the men, that is, who have become forces in the life of humanity, are not actual, concrete persons who existed in a certain age. There is not a single great man in history of whom the popular fancy has not drawn a picture entirely different from the actual man; and it is this imaginary conception, created by the masses to suit their needs and their inclinations, that is the real great man, exerting an influence which abides in some cases for thousands of years - this, and not the concrete original who lived a brief period in the actual world, and was never seen by the masses in his true likeness.

(Ahad Ha'am, 1912, p. 306)

The most salient characteristic of Moses, according to Ahad Ha'am, is that he is a "man of truth" and a "man of extremes." In other words, he is a person who saw life as it really is, who adhered to the path he believed in, and who rose above his selfish interests in order to realize his sublime values. The sublime validity of these values derives from their objectivity, the fact that they express a realistic and precise view of the world. Divine truth is simple, absolute, objective truth. It is not the truth of an individual, but, rather, the truth for everyone. Ahad Ha'am even provided a Freudian psychological explanation for Moses's experience of revelation at the burning bush. He argued that the voice Moses heard, the voice of God, was the voice of the national spirit that Moses bore in his

heart from the time of his forgotten childhood, which was later, following his education in Pharaoh's palace, covered up and shunted aside in his adult life. This repressed memory suddenly surfaced in Moses's psyche in the wake of two incidents. The first was when he killed the Egyptian taskmaster he saw beating a Hebrew slave, and the second was when he encountered two Hebrews fighting each other. In the latter instance, when Moses told them to stop, one of them castigated Moses for murdering the Egyptian and trying to conceal his crime. As a result, Moses fled for his life. He tried to forget what had happened but did not succeed. His flight weighed on his conscience. But then came the most important event of all: he awakened from his "fainting fit [and] temporary loss of consciousness" and understood that he had fled not from his personal destiny but rather from that of his people (cf. Schweid, 1985). Clearly, the Moses of Ahad Ha'am epitomizes a post-traumatic individual in the analytic sense of the word.

In the monologue with which he concludes his book *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Intermittent* Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1991) wrote that the theory of Oedipal morality that Freud put in final form in his book on Moses is incontrovertible proof of Moses's "non-Jewish" origin. The interminable repetition of the repressed, Yerushalmi argued, is the precise opposite of the Jewish telos that looks to a specific future. Yerushalmi's sweeping conclusion was that Freud hoped that psychoanalysis would gradually become an alternative Jewish religion, devoid of all transcendental, metaphysical, and irrational components.

I think that in your innermost heart you believed that psychoanalysis is itself a further, if not final, metamorphosed extension of Judaism, divested of its illusory religious forms, but retaining its essential monotheistic characteristics, at least as you understood and described them. In short, I think you believed that just as you are a godless Jew, psychoanalysis is a godless Judaism.

(Yerushalmi, 1991)

Just as Freud's Egyptian Moses is the outsider who brings the Israelites the tidings of monotheism, Freud the Jew is the outsider who brings psychoanalysis to the world. More recently, in *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (2001), Eric Santner has taken a less radical approach to the psychoanalytic project, one that reconciles it with the philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig, a German-Jewish philosopher of the early twentieth century. Santner proposed that these two post-Nietzschean thinkers were classic representatives of secular theology. If there was any inherent Jewish dimension to psychoanalytic thinking, it was reducible to the concept that psychic healing is a type of Exodus from Egypt, in a more general way – it means giving up the national project and the search for a "home" (Santner, 2001).

Edward Said read *European* (2003). For with the Other, or, European." Both Mo the founder of psych Jewish Jews" (Deut operated simultane These writers not o conception as Jews, concept of identity both Said and Santr his roots in a tribe t expression of Freud' home and to the Je so doing, both Said Yerushalmi to the Fr role that a psychoan tion of groups, natio like Moses's, was, a psychology of the in if heterogeneous and their source in influ tory. The paradox in inability of a whole cissistic search for th different. Rather, the spirituality through t and unpleasant with is a lesson to be learn sible only if we miti for disavowal and ac within its boundaries.

It follows that whe at the truth behind M his people's "nationa essay would not only also help mitigate a p solipsistic tendencies. Yishuv's reaction to th

### The Jewish Offensi

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Edward Said reached a similar conclusion in his essay *Freud and the Non-European* (2003). For Said, Moses became paradigmatic for the encounter with the Other, or, to use Said's post-colonial language, with the "non-European." Both Moses, the founder of Jewish self-awareness, and Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, should, thus, be placed among those "non-Jewish Jews" (Deutscher, 1968) such as Spinoza, Marx, and Heine, who operated simultaneously from within and outside their Jewish identities. These writers not only stress the universal imperative within their self-conception as Jews, but also mark that intermediate space in which the concept of identity manifests itself in general. In their reading of Freud both Said and Santner countered the banal claim that Freud's search for his roots in a tribe that adopted Moses as a leader was no more than an expression of Freud's yearning to return to his and his parents' childhood home and to the Jewish tradition he had shed during his adult life. In so doing, both Said and Santner did, in my opinion, more justice than Yerushalmi to the Freudian outlook on the concept of identity and on the role that a psychoanalytically informed leadership can play in the formation of groups, nations and in politics in general. Freud's Jewish identity, like Moses's, was, a partial, broken identity that acknowledged that the psychology of the individual, like that of the collective, contains within it heterogeneous and fortuitous elements and identifications that have their source in influences lying outside consciousness and personal history. The paradox in the Freudian conception of identity derived from the inability of a whole and integrated identity to be achievable via a narcissistic search for the like, aided by the expulsion or evacuation of the different. Rather, the Jews elevated their capacity for abstract thinking and spirituality through the incorporation of the foreign, different, stressful, and unpleasant within the boundaries of the self, or the group. If there is a lesson to be learnt from the history of the Jews is that identity is possible only if we mitigate the individual as well as the group's propensity for disavowal and acknowledge the presence of the foreign (or the Other) within its boundaries.

It follows that when Freud sarcastically declared that he intended to get at the truth behind Moses's "true identity," even if it meant undermining his people's "national interests," he might have thought that his Moses essay would not only shed light on the rise of anti-Semitism, but would also help mitigate a particular Jewish nationalist response to it: Zionism's solipsistic tendencies. That such tendencies existed was proved by the Yishuv's reaction to the book.

### The Jewish Offensive

A few months after Freud received Dvir-Dwosis's letter, Max Eitingon (who founded the Palestine Psychoanalytic Society in 1934) reported to him that the Yishuv was awash with rumors about the content of his new

book, and that he had gained opponents even though none of his critics had yet read it in its entirety. Shortly after the publication date, Eitingon met for the first time with Martin Buber, whom he considered one of the most influential critics of psychoanalysis on the Yishuv's intellectual scene. Following the meeting, he notified Freud that, while he thought he had got through his incisive conversation with the philosopher with his honor intact, there could be no doubt that psychoanalysis in Palestine had a determined nemesis in Buber. While Freud's assumptions about the etiology of the dream or on totemism were unacceptable to Buber, he saw no need to voice his views. But when it came to *Moses and Monotheism*, Buber informed Eitingon that he "could no longer remain silent," and that he intended to come out with a public statement condemning the book (letter dated February 16, 1939, in Freud & Eitingon, 2004, pp. 918-920). Buber and "his sanctimonious pronouncements" against the psychoanalytic theory of dreams did not cost Freud any sleep. "Moses is much more vulnerable and I am prepared for the Jewish offensive on it," he assured Eitingon (Freud to Eitingon, March 5, 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 920-921). In 1945, when Buber published his own book on Moses, he rejected the approach of Bible scholars who cast doubt on the historicity of this Hebrew leader and wrote "that a scholar of so much importance in his own field as Sigmund Freud could permit himself to issue so unscientific a work, based upon groundless hypotheses, as his *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), is regrettable" (Buber, 1958, p. 7).

Eitingon himself had a hard time with *Moses and Monotheism*. Apparently, he read drafts of the manuscript prior to publication. His letter of thanks to Freud betrays the bewilderment of even Freud's most loyal admirers, especially his disciples in Palestine, over this work. Eitingon's ambivalence was evident between his lines of praise. He seems to have realized that the book could shut the door on his teaching psychoanalysis at the Hebrew University. Establishing a chair in psychoanalytic studies now seemed further away than ever.

There is something exceptionally symbolic in the fact that your book on Moses arrived here on the Passover holiday, about which the Haggadah relates that God took the Jews out of Egypt "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm" [Eitingon wrote this phrase in the original Hebrew, but in German letters]. One can somehow sense the analogy in your book. Piercing logic, and a charm that cannot be withstood. That is how you bring the reader close to you in the final section, repeating for him the difficult arguments you make in Part II. It is a fine book.

(Eitingon to Freud, April 11, 1939, in Freud & Eitingon, 2004, p. 923)

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The Tel-Aviv b lytic societies of Jerusalem Societ the book's struct different from the had conveyed to ject at hand and t aesthetic, in *Mose suppressed his o ledge,"* Wulff wr work of Freud's with a discussion his book the 'Mo Whole may even bottom, yet it ne an inner truth of

The Hebrew p space for all thos against Moses!" s (Kaminka, 1939). farmer, Nachum. to link his critic buy goods grow queried, relate on lectual and spirit In an open letter zinc, *Moznayyim*, rebuked those w sea our spiritual wide to concepts

Two weeks later Eitingon informed Freud that "some excitement" was evident in the public's reaction to the book (letter dated April 30, 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 924-925).

In May 1939, the Palestine Psychoanalytic Society convened a special meeting at which its members heard a lecture on the volume by Erich Gumbel, at the time Eitingon's senior candidate in training, who would soon become the Jerusalem Psychoanalytic Institute's first graduate (Gumbel to Freud, May 22, 1939; Archives of Freud Museum, London). The task of surveying this complex work was not an easy one. Even readers accustomed to reading Freud found that this book upset them. In his speech at this exceptional meeting, Eitingon intimated that the time might come when people would be skeptical of Freud's Jewish origins (Eitingon, 1950).

The Tel-Aviv based analyst Moshe Wulff (a former member of the analytic societies of Vienna, Russia and Berlin) was the first member of the Jerusalem Society to publish his impressions of the work. He noted that the book's structure and the wealth of subjects addressed made it much different from the rest of Freud's writings. While in his other books Freud had conveyed to his readers a feeling that he was totally on top of the subject at hand and that the main issues he faced as a writer were stylistic and aesthetic, in *Moses and Monotheism* Moses had "overwhelmed" Freud and suppressed his organizational and conceptual abilities. "I must acknowledge," Wulff wrote, "that I have never been so profoundly affected by a work of Freud's as I have been by this one." And Wulff ended his paper with a discussion of the "eternal question" of truth: "And so Freud called his book the 'Moses Novel.' Such things do occur in novels and in art: the Whole may even be fictitious, invented, the fruit of phantasy from top to bottom, yet it nevertheless remains the highest and most profound truth, an inner truth of the human soul" (Wulff, 1950, pp. 124-142).

The Hebrew press seethed and only with difficulty was able to provide space for all those who wanted to fulminate about the book. "Freud's war against Moses!" shouted a headline in the religious Zionist daily *Hatzofeh* (Kaminka, 1939). Moses defenders came from all walks of life: a citrus farmer, Nachum Perlman, was deeply affected by Freud's book. He sought to link his critique to the campaign then under way to persuade Jews to buy goods grown or manufactured in the Yishuv. Did the campaign, he queried, relate only to material items, or should not Jews also boycott intellectual and spiritual imports which undermine Jewish national interests? In an open letter to Freud published in the Yishuv's leading literary magazine, *Moznayyim*, headlined "Professor Freud and buying local," Perlman rebuked those who allowed themselves "to cast into the depths of the sea our spiritual possessions and, in spiritual matters, to open all gates wide to concepts entirely foreign to Judaism" (Perlman to Freud, July

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2, 1939: AFM). Perlman did not simply write his open letter to Freud in Hebrew. He translated it into German and sent it directly to Freud, adding a covering letter:

I presume to address you, sir, as I do below, despite being no more than a layman with regard to your scientific profession. I write from the point of view of a Jew who has lived in the Land of Israel for the last thirteen years, not by coincidence, but because he feels that the continued existence of the Jewish people is something valuable for all of humanity. But because I am, sir, as I have already said, no more than a layman, I do not permit myself to critique your book *Moses* but only to ask you one question. You must certainly know, sir, that at this time a large number of our brethren view the results of Biblical criticism as the actual content of the Jewish people's literature, without thinking through to themselves that in doing so they are cutting off the branch on which they sit, a thing that is on the one hand consistent, since it is known that we, the Jews, are "air people [...]. But not only does the reading public welcome this science, so do intelligent people and well known Jewish writers among those who steer them, without considering the fact that all the archaeological excavations that have been conducted so far that contain any sort of indication regarding the Torah all confirm the words of the Bible and prove the flimsiness of Biblical criticism.

(Perlman to Freud, July 2, 1939: Archives of the Freud Museum, London)

Was not affirmation or repudiation of Biblical criticism by Jews intended, whether they were aware of it or not, to justify their betrayal of the foundations of the Jewish religion and the Torah's commandments, Perlman asked Freud. He answered the question himself:

I believe that you, Herr Professor, are the best man to offer a full answer to my question, and I believe that in answering this question you will have the privilege of doing more for Jewish existence than you did with your book *Moses*.

(*ibid.*; the original letter is reproduced in Rolnik, 2010)

Raphaël DaCosta of Jerusalem also wrote to Freud after reading the book. Unlike Perlman, he enjoyed it immensely. Nevertheless, he was of the opinion that the evidence Freud had adduced was insufficient. Freud based his claims on the thesis that the figure of Moses was actually composed of two different men, each of whom represented a distinct set of beliefs. This had to be the case, Freud maintained, because the differences between the two deities represented in the Torah are so huge that it would be difficult to conceive that they had been put forward by

a single priest. DaCosta's position had it not been for an Egyptian priest. The priest was appointed to represent the deity on April 23, 1939: AFM).

Freud took the position that seems even to have been taken by Moses. Moses was actually a priest. He replied to

There is indeed a Moses that I am not of great value to Moses, who is of great value to do without the

Another point is that the book should have been whether the two be mutually exclusive. Biblical criticism with faith? What is the theological truth and the historical truth, which he is a religious truth?

In *The Future of a Civilization* on the order of religious thinking of all things, sexuality, and that must be overcome. Freud (1930). But Freud's view is more nuanced view of religious faith. In *Moses* religious and subjective did not present these positions that a person gave historical truth and moral truths. It did not any type, but, rather, allowed phantasmic in a dynamic representation of historical truth to each material truth in the goals of the psychoanalysis. To deprive Freud of the

a single priest. DaCosta wrote that he would have accepted this proposition had it not implied that the Israelites had chosen the wrathful Egyptian priest. The other priest, the merciful man from Midian, was not appointed to represent Aton, the civilized sun god (DaCosta to Freud, April 23, 1939: AFM).

Freud took the reservations of this Jerusalem reader seriously, and seems even to have regretted his speculative proposal that the biblical Moses was actually a composite of two men, a "good" priest and a "bad" priest. He replied to DaCosta:

There is indeed a difference in the natures of the two figures called Moses that I am unable to explain, but it could be said that the matter is not of great significance. We know very little about the second Moses, who is of course an invention of mine, and I could have made do without the comment about his even-temperedness.

(Freud to DaCosta, May 2, 1939: AFM)

Another point DaCosta made to Freud concerned the implications the book should have for the Jewish view of the world. He asked Freud whether the two beliefs, in religious truth and in scientific truth, were mutually exclusive. In other words, is there a way to reconcile rationalism with faith? Would Freud permit his fellow Jews to maintain their theological truth along with material truth, or did he insist that historical truth, which he recreated in his psychoanalytic studies, replace religious truth?

In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud had already taken a firm position on the order of precedence of varying truths. He claimed that religious thinking of all kinds was simply the civilized incarnation of infantile sexuality, and that religion was tantamount to a neurosis that needed to be overcome. Freud repeats this position in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). But Freud's work on Moses seems to have led him to a somewhat more nuanced view, implying a certain revision of his conception of religious faith. In *Moses and Monotheism*, he acknowledged two truths, one religious and subjective, and the other archaeological and objective. He did not present these as contradictory, but rather as complementary two positions that a person can move between. In the newer work, Freud gave historical truth itself the special status of being able to include several truths. It did not derive from an unambiguous rational decision of any type, but, rather, from an ongoing process of give and take that also allowed phantasmic, mythological, and subjective elements to play a role in a dynamic representation of reality. The grafting of religious and historical truth to each other (in the absence of the ability to recreate lost material truth in the positivist sense) constituted one of the most important goals of the psychoanalytic project. The ability to tolerate doubt did not deprive Freud of the right to feel that he was persuaded of the truth of



his conclusions. Freud repeatedly addressed the question of certainty vs. skepticism throughout *Moses and Monotheism*, and, in doing so, re-enacted and demonstrated for his readers the convoluted nature of psychoanalytic epistemology. As Blass (2003) has pointed out, hovering between conviction and doubt, Freud's *Moses*, and in particular his employment of the Puzzle metaphor in the text, is a contribution to psychoanalytic epistemology and clinical theory. It is in this later work of his that Freud gave final expression to the dialectic view of the concept of "truth" in its unique psychoanalytic form. He stressed the tentative and speculative nature of his account, but did not let this prevent him from recognizing that he was approaching the truth. Indeed, his reply to DaCosta shows that as soon as he reached conclusions about historical truth, he could not put in its place another truth simply because the latter was worth believing in from a religious point of view. Freud wrote to DaCosta:

I am amazed at the way you succeed in bringing together the findings of scientific investigation and belief in the accuracy of the biblical account. I myself would be incapable of such acrobatics. But who gave you the right to grant the Bible a monopoly on the truth? All you are saying is that I believe because I believe.

(Letter dated May 2, 1939; AFM)

The question, then, is what is the nature of that truth that Freud proclaims? He opens his book hesitantly, qualifying his assertions, but, as the book proceeds into the third and final part, he seems to become more and more certain of himself, until, by the end, he states his thesis unambiguously. Did Freud convince himself on purely scientific grounds, or was he asserting a belief? After all, the scholar must have no less faith in historical and scientific truth than the religious person has in biblical truth. Freud tried to resolve this paradox by skipping back and forth between two of his favorite genres, the historical novel and the clinical case study. It becomes clear to the reader that *Moses and Monotheism* is neither a positivist historical account nor speculative psychology. Rather, it is a readers' response text devoted to examining the theory of psychoanalytic epistemology and the persuasive force that the truth – whether about the identity of the Hebrew leader or about the true value of the autobiographical memory that emerges during psychoanalytic treatment – can elicit from the person who seeks it. Freud thought that the historical novel genre could enable him, even though he viewed himself neither as a historian nor as a novelist, to address the question of the identity of this biblical figure in accordance with the rules of the clinical case study, in which the act of reconstruction is accomplished through the integration of historical and clinical evidence into the subjective narrative. Freud's biography of Moses can, thus, be seen as the last case study left to us by the creator of psychoanalysis.

## Concluding Remarks

"There is something... novelist A. B. Yehoshua... so intensely and so... searching for more... it" (Yehoshua, 2005)... leader of the Jewish... told us, whether his... a nation, is the pro... splits and repression... if not as an example,... arating the ideal of p... psychoanalytic proje... never rejected the J... rejected bourgeois li... free from the constr... Ironically, in this se... grant society, despi... immensity of anxieti... tied their personal r... of Israel. Zionism, to... very badly needed h...

## Notes

- 1 Prize committee dis... Wislavsky, January... introduction to the...
- 2 Rabbi Chaim Bloch... published extensive... and correspondenc... New York, and beca...
- 3 Freud knew Ahad F...

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### Concluding Remarks

"There is something ridiculous about an ancient nation," writes Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua, "that is still, after some 3,300 years, hammering so intensely and so obsessively at the enigma of its identity, tirelessly searching for more and more explanations, definitions and versions of it" (Yehoshua, 2005). Freud's explorations of the "true identity" of Moses, leader of the Jewish nation, address this very conundrum. Identity, Freud told us, whether historical or psychological, of an individual, a group or a nation, is the product of mixture and borrowing, and always includes splits and repressions. Freud's fractured Jewish identity could thus serve, if not as an example, then at least as a metaphor for the yawning abyss separating the ideal of pure identity that nurtured the Zionist project and the psychoanalytic project, born in the Diaspora. Unlike the Zionists, Freud never rejected the Jew of the Exile, and, unlike the socialists, he never rejected bourgeois life. He did not pretend to be designing a "new man" free from the constraints of frustration or guilt, much less a "new Jew." Ironically, in this sense, the philo-psychoanalysis of the Yishuv's immigrant society, despite its contradictions and paradoxes, testified to the immensity of anxieties, anguish, and doubts that were the lot of those who tied their personal redemption to reborn Jewish nationalism in the Land of Israel. Zionism, to put it simply, might not have agreed with Freud, but very badly needed him.

### Notes

- 1 Prize committee discussions, not dated, and letter of Mayor Israel Rokach to Wislavsky, January 29, 1945 (Tel Aviv City Archives). Max Fittingon wrote the introduction to the Hebrew translation.
- 2 Rabbi Chaim Bloch (Blach) emigrated from Galicia to Vienna in 1915. There he published extensively on Jewish legends and became known for his interviews and correspondence with famous Jewish scholars. In 1938, he immigrated to New York, and became known for his essays against Zionism.
- 3 Freud knew Ahad Haam personally (see Rolnik, 2012).

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## Editor's

Lawrence J. E

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# On Freud's "Moses and Monotheism"

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