Freud: “The brethren… were unkind and scornful of me…”

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Son who is dear to me, Shelomoh. In the seventh in the days of the years of your life the Spirit of the Lord began to move you and spoke within you: Go, read in my Book that I have written and there will burst open for you wellsprings of understanding, knowledge and wisdom. Behold it is the Book of Books, from which sages have excavated and lawmakers learned knowledge and judgment. A vision of the Almighty did you see; you heard and strove to do, and you soared on the wings of the Spirit.

Since then the book has been stored like the fragments of the tablets in an ark with me. For the day on which your years were filled to five and thirty I have put upon it a cover of new skin and have called it: “Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it.” And I have presented it to you as a memorial and as a reminder of love from your father, who loves you with everlasting love.

Jakob Son of R. Shelomah Freid [sic]


(Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s "deliberately literal" translation of Jakob Freud’s Hebrew inscription on the rebound Philippson Bible volume he presented Freud on the occasion of Freud’s birthday; Yerushalmi, 1991, 71.)

On April 24, 1900, Sigmund Freud gave a talk on Emile Zola’s Fecondite
at his B’nai B’rith lodge, which he had joined on September 29, 1897. Because it mirrors his Promised Land, an enlightened brotherly world, Freud could have easily penned the “divine dream” envisioned in this novel penned by Zola while in voluntary exile in England:

And the divine dream, the generous utopian thought
soars into the heavens; families blended into nations,
nations blended into mankind, one sole brotherly people
making of the world one sole city of peace and truth and justice! Ah! may eternal fruitfulness ever expand, may the seed of humanity be carried over the frontiers . . .

(Zola, 1899 [1925.] 411)

To have a ‘divine dream’ is one thing; to actually move on it is quite another, as Freud knows only too well. On Wednesday, April 25, 1900, the day following his B’nai B’rith talk and four days after Passover, the season the Messiah of the Jews is to appear, Freud penned Wilhelm Fliess the following, unintentionally revealing an inner resistance to acting on his ‘divine dream’:

Yesterday I gave a lecture on Zola’s Fecondite before my Society. I am always ill prepared; actually I start only an hour before. . . . During the night from Monday to Tuesday, I dreamed inordinately of this lecture. I explained that I had to go home to fetch the book, did not find the way and got lost, the weather was miserable . . . . The brethren, moreover, were unkind and scornful of me--conduct that is apt, quite surely to
reduce my interest in the success of my lecture (Freud, 1985, 410; the dream has not been published elsewhere.)

In "J'accuse!" (January 13, 1898), his bold defense of Captain Dreyfus languishing on Devil's Island off the coast of New Guinea, Zola denounced "that miserable antisemitism" (cf. "weather was miserable"). To eradicate that scourge, Freud secretly intends to do ill or evil (cf. "I am ... ill prepared"), that is to say, destroy the Torah: no Law, no Judaism, no Christianity, no miserable antisemitism. Accordingly, it is "apt" or fitting that his brethren, fellow sons of the convenant, are "unkind and scornful of" Freud, who would destroy their Tree of Life. To brave the hatred and contempt of his people would require the moral courage of a Zola. Does he then really wish to proceed with, not abandon or turn from, his impious ambition (cf. "reduce my interest...in...success")?

Perhaps this wicked son who has 'lost his way' should leave the "miserable antisemitism" to Herzl and his band of Zionists, and just "go home," return to that wellspring of "understanding, knowledge, and wisdom," the Book of Books, so dear to his grey-haired papa, Jakob, of blessed memory who loved him "with everlasting love"—and to the Almighty.

If "dreams are wishfulfilments" (Freud, 1900, 269), what would Freiud make of his brethren’s disdain? Consider this reading:

To eradicate antisemitism, I am bent on destroying the Torah. My brethen’s disdain signifies that at long last, I am making my move, showing my hand...
REFERENCES


