

Freud at the Crossroads in Rome

A Monologue

THE UNKNOWN FREUD: FIVE PLAYS



Michelangelo's *Moses* (c.1513–1515),
The Church of St. Peter in Chains, Rome

FREUD AT THE CROSSROADS IN ROME

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. . . I, Levi Yitzhak, son of Sarah, am come before you with pleas and prayers. What have you to do with Israel? To whom do you speak? To the children of Israel! To whom do you give commandments? To the children of Israel! Whom do you bid say he benedictions? To the children of Israel! And so I ask you: What have you to do with the children of Israel? Are there not plenty of Chaldeans, and Medes, and Persians? It must be that they are dear to you, the children of Israel—children of God they are called. Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the World!

—The revered Hasidic Master, Rebbe Levi-Yitzhak (1740–1809), delivering his Kiddush one Rosh Hashana before reciting the Prayer of Benediction; in Buber, M. (1947), *Tales of Hasidim: The Early Masters*.

When [Freud's taller stories] were concerned with clairvoyant visions or episodes at a distance, and visitations from departed spirits, I ventured to reprove him for his inclination to accept occult beliefs on flimsy evidence . . . I then asked him where such beliefs could come to a halt: if one could believe in mental processes floating in the air, one could go on to a belief in angels. He closed the discussion . . . with the remark: “Quite so, even der liebe Gott.” This was said in a jocular tone . . . But there was something searching also in his glance, and I went away not entirely happy lest there be some more serious undertone as well.

—Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (1957, p. 381; emphases added).

CAST

SIGMUND FREUD

Impeccably groomed, the 5 ft. 7-inch, 126 pound, forty-five year-old bearded father of psychoanalysis has penetrating brown eyes. Wearing a 3-piece gray suit, he has a skull cap on his head and prayer shawl or Tallith over his shoulders; in his right hand, he carries the Torah or Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses).

SETTING

Rome: The Church of St. Peter in Chains, the home of Michelangelo's *Moses*. The statue need not be visible. A slide projection of *Moses* can be used.

TIME

Thursday, September 5, 1901, 3 P. M.

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FREUD

(Moving tentatively towards Michelangelo's 8ft-4-inch horned *MOSES*.)

With each step I experience increasing dread and creeping horror. Another heart attack could do me in. And after I am wheeled out of this gloomy Roman church who would look after Martha and the children?

(From pocket removes train schedule.)

Besides the whole thing is crazy . . . I can catch the 5:30 train back to Vienna.
(‘Other’ FREUD Self:)

Turning tail? Some hero!!! Remember, you are of the line of Jesse, of David! Your necessary task, now get on with it!

(FREUD resumes moving; halts before *Moses*, looks up at the statue.)

Moses, you have shaped me, just as you have every other Jew . . . By assuring us that we are God's Chosen People, you have made us confident, optimistic, even proud. . . . To you, Moses, we Jews owe our tenacity of life. But, Moses, if Yahweh exists, where is His strong hand? His Chosen People, they haven't suffered enough? Why doesn't HE put an end, once and for all, to the perpetual persecution? . . . Moses, Judaism has a poisonous shoot, the Christian religion. Its faithful, they hate your people, the people of the Book.

(Raising the Torah high.)

This undying hostility is rooted in the psychology of the Christian. Not possessing the courage, the moral courage, to acknowledge that he hates his religion which obliges him to renounce and deny his aggressive tendencies and illicit sexual impulses, the good Christian displaces this hatred on to the ones who had enchained him, had shackled him with his demanding religion. Moses, so long as there is such a thing as Christianity, Jews will continue to pay dearly for their gift to the good Christians. This summer while vacationing near Salzburg, in my so-called 'fatherland' Austria, my two older boys were on the lake fishing, when grown men jeered at them.

Calling them "dirty little *Yid* Jew boys," they accused Oliver and Martin of stealing fish. With such abuse, and worse, can one live?! My little ones are only ten and eleven. Well, later that afternoon, Martin and I chanced on those good Christians!(Furious!).

The human trash made way, let me tell you! . . . Moses, it is with a heavy heart that I say this: The Law, the Torah, it must be sacrificed.

(Emphasizing with fingers, one at a time):

No Law, no Judaism, no Christianity, no miserable anti-Semitism. You look down on me with scorn. But I will not, must not cower before your wrathful glance! The time for Jewish martyrdom is over!

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(FREUD starts removing both the tallith and yarmulke,
when a thunder-clap occurs, followed by brilliant lightning.)

Moses' terrible radiance!—I am doomed!—

(Clutching his heart, he shields his face with the Torah.)

I held my ground. Then I, I, prevailed. (Disbelief!)

(Noticing in his hand what had been the Torah . . .)

My book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*? But I was holding the Torah.
My theoretical knowledge, then, really *did* support me.

(Raising high *The Interpretation of Dreams*)

did keep me from creeping away or fainting— . . . God the Father once
strode on earth in bodily form,

(Walking with authority)

in the form of the young boy's all-powerful, all-knowing papa, the oedipal
papa . . . Religion is but a wishful illusion that stems from a longing for the
father—My Dream Book, you've become heavy . . . like stone.

(Looking at his Dream Book, now a 'Tablet'.)

What's this?! By some mysterious alchemy you've become a marble tablet!
(Seeing his 'radiant' face reflected in the 'Tablet,' he reacts
initially as though terrified, turning away.)

Uncanny! The terrible radiance of Moses which had so terrified the
Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai—it has been transferred on to me.

(FREUD'S face can be bathed in light.)

But this radiance business, it's just a Bible story that I had learned on my papa
Jakob's knee—What's this? I'm limping. Well, to limp is no sin, especially
for one who now is in possession of the field as the new Lawgiver, with but
one Command,

(Raising over his head for all to see his one Law, gilt
lettered: 'Know Thyself!')

One moment I'm a Jew boy from the miserable streets of Vienna, and the next
the new Lawgiver, the new Moses whose Law, 'Know Thyself!', is *the* Law
of the Land, . . . of Mother Earth!

('Coming down' from this manic excitement, FREUD, now
flooded with guilt, cries:)

For destroying the Torah—our people's Tree of Life—father would have
disowned me. To that dear man I'd be dead. Guilt now floods me—

(The floor shakes, smoke rises as if from a fiery pit.)

The punishment of Korah and the other Israelites who rebelled against
the authority of Moses! Yahweh's terrible desert visitation, it now returns!!
'They, and all that *appertained* to them went down alive into the pit.'—The
fiery pit. The Bible Story, then it *is* true! No! (Horried!) Martha and the

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children! What have I done?! My little ones, Mathilde, Martin, Oliver, Sophie, Ernst, Anna, your papa, he has doomed your sweet, precious mama—he has doomed you all! . . . This must not happen! I will undo this! . . .

(About to fling his ‘Tablet’ to the ground—)

Collect yourself! It is still miserable outside. And much worse is to come! Daily, the noose around the necks of *der Kinder*, it is being tightened—

(Restraining himself from dashing the ‘Tablet,’ a mighty effort, he clutches it to his breast.)

(We hear *Kaddish*.)

Kaddish, the prayer for the dead?! Now, I hear a voice. It’s a child, an infant, crying—is that you, Julius? Julius, all I wanted was for you to just go away.—Well, when you were eight months old I got my hateful wish . . . Julius, if there really *is* a *liebe Gott in Himmel*, would He have allowed you to die? Cause me to suffer so?

(Checking torrent of tears.)

You would be forty-four. Your death and my guilt—the guilt of a guilt-ridden Cain—surfaced, returned, four years ago. Then and there, to you, I made a secret vow, a silent promise:

An enlightened world I will institute—a brotherly world, where, my dear Julius, children like you, children of our detested and homeless race, can move freely across frontiers—a world in which the seed of Abraham will be free to develop their talents and satisfy their needs. A peaceable, secular world where that miserable scourge, anti-Semitism, is unknown.

And at long last your tormented Cain of a brother purchases his redemption . . .

But before setting others free from their religious chains, I must set myself free from the Law. And it is for this purpose that I have come to this gloomy church. You see, Julius, our devout Czech nanny, Resi, instructed her two year-old Jewish charge well. She left her stamp—If bread can be Jesus,

(Mimes swallowing a Communion Wafer.)

then stone, marble, can be Moses, no?

After four years of detailed preparation, especially by studying my dreams, I at last summoned courage for this dreaded meeting with that Great Man of our people. Tell me, Julius, your ambitious brother, does he need to be put away?—

But wait! The apparition in the half-gloom . . . Like an unlaidd ghost, she returns. When Resi disappeared, frantic, I searched for her—even in the kitchen

cupboards. Later, our mama, Amalia, told me she was sent away, placed in jail, for stealing from our home, my toy soldiers even. By saying her name, have I called Resi up? Julius, after you went away, our pretty young mama—she was only 22—grieved so. It was then that Resi became my mama. With a grief-stricken young wife, our beloved 42-year-old father, Jakob—he was a struggling textile merchant—had matters more pressing to attend to than my traipsing along with our ugly, elderly but ever so wise nanny to her Church, the Church of The Nativity of Our Lady, in our birthplace, the tiny Catholic town of Freiberg in Moravia. After Mass, this little *pisher* would tell mama and papa about how our Lord Jesus Christ conducts His affairs. Can you imagine?! . . .

Julius, you never knew the joy of the Passover Seder, especially of asking that sweet soul, our gray-haired papa, ‘Why is this night different. . . ?’ His death five years ago left me feeling as though I had been pulled up by the roots. Sh-sh! My Catholic mama, once again she mouths those words, words to comfort me—

Sh-sh! little Sigi, do not cry, baby Julius, he is with Jesus. And when you die as everyone must, Julius will welcome you in Paradise. Together you will be once again, and for all eternity—

(As though in a trance, positioning his ‘Tablet’ between his right elbow and side, FREUD kneels; as he begins to Cross himself, his ‘Tablet’ starts to slip, breaking the trance; FREUD grasps the ‘Tablet’ just in time.)

What’s this, bending the knee?! Just as I had anticipated. Here, in the center of Christendom, my long suppressed wish to acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, it has broken through. By this simple act, Resi, I’d be coming home, wouldn’t I?—home to you, home to your, to *our* church, and home to Jesus Christ whose blood cleanseth us from all sin, including brother-murder. Resi, it is so very tempting, this seductive promise of Salvation which I had learned at your breast, but, as you see, (rising) my bloody nun of a mother, I have come through this dreaded test—You and Jesus and his miserable church no longer have a hold on me. You can go now. . . . No, not you, my dear Julius—we have work to do!

(Removes tallith and skullcap, raises ‘Tablet’ over his head, looks over the horizon, and cries:)

The ground for our Promised Land, a brotherly world, it must be prepared!

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(The bells of St. Stephen's Cathedral begin to chime,
awakening FREUD with a start.)

END of MONOLOGUE

(A staged reading was given at the Emerging Artists Theatre in NYC on
May 23, 2006.)

EPILOGUE (optional)

The synagogue was ready for Passover, but the dedication was postponed until Lag B'Omer, for that day is considered to be lucky.

—Sholem Asch (1959), *Kiddush Ha-Shem*.

The following fall (1902) Freud gathers disciples, and he is on his way. Six years later, on the evening of April 15, 1908, on the fiftieth anniversary of Julius's death, on Freud's carried motion the Psychological Wednesday Society is renamed the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society; in this manner, Freud secretly dedicates the psychoanalytic movement to the memory of Julius—a movement which would establish Freud's (and Julius's) Promised Land, a brotherly world in which, anti-Semitism being unknown, future Juliuses (and Sarahs) could at long last live in peace, and move freely across frontiers.

Five years later, on Sunday, May 25th, 1913, a full nine months after writing his disciple Ernest Jones about his enthusiasm for Jones's suggestion of a 'secret council,' Freud who has an easy familiarity with Jewish holidays hands his five favorite adherents an ancient stone engraved with a scene from classical antiquity to be mounted into a gold ring like his. In the Jewish calendar this date was the eighteenth of Iyar or *Lag B'Omer* (5673), the thirty-third day of the Counting of the Omer (Sheaf). This feast day, *Lag B'Omer*, marks the end of a plague that was killing students of Rabbi Akiba Ben Joseph who gave the Jewish warrior Bar Kochba (132–135 C.E. rebellion) his name, which means "Son of a Star," an allusion to the Messiah to come: ". . . there shall come a Star out of Jacob . . ." (Numbers 24:17)—Jacob, as in Jacob Freud. Because Akiba proclaimed that Bar Kochba was their long-awaited Messiah, Jews flocked to Bar Kochba, under whose leadership they recaptured from the Romans all of Judea; after which they minted coins with Hebrew inscriptions: "the redemption of Israel," "the freedom of Israel," and "the freedom of Jerusalem."

The following year, 1914, Freud's essay "The Moses of Michelangelo" is published anonymously. In this paper, which he began on Christmas Day 1913, and completed on New Year's Day 1914, Freud states, understandably, "no other piece of statuary has ever made a stronger effect on me than [Michelangelo's *Moses*]."

Twenty-four years later, the date-sensitive father of psychoanalysis, his Job-like cancerous sores ravaging his mouth and jaw, pens the last sentence of *Moses and Monotheism* on Sunday, July 17, 1938, or the civil date of the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz, a day of mourning in memory of both

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the Babylonian breach (586 B.C.E.) and the Roman breach (70 C.E.) of the walls of Jerusalem, which, three weeks later, on the Ninth of Av (Tisha b'Av), resulted in Nebuchadnezzar destroying the First and Titus the Second Temples, respectively.. And with this his last major attack on religion, Freud intends, ultimately, to destroy the 'stone' fortress of the Jews, the Torah—and, thereby, to paraphrase the famous lament of the Babylonian exile, “rase [Christendom] . . . even to the foundation.”

The following year,1939, this weary, relentless, and unknown fighter for the human rights of his people will give up the ghost on Saturday, September 23rd at 3 A.M. To die on the Sabbath, indeed to die on any Jewish Holy Day, is a good sign; it means that one has led righteous life. In the Jewish Calendar that fateful *Shabbos* was the Tenth of Tishri or Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—and the day the Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai received the Law from Moses.