

# Is Freud in the Dates?

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— My own superstition has its root in suppressed ambition (immortality) ...

— Sigmund Freud<sup>1</sup>

... the [synagogue's] dedication was postponed until Lag b'Omer, for that day is considered to be very lucky.

— From Sholem Asch's 1926 novel, *Kiddush Ha-Shem*

Freud never overcame the trauma which antisemitism brought upon him. In reading *Moses and Monotheism*, after hearing his personal views, I am convinced that he unconsciously felt he was a new Moses come to lead the people out of another bondage....

The psychoanalyst, Roy R. Grinker, 1940.<sup>2</sup>

According to the psychoanalyst Max Schur,<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was date-sensitive. Schur, who came from the same Jewish cultural background and who had been Freud's personal physician the last 11 years of his life, suspects that Freud got engaged to Martha Bernays on the 17th of the month (June 1882) because in Hebrew the letters of the word "good" add up to 17. Which raises the question: Can dates significant in the history of psychoanalysis help us better understand Freud and his creation, the psychoanalytic movement? In this paper I refer to three dates, two of which correspond to Jewish holidays, one a feast day, and the other a fast day.

On Sunday, 25 May 1913, nine months after writing Ernest Jones about his enthusiasm for Jones's idea of a "secret council,"<sup>4</sup> Freud handed 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 18th of Iyar or Lag b'Omer (5673).<sup>5</sup> The recipients of the stones were Ernest Jones (London), Sandor Ferenczi (Budapest), Karl Abraham (Berlin), and Otto Rank and Hanns Sachs (both of Vienna); calling itself the Committee, this secret society worked behind the scenes under Freud's leadership, directing and protecting the psychoanalytic movement.<sup>6</sup>

Lag b'Omer, the 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer (Sheaf), marks the end of a plague that was killing students of Rabbi Akiva Ben Joseph who gave the Jewish warrior Bar Kochba (132-135 CE 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) Because Akiva proclaimed that Bar Kochba was the Messiah, Jews flocked to Bar Kochba, under whose leader-

ship 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."<sup>7</sup>

Did Freud identify with Bar Kochba, secretly envision himself as the savior of the Jews? If so, the Jewish fast day corresponding to the second date seems to be helpful here, for it hints at how he would save his people.

On Sunday, 17 July 1938, Freud in exile in London, cancer ravaging his mouth and jaw, completed *Moses and Monotheism*, which he had begun in 1934.<sup>8</sup> This date corresponds to the civil date of the fast of the seventeenth of Tammuz, the day of mourning in memory of both the Babylonian breach (586 BCE) and the Roman breach (70 CE) 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 Temple.

In this book, which is Freud's last major assault on religion, and which Martin Buber contends is "based on groundless hypotheses,"<sup>9</sup> Freud asserts that Moses was a high-born Egyptian who had acquired his religion from the monotheistic pharaoh, Akhenaten. This means, of course, that the Law of Moses is a creation of man, which, if universally accepted, would destroy the Jews' "stone" fortress, the Torah.

But more to the point: no divine law, no God, no Judaism, no Christianity, no miserable antisemitism. In my view, Freud, like Bar Kochba in the last Jewish war of independence, was bent on ending Roman rule, i.e., Roman Catholic rule, so that, ultimately, with the aid of his hand-picked sons (whom he kept in the dark), he could eliminate that miserable plague, antisemitism.

At this point, readers may object: All you have shown, if that, is that Freud was superstitious about dates and numbers: recall, it was on the seventeenth that Freud completed *Moses and Monotheism*, and, as Dr. Schur has asserted, Freud considered seventeen a lucky number; moreover, Jews consider Lag b'Omer to be a lucky day. To which I counter: It was as an afterthought that I looked up the two dates in the Jewish calendar: I had already concluded, based on years of research (his dreams, name-repressions, works, correspondence, etc.), that Freud was secretly bent on saving the Jews by eliminating antisemitism, and that, moreover, his creation, the psychoanalytic movement, would, he trusted, bring this about; in other words, the above date-correspondences support my earlier findings.

Now, if my reading is valid, how can we account for Freud's vast ambition? Instructive here is the third date significant to the psychoanalytic movement. On 15 April

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1908, the six-year-old Psychological Wednesday Society — as per Freud's carried motion — was renamed the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society<sup>10</sup>; this date was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Freud's infant brother, Julius, who had died at eight months of age. After his eighty-one-year-old father, Jakob, passed away on 23 October 1896, Freud, feeling uprooted, began to study himself in depth, mainly by interpreting his dreams; in 1897, several months into his systematic self-analysis, Freud discovered that he, all these years, had subconsciously felt that he had "murdered" Julius:

... I welcomed my one-year-younger brother (who died within a few months) with ill wishes and real infantile jealousy, and ... his death left the germ of guilt in me. (Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 3 October 1897)<sup>11</sup>

In my view, it was Freud's fratricidal sense of guilt vis-à-vis Julius that spurred him to save the children: To atone for "murdering" Julius, Freud had resolved to make the world a better place for future little Juliuses (and Sarahs), a world in which antisemitism would be a thing of the past.

Accordingly, he began to look for a way to destroy the seedbed for budding antisemites — Christianity. And that same year, 1897, he drew his mighty weapon and ticket to personal redemption, namely, the oedipal origins of God: God the Father is merely a projection into the universe of the father as perceived by the oedipal boy. If he could convince the world that God the Father sprang from our collective longing for a powerful father, Freud would cut the ground out from under religion and, thereby, do away with antisemitism. True, there would be no Judaism, but at long last the seed of Abraham would be delivered from the miserable scourge of antisemitism. Once and for all. Freud kept God's humble beginnings under wraps. He had to bide his time and wait until he received

recognition, until he became an authority, if not *the* authority, on so-called civilized man.<sup>12</sup>

But without God, or the fear of God, isn't everything allowed, won't anarchy prevail? Not in Freud's enlightened Promised Land, as is alluded to in his 1927 assault on religion, *The Future of an Illusion*:

... New generations, who have been brought up in kindness and taught to have a high opinion of reason, and who have experienced the benefits of civilization at an early age ... will feel it as a possession of their very own and will be ready for its sake to make the sacrifices as regards work and instinctual satisfaction that are necessary for its preservation. They will be able to do [this] without coercion from their leaders. If no culture has so far produced human masses of such quality, it is because no culture has yet devised regulations that will influence men in this way, and in particular from childhood onwards.<sup>13</sup>

And in a later chapter, Freud adds:

... As honest smallholders on this earth they will know how to cultivate their plot in such a way that it supports them. By withdrawing their expectations from the other world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth, they will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone. Then, with one of our fellow-unbelievers [Heine], they will be able to say without regret:

"We leave Heaven to the angels and the sparrows."<sup>14</sup>

In my view, were they to follow Freud's date trail, psychoanalysts worth their salt, believing as they do that there is no such thing as chance behavior, couldn't help but conclude: the psychoanalytic movement was their father's solution to the Jewish Question; moreover, inasmuch as their father was arguably one of the most self-aware individuals ever, it was a solution arrived at in full consciousness. •

#### Notes:

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. London: Hogarth Press, 1901, p. 260, in editor's note three, from Freud's handwritten remarks in his interleaved copy of the 1904 edition.
2. Roy R. Grinker, "Reminiscences of a Personal Contact with Freud." In *Freud as We Knew Him*, edited by H.M. Ruitenbeek. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973, p. 185.
3. Max Schur, *FREUD: Living and Dying*. New York: International Universities Press, 1972, p. 25.
4. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Basic Books, 1955, p. 153. In his letter vis-à-vis the Committee to Jones of 1 August 1912, Freud cautioned, "First of all this committee must be strictly secret in its existence and in its actions." (p. 153; Freud's emphasis) The following January, that is, four months before dispensing the stones in his home, Freud and Carl Jung will have their final break. In this magnetic son of a Swiss pastor, Freud had felt he had his emissary to the Gentiles.
5. Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*. New York: Feldheim Press, 1986.
6. According to Ernest Jones, "the committee functioned perfectly for ten years." Op. cit., p. 164.
7. H.H. Ben Sassoon (ed.), *A History of the Jewish People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 332.
8. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*. London: Hogarth Press, 1939, editor's note, p. 3.
9. Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946, p. 7 n.
10. Herman Nunberg and Ernest Federn (eds.), *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, vol. 1, 1946-47. New York: International Universities Press, 1967, p. 373. Jones (p. 9) also refers to the name change taking place on 15 April 1908. That the date was the fiftieth anniversary of Julius's death is not mentioned in either book.
11. Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902*, edited by M. Bonaparte, A. Freud, and E. Kris. Translated by J. Strachey and edited by E. Mosbacher. New York: Basic Books, 1954, p. 219.
12. In his 1910 monograph, *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, Freud at last reveals God's humble origins: "Psycho-analysis has made us familiar with the intimate connection between the father-complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father ..." (Standard Edition, vol. XI, p. 123)
13. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*. Standard edition, 1927, vol. XXI, p. 8.
14. Ibid., p. 50. Ironically, in *The Jewish State*, Theodor Herzl (1896) asserted, "Universal brotherhood is not even a beautiful dream."