

Admiel Kosman  
Gender and Dialogue in the Rabbinic Prism

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# Gender and Dialogue in the Rabbinic Prism

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## In Place of an Introduction: On Gender Issues and Their Possible Significance for Understanding the Spiritual World of the Rabbis

### “Masculinity” and “Femininity” in the Psychosexual Theory of Freud and Nancy Chodorow

One of the central perspectives that influenced the writing of this book is connected to the distinction between “masculinity” and “femininity” drawn so sharply in post-Freudian feminist discussions.<sup>1</sup> Freud famously assumed that the traditional family structure is responsible for various psychosexual developmental processes among both sexes. Although Freud found no gender differences in the effect created by the early periods of the psyche, the oral and the anal, boys and girls develop in different ways beginning with the phallic stage, after they discover the anatomic differences between them: the fact that the boy has a penis, while the girl does not.

In this stage (from the age of three to about five or six), when the focus of the child’s psychosexual world moves to the pleasure derived from the stimulation of the sexual organs, the child gains an awareness of the importance of the mother as the fulfiller of his needs, and the curtain raises in his psyche on the greatest drama of his life, what Freud called the “Oedipus complex”: the child-son develops a fierce erotic attraction to his mother, and imagines that he conquers her for himself. But then he learns, to his disappointment, that the mother “belongs” to “Father.”<sup>2</sup> This arouses the child’s aggressive desires against the father, but since his way of thinking is still childish, he imagines that the father sees his forbidden thoughts, and is afraid lest he

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1 For a cogent summation of the Freudian approach and the opposition to it in feminist thought, see Friedman, *Annie Oakley*, pp. 27–37.

2 On the nature of the “Father” and the “Law of the Father,” see below, n. 10, and the expansion in chap. 3.

will be punished and the source of his pleasures taken from him. In other words, he fears castration. This anxiety is resolved only when the child learns that it is better for him to identify with his father instead of fighting him. He thereby resolves the Oedipal conflict by identification with the father, which transforms him into a “male” in his own eyes – a powerful male, similar to the father, and therefore someone capable of acquiring a woman, a substitute for the mother whom he forwent.<sup>3</sup>

Identification with the father is an extremely important process from the educational aspect, as well, for it is in this stage that the child internalizes the cultural values of “forbidden” and “permitted” that, so Freud maintains, come from the “father,” and not from the “mother.” Internalization of values is the basis for the development of the super-ego, that is responsible for everything related to guilt feelings, morality, and conscience.

Freud was much more hesitant regarding the developmental process of the daughter, and despite his suggesting somewhat of a female developmental process, he sensed its insufficiency, and for the rest of his life he repeatedly spoke of what seemed to him as the “enigma” inherent in the female character.<sup>4</sup>

Freud assumed that the daughter, too, develops feelings toward her mother, but he argued that in the phallic stage, when she discovers that she lacks a penis, she views herself as an inferior creature and develops penis envy of the other sex. The girl blames the mother for her sense of castration, and therefore transfers her love from the mother (the object of her first love) to the father.

From then on, a process occurs similar to that experienced by the son: the daughter, who is erotically attached to her father, battles with her mother over his love, and only when she realizes that she cannot receive from her father the “missing organ” – since it “belongs” exclusively to the mother – she changes the nature of the struggle: she identifies with the mother, and thereby acquires her sexual identity as a

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3 It should be noted that empirical studies conducted in this field do not support Freud’s conjecture regarding the importance of fear of castration by the father during the course of the son’s separation from the mother. These studies show that the father’s support and positive approach, specifically, encourage the child to identify with him, and to abandon competitiveness and rivalry. See Bitman, *Personality*, vol. 1, p. 128.

4 For a comprehensive summary of this issue, see Gay, *Freud*, pp. 501–22, and the excellent bibliography, pp. 773–74.

woman. The psychoanalytical significance of being a woman is therefore the acceptance of the fact of castration, followed by the awakening aspiration to attain for herself a male who gives her the missing phallus, that she can often identify, after birth, in her infant.

Thus, Freud’s theory defines “femininity” as sexuality that developed as a result of jealousy of the male penis-possessor, and from the failure to be like him. Freud especially emphasizes this in his description of the daughter’s development:

One cannot very well doubt the importance of envy for the penis. You may take it as an instance of male injustice if I assert that envy and jealousy play an even greater part in the mental life of women than of men. It is not that I think these characteristics are absent in men or that I think they have no other roots in women than envy for the penis; but I am inclined to attribute their greater amount in women to this latter influence.<sup>5</sup>

Freud also assumed that, since the daughter has no fear of castration, since she is already “castrated”, and is aware that she has no penis to be taken away from her, her Oedipus complex will never be finally resolved. Thus, according to Freud, she is incapable of developing a strong social-moral conscience like that of the son:

The fact that women must be regarded as having little sense of justice is no doubt related to the predominance of envy in their mental life; for the demand for justice is a modification of envy and lays down the condition subject to which one can put envy aside. We also regard women as weaker in their social interests and as having less capacity for sublimating their instincts than men.<sup>6</sup>

This Freudian approach was quite dominant in the past, and was the starting point for numerous dynamic psychological conceptions, even though many were uneasy with it. This concern was already voiced in the early 1940s by Karen Horney, who started out as a classical psychoanalyst. She opposed Freud’s declaration that women possessed a weaker conscience, and argued that penis envy was not a central factor

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5 Freud, *Psychological Works*, vol. 22, p. 125. Cf. Philo: “For no Essene takes a wife, because a wife is a selfish creature, excessively jealous and an adept at beguiling the morals of her husband and seducing him by her continued impositions” (Philo, *Hypothetica* 11.14, trans. vol. 9, pp. 442–43).

6 Freud, *Psychological Works*, vol. 22, p. 134. Cf. the Talmudic assertion (BT Bava Metzia 87a): “A woman looks with a more grudging eye on guests than a man.” A statement in *Sefer Hasidim* (para. 135, p. 146) closely accords with Freud’s claim: “A person should not take his wife’s advice regarding a commandment, because she looks with a grudging eye on guests.”

in the daughter's seeking the father's love, but rather the biological attraction characteristic of the female sex.<sup>7</sup>

Now, however, following the attention devoted to this topic in recent decades in feminist research, it seems that a completely different conception of the developmental course of "femininity" is emerging, one that refuses to place femininity in the shadow of masculinity and secondary to it.

The most interesting countertheory to that of Freud was advanced by Nancy Chodorow, based on the assumption that the first meaningful son-daughter difference is the fact of the daughter's birth to one of her one gender, while the son is born to one not of his gender. The daughter's initial identification with one of her own sex facilitates the development of her feminine identity, while the son's identification with the mother, whose sex is different from his, poses an obstacle to the development of his male identity. Unlike the daughter, during the course of normal development the son is to pass from the initial identification with the mother to identification with the father. And since the original connection with the mother is so strong – the symbiotic bond of such a tender age – it proves difficult to sever, and this might never be fully accomplished.

Consequently, the son defines himself at the beginning, when he has somewhat distanced himself from the mother, in terms of separation and negation, as someone who is not a daughter, but a son; additionally, he is to identify with the father, who is a figure somewhat strange to him, and to whom his attitude is usually less intimate. This identification with the father therefore ensues from the need and necessity imposed on the son, more than from a profound emotional tie.

The daughter faces a different difficulty. She need not exchange identities, but in the course of time she reveals that even if her identity is easily attainable, it is not as appreciated as that of the son. So, the son must invest effort to firmly base his identity, which is not self-understood, while the daughter, even if she feels that her identity is stable and distinct, has difficulty in accepting the fact of the lesser esteem afforded her identity.

This analysis of the psychological development of sons and daughters led Chodorow to argue that the daughter is more intimately

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7 Empirical studies, as well, did not provide evidence that women suffer from a feeling of inferiority due to their lack of a penis. See Bitman, *Personality*, vol. 1, p. 128.

aware of the experience of Being, while the son is closer to the experience of Doing. "Masculinity" is acquired through doing, while "femininity" is expressed by its very being, and in the woman's dialogue with herself and with her fellow.<sup>8</sup>

## Lacan's Interpretation of the Freudian Theory

Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst who structurally reinterpreted what Freud wrote, focused attention not on the penis (the anatomical sexual organ), around which the great drama depicted above plays out, but on its symbolic meaning. To this end Lacan stressed the importance of the phallus – and not the penis – as defining the "male" element that was at the basis of the struggle. He defined "phallus" as an extension of the feeling of ownership, the feeling of "I have," "this is mine"; and the inner expansion caused by this proprietary sense is the phallic sensation. The acquisition of a new object, profiting on the stock market, driving fast in a shiny automobile – all these are examples of phallic pleasure. Obviously, from this perspective, there are phallic women, just as there are phallic men. Lacan explains this thought:

Why speak of the phallus and not of the penis? [...] Because the phallus is not a question of form, or of an image, or of a phantasy, but rather of a signifier, the signifier of desire. In Greek antiquity the phallus is not represented by an organ but as an insignia; it is the ultimate significative object, which appears when all the veils are lifted. Everything related to it is an object of amputations and interdictions ... The phallus represents the intrusion of vital thrusting or growth as such, as what cannot enter the domain of the signifier without being *bared* from it, that is to say, covered over by castration ... It is at the level of the Other, in the place where castration manifests itself in the Other, it is in the mother – for both girls and boys – that what is called the castration complex is instituted. It is the desire of the Other which is marked by the bar.<sup>9</sup>

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- 8 See Chodorow, "Being and Doing." See also the depiction of being a woman in Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp. 62ff. Rich emphasizes that, as a woman, she did not experience her body as distinct and divorced from the surrounding world, as the male experiences this. She reports of situations in which she felt "the melting of the walls of flesh [...] blurring the boundary between body and body" (p. 63). For primary theoretical treatment experiments that seek to show that this distinction between "masculinity" and "femininity" has physical aspects, see, e.g., Dychtwald, *Bodymind*; Rushin, *Left, Right*.
- 9 Seminar of April-June 1958, "Les formations de l'inconscient," cited by Mannoni, *The Child*, pp. 276–77. See also Lacan, "Signification"; Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 312–14; Evans, *Dictionary*, pp. 140–44.

And now we come to Lacan's great innovation. He argued that there are two types of sexuality: phallic and nonphallic. Male sexuality is always phallic, since all males fall under the "Law of the Father," the phallic rule;<sup>10</sup> while sexuality for females is different: it is both phallic and feminine, that is, nonphallic.

What is "feminine sexuality"? According to Lacan, this is sexuality with a relationship to the "infinite," and he defines it negatively: it is not phallic sexuality. Masculinity, the pure phallic sexuality, is understandable, since the phallic movement is one within the time that is known to us and that is measurable. The phallus, like the penis, rises and falls; its movement is discernible, and we can say something about its essential nature; in contrast, female pleasure, that touches the "infinite," cannot be comprehended. Moreover, by the very fact of its being a process that continues "endlessly," it cannot be identified within the time processes known to us, all of which are related to the "Law of the Father." In this context, Lacan mentions the fact that women, unlike men, are capable of experiencing multiple orgasms; this, then, is a physical expression of that touching of the "infinite."

Feminine sexuality might therefore be completely different from masculine sexuality, which led Lacan to argue that it would be erroneous to think that the male and the female are complementary opposites who can attain this completion in the sexual encounter.

Lacan mentions that the recurring complaint voiced by men during the course of their treatment, in short, is that they do not receive what they want from the woman, and that she does not really understand them; while women frequently say that they do not receive what they want from men, **despite** their understanding the latter. With or without understanding, both sexes do not derive the sense of mutual completion and harmony from the relations between them.

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10 The "Law of the Father" is the term Lacan used to define in the psychological world (more precisely: in the symbolic system in the life of the psyche; see Mannoni, *The Child*, p. 270; Evans, *Dictionary*, pp. 98–99) what Levi-Strauss saw in the world of laws, and the symbolic relationship of the world into which we are born. This symbolic system ("culture") frequently opposes our hidden desires, which are given expression only in indirect fashions, in dreams and the like. The "Law of the Father" is therefore the symbolic structure constructed as the social language of words, and is similarly composed of strings of signifiers. Just as Levi-Strauss thought that the symbolic function of culture – any culture – is based on the first law, the "spark" that ignited culture, the law of incest, Lacan, following Freud, believed that the psyche's symbolic network rests on the "Law of the Father" (see Mannoni, *The Child*, p. 271; Evans, *Dictionary*, p. 99).

To explain the profundity of this idea, Lacan uses Freud's argument in *Totem and Taboo* that masculinity is the product of the early repression that follows the murder of the "mythic father" because of the longing to win the mother. Freud found this early repression responsible for the creation of the guilt feelings that led the "sons" (that is, men) to accept the "Law of the Father."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, we can say that we know what is "masculinity" (for both men and women), and that we can speak of it and understand it, since this collective acceptance of the "Law of the Father" is what defines the "male"; while women are not subject to a single law, and therefore possess an element that remains mysterious and incomprehensible to men; and, Lacan emphasizes, to themselves, as well.

Lacan draws this into clearer focus by declaring that **the** woman does not exist, even though, obviously, there are many women: there is no female prototype, and every woman is a special case, an "individual rule" from which conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the essential nature of "femininity."<sup>12</sup>

## The Drawbacks of the Freudian Approach

Each in their own way, Lacan and Chodorow raise a similar notion: the "feminine" experience differs from the "masculine" one in that it is not subject (at least not absolutely, like the male experience) to the process of desire that operates the phallic movement. Femininity is characterized by the experience of Being, unlike masculinity, with its experience of Doing.

Since Freud hardly gave any thought to these understandings of the unique essence of femininity, we can definitely state that he regarded all psychological processes, of both men and women, as revolving around the phallic movement. Accordingly, the male penis stands at the center of the psychological drama that he depicts, and he connects

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11 Although it should be said that, according to Lacan, males, too, can sometimes experience "feminine sexuality"; thus, the mystic, the poet, and the like, who relate to the infinite. See Evans, *Dictionary*, pp. 220–21.

12 The connection to the concept of the "individual rule" is mine. I am attempting here to present this Lacanian idea in a manner similar to the Kantian definition of beauty as an "individual rule" (see Lorand, *On the Nature of Art*, pp. 85–86). For more on these issues, see Kosman and Golan, "Woman's Voice," and the bibliography there.

everything with the varying degrees of its presence or absence. As, however, Marilyn Yalom observed, if Freud had been born a woman, he might have preferred to view the structure of sexual development from a completely different perspective. Center stage in the human psychological drama would be occupied, not by the male penis, but by the female breast that feeds and gives – the first object, whose impact on the infant's life is so decisive.<sup>13</sup> Yalom suggests the following, as a mirror image to Freud's theory:

A boy's mother is the first object of his love, and she remains so in essence all through his life. From the moment that he is attached to the mother's breast, he cannot get enough of it. If a new baby comes to replace him at the maternal breast, he will greet his younger sibling as an intruder and reproach his mother for withholding the breast from him – the earlier, rightful possessor. Hence, the feelings of ambivalence toward the mother and the sibling rivalry that festers within so many families.

As the little boy advances toward puberty, he harbors the fantasy that the breast will someday be restored to him. Unconsciously, he believes that he, too, like his sisters, will develop breasts in adolescence. When this does not happen, he feels seriously wronged. He holds his mother responsible for his defective chest and does not forgive her for having put him at such a disadvantage. He feels hollow and inferior to his sisters, with their bulging breasts, and he never gets over this sense of deficiency. The hopeless wish for his own breasts leaves ineradicable traces on the boy's development and on the formation of his character. He desires throughout his life to avenge himself on women for possessing something which he lacks. Till the end of his days, the female breast will inspire in him both a desire for ownership and a rage at his own shortcomings in not developing breasts himself. The first sentiment usually translated into a need to touch or suck women's breasts, and the bigger the better. The second sentiment results in self-contempt, which is sometimes displaced into acts of violence against women, with breasts specifically targeted for retaliation.

Even as a father, the adult male will be jealous of the baby at his wife's breast. He will always see that child as an interloper in the place that was originally his. Hence, the murderous wish he unconsciously holds toward his own offspring, and the inevitability of conflict between the generations. The desire for the breast must be seen as the foundation on which all of civilization lies, with both Eros and Thanatos warring for its possession.<sup>14</sup>

This amazing description of breast envy, with its ironic tone that is patently directed against the classic Freudian theory, aids us in clarifying the point raised above, if we assume that males, who must endure the

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13 We should mention Melanie Klein's observation that, for the newborn, the breast represent both the "good" and the "bad." From this aspect, the following discussion of the identification of the breast as a central organ in the life of the psyche refers to the "good breast." On Klein's theory, see Segal, *Klein*, mainly chap. 4.

14 Yalom, *History of the Breast*, pp. 152–53.



heavy burden of the “Law of the Father,” suffer in one way or another from profound envy of the female ability to experience the “infinite.” And then we will be able to present the object of their jealousy by means of a specific physical organ: the breast, or the womb.<sup>15</sup>

In light of this, we can agree with Lacan, who wishes to shift the discussion from the anatomical organs themselves to what they represent, that is, softness and giving, on the one hand, and possessiveness, on the other. Males are envious of the female ability to live in a dimension that is not fixated on phallic ambition, that is entirely chained to the life of doing – namely, the ability to derive pleasure from Being as it is, without the aggressiveness and violence that accompany the acquisitive action of male Doing. In other words, this envy is directed to the female ability to touch the “infinite” (in Lacan’s terminology), or to what Jean Klein calls “Welcoming,” a term that he uses in order to relate to the ability to experience moments of grace of contact with the Other as subject:

Sustaining without concentration happens spontaneously when there is no agent, no sustainer. In the absence of a director who is interested in the object, the emphasis falls on the looking, welcoming, itself, and the object is set free.<sup>16</sup> In other words, at the moment of taking note there is *only* taking note and nothing to note. The object is really only fixed energy and the release of the energy happens suddenly, unexpectedly.<sup>17</sup>

A description of the so complex relationship between masculinity and femininity could be enriched, in light of this observation, by the insight that envy (not as it was presented by Freud) is two-directional: a woman’s phallic aspect might cause her to be jealous of men, the possessors of a phallus, and to want to be like them; and, conversely, men are liable to envy women for the mysterious qualities of giving, warmth, and intimacy with which they have been blessed, the source of which men have difficulty in understanding.<sup>18</sup>

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15 On the womb, see Fromm, *Forgotten Language*, 232–34.

16 That is, the process characteristic of Doing, of transforming the Other into an object, ceases.

17 Klein, *Who Am I?*, pp. 49–50.

18 If my proposal is plausible, then we can understand the sweeping complaint that can be understood from Yalom’s note that the Freudian phallus-centered theory is merely the continuation of “‘the reign of the phallus’ that has dominated Western civilization for the past twenty-five hundred years” (*History of the Breast*, p. 8).

## Sara Ruddick and the Care Experience

This point is examined in another way by Sara Ruddick, who blazed a unique path among the diversity of feminist approaches. Ruddick argues that women think differently from men because they are somehow connected to the Care experience, of caring for and raising the child. Motherhood as a uniquely female occupation fosters a completely different type of experience, that is unknown to men. Ruddick's conclusions lead her from a specific and precise analysis of the maternal way of thinking to far-reaching political thought, on changing the way of the world by the adoption of "maternal thinking."<sup>19</sup>

Thus, for example, Ruddick portrays the mother's pressing need to gaze upon the newborn, which is essential for the latter, but when done in a too pressing manner, arouses in the baby a sense of invasiveness and delays his development, which requires a great deal of freedom. Ruddick accordingly argues that women learn to develop a special way of looking, that, on the one hand, examines, while, on the other, is not overly oppressive, a sort of "remote supervision" of the playing child.

The development of this complex "look" teaches women to acknowledge that, on the one hand, the child, for them, is an object that must be guarded above all, while, on the other, he is a subject, whose freedom, independence, and perhaps also privacy, must be respected. Ruddick believes that this uniquely female trait induces female humility, since, from the distance at which the woman supervises her child, she knows that she is not capable of completely controlling the situation.

Obviously, the mother walks a tightrope here, and she is liable to slip into suffocating activity or, conversely, excessive passivity. Ideally, however, the practice of motherhood will produce a special type of maternal look that teaches the mother humility, one that "involves a selfless respect for reality."<sup>20</sup>

Reaching a conclusion in a similar vein, Carol Gilligan observed that male images include violent fantasies, manifestations of aggressiveness, and conflicts, while the woman sees "a world of care and pro-

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19 See Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*. Fromm offers characteristics of the "masculine" and the "feminine" that closely resemble those of Ruddick. See Fromm, *Art of Loving*. For a discussion of this, and Schechter's responses to Fromm's characteristics based on several Talmudic sources, see Tadmor, *Intentionality*, pp. 180–85.

20 Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, pp. 72–73. Ruddick's definition relies on the earlier definition by Iris Murdoch.

tection, a life lived with others whom ‘you may love as much or even more than you love yourself.’”<sup>21</sup> Even if aggressiveness is to be regarded as an instinctual impulse, Gilligan maintains that

the violence in male fantasy seems rather to arise from a problem in communication and an absence of knowledge about human relationships. [...] eleven-year-old Amy sets out to build connection where Kohlberg<sup>22</sup> assumes it will fail.<sup>23</sup>

The different viewpoints presented here bring us to the central topic of this book: seeing the Other and the dialogue with him, which, as we already see, is prevented by the phallic relation. By its very definition as expansion and as conquest, phallicism regards the Other solely as an object to be used to attain its ends.

We, however, must constantly remind ourselves that we are not speaking of men and women, but of masculinity and femininity.

## Between Freud and Buber: Between Psychoanalysis and Dialogue

If we accept Freud’s hypothesis of the existence of the unconscious in the life of the psyche, we must also accept the accompanying conjecture that a considerable portion of our psychological energy is invested in the effort to ignore wishes, stimuli, and feelings which we do not wish to confront, a process that Freud termed “repression.” Freud concluded from this that the structure of the human psyche is more complex than appears from a superficial examination, and even from our self-inspection. For if the structure of our psyche generates repressions, this implies the existence of a basic division, between the seemingly “dominant” part and other parts, that cannot be exposed and conscious. Freud called the part that exerts mental energy in the supervision and policing of the others the “ego,” and the other, unconscious, part, that is compelled to be “repressed,” the “id.”<sup>24</sup>

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21 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 38.

22 A scholar who posed moral dilemmas to boys and girls and examined their responses. See the discussion in Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 24ff.

23 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 45.

24 This primary division obviously has a very complex structure in Freudian theory, but its details are not pertinent for our discussion. For a more complete picture of the relation between the topographical model and the structural one in Freudian theory, see Bitman, *Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 92–99.

Freud wondered why this complex and divided mechanism was created in the human psyche, and the answer he found was that the unconscious part contains types of thoughts, desires, and emotions that the “ego” repressed since they caused it anxiety, generally because these are the types of things that society regards as taboo. Such, for example, is the primal, universal repression that Freud thought to be the spark that ignites human culture:<sup>25</sup> the repression of the child’s desire for his mother.

The difficulty of acknowledging the existence of certain contents in our psyche and the tendency to repress them are therefore dependent on what is taboo in the society in which the individual was raised.<sup>26</sup> At any rate, we have not yet fully answered the question of the purpose of the ego when it represses these undesirable contents. The social explanation is not exhaustive, since we can raise another question regarding it: Why does the ego fear the criticism of the surrounding society? Why doesn’t it ignore this criticism? And as we know, various individuals are distinguished from one another by their level of anxiety from contact with the realm of the “forbidden.”

Freud addressed this issue by stating that the fear of social criticism is not the only reason why the “ego” acts to repress problematic contents. Its concentrated effort to repress unpleasant matters that emerge in mental activity is part of the hard work of self-organization, at the end of which it hopes to obtain the pleasure which it knows it cannot instantly attain: phallic pleasure. It is only at the price of repressing parts of the id, and to great degree, also of repressing the threatening voice of the superego, that the ego can hope to win the social recognition that will enable it to attain the desired gratification (the deep source controlling it is the desires latent in the id). Freud called this principle, that exposes the ego’s sophistication, the “reality principle.”<sup>27</sup>

But what is the pleasure sought by the ego? Freud assumed that the mental energy that drives man – whose hidden source is in the libidinal energies in the id – is the life-energy, the erotic energy, to which Freud later added the destructive urge, the Thanatos.<sup>28</sup>

25 See above, n. 10.

26 Although there are types of taboo that each human society adopts, such as the varieties of the taboo against incest, the majority are arbitrary and dependent on the local context of forbidden and permitted.

27 See Bitman, *Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 96–97.

28 For more on this important discovery by Freud, who did not expand on it, see Bitman, *Personality*, pp. 100–101.

Unlike animals, Freud explained, man can derive erotic pleasure in many ways. First, because sexual energy can adopt many garbs; and second, the ego can effect sublimation processes in the nonsublimated sexual energy<sup>29</sup> that it uses to create a broad range of new pleasurable possibilities. Thus, according to Freud, phallic pleasure is not necessarily that produced during the process of direct sexual stimulation – and, as we saw above in Lacan’s explanation, every expansion of the egoistic center creates phallic pleasure, since the phallus is defined as the expansion of the self. Consequently, every sensation of increasing and intensifying self-importance is a phallic sensation.

At this point in our discussion, we find a linkage between two issues that Freud spoke of separately, and that are generally perceived as being unconnected: phallic energy and narcissistic energy. Methodical and consistent thinking about the essence of the issues proposed above leads us to conclude that these two forms of energy are closely bound together. If we understand that phallic pleasure is derived from the expansion of the egoistic center, then we must assume that this expansion primarily relates to the creation of the inner image of “being of value,” and that this image is the leading concern of the egoistic center.

For the “male” who is engaged in Doing, in the conquest of some goal or other, his resources are not exclusively concentrated in the modest aim of releasing the drive energy in order to reach homeostasis (a state of balance, the silencing of the libidinal tension), as is the case for most animals, but this is a much more complex phenomenon: the “male” wants to prove his “masculinity” by an act of victory and conquest; by this act, he strengthens the existing (albeit tenuous) construction of the male image, from which he derives phallic pleasure.

The Don Juan type, for example, derives phallic pleasure from repeatedly proving to himself that women fall prey to his charms, and based on these recurring “proofs” his ego succeeds in creating the desired **image** of the conquering male. This image, and not the physical orgasms themselves, that he probably could attain also in a prolonged relationship with a single partner, is the goal sought by the Don Juan, since it provides him with the most intense phallic pleasure.

This last example leads us to conclude that the ego’s central activity is the formation of a highly important self-image; whether that of the

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29 See the extensive discussion: Loewald, *Sublimation*.

“charming Don Juan,” or any other image of the expansion of the self, the ego derives phallic pleasure from it. This activity can be presented in theatrical terms, as does Jean Klein:

We are in the theatre watching our own play on stage. The actor is always ‘behind’ his persona. He seems to be completely lost in suffering, in being a hero, a lover, a rascal.<sup>30</sup>

This is a very complex and misleading structure. Lacan’s conclusions, that cast some light on the relationship between the “actor” and the “persona,” might aid in opening some of the entanglements of this thicket.

Since we all act totally coupled to language, in both the manner of our communication with the external world and our inner lives (Lacan argued that the unconscious, too, is actually built from “language”), then the “actor,” the subject, is nothing other than words. Lacan emphasizes that it would be incorrect to say that the subject uses words; rather, the subject is moved by words, and indeed, is nothing more than them.

When we speak or write, we present ourselves through words. This, however, according to Lacan, is not a direct communication between subjects. Lacan formulated his definition of verbal interpersonal communication as follows: “The signifiers present the subject to the other signifiers.” He meant that the subject’s signifiers are a sort of “advocate,” who presents his “client” in the most sophisticated fashion to the “advocate” of the subject facing him, who, in turn, performs a similar task for his client.

According to Lacan, therefore, dialogue between two partners is not an innocent and direct conversation, in which two subjects exchange information about themselves by means of the language, as would appear at first glance. Exactly the opposite is the case: the “advocates” are supposed to represent their “clients” in a way that will completely blur their truth, and their goal is always to present the client in the way that seems best to them for the “transaction.”<sup>31</sup> From

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30 Klein, *Who Am I?*, p. 22. Erving Goffman finely presented this gap between the “actor” and the “person” he wears, based on studies and observations utilizing the precise scientific tools of microsociology. Goffman distinguishes between front and back, and precisely defines the manner in which the “actor” functions within the “person” in the complex situations of social life. See Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, esp. pp. 56–66.

31 On the sociological definitions of the modern “marriage transaction” in this spirit, see below, chap. 2. The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, who, too,

this aspect, language is not only communication meant to connect the speakers to each other; paradoxically, it is, first and foremost, a vehicle that separates them from one another!

Moreover, Lacan believed that just as a lawyer who represents his client is not just his devoted and obedient agent, but is also an entity in his own right, who guides the client out of the lawyer's own private interests, so too language, in the final analysis, becomes an "entity" in its own right vis-a-vis the subject – an entity that frequently blurs and confuses it. Just like that lawyer whose negotiations, goals, and way of acting are not always completely evident to his client, and the course of action he adopts is not necessarily the correct one for his client.<sup>32</sup>

The cynical and pessimistic portrayal of human "conversation" that I presented here in a number of variants is certainly correct in most instances, but undoubtedly arouses unease: are these all the inherent human possibilities? Is a person really only words, as Lacan describes him? Is there no likelihood in interpersonal communication of exceeding the impersonal patterns of the discourse between lawyers? Is there no way to breach this pessimistic picture of humankind, and make room for intimacy between any two people?

The misleading mental structure from within which we speak with another person, and our concealed aim, like that Don Juan, to derive pleasure from the encounter, an aim that does not leave us free to listen to what emerges from the words of the other, are what led Martin Buber to concisely present the schematic of everyday, regular human relationships as "I-It."<sup>33</sup>

Buber realized that we are generally not engaged in a true dialogue with one's fellow that is based on actual listening. While, up front, the

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noted language's misleading function, cites Talleyrand, who argued that man did not receive speech in order to express his thoughts, but to conceal them (see the discussion in Mualem, "Limits of Language," pp. 146–47). Ludwig Wittgenstein writes in a similar spirit: "Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.002; trans., pp. 36–37).

32 See Hill, *Lacan for Beginners*, pp. 25–35.

33 Buber does not relate directly to Freud's mechanistic assumption of the structure of the human psyche. See what he wrote on Freud's teaching: Buber, "Education" (*Between Man and Man*, pp. 111–13); Shapira, *Between Spirit and Reality*, pp. 170–71. In a note opening the first introduction to his book *Moses* Buber calls Freud "auf seinem Gebiet so bedeutender Forscher" (see Buber, *Moses*, p. 7).

ego presents its message to the other in a logical manner, and pretends to conduct a dialogue, in the back, hidden from sight, with great sophistication, it transforms the encounter into a tool, and the other into an object, hoping to derive some phallic pleasure through them. Returning to Klein's metaphor, we can say that during the course of the dialogue each partner is engaged in screening his own private movie on the possible pleasure to be derived from this seeming dialogue.

The Buberian concept of dialogue, as opposed to Lacan's functional attitude to the other, posits that actual connection to the other as subject is possible, albeit very seldomly. Buber assumes that only awareness of our obtuseness will enable us to breach it. True dialogue is conditional on a clear and sober view, to the greatest extent possible, of these inner processes, and on placing them honestly, in clear view in the relationship between a person and himself, and between a person and his fellow.<sup>34</sup> This perception of oneself and of the other invites a special type of love, that bears no resemblance to the falling in love that turns the other into an object to fulfill our lack.<sup>35</sup> I will term this love "sight."<sup>36</sup> This is what Buber called the "I-Thou" relationship:

If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-Thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things

This human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time, within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in *his* light.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of belief in God – specifically, the monotheistic concept of one God, to be precise, the idea of mystical divine unity in the Hasidic

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34 The fellow could be the natural realm, the human realm, and the spiritual beings (Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 21–22).

35 Lacan (if we set aside for a moment his revolutionary idea concerning the feminine and "infinite" sexuality) generally assumed that love is always built on an error of identification: the lover identifies in the loved the "object petit a" (in Lacanian terminology), and thereby objectifies it for himself; there is never a subject-subject meeting.

36 See below, chap. 2.

37 Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 23–24. For a more precise understanding of the "I-Thou" relationship as contrasted with the "I-It" one, see Bergmann, *Dialogical Philosophy*, pp. 217–38; and the discussion in Dreyfus, *Philosophical Dialogue*, pp. 145–57. Sociologists, as well, using their own tools, noted that there are different types of relationship patterns. On a quite similar division by relationships, see Kosman, "Adam Gave Names," pp. 82ff.



context of our interpretation – underlies Buber’s assumption. According to him, an “I-Thou” relationship is possible only when a person is not fragmented, and is capable of listening to himself, as we explained above. Only then can he completely devote himself to listening to the other, and see him as “Thou”:

The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*.

All real living is meeting.<sup>38</sup>

Buber, as a Jewish religious thinker, maintained that the divine, which is always “Thou,” the “Eternal Thou,” is present in such an encounter between one subject and another:<sup>39</sup>

The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal *Thou*.

Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of very particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*. Through this mediation of the *Thou* of all beings fulfilment, and non-fulfilment, of relations comes to them: the inborn *Thou* is realised in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the *Thou* that by its nature cannot become *It*.<sup>40</sup>

And once again, to Klein’s simple, but enlightening, formulation:

In intimate or problematic situations, each must speak in humility of how they feel. It is simply a statement of facts with no justification, no interpretation. We must not look for a conclusion. If we allow the situation complete freedom from evaluation and judgement and pressure to find a conclusion, many things appear which do not belong to our memory.

Humility arises when there is no reference to an ‘I’. This emptiness is the healing factor in any situation. [...] Be open to non-concluding. In this openness the situation offers its own solution.<sup>41</sup>

Buber called such a meeting the “embrace of unifying.”<sup>42</sup> All this allows us to somewhat clarify the Buberian concept of unity: when we come to meet one another, we are burdened with our own identities, experiences, and baggage, from within which a certain narrative is pres-

38 Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 11. On the need for that man to first listen to himself and not act in a fragmented manner, see the extensive discussion on the narrative of R. Assi and his mother (below, Chapter Four).

39 For Buber’s concept of the “eternal Thou” (or the “absolute Thou”), see Horwitz, “How the Book,” pp. 169–71.

40 Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 75.

41 Klein, *Who Am I?*, p. 23.

42 See Bergmann, *Dialogical Philosophy*, p. 225. Bergmann’s discussion is most probably the 1925 essay by Buber, “*Al ha-Ma’aseh ha-Hinukhi*” (translated as “Education” in *Between Man and Man*, pp. 109–31).

ented. But there is no meaning to its presentation to the other as long as the parties to the meeting present two narratives that are set forth and confront each other in the nonempty space of inattentiveness. This is the situation we encounter in our everyday lives. The divine-inner “miracle,” the state of mind in which “the Divine Presence abides” between the two parties in dialogue (“When husband and wife are worthy, the Divine Presence abides between them” – BT Sotah 17a) occurs when each party to the conversation frees a true, experiential, place for sincere attentiveness to the different narrative that arises from the Otherness standing before him. This profound attentiveness may be called “humility.” As Klein explains this:

Humility is not something you wear like a garment. It has nothing to do with bowed heads and averted eyes! It comes from the reabsorption of individuality in being, in stillness. It comes from the ending of all agitation. In attention, alertness, there is humility. It is receptivity, openness, to all that life brings. Where there is no psychological memory, no accumulation of knowledge, there is innocence. Innocence is humility.<sup>43</sup>

### A Note on the Relationship between “I-Thou” and Halakhah and “Law”

The direction charted by Buber could be understood as a call to rebel against all the formal modes of communication of language embodied in the halakhah and “law” in general, but this would be incorrect. For Buber, every type of “revolt” is an absolute mistake, since it is done from its nature, not in a dialogic way, and rather creates a new dogma or “just ideology,” that arrogantly raises itself over its predecessors. The call for dialogue seeks a deeper understanding of the law, that actually expands the realm of its applicability.

For someone in an “I-Thou” relationship, the encounter with the “Eternal Thou” constantly renews itself. The “encounter” is a response to the divine command that the individual “hears” within the “situation,” that mandates some action or other; consequently, he is constantly commanded at each and every moment of his life by the “individual law” of which we spoke above, that is reborn, fresh and true, in the moment of the encounter with the “Thou.”

What, then, is the role of the “Law,” according to the Buberian way of thinking? When an enlightened society formulates its laws with hu-

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<sup>43</sup> Klein, *Who Am I?*, p. 23.

mility and tolerance, and with the understanding that their application is always a private matter that is connected to the inner world of each person at a given moment and his unique capacity, then it does not attempt to strictly impose the "Law of the Father" on its members. This society has only two concerns: the establishment of general principles that enable each individual to remember the general orientation of the law; and the defense of the weak against harm by those who seek to derive improper benefit by taking advantage of this relative freedom.

This is like the difference between the school as an institution whose activity is based on the assumption that "the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21) and "he who spares the rod hates his son" (Prov. 13:24), thereby combining a prison with a preachy institution that brainwashes the child with platitudes and hollow demands, on the one hand; and, on the other, an educational institution that assumes that "God made men upright, but they have engaged in too much reasoning" (Eccl. 7:29). True educational work resembles that of the devoted gardener, who provides the tender shoots with all the conditions they need to blossom on their own, in their own way, and does not interfere in their growth with direction and criticism. Any such intervention would count as the "much reasoning" that spoils the tree's natural growth, which is the upright and correct growth – even if things sometimes appear differently to the "gardener." This is the secret of the gardener's dialogue with the budding shoot, and the secret of love.<sup>44</sup>

This sharp distinction between institutionalized "religion" in its problematic sense, that imposes a dogmatic, harsh, and inflexible "Law of the Father," and the attentive "religiosity" that Buber proposes, requires very sharp rational vision, on the one hand, and, on the other, the ability to clearly see the inner world, in which the great drama between the repressor and the repressed is played out.<sup>45</sup>

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44 For the educational act and its relation to Eros, see Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 120–25.

45 On the distinction between "religion" and "religiosity," see the extensive distinction: Kosman, "Obedience to the Law." Marshall Rosenberg recently linked these dialogic elements with various psychological approaches, thereby posing an intriguing educational challenge that could turn our theoretical discussions into a practical guidance approach capable of aiding in the development of dialogic relationships from kindergartens to institutions of adult education. See Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*.

## Phallicism, Humility, and the Tension between “Masculinity” and “Femininity” in the Aggadic Narratives

Each of the chapters in this book, that are literary readings of texts from the aggadic literature, examines the attitude of the Talmudic narratives to the phallic structure of the masculine reality in its contact with the female “infinite.” In my suggested reading, these texts confront the phallic, masculine world – as it transfers its achievement-oriented movement of expansion to the “religious” sphere and the life of the study hall – with the Being represented by the female side. In the first narrative, of Mar Ukba and his wife, my reading emphasizes the inability of the masculine character of this prominent rabbi to “see” what his wife’s simple “good heart” enables her to.

This conclusion drawn from a reading of the Talmudic narratives is especially significant in light of the texts of nascent Christianity, with their patent depiction of the woman as an inferior being, who is incapable of directly meeting God and who needs the male’s intermediation. We find this explicitly in Paul’s writings, in the hierarchical order set forth in I Corinthians 11:3:<sup>46</sup> “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”<sup>47</sup> The aggadah, in contrast, frequently emphasizes the spiritual quality of the “simple person” – which in many instances is represented by the woman, specifically – and shows that it is closer to God than the one who turns the arena of religious activity into a racetrack, with achievement as the prize.

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46 See Ruether, *Sexism*, pp. 53ff. Cf. also Weisberg, “Man Imagining Women,” that indicates that the sages of the Talmud had no difficulty in conceiving that women are in direct contact with God. Weisberg concludes: “While the Rabbis may have seen women as somewhat foreign beings, they did not regard them as alienated from God.”

47 The continuation of Corinthians also speaks clearly on this matter. Vv. 7–10 state: “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. (Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels.” In the interests of precision, however, we should note that vv. 11–12 assert “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman.” See the extended discussion of these verses by Orr and Walther, *I Corinthians*, pp. 258ff.; Byrne, *Paul*, esp. the discussion in chap. 3, pp. 31–58; see also the bibliography in Kosman and Golan, “Woman’s Voice,” n. 11.