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A Well-Deserved Sabbath Rest: Three Freud Patriarchs

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The Talmud relates that King David constantly occupied himself with study on the Sabbath, for he had been foretold that on that day of the week he would die (Bab. Talmud, Shabbat 30a). Indeed, it was only when he ceased his study one Sabbath that the Angel of Death was able to claim him. In a related sense, we can speak likewise of the three generations of the Freud family: Sigmund Freud, his father Jacob, and grandfather Shlomo, after whom Sigmund was named. When their work was over, their time to lie down had arrived.

But beyond the basic commonality, the fate of all human beings, who must eventually yield to death and oblivion, the three generations of “patriarchs” mentioned above also shared life's culminating event on the Sabbath (i.e., the seventh day of the week), a coincidence gone unnoticed all these years. The records substantiating these occurrences are most illuminating even as they vary widely in preciseness, extent of available information, and nature of communication.

For Shlomo Freud, father and grandfather, respectively, of Jacob and Sigmund Freud, we have one clear detailed statement: the Gedenkblatt notice found in the Philipponson Bible. Ernest Freud (1956), Sigmund Freud's son, who discovered this sheet containing the notices of the death of Shlomo Freud and the birth of his posthumous grandson, believes that it was transferred to this Bible from another source, perhaps where other written records of life events were kept.

The memorial (copy of original document: courtesy of J. K. Davies, Freud Museum, London), translated from the Hebrew, reads:

My father, may his memory be for a blessing, Rabbi Shlomo son of Rabbi Ephraim Freud, may his memory be for a blessing, went to the land of heaven on the sixth day the fourth hour after the middle of the day during the month of First Adar on its sixteenth day 5616 and came to his

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rest upon his couch on the first day [of the week] the eighteenth day of the above-mentioned month in the city of his birth Tysmenitz. He shall rest on his couch who walks straightforward until the time at the end, until the day when He shall say to those that sleep in the dust “Awaken in peace.” Amen.

The day of death according to their reckoning [i.e., the secular calendar] was 21 February and the day of burial 23 February [1]856.

The approximate or exact biblical sources of the words and phrases in the memorial are: (1) “the land of heaven,” Ps 27:13; (2) “to his rest,” Is 11:10; (3) “upon his couch,” Memorial Prayer; (4) “He shall rest on his couch who walks straightforward,” Is 57: 2; (5) “until the time at the end,” Dan 11:35; (6) “to those that sleep in the dust,” Dan 12:2.

It should be noted that for the year 5616 the month of Adar was doubled (i.e., Adar I and Adar II). The lunar year of the Hebrew calendar is shorter and requires intercalary months during a 19-year cycle to balance the solar year.

The Jewish Sabbath extends from Friday evening to Saturday evening, beginning about a half hour before sunset, with occupational activities ending much earlier. In Jerusalem, the sound of a siren is heard throughout the city every Friday afternoon to announce the coming of the Sabbath. Moreover, burials are not permitted to desecrate the Sabbath; thus, eulogies and interments are postponed to Sunday.

It is noteworthy that Jacob Freud erred in his secular dating of his father's death and burial. The correct death date, based on Freund (**n.d.**), should have read 22 February and burial date 24 February 1856 (pp. 165, 167). These findings are significant in that, though these mistakes may have been an oversight, they reveal that Jacob was not attentive to secular aspects.

For knowledge of Jacob Freud's passing, we must look widely among the letters Sigmund Freud wrote and the evaluations of his dreams and related material. His letters to Wilhem Fliess particularly, discussed by Ernst Jones (**1953-57**) and detailed by Jeffrey M. Masson (**1985**), although also examined by other biographers, reveal his father's late illnesses and dying days. Apparently, Jacob died on Friday evening (23 October 1896), a few hours more into the Sabbath than the time of passing of his own father, Jacob was interred on Sunday (25 October 1896). Because we find nowhere in the Freudian literature the corresponding Hebrew dates, they were

ascertained, again from Freund (pp. 46, 48), to be 16 Heshvan 5657 and 18 Heshvan 5657 for the death and burial dates, respectively.

For Sigmund Freud's death, the best source is the record of his own personal physician, Max Schur (1972), who accompanied him from Vienna to London. He avers that Freud died on the night of Friday, 22 September 1939, an injection of morphine easing the way into his last sleep with death occurring about 3 AM (p. 529).

Thus, the parallel weekdays for death is evident: All three generations died on the sabbath, in Jewish lore a sign of a deserved rest. The day of Sigmund Freud's death has an additional unique feature: He died on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, coinciding with the Sabbath. In traditional Judaism this coincidence would be seen as quite significant: that thereby Sigmund Freud had been fully cleansed and forgiven of his "sins." It is not that Freud felt he had committed any sins or that he ever sought any forgiveness, but his later years do suggest something of a return to his heritage, for he had never forgotten or forsaken his people. Emanuel Rice (1990), for example, points out Freud's "acquisition of a complete set of Talmud ... activity the Bnai Brith, Zionist sympathies" as indications of his deep Jewish attachments (p. 24).

Nothing appears to be known regarding the state of health of Shlomo or any other medical conditions that might have contributed to his death. As we noted, Jacob Freud, in his faith, memorialized his father by writing that he will rest on his couch until "the sleepers in the dust will awaken" (Dan 12:2).

Sigmund Freud, however, does discuss in his letters (especially to Wilhelm Fliess, mentioned above) his own father's health and well-being during the late years. Only near the end of his life, however, (and after Jacob's death) did Freud bring himself to attribute to his father positive traits, and acknowledge personal attachment.

Jacob had a number of illnesses late in life. Jones (1953-57) tells us that Jacob's earliest recorded (about age 70) and least serious illness was glaucoma, successfully treated by a friend of Freud's (1:87). On his 78th birthday, according to Schur (1972), he had a severe attack of influenza during an epidemic, which greatly affected his health (p. 63). Even so he was apparently not bedridden until the last year of his life when "my old father ... [had] heart failure, paralysis of the liver," "paralysis of the bladder and rectum" with nutritional failure, and, finally, pneumonia

(Schur, 1972, pp. 193-194, 199). During this period Freud could write that “to be sure he is a tremendous fellow and should he be granted a span of well-being, as I hope he will” (p. 193) and “the old man strangely is thriving again” in a letter dated August 12, 1896, two months before his father's death (p. 196). Jacob Freud seemed to be a flickering candle that refused to go out. With his passing Sigmund could say that Jacob “was an interesting human being, very happy with himself” (p. 195) and “retained his beautiful composure to the end” (p. 344).

In the midst of all Jacob Freud's ailments, we find no mention of smoking as a possible cause of his late ill health, although obviously Freud's own health was devastated during his later years by a lifetime of cigar smoking, a habit not readily relinquished. Still, Peter Gay (1988) writes that Freud, while believing that this “‘habit or vice,’ as he called it, greatly enhanced his ability for work,” also claimed that “his father, ‘a heavy smoker’ who ‘remained one until his eighty-first year,’ had been his model” (begun when Freud was about 24) (p. 169). In partial confirmation of the above is the recent discovery of a note in the Freud Collections of the Library of Congress (courtesy of David Wigdor, Manuscripts Division) written by Jacob Freud to his son Alexander on the occasion of the latter's 27th birthday (27 April 1993, when Jacob was 77) accompanied by a box of cigars as a gift (certainly suggesting that Jacob was still a smoker).

With regard to Sigmund Freud, it is well known he suffered for many years from cancer of the jaw stemming from his addiction to heavy smoking (Schur, 1972, p. 50). Despite 17 years of operations, pain and torment, he strove to remain productive. Max Schur informs us that from 1893 (age 37) Freud displayed signs of cardiac problems: tachycardia with arrhythmia, coronary insufficiency and anginal pain; radiating chest pain, dyspnea, frequent extrasystoles and paroxysmal tachycardia (over his lifetime) (pp. 41, 44, 56, 58). He also endured spastic colon attacks and “fainting spells always in times of acute stress (p. 58). Other annoying conditions of ill-health, though not life-threatening, Masson (1985) adds, were a chronic nasal catarrh, sciatica, and migraine headaches (p. 416).

As a physician, Schur (1972) was certainly knowledgeable regarding his illustrious patient's physical state; yet, the question might be raised as to whether Schur set the scales so that a focus on Sigmund Freud's physical disabilities would lessen the attribution of emotional (neurotic?) behavior. Jones (1953-57), for example,

refers to Freud's changes in mood and his anxieties (1:336-337, 345f.) as do other biographers.

Jacob Freud's buoyancy, optimistic attitudes, and acceptance of life and its limitations certainly appear to contrast with Sigmund's anxieties, pessimistic feelings and sense of deprivation, including his fear of dying. To this must be added his superstitious traits, probably stemming from his mother, and a belief in numerology (at least, for a time) enhanced by the influence of his longtime friend, Wilhelm Fliess. Masson (1985) describes this impact fully; Schur (1972) notes, especially, Freud's remark in a letter to Fliess: "You know that I am the 'nobody' who believes in your periods" (p. 111). Despite his superstitious nature Freud was able to recognize objectively that, according to Jones (1953-57), "the majority [i.e., of superstitions] can be traced to repressed death wishes, originally against some loved person" (3:178).

Among his numerological theories was biological periodicity as espoused by Fliess, involving the numbers 28 (female) and 23 (male). On the basis of the sum of these two figures, Freud hoped to be able to live until age 51. In a letter to Fliess, Masson (1985) reports, Freud wrote explicitly that "I would like so much to hold out until that famous limit of approximately 51" (p. 198). Schur (1972) states Freud had an ongoing "preoccupation with prospective dates of his death" (p. 233), finding, besides age 51, a number of "critical" periods (e.g., years 41-42, 61-62, etc.) (pp. 186-187). Every new age seemed to him a hoped-for yet uncertain goal. At age 70, Freud feels he must offer motives for wanting to live (p. 389). He must carry on the "cause" and must provide for a large family, including "his sisters, their children." The last age that distressed Freud was 81½ years, for at that approximate age both his father and older brother Emanuel died, the first naturally, the second by accident.

It does seem strange that if Freud was so concerned with his own life and professed one of the reasons for his existence to be his need to care for the well-being of his sisters and their children, he does not appear to have done anything to save their lives. He stayed on in Vienna to the last minute before being pressed to leave. The question remains why he failed his sisters in the middle and late 1930s, when they were in mortal danger, finally sacrificing their lives in the Holocaust.

It may be revealing that Sigmund Freud was deeply concerned with the deaths of kings, possibly identifying himself with their status and thereby suffering their fate. Thus, with regard to the

death of Alphonso II of Spain, Freud remarked that this was the first king he had outlived. He was disturbed, similarly, by the tragic death of Ludwig II of Bavaria by drowning, as Jones (1953-57) relates (3:192-193).

His final work, *Moses and Monotheism*, published in English shortly before his death at 83, reveals his lifelong struggle with his Jewish heritage. Indeed, Emanuel Rice (1990) may have found a most suitable epitaph for Sigmund Freud in the subtitle of his recent work: *The Long Journey Home*. Like Moses, his many years of wandering were over. Freud was finally returning to his proper resting place. Like his father, he too had run his course and was prepared to depart this earth.

Incidentally, his mother, Amalia's, death followed almost the same pattern. Rice (1990, p. 109) informs us she died early on Friday, 12 September 1930 (21 Elul 5690) and was buried on Sunday, 14 September 1930 (23 Elul 5690).

As to his mother's illnesses, it appears that as a young married woman she was often ailing and went each summer to the country, usually with two or three children, to improve her physical well-being, events that Krüll (1986) fully chronicles (pp. 214-215). Jones (1953-57) also mentions that Freud, in his concern, wrote that "mother [is] ill and in need of country air" (1:158). Yet, she lived to a ripe old age (95), a stern matriarch in full command of her mental faculties, as described by her granddaughter, Judith Bernays Heller (1956). This seems to contrast with the apparently good health of Freud's much older father, who, it would seem, never went on vacations, only becoming ill during his very last years.

Rice (1990) tells us that Freud arranged the funerals of both of his parents. His father's arrangements, it seems, were simple— "the way he would have wanted them," according to Freud. For his mother, we are told, he took a great deal of trouble to have a strictly Orthodox funeral and burial (pp. 108, 110).

Such effort must certainly prove that Freud was obedient to his mother's wishes and that she was still following the traditional faith. It also strongly suggests that Sigmund Freud, although personally antireligious, still retained a deep emotional attachment to his childhood beliefs.

As to attendance at funerals, another picture emerges. Freud wrote to Fliess, Masson (1958) points out, that he came "a little late" to his father's funeral and his family was "somewhat offended." It seems he could not break his daily routine of visiting the barber (p. 202). He did not appear at all at his mother's funeral,

sending as his delegate his daughter Anna, who would, in any case, have gone there on her own behalf. It is known that Freud was weak at the time and so did not travel to Frankfurt three months earlier to accept the Goethe Prize, but sent Anna to accept the award and present his response. His mother's funeral, however, was in Vienna. The reasons for his nonappearance is not clear. Rice (1990, p. 110) discusses all the possibilities: Was it to avoid ceremonials against which he would often inveigh (though he attended his father's funeral); his poor state of health; or because he might be affected excessively (as happened to his younger brother, who was visibly grieved)?

On that very Friday morning, Rice (1990) mentions, Freud wrote a letter to his British nephew Sam apprising him of Amalia's passing and adding that "The funeral may be on Saturday," a practice not permitted by Jewish law. In all probability he only meant, without giving much thought, that it would take place the next day, the usual Jewish practice. The intervening Sabbath obviously did not give him pause to consider. Undoubtedly this letter was written prior to his making Orthodox funeral arrangements, when he certainly would have been informed. (His father's Sunday funeral took place 34 years earlier.)

This inadvertence can be compared with that of Jacob Freud who used the wrong secular dates for his father's death and burial dates. Both men had little concern for the source of their errors, if in opposite directions.

Other tragic deaths may have driven Freud to formulate the death instinct (the counterpoise to the sex [= life] instinct) and to publish toward the end of 1920 *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*. Schur (1972, p. 318) describes three deaths, all within six weeks at the start of that year: his friend, Anton von Freund; his daughter, Sophie; and Ernst Jones's father — Sophie from the flu epidemic and the two men from malignancies. Freud himself had twice had a "cancer scare" (in 1914 and in 1917). He had, according to Schur, "inner motivations" — perhaps an "unconscious 'death wish'" — for developing the death principle, which Freud described in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* as "a remorseless law of nature, the sublime Ananke" (pp. 356-357). Ananke, in Greek mythology, identified as absolute necessity, prevailed over all the gods and thus offered Freud a security, a quasiscientific stability, a fatalism preferable to reliance on factors of chance.

This Freudian approach may be viewed in the biological terms of anabolism and catabolism, constructive and destructive metabolism,

a cyclic process in which first the former and then the latter play the dominant role in the life of the individual. In a sense we have here an echo of the talmudic approach (Bab. Talmud, Avot 4:29): “perforce you are created, perforce you are born, perforce you live, perforce you will die.” In other words, here we see agreement that existence is a necessary, revolving process, starting with birth and ending with death, then beginning again with the next generation.

The rabbinic outlook has recognized death as inevitable, as essential for maintaining the way of nature. Thus, length of life is predetermined (genetic?) but affected negatively by sinning (does this include smoking and other neglect of self?) and positively by doing good (does this include a positive mental outlook and care of self?) (Bab. Talmud, Shabbat 156b). Nevertheless both the wicked and the righteous are mortal and subject to the laws of nature.

Death may even be divinely approved, according to Rabbi Meir. In the Midrash (Gen Rabba 9:5) he explains that, when the work of the six days of genesis was completed, it was called *tov m'od*, “very good” (Gen 1:3). These two Hebrew words sound close to *tov mot*, “death is good.” His thought is that death and decay are essential for new creativity to be possible. Otherwise we would have a changeless, stagnating world.

Dying on the Sabbath eve, as in the case of both Shlomo and Jacob Freud, is considered a good omen, for this passing leads directly to Sabbath rest and peace (Bab. Talmud, Ketuvim 103b). Jacob's suffering of a disease of the bowels is also a positive sign since this condition allows for a symbolic purging of lifetime's accumulated sins (Bab. Talmud, Shabbat 118b). The significance of Sigmund dying on Sabbath-Yom Kippur was previously discussed.

Yet, Sigmund Freud, even after death, retained his uniqueness. Thus he alone of his whole family was not buried on the following Sunday. Rather, as Jones (1957) tells us, he was cremated on the following Tuesday (September 26, 1939) and his ashes placed in a Grecian urn (p. 246). Undoubtedly, this ending must have been at Freud's request for it is not in accordance with Jewish law, nor would this have been the wish of his wife.

Somehow this occurrence seems to fit in with previous practices during Freud's lifetime. Periodically he burned up all his papers; he did so prior to his 29th birthday stating it was a “great turning point in his life” (Mannoni, 1971, p. 5). His avowed purpose was to deprive future biographers, whom he distrusted (p. 6). So too

his own holocaust is similarly a “great turning point.” For, as he often stated, only his work is important, not his life (p. 8). By his final act of annihilation, he declares that only his work endures.

We find a remarkable parallel in the biblical account — which Freud may have read — of Manoah, promised a son (Samson) (Judges 13:17-20). Manoah addressed the “man” whom he met in the field: “What is your name? We should like to honor you when your words come true.” “You must not ask for my name; it is unknowable.” Then, “a marvelous thing happened ... as the flames leaped from the altar toward the sky, the angel ascended in the flames.” Such may have been the aura of mystery that Freud sought.

Finally, it is fascinating to compare the events occurring in the wake of each of these deaths. After Grandfather Shlomo's demise came the birth of Sigismund Freud, renamed Shlomo, to be instilled with deceased's spirit and heritage. After Jacob Freud's death came the reawakening of Sigmund Freud, leading to the blooming of psychoanalysis. After Sigmund Freud's death came a crescendo of biographies with their divergent analyses — which still has not abated — overwhelming the intellectual world.

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