

## ADLER'S PSYCHOLOGY AND THE JEWISH TRADITION

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Goethe's diagnosis, "The Church has a good stomach" (6, scene 9), is now again being substantiated by the manner in which the Churches are "digesting" psychoanalysis. The recent marriage of convenience between religion and psychoanalysis supplies an interesting commentary on many religionists' readiness to sacrifice principles while letting the ends justify the means.

Obviously, there is common ground between psychology and religion. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis and religion are irreconcilably and diametrically opposed, what with the former relegating the latter to the realm of illusion and of neurotic escape from reality. No doubt, both psychoanalysis and religion deal with the soul, but "soul" means something altogether different to the psychoanalyst than to the clergyman. With all the lip-service, therefore, which psychoanalysis pays to religion and religion to psychoanalysis, the union is an uneasy one, for there looms a deep and forbidding chasm between the two partners.

It has taken psychoanalysis a long time to gain a foothold in the United States. As a result, Freudianism is still in the zenith of popularity in this country, at a time when in Europe it has been definitively displaced by the Freudian revisionists and dissidents. Here, it is only recently that the dissidents from Freud are making themselves heard, and so "psychology" is still largely identified with "psychoanalysis" by the public, not excepting most clergymen. The recent literature is largely oriented to creating a working synthesis between religion and psychoanalysis (3, 17, 22, with their extensive bibliographies).

While Freud's "pessimistic, irreligious and fatalistic" (1, p. 7) system is the very antithesis of the religious orientation, Adler's optimistic, religious in a non-dogmatic sense, and will-emphasizing psychology shares the premises and the outlook of the Western religions which are based on the Hebraic *Weltanschauung* as delineated in the Hebrew Bible. Adler himself was proud that "Individual Psychology has rediscovered many a lost position of Christian guidance," and he postulated as one of the aims of his system to show that it is "the heir to all great movements whose aim is the welfare of mankind" (1, p. 463). In keeping with this goal, Adler referred to the Old Testament for substantiating his thesis of the striving for superiority of the youngest and the only child, and for the stimulus supplied by an

organ inferiority. And he pointed to the Biblical account of Moses' "heavy tongue" as another case proving that orators not infrequently start out with a speech impediment (1, p. 29).

However, there are more significant correspondences and agreements between Individual Psychology and the Jewish tradition. In fact, there is virtual identity between the basic insights of Adlerian psychology and the wisdom of Judaism.

#### INFERIORITY FEELING

According to Adler, the axis of the soul-life is the feeling of inferiority, the source of the masculine protest. Individually and as groups men strive to compensate for their felt inferiorities and disabilities by advancing from minus to plus positions. As Adler saw it, civilization, in its multifarious aspects, is the fruit of the impulse to overcompensate and to provide by effort and work what nature will not freely yield.

The role of the youngest child, as Adler succinctly noted, is only one particular phase of overcompensation in action. Jewish Scriptures take it for granted that strength springs from weakness and that achievement is born from feeling inferior and being unhappy with a minus position. In the Old Testament narratives, it is invariably the youngest and weakest son who is the recipient of the blessing. Abel, and not Cain, was the favorite of God (8, ch. 4). Jacob, "the quiet man dwelling in tents," the younger of Isaac's twin sons, and not Esau "the cunning hunter" was chosen as the recipient of the patriarchal blessing (8, ch. 25: 28). The same pattern was repeated with Joseph and, still later, when Saul and David were anointed kings (1, p. 380). According to the traditionalist interpretation, Jewish history in its entirety demonstrates the power that resides in weakness fired by the incentive to compensate. Thus the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, "the smallest of all mountains (10, p. 382), and Israel, the smallest and weakest of the nations, was chosen as the recipient and transmitter of the Commandments. The unique phenomenon of Jewish survival, too, is an attestation of the potency of the impetus of inferiority coupled with the will for overcompensation. The Jews have survived two millenia of dispersion and persecution because they were fired with the determination to see the implementation of Isaiah's promise which pledged to Israel, the "suffering servant," that "fulfilment shall come by way of travail" (9, ch. 53: 11; 25, chs. 5 & 6). Like Abraham, who was bidden to leave his country and his

family, with nothing but his sense of alienation and a promise, which *he* made good, the Jews turned their affliction into a blessing. The insight of religion that suffering is a badge of distinction and that adversity is fraught with blessings, has a precise analogy in Adler's views on the compensatory role of the manifold handicaps and inferiorities to which men are subject.

#### REACTIONS TO THE FAMILY SITUATION

The child's reaction to his family situation was recognized by Adler as the axis of the family drama. For example, he noted that "Joseph's style of life is typical of the youngest child. Even in his dreams he asserts his superiority. The others must bow down to him; he outshines them all . . . In later days he was the pillar and support of the whole family, as the youngest child so often is" (1, p. 381).

The Old Testament abounds in accounts of sibling rivalry with formidable consequences, both for the individuals involved as well as for their people and mankind at large. According to the Biblical view, death came into the world in the wake of sibling rivalry. The first death recorded in the Bible is Abel's murder at the hand of his brother, Cain. The same pattern of sibling rivalry is enacted between Ismael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and Jacob's older sons and Joseph, except that the death wish of the older brothers for the younger brothers is frustrated. On the broader canvas of the nation, the ten tribes were in constant rivalry with the two smaller tribes, who in the end emerge victorious. The ten tribes became "lost" while the two tribes survived as *the* Jewish people. On the international scene, too, the strong "Gentiles" persecute the "weak" Jews, for even as Esau hated Jacob because he was the recipient of their father's "first" blessing, thus the nations hate Israel because it was blessed and singled out by God. According to the Rabbis of the Talmud, hatred (*sin'ah*) for the Jews is due to the Sinaitic covenant (*sinai*).

#### SOCIAL FEELING

Social feeling is the Adlerian answer to neurosis. Adler's identification of a normally developed social interest with health, and its opposite with neurotic affliction has a precise parallel in the role Judaism assigns to the community as the focal point of all healthy human endeavor. Jewish religion is community-centered, first, and only then God-centered. Thus the commandments enjoining neighborly love and charity have unqualified precedence over the ritual command-

ments. In keeping with this principle, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) can only help its observer to procure forgiveness for sins against God. Transgressions against fellow-men are so formidable that they cannot be atoned for by means of ritual and prayer. They must be amended, and forgiveness must be procured from those who were wronged. The honor and dignity of one's fellows must be respected, even if this may necessitate a ritual transgression (2, Sabbath 81b, Berakhot 19b), for Judaism is man-centered, not God-centered. Rabbi Hanina therefore declared: "He in whom the spirit of his fellow-men can take delight, in him the Spirit of the Omnipresent takes delight; and he in whom the spirit of his fellow-men takes no delight, in him the Spirit of the Omnipresent takes no delight" (4, III, 13).

Like Individual Psychology, Judaism wants to foster social feeling and satisfactory integration into the community. As far as religious expression is concerned, Judaism discourages individual religious exercises, such as private devotions and self-imposed fasts and penances. Jewish prayer is community-prayer in the congregation of the *minyan*—the prayer quorum of at least ten adult males. The important prayers avoid the first person singular and are couched in "we" formulas. God is appealed to as *our* (not *my*) God and the petitional prayers stress the needs of the community rather than individual wants. Even the confessions of sins are worded in the plural. The sinner in a Jewish congregation asks for Divine forgiveness not as an individual but as a member of the group, confessing: *We* have sinned.

Torah study, which according to Rabbinic opinion is the mode of worship most pleasing to God, is likewise community-based. The scholar withdrawn from life and isolated in the ivory tower of his study is looked at askance. Traditional Jewish study is group study. Even the scholar who pursues a research project of his own, is advised to do so in the community House of Study (*Bet Hamedrash*) where he has the fellowship of other scholars. In many different ways Jewish law stressed the basic theme: "Do not segregate yourself from the community." This does not mean that Judaism is oblivious of the need that "a philosopher must from time to time exile himself from society to think and write his books" (1, p. 141). But it insists, like Adler, that individual endeavor be geared to a "later enrichment of society." The lives of the Hebrew Prophets, who withdrew in order to receive the Word and then carried it to the people, provide a vivid illustration of other-directed, community-centered creativeness.

Adler commented in many contexts on the Hebrew command-

ment, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (13, 19:18). He regarded it as "the most exalted ideal purpose" (1, p. 449), and held that good adjustment and functioning on a non-pampered level are closely tied to the ability of loving one's fellow-men without asking why one should (1, p. 161). Judaism takes the identical attitude, that concern and love for one's fellow-men are "natural" in the well-adjusted individual. It sees mankind as inter-related and inter-connected. Various commentaries therefore explain that the commandment reads: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," because he is "as yourself—a human being, the child of God, and a brother."

The same kind of healthy realism which informs Adler's "social interest" is at the root of Jewish social ethics. Individual Psychology, as the name attests, does not obliterate the individual as a value in his own right when integrating him into the social fabric. It is the same with Judaism, which demands that a healthy balance be achieved between individualism and community-integration. One must be both an individual and a member of the group, for, as the Rabbis put it, "If I am not for myself, who will be? But if I am only for myself, what am I?" (4, I, 14). The neighborly love which Judaism commands is realistic. It does not require renunciation of healthy self-interest, but it obliges the Jew always to respect and love "the image of God" in his fellow-humans, even enemies. The Bible teaches: "When thine enemy falleth, do not rejoice" (19, 24: 17), and a pithy Talmudic interpretation has it that after the Egyptians had drowned in the Red Sea, God prohibited his angels to rejoice. Although the punishment was inevitable and deserved, the drowned Egyptians were human beings. "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and you would intone a song!" God is said to have upbraided the angels (2, Sanhedrin 39b).

In Adler's system the happily integrated person is depicted as constructively occupied with a useful occupation; he functions as a marital partner and parent, fulfilling himself sexually; and he takes his place in the community, in accordance with his special gifts, interests and the needs of the group of which he is a member (1, p. 158). Judaism conceives of a happy and useful life in identical terms. It sees in work the source of personal and societal fulfilment, and not merely the means of a livelihood. The satisfactions bound up with work transcend its immediate benefits, as Judaism sees it. It is the same with marriage and parenthood. Indeed, Judaism accepts the sexual component of love without qualms and misgivings, but it also takes it for granted that there is a dimension of love between man and

woman which, while rooted in biology, transcends the physical. Both work and the family are ultimately oriented to the community, from which, in turn, they derive manifold stimuli and supports.

#### CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

Jewish God ideas, over close to four millenia, are of great variety. They range from the father-image type of superman God to the postulation of "God as the power that makes for salvation" (12, pp. 385ff.). The progressive divestation of anthropomorphism from the Jewish God idea, at work already in the Hebrew Bible, is one aspect of the tendency to make God an ideal goal for human ethical endeavor. Like Individual Psychology, Judaism conceives of God as the goal to which man must aspire. "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (13, 11:44), is God's demand to Israel and mankind. Thus God is postulated as the aim for human striving and perfection. Adler put it this way: The idea of God . . . is the concretization and interpretation of the human recognition of greatness and perfection, and the dedication of the individual as well as of society to a goal which rests in the future and which enhances in the present the driving force toward greatness by strengthening the appropriate feelings and emotions (1, p. 460).

Judaism has no unilateral definition of God. In point of fact, its great prophets and teachers were dismayed because they knew that the real being and essence of God cannot be known. Isaiah's words: "To whom then will ye liken Me, that I should be equal?" (9, 40:25, 46:5) resound in many variations throughout Jewish religious literature. Thus a Hasidic Rabbi explained that "God is called the God of gods (Deuteronomy 10:17) because he is above any conceptualization of which man is capable" (16, p. 148). Like Adler, the Jewish sages knew that "Each individual forms an image of the functioning and shape of the supreme being which differs from that of the next man by nuances of a thousand-fold variation. No wonder that the scale of concretizations ranges all the way from personification to its opposite" (1, p. 460). The Jewish commentaries, aware that no two individuals have the same God concept, explain that the Biblical text uses the formula "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," instead of "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," in order to take note of the fact that each of the patriarchs conceived differently of God. Accordingly the Rabbis warned: "You must not believe that there are many gods in heaven, because you have different conceptions of God" (15). Time and again there recurs in Talmudic

and Rabbinic literature the statement that attributes and descriptions are attached to God in order to make men understand him better: Thus even physical human qualities are ascribed to him for the purpose of making it easier to comprehend his being. But this does not mean that God has a form. "He who conceives of God to be a corporeal being is an apostate" (14), as Judaism sees it. Accordingly, Jews avow in their daily prayers: "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, has no bodily form and that no form can represent Him."

In contradistinction to the pagan religions grounded in mythologies of a Golden Age, Judaism and its daughter religions, Christianity and Islam, are Messianic faiths resting on the conviction that the better future lies ahead—and that the future holds greater accomplishments and blessings than the past. The Days of Messiah, as interpreted by Judaism, are to be enacted in the terrestrial setting of this world. History will be fulfilled—not concluded or suspended—when war will be no more, when social justice will prevail, and when universal brotherhood will triumph. Judaism conceives of human life as the task-and-challenge to achieve perfection, and its teachings stress that this perfection of peace, justice and brotherhood are not beyond man's capacity. The Jewish concept of sin, too, is informed by this ethical optimism. Sin, in Jewish interpretation, is accident, not fate. It is neither inherited as "original sin" nor is it a compulsion against which man cannot prevail (24, ch. 3). Man, as Judaism conceives of him, is born with a clean slate, and his endowment with freedom of will and action is unlimited.

#### STRIVING FOR PERFECTION

Jewish Messianism points the road from the minus position of imperfection to the plus position of perfection in the same way which Adler delineated for the finality of mankind. Adler was right in stating that "Only Individual Psychology has pointed out that this striving for perfection is found in every individual" (1, p. 104). But the priority of having staked out this striving as a goal and obligation belongs really to Judaism which since its earliest beginnings has challenged all men with what Adler considered the crucial striving upward from below, the imperatives "Achieve! Arise! Conquer!" (1, p. 103).

The Freudian system has no room for the core-ideas of religion. Basically reductionist, psychoanalysis takes a dim view of human perfectability, while regarding the ethical principles which Individual

Psychology has in common with the monotheistic tradition as a positive threat to mental health. Thus the Freudians look with alarm at man's quest to transcend himself spiritually. The ethical quest is to them a doubtful blessing, for they regard it as one of the principal causes of neurosis. Psychoanalytical therapy, therefore, aims at mitigating the ethical quest by reducing the demands of the super-ego. To the Freudians, man's "moral climbing" is a sign of neurosis, for they hold, as Theodor Reik puts it, "If history teaches anything, if man can learn anything from the evolution of his species, it is that an animal can be tamed only to a certain extent" (20, pp. 416ff.). In the "mechanistic conception" of psychoanalysis, man remains chained to his animal nature. The "organismic conception" of Individual Psychology (1, p. 5), on the other hand, envisions for him, within its holistic system, the very acme of perfectability within the context of the ideal society which the Hebrew Prophets limned for the future in the dim past.

Individual Psychology, like Judaism, sees man as a whole (holism). Indeed, both the Jewish tradition and Adler are aware that the whole consists of parts which must be understood. But the atomistic approach of psychoanalysis is alien to their integrating tendency. Religion is predicated on the axiomatic assumption that the whole is greater than the sum total of its parts. Indeed, man comes from dust and returns to dust, and his physical-biological drives and functions are no different from those of other mammals. Yet, because man is a "moral climber" by constitution and destiny, as of right, he is capable of transcending himself without incurring the dire consequences which psychoanalysis attaches to more than a mere modicum of sublimation.

By making the striving for superiority the axis of his system, Adler freed depth psychology from the shackles of the limitations implicit in a system which proclaims the libido as the basic human drive. Even in its sublimated and transvalued forms, the libido must remain bound to matter-and-biology. In a system grounded in the libido, there is no room for individual freedom, as Freud's emphasis on the phylogenetic memory in the form of the compulsion of the Oedipus complex amply illustrates. Judaism, like Individual Psychology, is aware of the existence of the kind of situations which Freud designated as Oedipal and Electral. The Old Testament even records that Lot had intercourse and sired children with his daughters (8, 19: 30-38). But Judaism was not misled into assuming that Lot's daughters or Jacob, who

was a pampered child and remained tied to his mother's apron strings (8, ch. 27), are anything but atypical of the norm. Judaism is fully in agreement with Adler's conclusion that "What Freud has designated as the Oedipus complex . . . is nothing but one of the many phenomena in the life of a pampered child who is the unresisting plaything of his intensified wishes" (1, p. 375).

Adler avowed "the nearly limitless possibilities of the creative power of the child" (1, p. 178) in choosing his style of life. As Individual Psychology sees it, the style of life is the personal, free and self-chosen creation of each and every person. Like Judaism—Individual Psychology stresses the element of free choice in the style of life. Adler wrote: "It can happen that in a quite ethical family an anti-social child may grow up. The same experience has never exactly the same effect on two individuals; and we learn from experience only to the extent that the style of life permits" (1, p. 178). The Prophets phrased the problem of anti-social man in the social-minded society almost identically. They disowned the compulsion of the phylogenetic experience and memory by proclaiming that the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge," shall no longer be used in Israel (5, 18:2f.; 24, p. 55), for the actions of the fathers do not oblige the children, just as the actions of the children cannot be blamed on or credited to the fathers. The watchword of Judaism is freedom of choice in all action-situations, and its attitude to "acting or not acting" is identical with that of Individual Psychology.

#### IRRECONCILABILITY OF FREUD AND RELIGION

The great weakness of the Freudian system is that it postulates the pathological as the norm, as in the case of the Oedipus complex. Because of this self-constructed Procrustean bed, Freud and some of his disciples did extreme violence to the Hebrew Bible by attempting to force their mechanistic analytical blue-print on the early Biblical myths and, especially, the story of Moses (7).<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew Bible has become the book of mankind, treasured by secular heretics no less than by religious believers, because it is the book of the abiding truth and the realism of life. It portrays life in its entirety and, also, the sinister depths to which men can sink. There is, for example, the stark tragedy of Amnon's consuming passion for his sister Tamar,

<sup>1</sup>For a refutation of Freud's postulation of the Egyptian Moses see Weiss-Rosmarin (23; comp. 11, pp. 362 ff. and 26, pp. 33 ff.)

which, when it was appeased by rape, instantaneously turned into bitter hatred, so that "Amnon hated her with exceeding great hatred; for the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her" (21). Clearly, in an individual with the pampered style of life of Amnon, it is to be expected that, upon getting his wish, he will tire of it. But this does not mean that one may deduce from the Amnon-Tamar incident that the kind of ambivalence expressed in his actions is the norm. Freud, invariably, made the diseased, the anti-social, the on-the-animal-level arrested the norm, and it is for this reason that religious leaders in quest of a psychology system find it so difficult to come to terms with psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis simply leaves no room for religion and its basic insights.

This does not mean that certain correctives and techniques innovated by Freudianism can not be helpful in pastoral counseling and guidance. The recognition of the importance of catharsis and the freeing of sex from the sense of guilt which was imposed on it by Christianity are important contributions of psychoanalysis. But to be fruitful for religion, it is imperative that psychoanalysis should go beyond itself and approach "the human personality with an awareness of its magnitude" (18, p. 262). This psychoanalysis has not achieved and, what is even more significant, does not aim to achieve. It is for this reason that the truce between religion and psychoanalysis is so uneasy, for as Ira Progoff sums it up:

There have been innumerable attempts to relate depth psychology to religion and art; but for the most part these have been uneasy failures, suggesting that, despite their very good intentions, they were artificially contrived. The kind of psychology they chose to apply did not deal sympathetically with their material. Working with the analytical type of psychology, they labored under a severe handicap, for its reductive point of view was inherently out of tune with the requirements of spontaneous experience that is the core of the creative life (18, pp. 265f.)

The task for Individual Psychology is staked out by the great need and clamor for "a psychology with a soul" (1, p. 5). There is indeed the possibility of close cooperation and mutual enrichment of religion and depth psychology, provided the psychology is Adler's Individual Psychology.

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