
ASPECTS OF THE JEWISH UNCONSCIOUS

by

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My wife has recently taken up a job as a social worker for a Jewish communal agency. Her previous experience was outside the Jewish world and when I asked her if there were any differences immediately apparent in working only with Jews, she said, "Yes, our meetings are longer, and **much** louder". Although she said this jokingly, all of us recognise that we Jews love to talk - and if we are honest, we would say that we love to talk about ourselves.

This preoccupation with ourselves may be seen in the disproportionate number of Jewish clients seeing counsellors and therapists and analysis. And the fact that a high proportion of these professionals are themselves Jewish is not coincidental. For Jews, "Coincidence is not a kosher word". (So remarks one of Isaac Bashevis Singer's recent heroes, the penitent Joseph Shapiro). Coincidence is not a kosher word because situations have meaning, or can be given meaning, that might not always be self-evident at first glance.

So, I think that this contemporary Jewish quest **for** help and self-understanding on the one hand, and on the other hand the need to help others in **their** search for

understanding - this is not coincidental. Rather they are two inwardly-related aspects of a single, deeply felt - but perhaps largely unconscious - struggle that is taking place in the souls of Jews in this century.

At the heart of this inner struggle is a tremendous insecurity about our **personal** Jewish identity and our **collective** purpose. It is the roots and dimensions of this insecurity that I want to speak about. But first some remarks about our souls.

When I say that this struggle, this wrestling, about our identity has been taking place in our souls I am reminded of the wisdom of Bruno Bettelheim's recent drawing-to-our attention of the centrality of the soul in Freud's thinking. Freud coined the term "Psychoanalyse" to describe his work. "Psychoanalysis" - the examination of the soul. Bettelheim reminds us that erroneous or inadequate translations into English of Freud's writings have distorted our understanding of Freud's intentions. What we have inherited in translation, Bettelheim characterises in this way:

"abstract, depersonalized, highly theoretical, erudite and mecha-

nized - in short, "scientific" - statements about the strange and very complex workings of our mind. Instead of instilling a deep feeling for what is most human in all of us, the translations attempt to lure the reader into developing a "scientific" understanding of the unconscious and how it conditions much of our behaviour". (1)

So, if we are to talk of "Judaism and Psychotherapy", I felt the need to reflect with you on the significance of the term "Psyche" in psychotherapy.

It is a term full of the richest meaning, speaking of the essence of our being, our being human. This century's revolution in the conception of the human personality after Freud, stems from his emphasis on "examining the neglected and hidden aspects of our souls" and coming to "understand the roles they play in our lives".

So, the insecurity in our souls about our identity and purpose is the theme I would like to explore with you, but not in an abstract or theoretical way. Rather I would like to present as we progress a kind of case-study to illustrate some aspects of this insecurity about what we **are** as Jews, and what our **purpose** should be here in this world.

One readily identifiable outer manifestation of this inner insecurity is the perennial question - beloved of Jewish adult study groups and the Knesset alike - "What is a Jew?" or "Who is a Jew?" The passion and controversy generated by this question invites us to dig a bit below the surface.

I remember sitting in on one of these Synagogue discussions about Jewish identity.

During the discussion comments from the group were listed on a blackboard in response to this question: 'What is a Jew?':

1. Someone who has faith
2. Someone who **thinks** of themselves as Jewish
3. Someone who associates themselves with Jewish culture
4. Someone who has an emotional relationship to Israel
5. Someone who feels connected to other Jewish people
6. Someone who defines themselves in relation to the non-Jewish world.

What interested me was that there is no apparent mention here of ethical or ritual actions, Torah, or God. The woman who made the last point ("a Jew is someone who defines themselves in relation to the outside world") quoted with approval a statement she had once heard:

"I am a Jew as long as there is one antisemite left".

This negative, oppositional justification for being Jewish is a hallmark of a certain form of Jewish identity which says "I feel Jewish when I am criticised, insulted, attacked by a non-Jew. That is when I know what I am." I hear this often, sometimes even with a certain pride or smugness. "I do not have to DO anything to be Jewish; other people (i.e. non-Jews) provide me with my identity".

In her own way this woman gave me some very helpful insights into the Jewish unconscious. When asked how she expressed her Jewish identity in positive ways ("how would I know from going into your house that you were Jewish?"), her reply provided a beautiful vignette for Jewish identity. "You would see four people who argue all the time . . . about 5000 books . . . a menorah . . . and I light candles on a Friday night but I don't know why".

There you have it. First, said flippantly, but betraying a serious and disturbing Jewish characteristic: the passion for argument. Argument for argument's sake often. Whether or not this is an inherited relic of our Talmudic heritage, with its "on the one hand, but on the other hand" approach. Jews have traditionally emphasised and depended upon the intellect, rationality, logic and mental dexterity to order and manipulate their inner and outer worlds. You see this in synagogue committees and Jewish organisations which have lost their purpose: the words and arguments have a life of their own and are enjoyed more than the work itself.

Let us go a little deeper into this. Judaism is usually taught as a rational religion. There is a framework of laws, do's and don'ts. It controls behaviour. Our behaviour. Having an all powerful God means you only have two choices: you obey or you disobey. Either way you are responding to what is traditionally seen as a controlling, demanding, external force - the father God. **Avinu Malkenu.** Our Father, our King. So,

we are children, or servants. The children of Israel. "Therefore we bow down and submit . . ." (**Alenu**).

But children can, and do, argue. Naturally they want their own way. They need to establish their separateness, their own identity. Where they meet the parental "yes" to their instinctual needs and demands there can be pleasure and self-acceptance. Even when this parental "yes" has its boundaries - as it must do - which provide limitations on the child's instinctual life, the child who on balance experiences the **affirming** parental presence is being allowed to grow up with a sense of his or her own worth and value.

But if the parental "no" to the child's deeply-felt urges dominates, then, as we know, there is trouble ahead. In the end the child may submit to parental authority; be punished for disobedience; become conformist; become guilty about his own nature - there are many repercussions in the life of the child whose natural assertiveness of being has been negated. What I want to focus on here is that even if the child outwardly obeys, there remains the inner disobedience, the inner arguing, the inner rebellion.

"You won't really control **me**, even if I seem to do what you say". Then later on in adult life comes the reaction to being controlled: the need to control and be in control. When Judaism is experienced as a controlling religion, modifying behaviour, prohibiting behaviour, prohibiting human instinct - "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not

steal" - when Judaism is experienced predominantly in this starkly-defined, coolly rational, negating and unfeeling way, the reaction inevitably sets in - the disobedient, argumentative child breaks out in the adult.

The more controlling the dictates of a religion and the more controlled the resulting behaviour of its followers, the more they are unconsciously impelled to change or control others' behaviour.

We protect outwards our **own** wish to defy and transgress the law, and punish or criticise the real or imagined, "deviant" behaviour of others. Tolerance of others is born from accepting one's own limitations and weaknesses, and from the deep knowledge of the natural worth of one's own actions. Coming back to the four people arguing in this woman's house. They will be critical of each other's behaviour, particularly religious behaviour, because of the basic insecurity of their own religious position.

We will see this more clearly as we go along. Although they will attempt to be intellectual and rational in their arguing, it will be done with great emotion and much irrationality. Our insecurity feeds our irrational behaviour, however logical we try to be.

What of the 5000 books mentioned by this woman? Apart from the element of **exaggeration** which this includes, which would in itself be worthy of further thought, we come here to an aspect of Jewish identity which is of central importance. The

passion for learning and knowledge. When she is expressing pride in the possession of a library full of books, she is not talking about Jewish books, although she might have a shelf of Jewish novelists: Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Philip Roth. She is not talking about a library of Jewish legal, or philosophical, or homiletical works, or works of Jewish piety, such as would have been the content of a Jew's library 3 or 4 generations ago. She might have a Bible in Hebrew and English. She might have a Reform prayerbook. She will probably have an Orthodox prayerbook, inherited or given to her (or more probably her husband) as a child or teenager but probably unopened since then. But the vast majority of the books on her bookshelves, as in the vast majority of Jewish homes, will be there as the result of the eager grasping after the lifeblood of the rest of the world's creativity which was the product of the Emancipation of the Jews from the ghettos and insular life of centuries of Western, Central and Eastern European life.

Of course historically there has always been a cross-fertilisation of ideas between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. But the Jewish thirst for new ideas and experiences in the last two centuries has meant a rapid escape from the perceived limitations of the exclusively Jewish world view and a participation in and contribution towards not just art, music, literature, and politics but the scientific and technological advances of our times. The consequent abandonment of study of Jewish sources by most Jews, with the rationalisation that they are

unhistoric, archaic, fairytales, just 'stories', irrelevant to modern times, has, however, left a gap in the heart and mind of the Jew. The avid pursuit of political or psychological or scientific theories of knowledge to fill the vacuum left by the disparagement of traditional insights **has** resulted in the creativity of Marx, Freud, Chomsky, Einstein, and their followers. But it has also resulted in the confusion of ordinary Jews caught between the religious needs of their hearts and the secular learning of their university educations.

And of course the academic approach of schools and universities, with the emphasis on rational and intellectual expertise, and devaluation of emotional, intuitive or spiritual insights, is the perfect hook on which Jews are so keen to impale themselves in their flight from their inner natures. The balance between head and heart, mind and emotion, **halacha** and **aggada**, body and spirit, used to be possible within the Jewish experience. I believe that is true, not just wishful thinking. That delicate balance, individually achieved, could be a creative tension. But the subtlety of the dialectic, that movement between the rational and the supra-rational, was lost once Judaism adopted wholesale the refined critical apparatus of the predominantly German empirical (and supposedly scientific) schools of thought. New answers for old. But the new answers to life's eternal questions have not proved satisfying for Jews. Doctors' surgeries are full of Jews with psychosomatic complaints. Analysts and therapists and

counsellors have waiting lists of clients (a high proportion of whom, as I said before, are Jews) who have either abandoned the search for personal insight and understanding within a Jewish context, or who would not even dream of looking for it there. Or they might dream of it, but would probably dismiss the significance of those dreams. And spiritualist groups and Gurdieff and freemasonry and Hare Krishna and Rajneesh cater for all ages, and Jewish participation in all of these is numerically very high.

Which brings me to the two children of this woman. One of the reasons why the four of them are probably arguing is because of these two children. The daughter is about 20, had a very pressurised academically stretching education in her teenage years, then went to Cambridge University, where she had a nervous breakdown. This is an extreme form of a familiar pattern in certain kinds of Jewish homes, and what happened then is also not unique. She eventually left university, and went to India, ending up in Poona with Rajneesh (over 75% of the ashram there were Jewish). The Jewish hunger for spirituality has led to a flight from Judaism into other forms of spirituality, particularly the Western movements following the mystical or meditation patterns of the East. In San Francisco 50% of the disciples of Zen Buddhism are Jewish, as are 15% of the American followers of Hare Krishna. The figures in Western Europe are probably not as high as this, but we share this trend towards religious alternatives. And while we're talking of this, I can mention Robert Zimmerman whose record albums of

the late seventies had crosses on the outside and whose concerts preached born-again Christianity. For the uninitiated, Robert Zimmerman is known to the world as Bob Dylan. However, you may have noticed a year or so ago, in the Jewish Chronicle, a picture of him wearing tephilin - his son was becoming Bar-Mitzvah at the Western Wall. But that is another part of the story for which we will have to wait.

When the traditional sources of meaning and inspiration run dry, we Jews often turn to psychological or spiritual or material alternatives to feed the hunger of our souls.

At least our therapists respect our inner worlds and needs even if our religious leaders are concerned more with working parties on Halacha, or fundraising for a new synagogue building or Jewish centre, or factfinding missions to Israel. At least those groups of people meeting together from different religious traditions and none, to listen to the tapes of the latest guru or study some esoteric doctrine, or sing or dance or play or pray together - at least they provide some emotional support and warmth, friendship, even love. Do our synagogues and Jewish institutions provide the same? Over a third of the Jews in England do not belong to a synagogue - there is nothing in it that relates to their lives; if they do identify themselves as Jews, it is not on a religious or synagogue-related basis. And it is the material alternatives especially which provide some replacement security for that which the contemporary Jew feels he's lost: insurance

policies, investment in bricks and mortar, a proliferation of possessions, something to hold on to, physical and tangible when the inner world goes.

But I haven't forgotten the son in this family. He's about 18. Before going to University he went for some months to Israel. He ended up in a Yeshivah. He came home fired with enthusiasm for a traditional Orthodox lifestyle and now totally rejects his parents' Jewish attitudes, which in his eyes are completely hypocritical. He's chosen not to go to University but to continue his Yeshivah education. This is the other reaction to assimilated Jewish life and is also far from unique. Back to tradition: but fundamentalist, with all the answers. And the moral arrogance of knowing this is what Judaism is **really** about. And a kind of contemptuous pity for those of us, who remain too weak to move from the narrow middle-ground of an open-minded, somewhat liberal, non-dogmatic, uncertain search, where paradox is allowed. Where the answers are not automatically given. Where the questions are also a religious act and are as important, perhaps more important, than finding the right answers.

Children live out the repressed or unacknowledged parts of their parents. I am not sure which of these children's reactions has caused most anxiety to their parents: the retreat into the ghetto away from secularised Jewish life, or the retreat into spirituality away from rationality and materialism. The return to Jewish fundamentalism is less common than the move from Judaism (although it is growing), but

both are rejections of conventional assimilated, outwardly secure Jewish life in the suburbs of our cities.

Let me go back to their mother. She is a professional woman, a lawyer, in her 40's. She's married to another professional. They are assimilated into English society with occasional gestures in the direction of their Jewish identity. This is the norm: a mainly suburban population concentrated in our large towns and cities, with a largely secular lifestyle. Her comments about the menorah and Shabbat candles which are lit but without knowing why are also typical. I didn't know if this meant she did not know why Shabbat candles are lit in the first place (i.e. the religious background to the Sabbath), or whether she **does** know about the outer purpose and meaning of the ritual but doesn't know why she bothers to do it. Her "not knowing why she does it" is probably a fairly typical combination of lack of objective knowledge about her tradition as well as a subjective feeling of uncertainty about the personal relevance of the ritual for her own life and that of her family.

Often now I meet this nominal adherence to rituals and traditions which are leftovers from a previous generation's piety. The confusions and contradictions over what to eat and what not to eat - the whole of the area of Kashrut - is a prime example. And the relics of Shabbat observance is another. Often these are done for nostalgic reasons. Nostalgia for the lost world of Jewish behaviourism can still be a motivation force in Jewish life: the romantic idealisation of the

"shtetl", or the East End with its tightknit community life, the extended family, the piety, the insular Jewish life where at least you knew who your enemies were. This is 'Fiddler-On-the-Roof' territory, as Lionel Blue would call it. But it is usually combined with large signs of relief for having escaped from its claustrophobia, its poverty, its narrowmindedness into the anonymity of secular life. And what is left for a family like this is the occasional participation in Jewish home ceremonies - the Seder at Passover being probably the most important, if not the only, major home ritual still kept in some fashion by many otherwise non-observant Jewish families. The importance of this probably lies in the re-unification of the family, perhaps only once a year. And there is the occasional visit to the synagogue. We used to talk about three-times-a-year Jews. As a child I could never work out which three this was supposed to be! But now this is perhaps only once a year, if at all, either the morning of Rosh Hashanah, (New Year), or the eve of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) for Kol Nidrei.

And of course there is the Bar Mitzvah, where the tribal nature of Jewish identity can perhaps be seen most clearly. It is the "rite de passage" of the 13 year old male, although girls now are also having such ceremonies, and particularly within the non-Orthodox world are usually encouraged to do so. The Bar Mitzvah is the declaration by the parents that they have succeeded in holding together the fragmented tradition for the next generation. Traditionally the boy becomes an

independent Jewish entity on that day. It is an emotional and very important part of Jewish life. The continuity of Jewish experience is at the centre. Feelings run high. Absent grandparents who did not live to see this day are very present. The whole of the extended family, from around the country or, nowadays, around the world, are there. It might be the first time in years. And it will possibly be the **last** time for some of them, the elderly members, or the younger members who will intermarry and be lost to the family and the continuity of Jewish life.

A basic, primitive level of experience is at stake with the Bar Mitzvah. I do not know if I really understand it. But perhaps it is partly to do with the transition to adulthood that it represents. The umbilical cord is being cut, symbolically - and the incestuous ties to the parents. It is also to do with potency, the very physical survival of the group. And it is to do with the passing on of wisdom from one generation to the next, which is symbolised in the reading from the Torah. Here the boy signifies his connection with past and future. Often our Bar Mitzvahs are truly magical experiences. The Torah scroll itself is an unknown, essentially mysterious object for most Jews today. They rarely touch one, they will probably never read from it (except the men on their own Bar Mitzvah). They do not usually understand what is read from it in the Hebrew. (Most Jews now cannot really read, let alone understand, Hebrew, and often even the English translation of the Bible they use is as intelligible as a passage from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and as far removed

from everyday life as even Homer's *Odyssey* appears to be).

Yet the young man has been initiated into the tribal wisdom, stands in front of the assembled community and his family, and recites or chants the magical sounds which he has been rehearsing for several months. The tears flow from the faces of the family, and the whole ceremony is quite cathartic. There is a power and a mystery here which goes to the **heart** of Jewish identity. The boy is at the pivot of Jewish continuity: these same passages have been read from the Torah for 2000 years and speak of events even older. The Torah has provided the security for Jewish life wherever Jews have lived: its observance and study were the basis for Jewish identity for millenia. It is the symbol of Jewish survival, Jewish security, Jewish life itself: **Aytz Chaim** (the tree of life). The boy reading from the Torah focuses the psychic reality of Jewish existence, and at least for a moment the survival of the people is ensured. There is another generation. We have a future. We have hope again. Perhaps the Messiah will come after all, after all that we have been through; if not in our generation, then in the next, because at least there is now a next generation.

Let me go back to this woman, who to the outside world is English and whose attitude to Jewish home life is, in her words: "Do it if you must, but keep the door shut". I recognise this, this fear of being seen to be different. The need to conform to the mores of the society around. The basic insecurity of a whole generation that has lost its faith; the dominant materialist and the

gastronomic Judaism: "kosher-style" food to keep the link with the past and one's cultural roots. Smoked salmon and bagels on a Sunday morning. Golf or shopping on a Saturday morning and holidays in Israel.

I want to say a few words about Israel, for very many Jews do have a strong emotional attachment to it. Many give money to it generously even while criticising its present policies. This is something of a dilemma for many Jews. A congregation with which I had contact a few years ago was fairly typical in this respect: money was given, and the occasional Israel-oriented evening was reasonably supported. But I remember a debate they held. Speakers from the congregation had to argue for or against the motion "This house believes that Israel will ultimately have to negotiate with the PLO". The level of the debate was not particularly high. The speeches were either defensive and emotional if they had family there; or a recapitulation of newspaper editorials emphasising the need to correct the injustices being perpetrated against the Palestinian people. In the end those who believed that negotiations will have to take place won the debate, and everybody went home with their various opinions unaltered.

But what was important, and what united both sides in the debate, was that their support for Israel was motivated not primarily by reasons of Jewish history or identity. Not because it was the constant dream and hope for 2000 years that we would once more have our own homeland. Not because after the last War it was the place which

received the survivors of the camps and it was a tragedy they had nowhere open to them in the 1930's. Not because Jews are looking forward to making Aliyah - because we **don't** want to live there. No, what united both sides in their support for Israel now (and this has been overwhelmingly confirmed in various studies of Jewish opinion), was the possibility they felt that they, or their children, might one day in the future need to live there. The spectre of antisemitism still haunts the Jewish imagination. That most basic insecurity of Jewish life in the Diaspora is still there in all but the most assimilated of Jewish hearts. "Perhaps one day, again". However English the Jew becomes he or she carries the imprint of persecution in their soul. Sometimes this is denied but I believe it is carried unconsciously if not consciously. And it accounts for a lot of our Jewish neurotic behaviour. And not least in Israel itself.

Meanwhile the ambivalence of the "outsider" continues. This is especially true at Christmas time. The jollity at Jewish Christmas dinners with their turkey and crackers and paperhats is slightly embarrassed. Many Jewish families have a Christmas tree and rationalise it by saying "Well they're pagan anyway, aren't they?" or more commonly "Well, we do it for the children really, so they won't feel different". But the children do feel different anyway, just as their parents "feel different". One person in that adult study discussion in the synagogue summed it up: "You feel inwardly that you are still an outsider". I am surprised by how often this feeling of discomfort is admitted to when Jews discuss this

issue seriously amongst themselves: feeling I do not quite fit into my **English** environment, but also not quite fitting either into a totally **Jewish** one. A feeling of on the one hand not being quite English enough for the non-Jews, but on the other hand not being quite Jewish enough either, in some vague and uneasy way, as when you know you have lost something, but cannot quite remember what it is you have lost.

The ambivalence of the Jewish outsider was expressed by this woman (with many murmurs of recognition by other people) in the following way: "When I am in a gathering of Jews only, I cannot stand them. They are noisy, vulgar, opinionated - who needs it? But when I am only with non-Jews I cannot wait to get back to my Jewish friends. They are my own family". I often share that feeling too. And like many Jews I consciously drop (when I speak to someone who isn't Jewish) that odd word in Yiddish which is still part of my vocabulary. And it's not just so that they can understand me better. And if I read the Jewish Chronicle on the underground, I glance up nervously every so often to see who is around. "Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they're **not** out to get you". - it could only have been a Jew who coined that aphorism!

However important we might feel, individually or collectively, we still remain, personally and communally, with the insecurities of the outsider. For we Jews are relatively new arrivals in the Western world. As we moved from the middle ages into the modern world we discovered that

the two great rationales that our medieval teachers had offered to support our faith were both collapsing. Judah HaLevi had offered history, and in particular sacred history, as the basis of Jewish faith. And Maimonides had offered rational arguments. But the findings of biblical critical studies meant we could no longer believe, for example that 600,000 of the Israelite people, our direct ancestors, had stood at Sinai to receive revelation from God. Similarly the Aristotelian-based medieval philosophic proofs of the existence of a First Cause were made redundant. And the attempts of German-Jewish scholars to re-establish Judaism on a philosophical basis, using Hegel or Kant, did not succeed in capturing the Jewish imagination. (2)

History and rational arguments gave way to confusion and scepticism. And the events in Europe which came to be known as the Holocaust dealt the death-blow not only to one third of the Jewish people, but also to the psychic security of the survivors, "even to the third and fourth generations".

Now, I hesitate to speak of the Holocaust. Sometimes I think it is totally irrelevant to the ordinary day-to-day lives of Jews. On one level life continues as if it never happened: Jews marry, have children, and when they die want to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, even if they have never taken part in Jewish life. Yet in another way the amputation of part of our people has left a scar on the mind and soul of the Jewish people, a very deep wound in the collective Jewish consciousness. It would be dishonest

to speak of aspects of the Jewish unconscious without speaking of the Holocaust, even if what I can say is painfully inadequate. For this wound is still bleeding. But it is like the dripping tap you hear only in the middle of the night.

I would like to share with you some statistics. (1) I mentioned before intermarriage. Up until 1940 the rate of intermarriage in the USA was 3%. (At that time America had, as it still does, the largest number of Jews in any one country). In 1960 the rate of intermarriage was 5.9%. Let us pause at that figure. Only 25 years ago, and 15 years after the end of the War, only 6 out of every 100 Jews who married, married non-Jews - in the most assimilated Jewish society in the world. In 1965 it was 17%. It is now nearly 50% and rising.

Now there are many factors in this, obviously. But I find it interesting to note that the very term "Holocaust" was in use, in 1960, only in Jewish scholarly circles. (4) The word did not take root in the ordinary consciousness of Jews until the mid-1960's. Today most people, Jews and non-Jews, do not know any other name for the events it covers. This does not mean that Jews did not know of the events of 1933-45 in the first 15 years after the war. But the prominence of the Holocaust in Jewish life and education from the early 60's onwards has been paralleled by the flight from Judaism of hundreds of thousands of Jews around the world. Now of course there are many factors involved. However I feel we need to reflect on the connection between the penetration into the Jewish

psyche of the events of the Holocaust, and this radical shift towards a physical merging into the body of our host communities - that is meant to be a literal and metaphorical statement.

Incidentally, about 30% of Jews in England now marry non-Jews and on the Continent it is nearer 60%. These percentages are increasing. There is a greater proportion of men "marrying out" than women. It increases where standards of education are higher. This process of merging is matched by the end to the traditional high fertility rate within Jewish marriages. Families of 7, 8, 9 or 10 children are now rare, not the norm. Jewish families use contraceptive methods more extensively than the surrounding populations and reduce their fertility more than other groups. In almost all communities the number of children now born to Jewish families, does **not** reach the level (slightly higher than 2) necessary in order to ensure population replacement from one generation to another. Israel is the only exception. (5)

It is against this background that I would place the passionate writing of one of our leading Jewish scholars, Emil Fackenheim. For him the numerical survival of the Jewish people is a priority. More than a priority, he has elevated it to a "mitzvah", an additional divine commandment to add to the obligations binding upon the Jewish people. He feels that if we fail in **this** "mitzvah", we are, in his words, "handing Hitler a posthumous victory". And on a popular level this is often a Jew's unarticulated gut

feeling. "I must survive as a Jew ... I must continue". This bloodyminded determination just to be seen, to be heard, to exist as a Jew is often a powerful motivation for Jewish identity. What that survival is for - the **purpose** of Jewish survival - is of minor importance and rarely thought about by ordinary Jewish people, in comparison with the dogged determination just to continue to be here.

So just as there were those who found their faith in the camps and those who lost it there, so now amongst us the survivors (and we are all survivors on a symbolic, if not literal, level) there are those who feel they must remain as Jews because of the past, and those who use the past as a rationalisation for the flight from their Jewish identity. And most of this I think happens at a barely conscious level. The events of the Holocaust have gone deep inside the Jew and we are still witnessing the reactions to the trauma.

A part of the reaction is that the traditional priorities of Jewish life have been turned on their head. First, there used to be the unifying belief in the power and reality of God; secondly the study and observance of Torah; thirdly the collective identity of the Jewish people, **Klal Israel**, scattered throughout the world yet somehow united in purpose. In our post-Holocaust world, the nation Israel now provides the unifying belief: nationalism without a purpose other than survival. "I believe in Israel" has been a phrase heard far more commonly - at least until recently - on the tongues of Jews than "I

believe in God". Secondly, comes Torah - Jewish observance at a minimum or maximum level. That still exists of course. And thirdly, if at all, comes God. Sometimes I am made to feel that to speak of God after Aushwitz is a form of madness or blasphemy. I am made to feel that by Jews, who, however, also long to hear it again, who actually want to hear nothing else. "How can I believe? How can I believe again? How do I pray? How do I learn to hear God's voice?" These are the real questions, which come when Jews are helped to feel again (not just think), to listen again to the crying of their souls.

So, where are we now? Thus far I have been using the comments (and the family) of one woman who was involved in a synagogue discussion group as a very loose framework in which to outline some of the insecurities and issues which I believe emerge from reflecting on the Jewish unconscious. But of the original 4 members of this argumentative family, one seems noticeably absent - the husband. Where is he? And who is he? Because he never came to the synagogue and I never met him I can allow myself to have a fantasy about him: I imagine a man of strong opinions, particularly about religion - which he believes is good for children, and necessary for the simple-minded. He tolerates (and scorns) his wife's involvement.

Although a professional man, well read in many subjects, when it comes to Judaism he is still our trembling 13 year old Bar-Mitzvah boy stuck with the child's view of the Bible and a child's image of God.

Because he left **cheder** the day after his ceremony, the guilt and the resentment and the anger and the confusion that were his Jewish heritage then, have remained into adult life to block any more sophisticated or mature approach. His intelligent adult consciousness, well able to master the intricacies of law or computers or medicine, regresses in panic when confronted again by the emotional density of feeling bound up with matters Jewish. Although of course this is partly caricature, we do recognise his cynicism, his scepticism, his dismissive or rigid opinions - these are the defenses against a tremendous amount of uncertainty, insecurity and pain wrapped up in those childhood years.

Howard Jacobson, the Anglo-Jewish novelist, has described one aspect of his own background in this way:

"Although I was taught Hebrew every Tuesday and Thursday evening throughout the entirety of my childhood and youth, I never came close to mastering a word of it. The teaching was partly to blame because it was propagandist and emotional: I didn't find that it helped to have the Rabbi cry when I made a mistake.

But I wouldn't have got on with the language however it was taught. I hated the primitive, Asiatic look of the script: I was unable, on aesthetic and neurological grounds, to recognise or reproduce the characters; and I resented in my soul being required to sway and incant. Read aloud, Hebrew sounded to me like a perpetual wail for the dead." (6)

There is pathos as well as humour there. I would want to take seriously the psychological residue in Jewish adult males of all those unfulfilled parental hopes and all those expectations (unexpressed or neverendingly expressed) which burden Jewish males from childhood onwards. No wonder this woman's husband is absent - is not the synagogue with its reverence for tradition, is not Judaism with its dependence upon and veneration of the past, is not the Jewish God, protecting but exacting, is not all of this experienced within as parental authority, parental demand, shadowing the boy in the man throughout his life? We know that there is the universal wish to remain unaware of one's own unconscious. What energy it takes to really separate from one's 'home' (parental and Jewish) and develop a feeling and thinking and responsible, adult relationship with what one knows has formed one's body and soul.

How much easier it is to act it all out, to run away from 'home', like the Biblical Jacob, in the attempt to leave it all behind. So the absent husband himself with the illusion that the issues are resolved by his non-involvement. He has left the tribe; he does not belong; nothing more is demanded of him; he is free of the past. Except that in the unconscious the tearful or rebellious or frightened little boy still stands on his Bar Mitzvah day, overwhelmed, confused, betrayed; denied his childhood, thrust into adulthood before his time. In reality there is no escape for this absent husband. Perhaps after all this is the real reason for circumcision: to remind the Jewish male day after

day: "This is what you are, whether you wish it or not; your body carries the reminder of the ancient and eternal covenant until the end of **its** days; so, do not delude yourself - your psyche too carries its own indissoluble imprint of history and legend, wrestling and encounter".

In spite of himself, Jacob became Israel. The trickster, the manipulator, the heel, becomes the one who strives with God, on behalf of God. In this struggle, which is the struggle for transformation, for consciousness, there is a continual ebb and flow, of victory and then defeat, another victory another defeat. Jacob becomes Israel, Israel becomes Jacob, over and over again. The body is marked for life with the covenant and for the soul too there is no rest, no escape. Only death provides release from this drama.

I would like to finish by telling you of a dream, which both speaks to some of those themes I have been exploring, but goes on perhaps to point a way forward. It is a dream of a young Jewish man. This is what he dreamt:

*"I am watching a marriage ceremony of a young Jewish couple. The Chief Rabbi is conducting the ceremony. In the middle of it the woman starts arguing with what is happening. The Chief Rabbi ignores her and continues the ceremony. This seems wrong to me. A certain traditional phrase is reached in the service, but instead of it being "this **great** people", what I am surprised to hear is the phrase "this **dead** people".*

You will each perhaps want to meditate for yourselves on your responses to that dream. I find it both shocking and liberating. Shocking because it acknowledges that a transformation has occurred: something of our once great people, the Jewish people, is dead. Whether it is their physical presence, their piety, their learning, their idealism, their passion for truth, when we look around us something has gone forever. Or perhaps the dream only warns: if we continue what we are doing, the outer ceremony of Jewish living, but ignore what is actually happening to the people involved, then our greatness will be a hollow sham, a living death. But what is liberating is to see the woman arguing with what is happening, saying "No, I cannot continue with this". I feel that this woman arguing is a very different woman from the one in the synagogue whose home is full of argument. For many thousands of years Jewish creativity has rested predominantly with men in their arguing and wrestling with the old and the new. Now the dream speaks of the woman breaking through the set ritual, the way things have to be done, the words we always repeat. The woman wishes to introduce a new consciousness into what is happening. She is involved and will not stand by passively. She will be heard. She must **insist** on being heard.

I believe that our understanding of the Jewish unconscious would be transformed if the Jewish woman was to find her true voice, if she were to speak the knowledge she possesses, to express fully the reality she experiences. So men, like the Chief Rabbi in the dream,

would prefer to ignore it. We might have to change if we listened to the voice of the woman. But our responsibility is even more than that. Jewish men, the men who by and large still lead the Jewish religious and secular institutions, need also to listen to their own **inner** woman, their own feminine principle. She is our inner guide, our intuitive helper. When we fail to hear her voice or when we ignore her voice within us, we die. A living death. A little like many Jews experience their own identity, or lack of it.

So our future lies in listening to the Jewish woman and, if we are men, our own inner woman. (And our women can help us with that too. They have a heavy responsibility now I feel). And finally there is that other feminine energy which we all have the possibility of experiencing, and which can lead us forward. Traditionally it is called the **Shekhinah**, the indwelling presence of God.

Not "Our Father Our King", transcendent, dominating and all powerful, but that cosmic **feminine** principle which is manifest in each human soul. Its concern is my personal growth, my development and my change as a human being.

The traditional domination of the Jewish world by 'logos' unbalances us all. The Shekhinah is still wandering and in exile. She weeps for our exile from our true home, our inner Jewish identity. Our redemption can come only from the re-integration of the assertive, organising, "Halachic", and playful, imaginative, "aggadic" energies within us: intellect and feeling, mind and body and soul together. This is our responsibility, individually and collectively. The finding of our Jewish identity is also no less than redemption of God: the reuniting of the Shekhinah, the Queen, with her partner who will remain, whether I like it or not, thank God, **Avinu Malkenu**, Our Father, Our King of course.

Rabbi Howard Cooper is a psychotherapist and graduate of Leo Baeck College, where he gave this talk in 1985.

Notes

- 1) B. Bettelheim, **Freud and Man's Soul** (London, Fontana, 1985) p.5
 - 2) See Arthur E. Green "Jewish Mysticism in a Contemporary Theology of Judaism", **Shefa Quarterly**, Volume I, No.4. (September 1978, Jerusalem) p.27.
 - 3) See R. Bachi. "The Demographic Crisis of Diaspora Jewry" in **Forum** 42/3, Winter 1981 (WZO, Jerusalem, 1981) pp. 40-2; 57.
 - 4) See Alan Rosenburgh "The Genocidal Universe" in **European Judaism** 25. (1979:1), p.32.
 - 5) See Bachi (ibid), p.42-4.
 - 6) "Hebrew and Yiddish Legacies - A symposium", **Times Literary Supplement**, May 3rd 1985.
 - 7) See Andrew Samuels, "Gender and Psyche: Developments in Analytical Psychology: in **British Journal of Psychotherapy** 1:1 (Autumn 1984), pp. 31-49.
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