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A Psychohistorical Approach to the Life of the Biblical Jacob
Touching on All Major Episodes, from Birth to Name Change

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INTRODUCTION

"*One cannot seduce others, if one has not oneself been seduced*"[1]

i. General Points

This paper seeks to fruitfully combine psychology and religious studies in an attempt to decode the life of the biblical Jacob in novel ways. Jacob is an individual who walks the line between history and myth depending on the personal faith of each reader of the Old Testament. This paper chooses to approach the biblical narrative of the life of Jacob as true testimony, affording its study with all due seriousness and respect. The approach taken here is rooted in the Psychology of Religion, which is a tool springing from the discipline of Psychology. As Merkur explains in his paper on the Psychology of Religion's origin and critical functions,[2] this tool of Psychology allows us to re-examine the various stories narrated within the history of religion itself, that are about significant (historical or otherwise) individuals, such as Jacob, who is this paper's research focus.

ii. Methodology and Research Aims of this Paper

An important point, which we must examine from the beginning of this paper, is *if and how* we will be able to establish our 'objective' position towards the narrated life of Jacob in the Old Testament. The question of whether such a position is possible remains open and requires constant vigilance because, as Knott notes in her study on the special perspective of the one who observes the life of a person:

> "Can we ever fully understand someone else's experience? [...] Does translation from one language to another bridge a gap or create a barrier between the person telling the story and the one reading it?"[3]

For us, the 'translation', which phenomenologically should be done in this paper, concerns the attempt to decode the biblical language, as it narrates the life of Jacob, into another contemporary language, which will be in a dynamic relationship with the special language of Psychology.

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[1] J. Baudrillard, (1979), *Seduction*, trans. B. Singer. London: Macmillan, 1990, p. 81.
[2] D. Merkur (2005), "Psychology of Religion," in J. R. Hinnells (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, USA and Canada: Routledge, p. 164-181.
[3] K. Knott (2005), "Insider/Outsider Perspectives," in J. R. Hinnells (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, USA and Canada: Routledge, p. 243.

On this issue, we feel particularly close to the perspective from which Schept understands the meaning of the Hebrew word *midrash*:[4] each midrash is an attempt to translate the message that lurks hidden between the words of the –very often– laconic text of the Torah. For Schept, each midrash desires a dialogue between the scholar of the biblical text –the *darshan*–[5] and the meaning that is hidden between the words, with the ultimate goal of making the –from a Jungian perspective– mythical content appear as a new and fresh message in the light of consciousness.

In a similar vein, we wish to view this paper as our own contemporary attempt to propose a particular midrash of the biblical story of Jacob. However, we believe that our 'midrash' should more properly be called a *narrative*, and so we will refer to it in this paper as such (a narrative). We acknowledge that our work of 'translation' doesn't fulfill the normative role of a real midrash, given the difference in the tools used here (that of Psychohistory, with which we attempt a historical approach on Jacob's life, seen through the lenses of Psychology), from the tools used for the emergence of a classic midrash, such as comparative Biblical literature, and other (non)esoteric practices (i.e. Kabbalah and Torah hermeneutics) and disciplines.

This paper is grounded in the contemporary historical context that Heelas designates *postmodern religion*.[6] In constructing our strategy for the psychohistorical reading of the life of Jacob, moving carefully between critical approach and associative empathy, we draw on the *apophatic* (or *negative*) theology outlined by Pseudo-Dionysius and cited by Richard King in his study on the connections between mysticism and spirituality.[7] In this paper, we are interested in precisely such an 'apophatic' reading of the life of the biblical Jacob, especially whenever we attempt to talk about psychic/psychological 'landscapes' that may occur within him at critical moments in his life, as we attempt to analyze them from a psychoanalytic/psychohistorical perspective. These psychic/psychological landscapes, if indeed can be found or sensed in the biblical narration of Jacob's life, are rather only insinuated than clearly described in the biblical text; for us, our work is about allowing these (hypothetical?) landscapes of Jacob to emerge in the consciousness. In a way, this is how we understand this paper speaks of *what is not visibly there* (yet) but *can be intuitively imagined* or about what Jacob is *not consciously* manifesting, and in doing so, this paper dialectically 'mimics' (but only partially) Pseudo-Dionysius apophatic[8] theology's paradigm.

As Pietikainen and Ihanus note in their study on the historical origins of psychoanalytic psychohistory, "the particular application of psychoanalysis to historical scholarship known as *psychohistory* is distinctly an American phenomenon."[9] The first important reference point in the development of psychohistory is the publication of the book *Young Man Luther*[10], in 1958, written by psychologist Erik H. Erikson, where for the first time he proposes the concept of *psychoanalytical psychohistory*[11] as a method of analyzing the biography of important historical figures (there of Martin Luther King).

In the personal conflicts of *great men*[12] (as Luther or Jacob are), which Erikson examines, as cited by Pietikainen and Ihanus, he distinguishes between physical, personal, and social conflicts, following Freud's example[13]. In this effort, the role of the psychohistorian is "to gain an insight into people's ways of historicizing the past by unmasking people's repetitive behaviour patterns and to subject historical processes to future reappraisal and

[4] S. Schept (2007), "Jacob's Dream of a Ladder: Freudian and Jungian Perspectives," *Psychological Perspectives*, Vol. 50, No. 1, C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles: Routledge, p. 115.

[5] Op. cit.

[6] P. Heelas (2005), "Postmodernism," in J. R. Hinnells (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, USA and Canada: Routledge, p. 272.

[7] R. King (2005), "Mysticism and spirituality," in J. R. Hinnells (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 307–308.

[8] Pseudo-Dionysius *apophatic* theology understands the direct description of who/what God as impossible and beyond human intellectual capacity, and so Pseudo-Dionysius finds no other way to indirectly describe who/what God is than through the *negative* (*apophatic*) observation of who/what God is (obviously) *not*.

[9] P. Pietikainen, and J. Ihanus (2003), «On the Origins of Psychoanalytical Psychohistory», *History of Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 171.

[10] Op. cit., p. 173.

[11] Op. cit.

[12] Op. cit., p.175.

[13] Op. cit.

re-enactment."[14] This direct interaction of the personal biography of the great figures of an era with the very era in which they live, Erikson emphasizes, occurs as any greatness expressed in an individual also involves a huge conflict of the individual with themselves, but also with their historical era in general.

At the same time, Pietikainen and Ihanus argue –while citing Erikson again–, as the psychohistorians examine the biography of a prominent historical figure, a series of changes occur within the psychohistorians themselves. This is a result of the fact that they are subject to the –largely unconscious– same cognitive-emotional and logical-ideological limitations, in such a way that the demand for genuine objectivity becomes rather inaccessible to all psychohistorians. As they interpret a significant historical biography, the psychohistorians are influenced by their own specific sensitivities, incorporate them into their interpretation and thus change it away from a truly 'objective' interpretation. At the same time, this altered interpretation by the psychohistorians' personal element ultimately leads the psychohistorians themselves to intentional or unintentional changes in their psycho-spiritual nature. As Pietikainen and Ihanus note, "psychohistorical narratives embody changing identities of psychohistorians."[15] It is interesting here to also refer to Erikson's notion of "metabolism of generations"[16], again cited by Pietikainen and Ihanus, which concerns the ability of each new generation to assimilate and/or reject certain characteristics of the previous one. This also affects all psychohistorians, being themselves a member of his generation. Also, we will show in this paper how this notion strongly resonates with Jacob's story too.

Finally, as we will be diving into the book of Genesis, in the first part of this paper we focus on the intrafamilial relationships in Jacob's family, always keeping Jacob as our point of attention. In the second part we explore the episode of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, seen as a crucially transformative event for Jacob. In the third part of our paper, we focus on the analysis of Jacob's psycho-spiritual maturation. In doing so, we study the dream of the *Ladder*, and Jacob's subsequent name change to *Israel* at the end of his wrestling with the Angel. The present study concludes with a discussion of the findings and the presentation of our constraints, as well as of possibilities for future research.

PART ONE: *JACOB'S FAMILY AND INTRAFAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS*

I.A. The Relationship between Jacob and Isaac in the Book of Genesis[17]

The first significant family relationship in the biblical narrative of Jacob's life concerns his relationship with his father, Isaac. It is striking that there are only two points in the biblical text where Jacob comes into direct contact with his father. These two moments are crucial in the development of Jacob's life and are connected to a blessing that Jacob receives from his father, although each under very different circumstances: the first blessing comes (apparently) as the product of the father's deception by the second-born son, but the second is provided by the father, acting with free will in favor of Jacob as he sends him into exile in the land of Laban.

We can claim that at both moments when Jacob receives a blessing from his father, Jacob simultaneously experiences a rupture from him. By extension, it is precisely then that Jacob also experiences a rupture from his entire family, as well as from his tribe and its ancient traditions. Despite the apparent silence of the words in the biblical text regarding how Jacob feels about this multifaceted rupture, we can imagine him in immense inner turmoil. A deep rift must be caused within him, a schism with himself. We can also imagine that this intense inner crisis of Jacob fills him with guilt: Jacob deceives his father and is separated from him, the progenitor of the tribe, the patriarch of the traditions with which he was nurtured from a tender age. Jacob's entire familiar world is now rendered unfamiliar.

I.A.1. Jacob Deceives his Father

[14] Op. cit., p. 176.
[15] Op. cit.
[16] Op. cit., p.177.
[17] This sub-narrative concerns the biblical tracts Gen. 25:27–28, Gen. 27:18–30, and Gen. 28:1–5.

The moment when the deception takes place is very crucial because it is the moment when Isaac must put Jacob to the test. Zucker emphasizes the fact that the biblical text testifies that "Isaac examines six times" which of his two sons is standing before him.[18] As the biblical narrative testifies, Isaac is indeed old and almost blind, but really, does he need to ask Jacob six times if it is really Esau? Is it really impossible for the father to recognize which son is standing before him, especially at the moment when he exclaims the well-known phrase "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau"?[19] Obviously not. Isaac does not need this multiple confirmation, as Zucker notes.[20] The one who needs it is Jacob, because –as we sense that Isaac may already know– every time he confirms the deception, Jacob not only reinforces the lie to his father, but he also reinforces his own decision to take his life (finally) into his own hands. Isaac, by asking the disguised Jacob each time who it is that really stands before him, forces Jacob to put his own identity to the test. Each time Jacob, disguised as Esau, lies about who he is, he not only denies the truth to his father but also denies his old self.

The famous phrase "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau"[21] which Isaac utters, may also hide another meaning. The voice, a product of breathing, can be understood as something that belongs more to the spiritual realm, in contrast to the hands that we can easily understand as a symbol of action in the material world. Since Isaac, therefore, recognizes in the disguised Jacob his voice (which belongs to his real nature), but in his hands those (hands) of the practical, robust, bound to the material world Esau, perhaps Isaac ultimately perceives his son's disguise as the depiction of a new, 'mixed' being into which Jacob must transform from that moment on. Perhaps the blind Isaac recognizes the true, spiritual nature of Jacob, but this nature –as the father, but also the mother who disguises the son seem to understand– will henceforth have to 'wear' the hairy hands of Esau in order for this spirituality to acquire the necessary materiality which it has been lacking up until that moment, thus keeping Jacob captive inside the house. The partnership of these two natures –the spiritual with the material– is the key that will bring Jacob before his destiny – that is, before himself.

I.A.2. The Double Symbolic Killing of the Father

What ultimately drives Jacob to deceive his father, Isaac? As is well known, Freud first develops a central theory of his work in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*,[22] a theory he would later call the "Oedipus Complex."[23] Interpreting the psyche of the young boy in particular, Freud sees many reasons and various motives for the development of an unconscious hostility of the young boy towards his father. At one point in the same book, he even writes the following, which resonates with great interest as we sense its possible relevance to Jacob's relationship with Isaac:

> "The more despotically the father ruled the ancient family, the more must the son have taken the position of an enemy, and the greater must have been his impatience, as designated successor, to obtain the mastery himself after his father's death."[24]

If we follow the above Freudian observation, we can perhaps see the event of the theft of Isaac's blessing by Jacob as a symbolic and perhaps unconscious annulment of the father. This particular blessing of the father carries a special weight, since it is known to all that whoever is given it, will automatically be recognized as the next patriarch of their entire generation. The replacement of the old patriarch by the new one could be understood here as an act of a symbolic death of the father by the son, who has been chosen to replace him. In the story of the biblical Jacob, Freud may have seen in Jacob the beginning of a neurosis through the manifest desire to kill every father figure in his life: his firstborn brother initially (since at the beginning of the twins' lives, Esau is superior in physical and political

[18] D. J. Zucker (2011), "The Deceiver Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 53.
[19] Gen. 27:22. (transl. by the author)
[20] D. J. Zucker (2011), "The Deceiver Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 53.
[21] Gen. 27:22. (transl. by the author)
[22] S. Freud (1919), *The Interpretation of Dreams*, third edition, translated by A. A. Brill, London & New York: George Allen and Unwin & The Macmillan Company.
[23] Op. cit., p. 223.
[24] Op. cit., p. 217.

power to Jacob) and ultimately his father himself. With these two symbolic killings –the theft of the birthright and the theft of the blessing– Jacob 'destroys' everything that appears as a father figure in his life. Thus, symbolically, Jacob manages to emerge victorious in his fantasy, as he carries out his unconscious struggle. However, the result of this unconscious struggle in his imagination is very real: Jacob is indeed finally anointed as the next patriarch, the next father of his nation, now taking the place of the ultimate symbolic father.

In an attempt to dialectically expand on the above reflections, we choose to refer to Lacan's psychoanalytic concept of the "Name-of-the-Father,"[25] which the French psychoanalyst considers to be the primary signifier, one that allows the process of giving meaning and attributing identity to a subject to be carried out in a normal way. We can think that a similar process is carried out when we talk about the symbolic killing of the father (like the archetypal killing realized by the Protoplasts against God-the-Father), since, as Jacob fights the "Name-of-the-Father" (i.e. Isaac), Isaac gives meaning to Jacob's world in a novel manner, opening the way for his son towards the self-realization of his personality. At the same time, Isaac successfully removes Jacob from Rebekah's close embrace, activating the Oedipal incest prohibition, which –from the Lacanian perspective– simultaneously rescues Jacob from psychosis.[26]

I.B. The Relationship between Jacob and Rebekah in the Book of Genesis[27]

The second very important intrafamilial relationship for Jacob is his relationship with his mother, Rebekah. We find it interesting to keep in mind the way in which Gottlieb refers to the feminine element, in her study of the relationship between Kabbalah and the feminine image according to Jung: there, Gottlieb mentions that Jung speaks of the ambivalence of the feminine element,[28] which in Kabbalah is referred to as *Shekhinah*, and which often has "a shady character; in fact she sometimes stands for evil itself […]. She is the dark and dreaded maternal womb which is of an essentially ambivalent nature." [29] Thus the feminine element, bearing the womb which creates life, can be understood as the link between the physical and the spiritual, the 'masculine' and the 'feminine'. In fact, according to Jung (as Gottlieb informs us), there is always a confrontation, an antagonism between the masculine and the feminine elements: where there is a conflict between the father and the mother, we can see the manifestation of "undying hostility, says Jung, between the principles, the father and the mother, consciousness and unconsciousness."[30] Applying this Jungian interpretation to the special relationship between Rebekah and Isaac, we can perhaps also understand it in the context of this primordial conflict between the masculine and the feminine. By extension, we could say that Rebekah unconsciously competes with Isaac, obeying this primordial and unconscious rule of conflict between the masculine and the feminine.

I.B.1. The Plot of Son and Mother Against the Father

David Fass recognizes real dynamism in Rebekah's character, re-attributing to her her neglected role as "keeper of Abraham's dream and engineer of the future of the Jewish people,"[31] meaning that she is recognized for the initiative to pull the strings within the family in such a way as to confirm God's promise, which has been given to her since she had the twins in her womb. Fass also recognizes in Rebekah a decisive heroism, noting that it is thanks to her actions –namely, in laying the plot– that Isaac ultimately defies the tradition of attributing the primogeniture to the firstborn Esau. Fass observes that Rebekah changes tradition, motivating her husband Isaac to attribute the leadership

[25] "Nom-du-Père" in the original French. In: D. Evans (1996), *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, p. 119.

[26] Op. cit.

[27] This relationship is described in the biblical tracts Gen. 25:21–24, Gen. 25:27–28, Gen. 27:1–17, and Gen. 27:41–46.

[28] F. Gottlieb (1994), "The Kabbala, Jung and the Feminine Image," in J. Ryce-Menuhin (ed.) *Jung and Monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, London: Routledge, p. 65.

[29] Op. cit.

[30] Op. cit.

[31] D. E. Fass (1992), "Unbinding Mother Rebekah," *Judaism*, Vol. 41, No. 4, p. 361.

and the continuation of the tribe to Jacob,[32] because this is what must be verified, since this is what their God has already promised. Rebekah realizes, however, that Jacob is still unborn in the world, without having shown his worth, because he remains within the security of his mother's hearth. In order to break this habit, in order for Jacob to accept the fate that God has reserved for him from when in his mother's womb, changing the tradition of her tribe, Rebekah needs a trick: here the story begins to unfold with the apparent plot.

For Fass, Rebekah demonstrates an admirable ability "as one who unbinds others […] to remove the ties that bound,"[33] an ability promised by her very name itself: one possible etymology proposed for *Rivkah* (Rebekah in Hebrew) is derived from a root that means "to loop a cord over the head of a lamb or kid."[34] She who has the ability to bind a lamb or kid with a cord naturally also has the ability to untie it. Rebekah believes in what God has ordained for her two sons and knows that Jacob is the one who should lead, even though he is the second-born. At the same time, however, she understands that there is nothing that will happen 'automatically' from this divine promise, because as Fass notes:

> "There was nothing automatic about the prophecy of Jacob's place in history. He was liable to fail. His hegemony was entirely conditional, and he was to lead only if he proved worthy."[35]

It is for this reason that Rebekah ultimately acts in such a decisive manner, devising the plot. Zucker has the perception that Rebekah does not act entirely on her own and secretly from her husband but, on the contrary, her actions are in complete agreement with Isaac since Zucker considers (and we, in our own narrative, agree with him) that "without Isaac's major contribution to the scheme […] the deception of Jacob would not have succeeded."[36] He even goes so far as to state that while an act of deception does indeed occur at this point in the biblical narrative, the deception primarily targets neither Isaac nor Esau: for Zucker, the one who is actually deceived "was Jacob, the deceiver."[37]

The parents agree, as Zucker notes, that Esau should not be the one to receive the father's blessing, even though they know that they are violating the ancient law of their tribe.[38] However, they cannot simply announce this to Esau, so together they think of setting up the theater of the plot. It is not a plan without risk: Esau must be removed with a pretext – the father's desire to eat the prey of his firstborn son in order to bless him. This is why Isaac asks Esau to go hunting for him. At the same time, Jacob must be persuaded to leave the interior of the tent. Rebekah and Isaac devise the plan of deception and push Jacob out into the world because Jacob must know the world, its goodness and its evil, if he is ever to become a worthy patriarch of his tribe, the next after the worthy Isaac. And in order for him to get to know the world, and for the world to get to know Jacob, the parents understand that they must make Jacob act "immorally," "to cast Jacob as the villain,"[39] to leave behind his old forty-year-old self, "a homebody, lacking a clear future direction for life,"[40] so that his own story can begin to unfold, far from the safety of his father's home, where he would remain forever by his mother's side.

I.B.2. The 'Feminine' Jacob

We could speak of Jacob as expressing a latent 'femininity' in the sense that the biblical text presents him as a man who does not engage in activities that would undoubtedly be described as 'masculine'. The counterexample to this is his twin brother, Esau, who displays a vigorous relationship with life and the countryside, dedicated to hunting and the pleasures of the here and now.

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[32] Op. cit.
[33] Op. cit., p. 370.
[34] Op. cit.
[35] Op. cit., p. 371.
[36] D. J. Zucker (2011), "The Deceiver Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 46.
[37] Op. cit., p. 47.
[38] Op. cit.
[39] Op. cit., p. 48.
[40] Op. cit.

How could we understand in greater depth this image of the 'feminine' Jacob, which is handed down to us in the book of Genesis? Gottlieb, in her study on the –under Jungian psychology– feminine image in Kabbalah, states the following:

> "Though Judaism is supposedly a paternalistic religion, in the Kabbala we find possibly the highest compliment to the feminine paid by a monotheistic faith, and yet in this regard it is just compliments that hint at their reverse. If the *Shekhinah,* the divine presence *per se,* is given a female typology, it is, the rabbis insist, only because the entire function of the Shekhinah is in the inferior realms, nature, the physical. The point about the Shekhinah is that she is the spatialization of spirituality. If not for the need of substance and square feet, she would telescope back into her Father. Spatialization or the impregnation of the womb of creation immediately implied feminization, at least as far as the human imagination is concerned, of the divine light itself. As soon as God required a 'place' for His light, the light as it were descended and became feminized."[41]

In this perspective, we see that the metaphorical and spatial locus of (divine) spirituality in the world is the feminine element, the femininity that is based in the womb. The Jewish rabbis see in the feminine materiality of the womb the necessary condition for God to act in the world and to connect with it. The *Shekhinah* –literally the light of God, according to the rabbis– 'feminizes itself' as it descends into the world – that is, it unites (co-essences) with ('lower') matter, and this constitutes the necessary condition for the light of God to illuminate Creation. In this way, we finally understand that everything that is spiritualized in the world, spirituality itself, is ultimately 'feminine' – that is, it has passed through the space of the womb, the place par excellence of God's glory.

Sticking to our own narrative, we could claim that Jacob's apparent 'feminine' behavior, as described in the biblical text, is probably trying to give meaning to a special, completely personal relationship between Jacob and spirituality. In complete contrast to the earthly power of Esau, a man devoted to the struggle for the goods of the earth and the material world, Jacob is introduced as the 'feminine' son, which ultimately signals a man who has been strictly devoted to the divine since childhood. It is perhaps because of this devotion that Jacob prefers to spend his time in the dim light that prevails inside his mother's chambers, here them seen as the metaphor of his mother's spiritual womb.

For Gary Inbinder, Jacob's inclination towards –by nature 'feminine'– spirituality is linked to the Platonic understanding of *arete* ("virtue").[42] The virtuous person understands that sometimes pleasure in the *hic et nunc* must be sacrificed, precisely because the virtuous person expects something to be gained in the future from this sacrifice. Conversely, the non-virtuous person does not wish to postpone or cancel pleasure in the here and now precisely because they are unable to discern any benefit for themselves in the future. They cannot inhibit their needs or drives, like the animal. Consequently, the ancient Greek understanding of virtue makes virtue equivalent to knowledge (see Socrates): the virtuous person can discern where, how and when new knowledge is pregnant for them. To use an analogy, Jacob has the discernment and knowledge of a future which he envisions and anticipates as his own. The creative (generative) power of the 'feminine' Jacob is precisely this ability to discern, which is directly proportional to the strength of his spirituality, which is synonymous with the strength of his faith in the future that his God has promised him.

I.C. The Relationship Between Jacob and Esau in the Book of Genesis[43]

[41] F. Gottlieb (1994), "The Kabbala, Jung and the Feminine Image," in J. Ryce-Menuhin (ed.) *Jung and Monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, London: Routledge, p. 64.

[42] G. Inbinder (2003), "Jacob and Esau," *Humanitas*, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 91.

[43] All the relevant passages from the book of Genesis that shed light on the complex relationship between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau are the biblical tracts Gen. 25:19–34, Gen. 27:30–41 και Gen. 28: 6–9. We exclude here the biblical tracts that concern the process of reconciliation between the two brothers, which takes place much later in their lives, and which marks the end of Jacob's exile in the land of Laban.

We can say that the entire life story of the biblical Jacob is proposed to the reader as a story of "superiority and subordination, power and powerlessness."[44] Indeed, the story of Jacob can be read as a struggle for dominance between the two twin brothers. Jacob is a very different person from Esau. There are fundamental differences between them, although they come from the same womb. The fraternal antagonism, which was analyzed by the father of Individual Psychology, Alfred Adler, is expressed in various ways in this biblical story of the two twin brothers. A complex system between power and subordination (see Hegel), dominance and deception, fraternal enmity and hatred for what each of them does not have is already evident from the beginning of their common story: Jacob envies Esau for what he has, Esau hates Jacob for what he took from him. But what could be the deeper cause of this competition?

I.C.1. The 'Masculine' Esau

Esau is a very different man from Jacob. He is presented as "hairy" all over his body,[45] and his name refers to the color red in Hebrew and is thus commented on as "red,"[46] especially during the episode of selling the birthright to Jacob in exchange for a dish of similarly "red" lentils.[47] Esau is a man of the countryside and a keen hunter, a man of material things, who enjoys the here and now of pleasures.

We can perceive these external characteristics of redness and intense hairiness, which the biblical narrative attributes to Esau, as something more than a simple description of his appearance – that is, as elements that guide us in describing his personality: here, the external characteristics are elements of the performativity of a human psyche. This performativity acquires fundamental importance, since it ends up attributing to Esau's gender-specific external characteristics which communicate to the reader his increased masculinity, in complete contrast to the simultaneous testimony of a peculiar 'femininity' of Jacob, who –as we saw earlier– prefers to remain inside the tent, close to his mother. According to Judith Butler in her study of the socio-cultural constructions of gender, the social expression of gender is always the product of a specific performativity which responds to pre-existing multicultural constraints:

> "[W]hat is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo.[48] […] Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed."[49]

This finding is of particular importance for our own study, since we can consider that the way in which either Jacob or Esau perform their gender within the closed society of their tribe assigns them a specific social role that is 'expected' to be carried out by them in the present and in the future, with a significant impact on their psyche.

In her study of the narrative description of Isaac's blessing of Jacob, Sarah Schwartz argues[50] that –during the overall episode of Jacob's deception of Isaac and the immediate revelation of the deception upon Esau's return from the hunt– what (seemingly, as we saw earlier) convinces the half-blind Isaac that the disguised Jacob is indeed Esau's firstborn son is not the voice he hears, but the hairy hands, which he immediately attributes to Esau. Schwartz suggests here that "Esau's hairy hands are more than a technical means of identification, but rather a literary device that serves to define Esau's character as a skilled hunter."[51]

In other words, in the moment when he feels Jacob's –falsely– hairy hands, what Isaac fervently wants to discover seems to be which of the two sons bears the mark of the hunter which, as Schwartz notes, constitutes the necessary characteristic –as a metaphor (for the biblical tradition)– of a dynamic future leader.[52] Isaac attempts to feel the performativity of power and leadership, which are the hairy hands, whether they rightfully belong to Esau

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[44] *Jacob: Hebrew Patriarch*, Britannica (online encyclopedia: https://britannica.com/biography/Jacob-Hebrew-patriarch).
[45] Gen. 25:25.
[46] Op. cit.
[47] Gen. 25:30.
[48] J. Butler (1988), "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre* Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4, USA: The John Hopkins University Press, p. 520.
[49] Op. cit., p. 527.
[50] S. Schwartz (2019), "Isaac's Dual Test in the Blessings Narrative: A New Reading of Gen 27:18–29," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Israel: Sage, p. 704.
[51] Op. cit., p. 705.
[52] Op. cit., p. 707.

(since he was born that way), or they appear by deception in the hands of someone else, here of Jacob, Esau's twin brother. It is in these hairy hands, where the ultimate demonstration of strength and ability for leadership is accomplished, that Isaac delivers his blessing, designating the one who officially displays them before him as the next patriarch of the tribe.

Inbinder, by comparing the roughness and redness of the hairy Esau with the softness and whiteness of the skin of the hairless Jacob, transforms the aforementioned power struggle between them into a struggle between an "old" and a "new" version of the world, between an anachronistic, traditional "barbarism" and a pioneering, logocentric and future-oriented culture.[53] Jacob's dominance is based on the world of spirit, language and intellect, while Esau's is based on the material world. The vision of leadership that the two brothers have could not be more different. We gradually see how Esau's 'masculine' nature signals an older world, which must begin to be replaced by a new vision, expressed through Jacob's 'femininity'. The two twin brothers, born from the same womb, fight each other as they embody oppositions of cosmic dimensions.

I.C.2. Jacob's Envy: Grasping the Heel of Esau

The biblical account tells us that Jacob is born second, holding on tightly to the heel of his twin brother.[54] As we have seen, it is because of this event that Jacob gets his name, a name that in Hebrew is related to the word "heel."[55] In his psychoanalytical paper on Jacob's wrestling match with the angel, Michael Abramsky notes:

> "The metaphor of grasping the heel defines Jacob's most primitive, neurotic struggle. […] To attack the heel is to come from behind, to be sneaky, to get one's way through deception or trickery. […] Jacob is dominated by envy."[56]

As Abramsky explains: "Envy is a regressive psychological state where one covets what another has and resents those who have what is desired."[57] From a theological standpoint, "it is a violation of one of the Ten Commandments and a source of psychic imbalance dominated by hostility toward others."[58] From this perspective, Jacob begins his life sick, and his entire biblical story is the narrative of how Jacob responds –consciously or unconsciously– to this illness.

It is interesting to understand the event of Jacob grabbing Esau's heel, as he emerges from Rebekah's womb, as Jacob's *idion thelema* or "self-will", as explained by Saint John Chrysostom[59]. This naturally manifests itself negatively in Jacob, since it starts from thoughts, feelings and actions of egoism, which strengthen the self-will even more, involving Jacob in a destructive vicious circle. Jacob alters his authentic –according to theological Anthropology– identity, through his internal intercourse with the passion of his envy towards Esau. His first major decisions are of a morally negative order, precisely because he attempts to satisfy an imaginary standard, which tells him that he rightfully owns what is not given to him by the cultural tradition of his tribe.

Of particular interest is the fact that Dolev and Shifron note that "envy is considered a central feature of narcissistic personalities,"[60] (citing Krizan and Johar) and they distinguish "two distinct expressions of narcissistic tendencies, one centered on grandiosity and the other on inferiority"[61] (again citing Krizan and Johar). These findings

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[53] G. Inbinder (2003), "Jacob and Esau," *Humanitas*, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 90.

[54] Gen. 25:26.

[55] *Akev* in Hebrew, which is one of the etymological roots of the Hebrew name Ya'akov – that is, Jacob. In: K. Gies (2013), *Jacob*, Deutsche Bibel Gesellschaft.

[56] M. Abramsky (2010), "Jacob Wrestles the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash," *California Institute of Integral Studies / International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 107.

[57] Op. cit.

[58] Op. cit.

[59] The Holy Chrysostom speaks of the *idion thelema* in the following homilies:
− Homily on the *Epistle to the Romans* (Homily VI, PG 60, 450).
− Homily on the *Epistle to the Ephesians* (Homily XIX, PG 62, 135).
− Homily on the *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Homily XV, PG 61, 124).

[60] A. Dolev and R. Shifron (2016), "Envy in Siblings-in-Law Relationships," *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 72, No. 2, USA: University of Texas Press for North American Society of Adlerian Psychology, p.124.

[61] Op. cit.

lead us to wonder about the possibility that Jacob is a similar case of an individual with a narcissistic personality, which would in fact manifest itself through the –indeed recorded in the biblical narrative– feeling of inferiority which he had towards his brother Esau, from the moment of their common birth. Jacob apparently envies Esau because he feels weakened and inferior to him, and because of this he devises –with the help or tolerance of his parents– a plan to usurp this right of power from his brother, envisioning a new (megalomaniacal) vision of dominance for himself.

I.C.3. Jacob Deceives his Brother

According to Bible scholars,[62] by committing this double deception, Jacob falls into a very serious transgression (*pesha* in Hebrew) which concerns the violation of the trust that his father and his brother originally had towards him. This rupture in trust (faith) between people or between peoples is a very serious negative event in Judaism, and recalls the primary offense of humanity, which is the Fall of Adam and Eve.[63] Understanding this offense brings it very close to the complex concept of *sin*, but without the concepts being completely identical. In any case, Jacob commits a much greater error than a simple deception: he proves to be an abuser of the sacred trust that should always exist between the members of his family and the traditions of his tribe.

I.D. The Relationship between Jacob and his Uncle Laban in the Book of Genesis[64]

At this point, we will deal with the particularly complex relationship between Jacob and his uncle, Laban, to whose country he arrives in self-exile after the events of the two deceptions. In the twenty years of his self-exile in Laban's country, Jacob creates his own family and his own wealth. Although he grows significantly in power and social status, he is, however, always –while he remains in the land of Haran– in the shadow of his uncle, a man who often demonstrates his unstable morals. The motif of the exile of the main hero is not foreign either to the Bible or more generally to the epic narratives that run through almost all great civilizations. Jacob, in order to know himself and to increase, both in descendants and in material wealth, must go on a journey: he must walk this journey, step by step.

I.D.1. Laban Deceives Jacob: the Deceiver is Deceived

Deception after deception: in the biblical narrative, Jacob is both victim and perpetrator. Deception is presented as a key characteristic of Jacob's personality, to the point that for many scholars Jacob acquires the nickname *trickster*, a nickname that one would not expect to be attributed to the progenitor of the people of Israel.

As Dean notes in his study of the pattern of deception in the Pentateuch, all societies have at their disposal certain "'rites of passage' between the principle social roles: child to adult, adult to grandparent/wise elder."[65] These rites are intended to guide and protect the individual during these 'passages', where the individual enters a very open psychospiritual and sensory space, and which aim to enable the individual to acquire special abilities but also new obligations towards the community to which they belong. When society is in a healthy state, the individual is not encouraged to remain within these rites of passage for a long time. On the contrary, the individual is then encouraged to leave them as soon as possible, having spent exactly as much time as is absolutely necessary in order to complete the passage from one state to another that is more useful to the community. When, however, as Dean emphasizes, a community is 'sick' or is at a critical juncture in its history, the individual on the contrary receives from the community the right to remain within this fluid space of the process of passage for as long as necessary, without restriction, in order to experiment as much as necessary –and in terms outside the norm– in order for this individual to discover, both for himself and for the entire community, the appropriate way to overcome this critical juncture in

[62] Bible Project (2010), "Pesha / Transgression" (https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/pesha-transgression/).
[63] Op. cit.
[64] This relationship is presented in the tracts Gen. 29:1–30, Gen. 30:25–43 and Gen. 31:1–55.
[65] P. Madigan (2009), "*The Trickster Revisited: Deception as a Motif in the Pentateuch* by D. A. Nicholas," *The Heythrop Journal*, 50: 1025.

their history. In these instances, we have the establishment of the *trickster*.[66] Dean even notes that very often in the Bible, the Patriarchs have resorted to deceit and deception in order to achieve something beneficial for the community which could not have been achieved otherwise, that is, if they followed the moral norms of their time. In this paper, we will argue that ultimately something similar applies to the 'deceiver/swindler' Jacob.

If Jacob is an instance of a *trickster*, then what is the main positive result that he achieves on behalf of his community and tribe, ultimately on behalf of the entire people of Israel? In order to answer this complex question, we will focus on the most prominent episode that characterizes the relationship between Jacob and Laban: the division of their property and Jacob's 'magic' trick.

With an elaborate analysis, in her study of the episode of the division of property between Jacob and Laban, Song-Mi Suzie Park focuses primarily on the very sound of the names of Laban and Jacob in Hebrew in order to understand why the white (or light-colored) sheep and all the colored non-pied-spotted goats belong to Laban, while, conversely, all the dark-colored sheep and the colored pied-spotted goats belong to Jacob. The biblical text informs us that this was precisely their agreement when they decided to divide Laban's property among themselves in return for Jacob's work, as the latter announces his intention to return to his father's country, along with his entire family and the possessions he had acquired in the meantime. In this division, Park sees in the Hebrew name Laban the white (or light) color,[67] since in Hebrew *Laban* means exactly that. At the same time, Jacob performs his famous 'magic' trick: he uses colored speckled branches in order to make Laban's sheep and goats give birth to colored speckled sheep and goats, in a homeopathic way, known in his time. Thus, according to the agreement between them, the colored speckled sheep and goats should henceforth rightfully belong to Jacob, since they are not *Laban('s)*, that is, they are not white, light-colored. In this miraculous (but scientific for its time) way, Jacob's wealth increased at the expense of Laban.

What is truly extraordinary here, as Park notes, is that the success of Jacob's clever technique created the following reality: "the flocks that mate are Laban's, in terms of both ownership and appearance; the flocks produced, however, are Jacob's, again in terms of both ownership and appearance."[68] This paradox essentially leads to the conclusion that ultimately –although he is accused of this– Jacob does not steal anything from Laban, not a single sheep or a single goat, since what happens is that Laban's original flocks (to a very large extent) "are being transformed into Jacob's."[69] Thus, technically, the letter of their agreement is never violated, since Jacob never receives anything that rightfully belongs to Laban.

This mysterious incident, where "Jacob is neither stealing Laban's flocks nor taking what is rightfully his (Laban's), but is using what is Laban's to produce what is his (Jacob's),"[70] sheds light first on the awkward and to some extent indissoluble relationship between the two men, which often remains opaque about what belongs to whom. For example, in response to Jacob's reproach that he wrongly accused him of stealing the teraphim (i.e. the idols of Laban's gods), Laban begins by saying that Jacob's two wives and their children are in fact his and not Jacob's,[71] as well as all the flocks, which Jacob considers his own. This is a clear indication of the confusion between them in matters of objective and metaphorical ownership. The biblical text seems to imply here that an objective and a metaphorical separation between two different types of property is necessary: the real family and real possessions of Jacob must be separated from the real family and real possessions of Laban, but a corresponding separation must also be made in the metaphor of these two properties, which metaphor concerns the necessary complete separation of the tribe of Jacob from the tribe of Laban. Indeed, on the level of objective genealogy, Jacob comes from the tribe

[66] Op. cit. – The *trickster* in many cultures takes on almost metaphysical qualities. Jesus Christ himself, whose prototype is considered to be Jacob (see *Israel* as a collective personality), according to many Fathers of the Church, with His Incarnation "deceived the deceiver", i.e. the devil.

[67] S-M S. Park (2010), "Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob's 'Flocks' in Genesis 30:25–43: Identity, Election, and the Role of the Divine," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 4, p. 669.

[68] Op. cit., p. 670.

[69] Op. cit.

[70] Op. cit.

[71] Gen. 31:43.

of the Israelites, while Laban from the tribe of the Arameans, which historically and culturally are related tribes, but not identical.

As Park notes: "Are they different peoples, families, and groups (the Israelites and the Arameans), or are they the same, since they are related by blood and by marriage?" [72] The fact of the 'transformation' of a large part of Laban's flocks into Jacob's flocks, through the miraculous/scientific trick, also signals the truth that (a large) part of what Jacob manages to be at the end of his twenty-year self-exile in the land of Haran has its origins in Laban's material and cultural space.[73] Thus, the separation of the two tribes, the two flocks of sheep and goats, the two relatives, the two peoples becomes even more imperative:[74] Jacob and his people must become completely distinct from Laban and his own people, so that in the future it will become possible for Jacob's people to transform into the 'chosen people' of Israel.

We can thus understand the successive deceptions that Jacob carries out as those necessary steps that the *trickster*, the 'deceived deceiver' representative of an entire people –here the people of Israel– is forced to follow in order for this people to appear in historical time. Jacob's self-exile thus becomes the most decisive step in his life, which transforms him into a husband, father, possessor of wealth, and ultimately leader of an entire people, who await –until before the moment when the flocks of sheep and goats are finally separated– his own appearance in the world.

PART TWO: *JACOB WRESTLES WITH THE ANGEL*[75]

During his wrestle with the Angel, as dawn breaks, after an all-night fight that produced no clear winner, Jacob is touched on his thigh by that unknown man and immediately his thigh becomes paralyzed. From then on, Jacob will limp until the end of his life, as if he had been injured in the heel. The end of his wrestle with the Angel introduces Jacob to the experience of disability. At the same time, it transforms him from Jacob to *Israel*.

In his study of the role of disability in the Bible, Gaventa notes that "Jacob's limp was a sign of God's blessing, as the Angel finally gave him the blessing Jacob demanded before letting him go."[76] Here we encounter a very interesting idea, which concerns the connection of an experience of physical weakness, such as the manifestation of any physical disability, with an experience of spiritual ascension and strengthening of the spirit. Every psycho-spiritual experience is connected and leaves some trace in the body. Here, physical finitude is confirmed as a human condition, simultaneously with the psycho-spiritual transcendence that occurs in a person: it is the manifestation of a wrestling between the humble (human) and the high expression of Jacob's identity, a wrestling that seems to be balanced *only because* one quality opposes the other. It is thanks to this inseparable relationship of necessity that Jacob encounters himself as *Israel*. From now on, his disabled body will be the place where this relationship is expressed: it seems the patriarch of Israel, in order to be a patriarch, must simultaneously be marked by disability, that is, by an indelible mark of weakness.[77]

II.A. 'Wrestling with God' as the Existential Struggle to Find Purpose in Life

Just before dawn, at the end of his wrestling, the biblical text describes Jacob's demand that the Angel bless him – a demand he won with his all-night fight. Jacob submits to his superior (the Angel), earning the blessing that can only be given by him (the Angel). Jacob's submission brings him manifold gain and a special victory, which is realized only when he truly realizes his vulnerability. The crippled Jacob becomes the glorious leader of all Israel.

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[72] S-M S. Park (2010), "Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob's 'Flocks' in Genesis 30:25–43: Identity, Election, and the Role of the Divine," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 4, p. 670.

[73] Op. cit., p. 171.

[74] Op. cit., p. 172.

[75] The focus here is on Book 32 in Genesis.

[76] B. Gaventa (2019), "Between Text and Sermon: Genesis 32:22–32," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol. 73, No. 4, USA: Sage, p. 386.

[77] See theologically "to be crucified" (in Greek: «σταυρούσθαι»).

For Price and Gardner, in their study on whether submission to a superior (here, a deity) frees us from the possibility of depression, they note that the paradox of Jacob's peculiar victory occurs every time a person submits indeed to a deity.[78] Jacob's victory (over the Angel) arrives after the necessary condition of the victor's submission to something higher is satisfied: it is then that the person will be blessed with this paradoxical victory, experiencing a particularly complex situation. No struggle is a linear affair of a simple cause-and-effect nature: Jacob must find his own personal way to cope with the ordeal (see *religious coping*). How is this achieved? Affirmation of destiny, acceptance of the upcoming struggle, and submission to the superior: three basic conditions[79] for Jacob (and every person) to realize their destiny. Jacob's paralyzed thigh is thus transformed into a victory trophy and crown of the patriarch of Israel, and signals that each person's personal victory (i.e. the fulfillment of each person's own purpose in life) requires the synergy (see *synergism* in Christian theology) of human vulnerability with divine transcendence.

II.B. 'Wrestling with God' as Intrapsychic Struggle

The biblical narrative clearly states that Jacob fears for his life shortly before meeting Esau (and their eventual reconciliation which, until then, seemed utterly impossible). Jacob knows that twenty years ago he caused real pain to his brother by deceiving him. Now he knows that Esau is arriving at the place where he and his family are camped. Esau has with him four hundred men, an entire army. Shortly before the vision of his wrestle with the Angel, Jacob is filled with the fear of death. Until that moment, Jacob is only Jacob, he is not *yet* Israel, because his wrestle with the Angel has not yet occurred, that is, Jacob has not yet fully submitted to his destiny. For this reason, just before he encounters his brother's belated wrath, Jacob remains closer to his old, neurotic self, a self that is still largely defined by the feeling of envy that –until that moment– has negatively guided him in successive acts of deception.

II.B.1. Guilt and Depressive Episode of Jacob Before Wrestling with the Angel

We will explore here the possibility that Jacob was experiencing some form of depressive episode at that very moment before his expected meeting with his twin brother. This investigation is not easy, on the one hand because the only testimony of what happens to Jacob is the biblical text, which is largely sparing in its descriptions, and on the other hand because whatever happens to Jacob, we must treat it as the result of a variety of crucial factors which are not always easy to identify. In her study of the relationship between religion, culture and mental health, Kate Loewenthal notes that "cultural and social psychiatrists and medical anthropologists very rarely consider religious factors separately from cultural factors."[80] The aim is to understand a psychiatric disorder always within a broader cultural context, of which the various religious manifestations are an integral part.

It is important not to forget that Jacob is indeed a religious person, with real anxiety about his personal spiritual hypostasis and with a strong faith in God. Such religious individuals, when they are overwhelmed by a true feeling of guilt for something they did and which –both within the personal and the religious code they follow– they consider reprehensible, then the possibility of a depressive episode may multiply due, as Loewenthal notes, to the following frequently observed pathway in depressed individuals:

"[faith in a] Religion → Guilt, shame and/or anxiety → Depression."[81]

We see that –under certain circumstances, where some kind of guilt is manifested– it is possible for a person's intense religiosity to be an auxiliary factor in the manifestation of a depressive episode. Siegmund Hurwitz, however, in his

[78] J. S. Price, and R. Jr. Gardner (2009), «Does submission to a deity relieve depression? Illustrations from the book of Job and the Bhagavd Gita», *Philosophical Papers and Reviews*, Vol. 1, No. 2, σελ. 27.
[79] Op. cit.
[80] K. Loewenthal (2006), *Religion, Culture and Mental Health*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 10.
[81] Op. cit., p. 68.

study on the dual (positive and negative, light and dark) nature of God, occasioned by the expression of Evil in the Book of Job, reminds us that in late rabbinic thought in the Talmud, two *middot*[82] of God are described, which are the characteristics or the behavior of God. One describes "divine love, mercy and compassion,"[83] while the second describes "harsh judgment, divine wrath, the demonic side" of Yahweh.[84] Yahweh is a god with two aspects, a god with a "'right hand' and [a] 'left hand'"[85] – a god who evokes a feeling of infinite love in man, but also a god who can cause him terror (see *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*). This is the God of Jacob, a man who knows that, since he is guilty of those previous actions of deception, to which he was led out of envy for his brother, it is possible that he will experience the wrath of this God, despite His already stated promises (to Jacob) that He will always stand by his side. It seems, therefore, Jacob's realization that he may have already broken with his God is capable of making him despair (even temporarily) and leading him to experience a depressive episode.

Exploring the influence of Jungian psychology on the rabbinical interpretation of the Talmud, Dreifuss focuses on Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, which he interprets in Jungian terms as "psychologically a fight between the ego and the Self, or realizing the religious function of the psyche and the inner conflict between ego and the demands of the Self."[86] This observation illuminates Jacob's moment of anguish as a critical moment for his own identity, which gives it additional psycho-spiritual weight.

Modern Psychoanalysis has generally associated the experience of extraordinary and miraculous states –such as all the instances of spiritually transcendental sightings throughout Jacob's life– not only with depression but very often with the syndrome of schizophrenia. Steven Rogers and Raymond Paloutzian, in their study of the relationship between schizophrenia, neurology and religion, where they explore the special role that psychoses (to which the syndrome of schizophrenia belongs) may have played in the development of religion, note that "religious ideation and delusion have long been part of the symptomatology of individuals with schizophrenia."[87] The two scholars believe that this is due to the current medical model, which defines what psychopathology is. According to the current medical model, the symptoms of schizophrenia –especially those related to religious delusions– should be considered harmful and therefore attempts should be made to eliminate and cure them. However, as Rogers and Paloutzian emphasize, "this does not answer the question about what distinguishes the meaning of religious experiences on individuals with schizophrenia from the experiences of those without it."[88] In their study on schizophrenia, Alex Cohen et al. define it "on the basis of symptoms of delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech or catatonic behavior and other negative symptoms."[89] We read nothing in the biblical narrative that presents Jacob as displaying such behavior.

Rogers and Paloutzian add that the flat-out view of the consequences of the religious content of schizophrenic symptoms as negative, may overlook the personal or social contribution of such symptoms, adding that:

> "It may be that individuals with schizophrenia have an ability to tap into a spiritual realm and experience the divine via hallucination, delusion, and anomalous perceptual experiences. This ability may represent

[82] S. Hurwitz (1994), "The Dark Face of God in Judaism," in J. Ryce-Menuhin (ed.) *Jung and Monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, London: Routledge, p. 47.

[83] Op. cit.

[84] Op. cit.

[85] Op. cit.

[86] G. Dreifuss (1994), "Jerusalem and Zurich: An Individual Synthesis," in J. Ryce-Menuhin (ed.) *Jung and Monotheisms. Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, London: Routledge, p. 58.

[87] S. A. Rogers and R. F. Paloutzian (2006), "Schizophrenia, Neurology, and Religion: What Can Psychosis Teach Us about the Evolutionary Role of Religion?" in P. McNamara (ed.) *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion: Vol. 3: The Psychology of Religious Experience*, USA: Praeger Publishers, p. 161.

[88] Op. cit.

[89] A. S. Cohen, D. A. Callaway, and T. L. Auster (2014), "Schizophrenia," in C. S. Richards and M. W. O'Hara (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Depression and Comorbidity*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 238.

> one of the unique societal contributions of schizophrenia that has led to its persistence across races, continents, and a common genetic ancestry."[90]

This possible contribution of individuals with schizophrenic symptoms to the evolution of religion and human societies in general is not without significance. Rogers and Paloutzian refer to individuals with *schizotypal traits*,[91] whose mental health lies somewhere between that of a commonly accepted normal person and that of a person with diagnosed schizophrenic symptoms. The interesting thing here is that schizoid individuals are found much more frequently than individuals with true schizophrenic symptoms, a fact that probably testifies to something 'normal' in schizoid individuals, which is generally common among people. As Rogers and Paloutzian argue, it may be correct to say that "all individuals exist on a continuum of temporal lobe sensitivity, where certain stimuli, such as grief, loss, and crisis, enhance the lability of the temporal lobe and therefore elevate the likelihood of religious experience."[92] We can thus consider these individuals as particularly gifted in having religious experiences, without ever crossing the threshold of mental illness. If we choose to take the biblical text as a true testimony of the life of Jacob, then we can consider that there is a really strong possibility that Jacob himself is just such a person. Indeed, it is interesting to wonder about the possibility that *Jacob-the-trickster*, whom we analyzed earlier, ultimately refers to a similar description of the particular characteristics of schizoid individuals.

We can, however, examine whether Jacob is indeed experiencing some kind of depressive episode by using two complementary definitions of depression that Beck has given. The first definition distinguishes the necessary expression of the following characteristic perceptions in order to be able to call a person 'depressed':[93]

(a) a negative view of self,
(b) a negative view of the world, and
(c) a negative view of the future.

In the case of Jacob, as we read in the biblical narrative, we can rather easily see that all three of the above perceptions are manifested: Jacob feels guilt for his past transgressions, he experiences sadness at being without a homeland –a stranger and exile in the world– and finally he experiences intense anxiety and fear of death for the future of his own life, as well as the life of his family and people. Taking these into account, we can say that it is indeed very likely that Jacob is experiencing depression (as defined by Beck).

In addition, Beck, during his study exploring the causes and treatment of depression, stipulates that the person suffering from depression presents the following five attributes:[94]

1. A specific alteration in mood: sadness, loneliness, apathy.
2. A negative self-concept associated with self-reproaches and self-blame.
3. Regressive and self-punitive wishes: desires to escape, hide, or die.
4. Vegetative changes: anorexia, insomnia, loss of libido.
5. Change in activity level: retardation or agitation.

Here too, we could see Jacob exhibiting at least some of the above characteristics. For example, the biblical narrative presents a sad Jacob, who feels guilty, who wants to hide, who may have insomnia, who feels agitated and restless. So here we have a second (according to Beck) and largely convincing indication of depressive behavior on the part of Jacob.

On the other hand, as Klein and Wender note in their study on depression, before we label a person as 'depressed,' we should take into account "the length of the period of distress and the degree of trouble that it has

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[90] S. A. Rogers and R. F. Paloutzian (2006), "Schizophrenia, Neurology, and Religion: What Can Psychosis Teach Us about the Evolutionary Role of Religion?" in P. McNamara (ed.) *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion: Vol. 3: The Psychology of Religious Experience*, USA: Praeger Publishers, p. 161.

[91] Discussed in a section titled: "Schizotypy." Op. cit., p. 171.

[92] Op. cit.

[93] L. P. Rehm (2014), "Cognitive and Behavioral Theories," in B. B. Wolman and G. Stricker (eds.) *Depressive Disorders: Facts, Theories, and Treatment*, USA: International Psychotherapy Institute E-books, pp. 204–205.

[94] A. T. Beck and B. A. Alford (2009), *Depression: Causes and Treatment*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 8.

produced,"[95] and generally suggest that someone should only be perceived as depressed "if the distress has lasted for over a month,"[96] although this should not be considered an inviolable rule either.

As Josiah Allen notes in his review of Beck's theory, the main feelings of depression are "failure […] and loss,"[97] which tend to prevail over any other possible –present or past– positive experiences of the depressed person. We can say that indeed Jacob –shortly before his wrestling with the Angel, experiencing intense fear of the future– may feel that he has failed or that he is going to fail in his encounter with Esau. Consequently, the specter of loss must weigh heavily on him.

At this point it is interesting to see what Jerold Gold mentions in his research on depression regarding "neurotic depression,"[98] that is, a "mild depression."[99] In this case of depression, the suffering person does indeed feel discomfort and a generalized feeling of helplessness, but the symptoms do not seem to persist when the suffering person's attention is turned away from the cause that drives them to manifest neurotic depression. If we read the biblical text carefully, it is not difficult to think that the intensity of the depressive episode that Jacob (possibly) presents is relatively low or moderate. This is supported by the fact that Jacob does indeed feel fear of death and doubt about God's promises, but he never reaches the point of giving up: indeed, the biblical text presents Jacob as a man who takes initiatives, despite his great fear and against the doubt that floods him. This element may ultimately indicate that Jacob is exhibiting precisely the neurotic depression Gold describes and not some other more severe form of depression. In support of this, we see that praying to God somehow removes Jacob from the immediate problem and immediately changes his mood, to such an extent that it successfully activates him to wrestle with the Angel for an entire night.

The night of Jacob's agony, which culminates in his wrestle with the Angel, is reminiscent of the "dark nights"[100] of John of the Cross, to which Denys Turner refers in his study on negativity in Christian mysticism. Turner connects these dark nights of John of the Cross with depression: the 'darkness' that the mystic Saint feels has an analogy with depression, from the perspective that "depression is the symptom of an under-constructed selfhood, of a disintegration of feeling and agency, the collapse of my personal narrative into meaningless segments of event for which I can have no liking or love."[101] John of the Cross loses his sense of self and his faith in his capacity for meaningful action: perhaps that is how Jacob feels that night, if only momentarily. However, just as what a mystic considers normal differs greatly from what is generally understood as normal by the non-mystic, Turner states that "what we are to count as depression depends in part on what we think is an appropriate and healthy sense of self."[102] Charles Hackney believes something similar, who, studying the general relationship between religion and mental health, notes "the lack of scholarly consensus on how to define mental health."[103] This question must also remain open in the present paper.

PART THREE: *JACOB'S TRANSFORMATION*

[95] D. F. Klein and P. H. Wender (2005), *Understanding Depression: A Complete Guide to Its Diagnosis and Treatment*, Oxford University Press, p. 13.

[96] Op. cit.

[97] J. P. Allen (2003), *An Overview of Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression in Contemporary Literature*, USA: Rochester University of Technology, p. 3.

[98] J. R. Gold (2014), "Levels of Depression," in B. B. Wolman and G. Stricker (eds.) *Depressive Disorders: Facts, Theories, and Treatment*, USA: International Psychotherapy Institute E-books, p. 512.

[99] Op. cit.

[100] D. Turner (1999), *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, UK: Cambridge University Press, p. 227.

[101] Op. cit., p. 228–229.

[102] Op. cit., p. 227–228.

[103] C. H. Hackney (2010), "Religion and Mental Health: What Do You Mean When You Say 'Religion'? What Do You Mean When You Say, 'Mental Health'?" in P. J. Verhagen, H. M. van Praag, J. J. López Jr., and J. L. Cox (eds.) *Religion and Psychiatry: Beyond Boundaries*, Driss Moussaoui, USA: Wiley-Blackwell Publications, p. 347.

III.A. The Dream of the *Ladder* in the Book of Genesis[104]

It is interesting to refer to Schept's study of the Freudian and Jungian perspectives on the dream of the *Ladder*. Schept notes that in Freudian psychology:

> "Dreams are symbolic of unconscious wishes left from childhood, particularly from points of fixation where psychic energy has not advanced. Those repressed infantile wishes are sexual and/or aggressive in nature. Most often these repressed wishes stem from the so-called Oedipus complex, in which conflicts surrounding 'the nursery triangle' are replayed. The Oedipus complex unfolds in the male child who harbors erotic wishes for the mother and death wishes for the father. This conflict is smashed when the male child identifies with his father (because of fears of castration) and gives up his mother as an erotic love object. The ultimate resolution occurs when the son becomes an adult and marries a woman who, on some unconscious level, is symbolically connected to the mother."[105]

Just before he has the dream of the Ladder, Jacob's relationship with his mother is indeed at a critical point, since it is the first time in his life that the two of them are separated, with Jacob abandoning the interior of the family tent, being the beloved son of his mother. In fact, Jacob's self-exile to the land of Laban has as its first concern for Jacob the finding of a wife, who, as Schept points out, "symbolically replaces the mother as the center of the man's emotional life."[106] We can safely assume that the imminent replacement of his beloved mother by an unknown woman, who will have to become his wife, certainly increases Jacob's anxiety about his present and future. With the additional psychological burden that Jacob must be feeling regarding the recent dramatic events that took place with his brother and father, he falls asleep and dreams of the Ladder.

Remaining in the Freudian context, Schept suggests that the Ladder, with the upward and downward movement of the Angels on it, can be understood as a representation of a sexual practice, since for Freud, "all tall, elongated objects are symbolic of the male organ."[107] Thus "the up and down motion of the angels" can be seen as "implying a self-gratifying act" performed by Jacob.[108] At the same time, the psycho-emotional state of Jacob –a Jacob, who is on the verge between the forty-year-old unmarried 'child', who until that point lived by his mother's side, and the future married man– could demonstrate that Jacob's encounter with God in the dream of the Ladder is nothing more than "manifestations and projections of his ambivalent relationship with his father, Isaac."[109] According to Freud, God is the *projection* of the Oedipal father, therefore at that difficult moment Jacob may have needed to dream of a God-father, who would relieve his guilt and calm his fear.

Continuing the Freudian interpretation of the Ladder dream, Schept suggests that we see the ritual that Jacob performs after he has the dream, using the stone on which he slept and dreamed, as a monument to the place of God, upon which he pours oil, as another "symbolic sexual act wherein Jacob both expresses the forbidden [sexual] impulse [towards his absent mother] and, at the same time, placates the heavenly father,"[110] (as a father, who appeases fear of the future). Therefore, for Freudian Psychology, symbols, whether in dreams or in ritual acts, are nothing more than "the reemergence into consciousness, in disguised form, of the repressed sexual and aggressive wishes stemming from childhood fixations."[111]

Moving on to the hermeneutics of Jung's Analytical Psychology, Schept distinguishes it from Freud's psychology, since –although Jung agrees with Freud that the symbol is a product of the unconscious– in Jung, conversely, "the rational, the unconscious, has both order and purpose."[112] She goes on:

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[104] The description of this dream within the biblical narrative is found in the passage Gen. 28:10–22.

[105] S. Schept (2007), "Jacob's Dream of a Ladder: Freudian and Jungian Perspectives," *Psychological Perspectives*, Vol. 50, No. 1, C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles: Routledge, pp. 117–118.

[106] Op. cit., p. 118.

[107] Op. cit.

[108] Op. cit.

[109] Op. cit.

[110] Op. cit., p. 119.

[111] Op. cit.

[112] Op. cit., p. 120.

> "The symbol, spontaneously produced by the unconscious, as in dreams, has the potential power to canalize, that is, to channel and transform psychic energy, thereby exerting a profound change in the individual. These symbols are often produced when the person is in crisis, in great upheaval, or in a liminal state. If the symbol itself is consciously acknowledged, it can impart great wisdom and aid the individual in his or her quest for meaning, wholeness, and psychic growth; the symbol can point the way forward, not backward."[113]

Here the Ladder is understood as a symbol of transformation, the symbolic place where the earthly (unconscious) – with Jacob's biological and instinctual reflexes– comes into connection with the 'heavenly' (conscious) – Jacob's spiritual virtues. The dream of the Ladder shows primarily that "Jacob is in transition,"[114] moving away from his mother's side –where he remained for far too long– to the outside world, which marks the psychic place of a higher level of self-awareness. As Schept notes, "Jacob must be set free from the childhood restraints of his parental family and be ready not only to assume his adult role but also to take his place in history among the patriarchs."[115]

The palindromic movement of the Angels on the Ladder embodies the message of Jacob's transformation, as the ascending Angels 'sanctify' (transubstantiate) the sexual and the earthly, while the descending Angels imbue the finite physical world with a new transcendent meaning. Thus, here, from a Jungian perspective, Jacob's ritual of pouring oil on the stone where he dreamed of the Ladder becomes the spatial placement of the symbol of transformation, which has already begun to manifest itself in Jacob's psyche. Through this ritual, Schept sees that Jacob "consciously repeats what was given to him unconsciously, thus symbolically accepting his adult role, including his impending marriage and the purpose toward which he is guided."[116] The Ladder ultimately becomes the vehicle of psycho-spiritual growth for Jacob, as we will analyze immediately below.

III.B. The *Ladder* as the Symbol of Spiritual Ascent (*Increase*) and Descent (*Decrease*)

Of Jacob's two transcendental experiences (the wrestling with the Angel and the dream of the Ladder), the dream of the Ladder is the most peaceful. Its description radiates serenity – it is calm, peaceful. We could speculate that, as Jacob sees it, he feels peaceful within – perhaps he is filled with a feeling of joy. We choose to include the dream of the Ladder in the category of Jung's *big dreams*[117] because of the transformative impact it had on Jacob's life. If the dream of the Ladder is an invitation to something, both for Jacob himself and for everyone who reads its description in the Bible, then this invitation comes as a friend. It comes, whispering, as it unlocks Jacob's spiritual space, broadening and increasing it. The friendly invitation extended to us by the dream of the Ladder seems to ultimately concern a psycho-spiritual *expansion* (in Greek: πλατυσμός, *platysmos*).

What does this experience of platysmos consist of? The capacity of the messengers of God to move reveals a possibility for them of choosing to move *upwards*, or *downwards*. This also illuminates the messengers' process in a very real way and at a very real pace: the Angels do not *only* ascend, nor do they *only* descend. The Angels ascend *and* descend, as they must, in order to deliver –descending– the word of God to people, as well as to deliver –ascending– the suffering of people to God, along with the request for salvation. The platysmos here seems, therefore, not to be presented in the dream of the Ladder as an unambiguous action upwards. The platysmos here seems more to speak of the possibility of having conscious choice –of the 'above' or the 'below'– which appears as a vision before Jacob and which, therefore, concerns the knowledge that the possibility of choice lies only in his hands. Along with this unprecedented awareness, a new, unprecedented, responsibility lands in Jacob's mind. Now, Jacob knows both the path to the above and the path to the below because he has seen both with his own eyes. Jacob is able now to observe the way in which the above is connected to the below, one feeding back into the other. Jacob is invited here to perceive the new awareness of himself and the new responsibility that this new relationship of the above to

[113] Op. cit.
[114] Op. cit.
[115] Op. cit.
[116] Op. cit.
[117] K. Bulkeley (2006), «The Origins of Dreaming», *Where God and Science Meet. How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion*, *Volume 3: The Psychology of Religious Experience*, Ed. P. McNamara, USA: Praeger Publishers, p. 217.

the below, which the dream of the Ladder indicates, brings with it. This is about the psycho-spiritual relationship that Jacob experiences, which perfectly expresses the new expansion (platysmos) of Jacob's heart.

According to Spyridon Tsitsingos, in his study on the Cognitive Psychology of Religion, the dream of the Ladder marks for Jacob the passage from the *self* –which, in agreement with Assagioli and Fromm, Tsitsingos refers to as the "small self"– to the *Self*, that is, the "great or spiritual self" respectively:

> "The 'small self' is simply the one who is aware of his or her difference as an individual, with the feeling of isolation and separation. The 'big' or spiritual self, or even the highest center in a human being (i.e. the mind, or the embodied mind), possesses a feeling of freedom, spaciousness, comfort, magnanimity, 'nobility,' mental peace, bliss, expansion, inter-communication with other selves and all of reality."[118]

We can consider that it is precisely this transcendent space-time that opens before Jacob's eyes, as he experiences the dream of the Ladder. This crucial spiritual experience of Jacob is recorded in the biblical text as a luminous vision, which presents the existence of the choice towards the above, that is, in agreement with the divine promise of man's psycho-spiritual elevation, which indicates the horizon of a new creation. Ultimately, the dream of the Ladder illuminates the relationship between 'heaven' and 'earth', a real relationship, a relationship between spirit and matter. It seems to remind us that life is precisely this 'up and down', from the high to the low, and from the trivial to the transcendent and indestructible. Through the dream of the Ladder, Jacob's life reveals a universal and timeless theo-humanistic message of transformation.

III.C. Stages of Jacob's Psycho-Spiritual Transformation

III.C.1. Pre-Liminal Stage

According to Abramsky, in his paper on Jacob's wrestling with the Angel: "Jacob, as the Biblical story opens, is in a pre-liminal stage. He is a man of the mundane world subject to the usual desires of power, greed, ignorance, and lust."[119] Jacob emerges into the world "deceitfully," born overcome with envy for the primogeniture – within his own family (in opposition to his brother and father) but also within his broader community. Jacob's deceitful actions distance him from God. Instead of accepting reality "as a reflection of God's will," he acts decisively "to be what he is not."[120] During this stage, Jacob's egoic needs are in complete control of his actions.[121]

III.C.2. Liminal Stage

Continuing with Abramsky, he notes that the "liminal stage"[122] in Jacob's journey towards transformation:

> "refers to a threshold. It is the rite of passage where the protagonist must struggle with who he is and who he may become. At this point, his world (the pre-liminal) has collapsed. His sense of identity has dissolved. His life is ambiguous and indeterminate. However, the point of crisis [hounded by the rage of Esau since he "stole" the blessing of their father] has also made him psychologically open, open to a new identity. Typically, this stage is fluid, filled with difficulties, small successes and failures. Ambiguity reigns until resolution occurs."[123]

As mentioned before, Jacob has a singular experience on the night before he is to face his brother on the field of battle, wrestling with a stranger till dawn – struggling with the Angel. This transcendent wrestling match leads Jacob

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[118] Σ. Κ. Τσιτσίγκος [S. K. Tsitsingos] (2019), *Στοιχεία Γνωσιακής Ψυχολογίας της Θρησκείας: Η Πνευματική Ψυχολογία υπό το πρίσμα της Νευροψυχολογίας* [*Cognitive Science of Religion Principles: Spiritual Psychology Through a Neuropsychological Prism*], Athens: Tremendum, p. 53.

[119] M. Abramsky (2010), "Jacob Wrestles the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash," *California Institute of Integral Studies / International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 107.

[120] Op. cit., p. 108.

[121] Op. cit., p. 109.

[122] Op. cit., p. 109.

[123] Op. cit.

to his genuine and ultimate transformation. Indeed, "resolution of the personal neurosis of envy opens the door to a spiritual transformation."[124]

Abramsky notes that "the major spiritual transformative vehicle in Judaic thought is repentance or *teshuvah*,"[125] and expansively goes on to point out (citing the work of Ehud Luz)[126] that:

> "teshuvah has two complementary meanings. It derives from the verb to return or to going back to the straight path, to one's origin, or to an authentic way of life after a period of absence. The second meaning derives from the verb to reply: a response to a call originating outside of one's self. Teshuvah embraces both meanings: a return to one's source or essence and a divine call. It is central to Judaic thought, which sees the relationship between man and God as ethical in nature, a partnership where both God and man have a role in bringing the world to perfection (*tikkun olam*). When there is an ethical break and the covenant between God and man is shattered, teshuvah repairs it. From the perspective of Biblical history, it creates a return to the ideal state –the Garden of Eden– that only existed prior to sin. Kabbalists speak of tikkun olam or the repair of the world. Ethical breaches shatter the spiritual world, and teshuvah restores it. […] Jacob's story could be the template for the process of teshuvah."[127]

Abramsky continues (again citing Luz):

> "Practically, teshuvah entails three processes. The first is insight or recognition of wrongdoing. […] Teshuvah also is the recognition that we have broken our covenant with God. […] The second step is compensation. Undoing the wrong means making the victim whole. Obviously one cannot reverse a temporal action, but compensation, both psychological and material, can be made. […] Thirdly, the offender must lose the desire, the seed, which began the destructive process. Learning must occur [that brings about teshuvah], so that the same actions do not repeat."[128]

Whenever it occurs through the process of teshuvah, healthy psycho-spiritual transformation brings an increased sense of freedom, a disposition for forgiveness, a sense of security and joy. Conversely, as Ellens emphasizes below, whenever a person feels threatened, anxious, terrified, and extremely afraid of God, leading them to moral legalisms, these are signs of pathology and an unhealthy psycho-spiritual transformation:

> "if we are to have healthy conversions, we must have a healthy God. A sick notion of God will produce a sick conversion into a sick faith perspective, shaping our life and thought in a destructive way.[129]

Although the biblical text assures us that Jacob did indeed succeed in fulfilling his destiny, that is, (healthily) transforming into the patriarch of Israel, it is very important to remember that his path towards the realization of his purpose is full of personal moral failures. Even more so, we saw that at other times and situations Jacob even manifested pathological behaviors, such as envy, or neurotic depression.

III.C.3. Post-Liminal Stage

Following Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, Abramsky suggests he enters the "post-liminal stage"[130] of his spiritual coming-of-age. This stage refers to "a new level of integration" and "represents the synthesis and incorporation of [Jacob's] previous conflicts into a new, more adaptive dynamic. […T]his incorporative stage represents a higher level

[124] Op. cit., p. 113.
[125] Op. cit., p. 113.
[126] E. Luz (2010), "Repentance" in A. A. Cohen and P. Mendes-Flohr (eds.) *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Thought, Movements, and Beliefs*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. 785–793.
[127] M. Abramsky (2010), "Jacob Wrestles the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash," *California Institute of Integral Studies / International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 113–114.
[128] Op. cit., p. 114.
[129] H. J. Ellens (2008), *Understanding Religious Experiences: What the Bible Says About Spirituality*, USA: Praeger Publishers, p. 122.
[130] M. Abramsky (2010), "Jacob Wrestles the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash," *California Institute of Integral Studies / International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 115.

of hierarchic integration, where older conflicts are resolved."[131] Here, Jacob has entered the 'kairos' (i.e. time, era) of his spiritual adulthood. Thus begins the period in his life where his destiny becomes clearer.

III.D. *Completion* and *Perfection* of Jacob

III.D.1. Jacob Reconciles with Esau[132]

Here we will analyze the episode concerning the reconciliation of Jacob with Esau, which also marks the end of Jacob's twenty-year exile in the land of Laban. The reconciliation of the twin brothers takes place after successive waves of gifts and offerings, which Jacob makes sure find Esau before their meeting. The offering of gifts has always, in almost all cultures, signaled the 'servile' and humble disposition of the offerant towards the receiver. Also, as we know, their meeting is preceded by Jacob's wrestle with the Angel, during which Jacob received the name *Israel*, thus accepting the destiny that God had already assigned to him from when he was still in the womb of his mother Rebekah. It is there, at the dawn of the wrestle, that Jacob's psycho-spiritual transformation begins to manifest itself clearly. Its first expression seems to be a feeling of self-humiliation and a willingness for repentance on the part of Jacob towards his brother, hoping that Esau will forgive him.

In his study on the relationship between psychotherapy and counselling, Paul Gilbert notes that "self-forgiveness is an important quality of inner caring and compassion,"[133] and adds that forgiveness has another two aspects that join self-forgiveness to form a crucial triad: "being able to forgive others [and] being able to be helped by receiving the forgiveness of others"[134] – that is, to accept forgiveness. This tripart act of forgiveness helps individuals overcome negative feelings of shame and guilt, feelings that Jacob himself must experience, since, after his wrestling with the Angel, he has now fully realized the need for personal atonement towards his brother.

Tsitsingos, in his work on the relationship between spirituality and spiritual psychotherapy, notes that the capacity for forgiveness, both of oneself and of another person, and the need for atonement, which springs from within the individual, who know that they have fallen morally before another person, is an indication of a strong spiritual identity and constitutes "a transformation in interpersonal relationships"[135] which guides the reborn spiritual self towards "what the Fathers of the Church called the 'dew of the Spirit.'"[136]

Vivien Hidary, in her study where she relates the Jewish feast of Tabernacles to the life of Jacob, emphasizes –in agreement with the aforementioned concept of kabbalistic teshuvah– that there are two necessary elements that make a person's repentance real: "making amends to those whom one has wronged and atoning for one's sins against God."[137] Hidary sees Jacob not only seeking and ultimately receiving forgiveness from Esau –realizing the first of the two aforementioned elements of true atonement– but also fighting and ultimately winning forgiveness from God himself during his wrestle with the Angel, since the Angel/God ultimately agrees to bless him.[138]

The professed tradition of the name –which for the ancient peoples was ontologically equivalent to the very essence of the person, which reveals its name– when changed at the end of the wrestling, expresses humility and submission. Therefore, we should point out here that the wrestle that took place did not come from enmity or hatred, but from a *spiritual violence* (see *divine love*), of which Christ had also spoken.[139] Thus, the previous stolen blessing from Isaac is replaced with one truly earned, and indeed with perseverance, with the psychosomatic toil and agony of an entire night. Jacob first gains heavenly forgiveness from God, regenerating his spiritual self by accepting the

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[131] Op. cit.

[132] This episode is described in the excerpts Gen. 32:1–21 and Gen. 33:1–20.

[133] P. Gilbert (2007), *Psychotherapy and Counselling for Depression*, London: Sage Publications, p. 317.

[134] Op. cit.

[135] Σ. Κ. Τσιτσίγκος [S. K. Tsitsingos] (2023), *Πνευματικότητα (θρησκειολογική θεώρηση) με έμφαση στην Ανατολική και Δυτική Πατερική Πνευματικότητα και με στοιχεία πνευματικής ψυχο-θεραπείας* [*Spirituality (As Seen From a Religious Studies Perspective) With a Focus on Eastern and Western Patristic Spirituality and Employing Spiritual Psychotherapy Principles*], Athens: Tremendum, p. 639–640.

[136] Op. cit., p. 640.

[137] V. Hidary (2015), "A Journey to Succoth," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor le Dor*, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 187.

[138] Op. cit., p. 189.

[139] Matt. 11, 12.

transformative message of his destiny as the patriarch of Israel, and at the same time by preparing himself to seek earthly forgiveness from his twin brother. Hidary sees the site of this double forgiveness, which constitutes Jacob's true atonement for his past moral transgressions as Jacob's personal Yom Kippur,[140] marking the day on which the episode of the twins' reconciliation takes place as Jacob's personal "Day of Atonement."[141]

Regarding any immediate benefits that Jacob receives when he achieves this double atonement, it is of particular interest that Fatemeh Fayyaz and Mohammad Ali Besharat note (in their comparative study on the influence of the act of forgiveness on people who experience depression) that forgiveness is a protective factor against depression. They even add that "people who are unable to forgive others have more tendency to become depressed by keeping the negative feelings of grudge and revenge."[142] This is of particular importance for Jacob since, as we saw earlier, he possibly shows signs of a depressive episode as soon as he learns that Esau is arriving for him, his family, and his people, accompanied by many men. We could thus claim that both the wrestling with the Angel and his encounter with Esau (since both lead to Jacob's atonement) ultimately succeed in resolving any possible tendency of Jacob towards depression.

However, the twins' reconciliation resolves much more than Jacob's possible tendency toward depression: it settles the future, both of the two brothers' relationship with each other and of each brother's relationship with the world and his personal destiny. In her study of the episode of Jacob's reconciliation with Esau, Chaya Greenberger informs us that "it was customary in the ancient world to use a 'go-between' when pacifying the anger of one's fellow, as it was considered brazen to face him/her head on [without a mediary]."[143] Thus, Jacob divides his family, people, and wealth into 'waves', which would arrive at Esau one after the other, all seeking his forgiveness, as they all simultaneously declared Jacob's willingness to submit to him. However, Greenberger emphasizes that Jacob's submission to Esau came with the message that it concerned submission only in worldly matters: in spiritual matters, Jacob rightfully had to maintain primacy over his brother.[144]

Finally, however, after bowing to the ground seven times before reaching him,[145] Jacob does indeed face Esau face to face. This, as we have seen, is a prerequisite for Jacob to reach a true reconciliation with his brother. As Gies notes, "Jacob knows that he is guilty towards his brother and that he must now stand without shame and fear before his brother. The latter accepts his gift as a gesture of reconciliation."[146] After the two embrace and cry together, forgiving each other for past mistakes, Esau proposes to Jacob that they henceforth walk together in life.[147] Jacob, however, has a different opinion about this and politely rejects his brother's proposal. It could not be otherwise: the two brothers have different destinations and special weights in the world, with Esau predominating in earthly (worldly) power and authority, and with Jacob having already chosen to dedicate his life to the conquest of spiritual perfection, paving the way for the future people of Israel.

The brothers are separated. Each man proceeds towards the material and psycho-spiritual place, respectively, to which he belongs, after having previously been reconciled and having at the same time recognized the crucial difference in each other, which leads them to their different destinations. Thus, God's prophecy, delivered when the twins were still in their mother's womb, is confirmed: two children, two peoples, two different destinies. The episode of their reconciliation constitutes a clear indication of *perfection*, that is, the realization of the true self, both primarily of Jacob – who concerns us directly in this paper – but also of his twin brother Esau.

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[140] V. Hidary (2015), "A Journey to Succoth," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor le Dor*, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 188.

[141] Op. cit.

[142] F. Fayyaz and M. A. Besharat (2011), "Comparison of Forgiveness in Clinical Depressed, Non-clinical Depressed and Normal People," *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 30, pp. 91–92.

[143] C. Greenberger (2018), "Esau and Jacob: Brothers Clash, Reconcile and Separate," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 148.

[144] Op. cit., p. 148–149.

[145] Gen. 33:3.

[146] K. Gies (2013), *Jacob*, Deutsche Bibel Gesellshacft.

[147] Gen. 33:12.

III.D.2. Jacob Returns at the 'House of the Father'[148]

We have seen that the reconciliation of the two brothers marks the beginning of a new, transformative era for Jacob. This moment coincides with Jacob's return to the land of his father Isaac, after his twenty-year self-exile in the land of his uncle, Laban. However, this is not Jacob's only return to his father's land: the end of his life, his *completion*, is marked by a second return to the land of Abraham and Isaac, the two first patriarchs. This second return of Jacob is also the definitive one, as it takes place after his death.

These two returns of Jacob to his father's land define the entire period of his life, where he realizes his transformed self towards his destiny as the patriarch of Israel. It is the period of maturity of Jacob's life, during which he manages to impress upon everyone's mind that he is the patriarch of a new people, chosen by God himself. The biblical account of the glorious mourning process for him, not only by his beloved son Joseph (and the rest of his sons) but by the entire people of Egypt, assures us of the greatness to which Jacob had reached in the consciousness of his contemporaries. Even Pharaoh himself understands the essence of this exceptional man and has no objection to his desire to be buried in the land of his ancestors. The greatest and most powerful ruler of the time submits to the will of Jacob because he recognizes behind him the will of an almighty God. Jacob's second return to his father's land constitutes the completion of a brilliantly heroic and uniquely spiritually elevated life.

In the Lacanian context, we can see the event of Jacob's death as the perfect filling of what Lacan calls the *void* associated with the Father and the Name-of-the-Father:[149] Jacob's life is completed, as he has succeeded in becoming the third patriarch, taking the place of his father, Isaac. The return to the land of the father is further marked by the placement of his body in exactly the same grave as Isaac's, in the final 'house of the father', in the land of the father, which is the geographical, existential-ontological and psychic locus of Jacob's origin. Symbolically, Jacob thus completely replaces the father-patriarch.

III.D.3. The Change of Name as the Psycho-Spiritual Maturation of Jacob

At the end of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, the Angel changes Jacob's name to *Israel*. In fact, in the biblical account of Jacob's life there is a second point where God appears to Jacob again and repeats that his name will now be *Israel*. The repetition comes to validate the first moment when his name is changed. The second and final change of Jacob's name takes place over twenty years after he has seen the dream of the Ladder.[150]

We have seen that scholars of the episode of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel do not all agree on the exact identity of the Angel. This is of great importance, since possible variations in the identity of the unknown man who wrestles with Jacob mean possible variations in the specific meaning of the act of changing the name. From a religious-psychoanalytic perspective, although all scholars agree that it is a *theopic* (i.e. a vision of divine origin), there are three basic hypotheses regarding who exactly the Angel is: God himself, a prefiguration of Esau, and, finally, Jacob himself.

The first interpretation emphasizes that the Angel is none other than the God of Abraham and Isaac himself, in whom Jacob also believes. This interpretation could be strengthened by the fact that in the repetition of the act of changing Jacob's name to Israel, it is clearly God himself who changes the name.[151] Presenting another possible interpretation in his psychological and spiritual study of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, Hayimm Angel notes the view that the Angel is "the tutelary Prince (guardian angel) of [Jacob's brother] Esau."[152] In this interpretation we can see the wrestle as the prelude to the conflict of the two twins in conscious reality, in which the two brothers are finally reconciled. There seems to be clear indications of this possibility in the biblical text where their reconciliation is described, since, as Angel notes: "When Jacob and Esau subsequently meet, Jacob tells his brother that seeing him

[148] The excerpts from the book of Genesis that relate to the death of Jacob and the second return to his father's land are as follows: Gen. 47:29–31, Gen. 49:29–33, and Gen. 50:1–14.

[149] J.-A. Miller (2011), "The Non-Existent Seminar," *Symptom*, Issue 12, p. 5.

[150] This is the excerpt Gen. 35:1–15.

[151] Gen. 35:10.

[152] H. Angel (2014), "'Heeling' in the Torah: A Psychological-Spiritual Reading of the Snake and Jacob's Wrestling Match," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 181.

is like seeing the face of God. This is an unusual compliment, but Jacob knows that he has battled an angel representing physical and metaphysical Esau."[153] Jacob here refers to what Esau does not know: unbeknownst to Esau, Jacob has already wrestled with him during the previous night, but not in the conscious reality but on another, transcendental, level. It is there in the transcendental realm that the 'equal' outcome of the wrestling has already foreshadowed their reconciliation, which is soon to take place in conscious reality. Greenberger agrees with this interpretation in her study of the relationship between the two twins, insisting in particular on the fact that the biblical text states that the name change occurs only after Jacob has wrestled "face-to-face"[154] with the Angel. The fact that the metaphysical wrestle occurred with one opponent looking straight into the face of the other opponent foreshadows the fact that later, during the day, Jacob will face his twin brother face to face. Thus, for Greenberger, "what took place subsequently 'on earth' between the brothers is a reflection of what took place 'in heaven.'"[155]

From the above, the biblical account of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel seems to imply that a necessary condition in order for the 'magical' act of renaming to *Israel* to take place is a particular gaze between the opponents: a gaze that looks directly into the other's eyes. The fact that a special quality of gaze is necessary in order for an act of transformation, such as Jacob's transformation into *Israel*, to occur, brings to mind another transformation, which takes place at another point in the biblical account of Jacob's life. It concerns the way in which the transformation of Laban's flocks of sheep and goats into Jacob's flocks of sheep and goats is successfully completed, an episode with which we have already dealt in a previous part of our study.

This time we focus on the integral role of the gaze of the sheep and goats, which looks resolutely towards a target, its 'rival', in order to achieve a crucial act of transformation. Park notes that Jacob's 'magic' trick involves painstakingly and precisely guiding him to what kind of rod –or horizon– Laban's sheep and goats should look at each time they mate. Ultimately, according to Park, what and where they look is what ultimately "transforms the sheep and goats that are born into Jacob's sheep and goats, bearing his colors."[156] Here Park emphasizes that Jacob forces Laban's sheep and goats to look somewhere specific, and there she sees an invisible transformative action of God,[157] which is made possible only thanks to the fact that Laban's sheep and goats look –without deviation– *where they should*, in order for the transformative act to manifest itself in all its fullness.

In Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, we encounter a similar insistence on the gaze,[158] on where and at whom the two opponents choose to look. The biblical narrative states that they look directly into each other's eyes: in the eyes of the Other is where the self (*desire*, Lacan would write) of each opponent is reflected. Thus, Jacob sees himself in the gaze of the Angel but it is God who –as the opponent who transforms him into Israel, and in analogy to the aforementioned increase in Jacob's material wealth– is ultimately responsible for Jacob's increasing spiritual wealth.

Angel refers to another interpretation of the identity of the Angel, who is said to have "appeared before him (Jacob) disguised as a shepherd,"[159] which is also Jacob's own profession. Thus, here Jacob seems to be struggling with his own self-image (a *projection*?). Truly, the fact that the Angel appears to grasp Jacob's thigh from behind seems to echo the fact that Jacob is born having grasped Esau's heel, coming deceitfully from behind, thus foreshadowing the envy he will later feel towards his brother. For Angel, Jacob's wrestle with the Angel symbolizes Jacob's morally reprehensible past, and since Jacob insists on looking it in the eye, as he looks the Angel in the eye, he becomes –secretly transformed by God– "ultimately worthy of having his name changed to Israel."[160]

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[153] Op. cit.

[154] C. Greenberger (2018), "Esau and Jacob: Brothers Clash, Reconcile and Separate," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 150.

[155] Op. cit., p. 151.

[156] S-M S. Park (2010), "Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob's 'Flocks' in Genesis 30:25–43: Identity, Election, and the Role of the Divine," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 4, pp. 667–673.

[157] Cf. E. Levinas (1961/1969), *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated from the French by A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

[158] Cf. Σ. Ράμφος [S. Ramfos] (1994), *Μυθολογία του βλέμματος* [*Mythology of the Gaze*], Athens: Εκδόσεις Αρμός [Armos Books].

[159] H. Angel (2014), "'Heeling' in the Torah: A Psychological-Spiritual Reading of the Snake and Jacob's Wrestling Match," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 181.

[160] Op. cit.

As Herbert Block notes in his distinction between the man Jacob and the progenitor of Israel, from this point until the end of the biblical narrative of Jacob's life, "some biblical passages use the name Jacob and some use Israel. Even God was not averse to using both names in one verse."[161] In this, Block sees the indication of a henceforth "dual personality – Jacob and Israel, two distinct characters resided in one man."[162] The transformative power of the change of his name does not concern a definitive and irrevocable event but on the contrary pushes Jacob and the people of Israel into a new dynamic relationship with the past and the future. In other words, the renaming of Jacob to Israel concerns a transformative *process* rather than an accomplished event. As Angel emphasizes, Jacob receives the blessing from the Angel only when he decides to definitively confront himself and the morally wrong actions of his past. His renaming as Israel is the first of many steps towards the transformation he desires, since "Jacob must constantly strive to become Israel."[163] Thus, a continuous process of gradual transformation of Jacob's character begins with the change of his name, which process will last until the end of his life.

The change of Jacob's name to Israel is ultimately the first expression of his *completion* as a personality and as a destiny. The change of name opens up a new future for Jacob, which is his real future. The *completion* (death) of his life, thus, comes to confirm –in a way, we could say– also the realization of his psycho-spiritual *completion*: Jacob's death marks the survival of Israel in the present and in future historical time. This process begins its course precisely at the moment of Jacob's renaming as Israel by the Angel: there lies the precise moment where Jacob –name and man– begins his course towards his inevitable biological death, as at the same moment Israel –name and people– painstakingly appears in history.

PART FOUR: *DISCUSSION*

In the hope of gaining even more critical insight on Jacob's biblical story, always maintaining a psycho-historical perspective, we choose here to follow a seemingly counterintuitive twofold strategy; in this part of our paper we first choose to remove our primary attention from Jacob, and we instead focus on the most important peripheral 'actors' around him. Secondly, we re-investigate the most crucial events of his life, under various new viewpoints. Ultimately, we attempt to discuss reflections and speculations (mainly of theological and psychoanalytical nature) emerging from this strategy.

IV.1. Jacob's Relationship With His Parents, Focusing on Isaac

We have already stated that Jacob, emerging from the half-light of the tent into the outside world, takes the burden of the patriarch Abraham on his shoulders: from now on, as seen in the Old Testament, as he gradually frees himself towards his destination, as he gradually encounters his emancipated self, Jacob will release the ancient message of the Ark, offering a new horizon to the people of Israel.

For us, this absolutely necessary work of emancipation of the son seems to be the most primary –we would call it ontological– *work of the father*. In the biblical text, it is the father who puts the son to a severe test: Isaac examines six times which of his two sons is standing before him, persistently asking his name, not because he does not know that it is Jacob –since we can safely assume that he immediately recognizes his voice– but because he wishes to force Jacob six times to renounce his old self. This test is a moment of immense anguish, both for the son and for the father. But, nevertheless, it is a moment of crucial importance for the subsequent course of the son's life. We feel that Isaac, by forcing Jacob to lie over and over again, by forcing him six times to pretend to be what he is *yet not* but what he *must* become in the future, knows that the son must break not only with his old self but even with

[161] H. Block (2006), "Distinguishing Jacob and Israel," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor le Dor*, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 155.
[162] Op. cit., p. 156.
[163] H. Angel (2014), "'Heeling' in the Torah: A Psychological-Spiritual Reading of the Snake and Jacob's Wrestling Match," *Jewish Bible Quarterly Dor el Dor*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 183.

his own father: Isaac sacrifices the *father Isaac*, unbeknownst to the son, in order for the *son Jacob* to fulfill his destiny, which is none other than to be radically transformed and to ultimately become the father of the new people of Israel.

From this perspective, we reconfirm here what we believed to be correct in our earlier study of Jacob's desire for a double symbolic killing of the father, starting from the psychoanalytic interpretation of the Freudian *Oedipus complex* and the Lacanian *Name-of-the-Father*. Indeed, we continue to believe that Jacob expresses such a desire, since he manifests a complex neurosis which first takes the form of envy for what Esau has instead of him, i.e. the birthright, which he usurps ('killing' in a way any right of Esau to become patriarch), and then is expressed through the direct 'stealing' of the blessing from Isaac, a blessing normally intended for Esau. This second theft is what finally allows Jacob to begin his path (in the real world) towards becoming the third patriarch, thus completely replacing his father ('killing' him). However, we understand here that the one who opens this path for Jacob is Isaac himself, that is, the father who is about to be 'killed.' This is done –according to our own narrative– with Isaac's full knowledge, as well as with the complete awareness and agreement of Rebekah. Therefore, by granting his double blessing to Jacob –which Isaac chooses to 'camouflage' as an accident or mistake or as the son's illegality and disobedience towards his father– it is Isaac who 'arms' the hand of Jacob, who truly desires to 'kill' the father, i.e. Isaac himself.

We think that the decision of the father-Isaac to bless the son-Jacob finally begins to seem very close to a *self-sacrifice* (see *castration*, in psychoanalytic terminology). The father decides to 'sacrifice himself' because he knows that the path to the future opens with his own symbolic killing. This future is his son, Jacob, and this future has the name *Israel*. The son does not yet know this, he does not know exactly his future, but he knows that he wants to take the father's place. It is this ignorance of the son that the father exploits, setting up the secret plot with the son's mother, his wife: the son believes that he is acting alone while in reality it seems that nothing would have been possible if the parents had not already been the first to envision the son's future, in response to God's promise. Thus, the 'stolen' blessing from the father 'ties' the son to his true destiny: that is all that matters, even if it means *the sacrifice of the father* on the altar of the emerging people of Israel. Herein lies, we believe, the immense contribution of Isaac[164] to the life of Jacob.

Isaac, however, does something more than his personal sacrifice[165] for the benefit of Jacob (Israel): Isaac seems to be contemplating what kind of person this new son, the new Jacob, Israel, should be in the future, and to dare a

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[164] Although we are not theologians, it is nevertheless interesting to venture to reflect further on how our claim about Isaac's self-sacrifice could possibly illuminate the known Christian theological thesis that Jacob is a prefiguration of Jesus Christ, through an unexpected emerging analogy: just as –according to Christian theology– Jesus Christ sacrifices Himself for the salvation of humanity (i.e. the fulfilment of its destiny), in an analogous way Isaac sacrifices himself for the salvation of his son, Jacob (i.e. again, the fulfilment of his destiny). This analogy –if it can stand as theologically sound– perhaps highlights a relationship of similar purpose (that of self-sacrifice) between Jesus Christ and Isaac. Extending this reflection, we can then see Jesus Christ as the 'Father' of the new (i.e. saved) humanity. But God, being the father of Jesus Christ (yet, according to the Trinity doctrine, Jesus Christ is not God's creation but consubstantial to Him), as he sends his Son into the world, in order to be killed by crucifixion and save the world with His sacrifice, perhaps we can say that He (God) is subjected to a kind of symbolic 'death' by Jesus Christ, since ultimately it is Jesus Christ who becomes the 'Father' of (the hence saved) humanity, 'replacing' (always in the Freudian and Lacanian context) the 'Father' par excellence of humanity (cf. E. Fromm), who is God (since we are all His children, His creations). However, this entire paradoxical scheme naturally takes place in full knowledge of God, because God is omniscient; therefore God is led voluntarily –as is Isaac– to His own 'self-sacrifice', since He 'ceases' (always in the specific psychoanalytic context that we are here following) to be the 'Father' of humanity, having been replaced in it by Jesus Christ. Thus, we see here a relationship of similar purpose (again, that of self-sacrifice) emerging between Isaac and God.

[165] Perhaps in this way, the Binding of Isaac is finally 'completed' in the Old Testament, positively 'ful-filling' the (Lacanian) *void* of the sacrifice that was in former times almost performed by the hands of his father, Abraham. In the case of Isaac and Jacob, we have a father sacrificing himself *in favour of* his son, while in the second case of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham is an example of a father who –although motivated by blind obedience to his God– almost goes so far as to literally sacrifice his son, not hesitating to act *against* him. Examining this observation even further, we can say that ultimately in the Old Testament it is the *positive* sacrifice that is permitted by God, in order to open a higher spiritual horizon in the world (with the advent of *Israel*), while at the same time the *negative* sacrifice is cancelled by God, which, if it had finally happened, would have raised serious ethical issues for the God who requested it and who would

very specific answer. We are talking here about the moment when he exclaims the famous phrase "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." At that moment, Isaac envisions the future Israel, which is a mixed creature, in which the spiritual (the voice, which belongs to Jacob) perfectly cooperates with the material (the hairy hands, which belong to Esau). In other words, what Isaac seems to be envisioning at that moment, as he utters these words, is that this new mixed creature, the creature *Israel*, is simultaneously both Jacob *and* Esau, not *just* Jacob nor *just* Esau. In a revealing way, we feel that this vision of the almost blind Isaac gives to the world the absolute reconciliation of these twin brothers, who bear different natures. Israel, says Isaac, is a body in which both twins – Jacob and Esau, Esau and Jacob– have been perfectly integrated, because both twin brothers are absolutely necessary for Israel, not in conflict with each other but rather tightly embraced in eternity. Perhaps, in this way, Isaac expresses –to us, from the depths of the centuries– a loving desire of a father to deliver his sons into the world as true friends. Already from that point in the biblical narrative, Isaac foresees the future reconciliation of his twin sons, but also *reconciliation* as the life-giving force and as an end in itself for the emerging mixed entity *Israel* (cf. God-man).

IV.2. Jacob's Relationship With His Parents, Focusing on Rebekah

It is known that Rebekah never sees Jacob again after he departs for his twenty-year self-exile in the country of her brother, Laban. Death overtakes her before her second-born son returns to his native land. We could see this event as the sacrifice to which the mother is subjected this time, functioning, so to speak, as a complement to the sacrifice of the father, which we saw earlier.

Without wanting to downplay the seriousness of this sacrifice in the slightest, we choose to see the mother-Rebekah not so much from this perspective but rather to focus on the characteristics that Fass attributes to her: Rebekah is a mother who chooses to free her son from the significant influence she has on him, thus giving him to the world and his true destiny. For us, all mothers are potentially 'Rebekah', but only very few actually become a *mother-Rebekah*. The fact that in the book of Genesis we encounter the story of a woman-mother, who chooses to free her beloved son, a son who is by her side, a son who seems to live a life similar to her own, is particularly striking to us. We perceive this story as an indirect hymn not only to Rebekah herself (who acts against her maternal nature as she 'liberates' Jacob), but also to all mothers, who manage to become a *mother-Rebekah*, freeing their sons (but also their daughters, ultimately all their children) towards their true destiny.

Ultimately, the book of Genesis, as it recounts the life of Jacob, indirectly glorifies this woman, recognizing her pivotal role in the history of the third patriarch of Israel. Long before the positive calls for female political and social emancipation, the book of Genesis seems –one might say– to offer us a 'pre-feminist' narrative, unexpectedly resistant to the conservative and male-dominated patriarchal Israelite era in which the book is written. Although this praise of Rebekah is delivered to us more as an allusion between the words than as a clear statement, nothing is taken away from the great significance of this gesture. For us, this gesture speaks primarily of the ability to choose to live truly free: and indeed, this freedom becomes truly real only when it is derived from a true understanding of the great responsibility that such a life of freedom brings for the person who chooses it. Rebekah, if she manages to stand as a 'feminist model' of an emancipated woman through the depths of the centuries, does so by accepting the great sacrifice that she must make simultaneously 'against herself' and in favor of Jacob – and in favor of the collective destiny of the people of Israel, which Rebekah knows he carries with him. Rebekah, carrying the womb of the *spiritual* within her own body, and therefore 'embodying' the spiritual herself (if we develop rabbinic thought a little further), becomes a beacon of freedom because she accepts her personal responsibility, which freedom always brings with it. It seems as if we are saying here that ultimately every time the spiritual is 'embodied' within a person, then that person is led to his or her true personal freedom.

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not have ultimately prevented it. The positive sacrifice is thus demonstrated primarily as the one that is practiced as a real offering to man by the God who permits it, while the negative sacrifice –if and whenever it is performed– is always practiced at the expense of man, and ultimately we should always expect it to be prevented by the true and rational God, because the opposite situation would constitute a strong indication of a false (idolater) and irrational God. We speculate that this may be why the Binding of Isaac resulted with God annulling Isaac's sacrifice (killing).

If this is true, then this arrives bringing with it a very important corollary thought: since we have all been born from the womb of a woman, this means that we have all already come into direct communion with the *spiritual*, from inside the womb of our mother. Which means: we have all been born truly free, because we are all born filled with spirituality.[166] It also seems to say here, as we reflect on the life of Rebekah, that the safest vehicle to true personal freedom is what we already know very well, because we have all been born into it: this is *the womb of the spiritual*. The more we manage to remain connected to this womb throughout our lives, the closer we seem to be to the full range of our personal truth, a state that is nothing but freedom.

It sounds right to say that all women, bearing a womb, are potentially *mother-Rebekah*, but it seems more correct to say that ultimately all of us, beyond the limitations of gender, are potentially *the embodiment of Rebekah's womb*, precisely because we have all begun our existence within it. Rebekah's womb is our first body, the primary place where man meets God, the place from which we all begin our lives. We said that this place is the locus of the *spiritual*, therefore we are born as its body. We also said that we are born free precisely because we are the embodied spirit. It seems ultimately logical to say that there, to Rebekah's womb, is where we must constantly return if we want to remain free, i.e. to what we ourselves are at the same time, the body of Rebekah's womb,[167] from the first moment of our creation. Ultimately, as we return to Rebekah's womb, we are in fact returning to our own authentic (spiritual, therefore true, therefore free) self.

Inbinder sees in this spiritual corporeality a connection with virtue, as understood in ancient Greek thought. Earlier in this paper we saw that the spiritual person sometimes sees that there is a benefit for them if a desire is not immediately satisfied, exercising patience for what they see coming in the future for them. Thus, the spiritual person *knows* that something new is approaching them from the future: this is how we think Rebekah acts. This decision justifies her personally since, without hesitating to undergo her sacrifice, by releasing Jacob to the world, his destiny is indeed realized, which at the same time constitutes the destiny of the entire people of Israel, of which Rebekah herself is a part. Rebekah is spiritually wise because her faith connects her with a true and indisputable knowledge. This is a great feat for a woman, whom the Old Testament does not hesitate to praise, despite the fact that Rebekah lives and acts in the era of powerful men, who are proclaimed patriarchs.

IV.3. Jacob's Relationship With Esau, Focusing on Esau

As we have noted, the entire biblical story of Jacob's life can be understood as a story of superiority and subordination, power and powerlessness. This dramatic dynamic becomes particularly evident in the relationship between the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. In fact, the biblical text seems to demonstrate that this dynamic has as its main starting point Jacob himself, with the competition that he introduces into his relationship with his brother from the moment of their birth. It is also important to note that in the Old Testament, the first (archetypal) competition between the two brothers Cain and Abel precedes it: in this sense, the competition between Jacob and Esau is not archetypically original in the Bible. Twinhood always seems necessary in every dialectical relationship. An

[166] Cf. Σ.Κ. Τσιτσίγκος [S.K. Tsitsingos] (2024), *Αναπτυξιακή Ψυχολογία τής Θρησκείας* [*Developmental Psychology of Religion*], Athens: EKPA publishing house.

[167] As is well known, Socrates called his philosophical practice *the midwife's method* in Greek (in English: *the Socratic dialogue*), inspired by his personal experience as the son of one of the most famous midwives of the time, his mother Phaenarete. In the context of our paper, as we speak of 'Rebekah's womb', we are associatively reminded of how Socrates himself perceived the way in which he philosophized, teaching the Athenians: Socrates said that he himself was nothing more than a midwife, whose duty was to bring out into the light of the world the personal baby of Truth, a baby that we all already (and always) carry. In this way, for Socrates, we all carry within us a 'womb', where our uniquely own baby of Truth resides. Like all excellent midwives, Socrates was not interested in what this baby would look like when it appeared in the world: the only important thing was that the baby should be healthy, and that its mother (each of us) should survive the experience of birth, without facing any serious risk to her health and life. For Socrates, then, we are all by nature 'female' beings, carrying within us our own personal 'fruit of the womb', i.e., the capacity for reason and creation. In fact, every time our personal Truth is indeed born healthy –through his obstetric method– into the world, Socrates declared that we immediately conceive our next personal 'baby of Truth' (i.e., the infant Christ is born within us, according to Christian theology), which we should again gestate with care and great love, until it too comes out in its turn into the light of the sun. For Socrates, this Truth, which we all gestate, is primarily of a spiritual nature, since each of our personal 'true' Truth self-evidently constitutes part of the supreme Truth of God.

expression of this dialectical relationship can also be the fact that the biblical text narrates the 'masculinity' of the material world, in contrast (but also a necessary complement) to the 'femininity' of the spiritual world. We also saw that Inbinder distinguishes in this contrasting relationship the conflict between an 'old' and a 'new' version of the world of anachronisms and traditional barbarism (with Esau as its representative), which gradually gives way to a logocentric and more civilized world, with Jacob steadily leading it towards its bright, progressive future.

Of course, after all this, one could say 'all's well that ends well' – in other words, despite the many negative points of this story, ultimately 'the end justifies the means' as each person in this story ultimately accomplished their great purpose towards strengthening the emergence of the people of Israel in historical time. Although we understand the logic of this perspective, we believe that it oversimplifies a very complex situation, which carries within it certain interesting reflections, which such a perspective avoids addressing.

Since in our narrative we accept that Isaac secretly collaborates with Rebekah in the reversed deception of both Jacob and Esau, and since Jacob's intention to deceive his father and brother seems true and undeniable, we see that the only person who does not deceive anyone is Esau. In light of this observation, and despite the truly positive –for the whole family– outcome of the story, Esau is indeed a victim: Esau is deceived by both his parents, but also by his twin brother. He is the good son, the older brother of the Prodigal Son of the relevant Gospel parable: he is 'good,' but he does nothing; he does not create anything. He is simply the 'good son' of the father, who has not struggled to build his own psychic identity, as Tsitsingos notes while citing Marcia.[168] Esau may not have been the right one to become the third patriarch, but he was indeed the firstborn son, and indeed, he was a man full of gifts of an essence from which he derived determination, strength, and ability. We believe that it would be unfair to insist on considering Esau simply as 'rude' or as 'self-evidently unworthy' of the primacy of the tribe and the history of the people of Israel by nature of his inferiority to the historical and cosmological circumstances of the time. At the same time, it is not easy to call the recorded wickedness, with which his parents and Jacob act against Esau, as intelligence. Nor does the fact that all the deceptions against him ultimately succeed prove anything as evidence of an alleged deficiency in the range of Esau's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacity, whenever that capacity is compared with the corresponding capacity of those who deceived him. On the contrary, we believe that the real catalyst by which all these overly complex and remarkably ambiguous deceptions ultimately succeed is the fact that God *willed it*. We sense that this divinely omnipotent hand is omnipresent in shaping the outcome of Jacob's story, rendering secondary any desire that any of the individuals in this family may have had at any point in the biblical narrative.

The will of God, expressed as this powerful hand which steadily and secretly acts, guiding the life of Jacob and his family, confronts us with a series of insoluble questions. Is it correct to say that the divine will for Jacob to fulfill his destiny at the same time required that Esau be the 'perfect' victim of these deceptions? Did God want to cause Esau pain, pain that is clearly recorded in the biblical text, as, for example, the moment when Esau realizes that his half-blind father gave Jacob the blessing that did not belong to him? Did God want Esau to be the objective victim of the deceptions? Furthermore, it is a fact that both the parents and Jacob commit the most serious –for Judaism– offense of *pesha*, since all three violate the sacred trust which should from the beginning and always exist between the members of the same family, and therefore always with regard to the thrice-deceived Esau. Why does this triple pesha seem to be part of God's own desire for Israel to appear in the world? We touch here on the unresolved theological issue of the unknown divine plan (Divine Providence), as well as of divine justice (*theodicy*[169]).

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[168] Cf Σ. Κ. Τσιτσίγκος [S.K. Tsitsingos] (2016), *Θρησκευτικότητα, Προσωπικότητα και Ταυτότητα* [*Religiosity, Personality, and Identity*], Athens: Tremendum.

[169] As is known from the book of Genesis, the introduction of God's obscure justice essentially occurs with the story of Abel, who was murdered by his brother, Cain. If we consider that –according to Christian theology– the exile of the Protoplasts from the Garden of Eden is rather a 'just' punishment for their disobedience to God's command, the fact that the innocent Abel dies unjustly, murdered by Cain, perplexes us. In this case, God's justice seems paradoxical, as it is indeed considered as such in Christianity: although God

If we carefully read all that is written about Esau in the book of Genesis, we do not think that it appears that Esau is an unjust or evil man. Although he may, when compared to Jacob, seem perhaps less perceptive, or more energetic and focused on the pleasures and materiality of life, he is nevertheless a man worthy of increasing his wealth and power, of creating a family, and of becoming the leader of an entire people. This reality marks a rather righteous man, blessed by God. Nevertheless, Esau suffers humiliation, being an undisputed victim within this family. From this perspective, the reason(s) why God allows Esau to suffer such serious deception by his brother and parents –despite, as we have said, the ultimate vindication of the divine plan for the entire family– remains open. Although wise explanations have been proposed that such injustice could be permitted (or even instigated) by God himself, with Holy Chrysostom preeminent in this explanation, nevertheless divine justice remains beyond our capacity for full comprehension. However, it is often understood theologically that God allows man to suffer evil in order to humble his human egoism. Perhaps Esau, in his self-awareness of power and cosmic superiority, is not far from such excessive egoism, an egoism that prevails in every (physically, economically, socially, politically) 'powerful' person, so that the humiliations he suffers at the hands of Jacob and his parents ultimately constitute his personal journey towards a better and more authentic self.

Within this inscrutable divine plan, we observe something that strikes us: in order for God's will to succeed, the two men –Jacob and Esau– not only have to be brothers, but they must be *twin* brothers. Why is this? Why is such biological proximity necessary? Couldn't the younger brother 'simply' feel envy for his older brother, wishing to usurp the birthright? Couldn't everything that this envy caused ultimately take place, without the Book of Genesis needing to narrate their twin birth, with Jacob being pulled second into the light of the world, clutching Esau's heel? Why do the two brothers *have* to be so close to each other at the moment of their birth, and at the same time so far away from one another?

In attempting to give answer to this question, we make the speculation that the two brothers must also be twins because this emphasizes –to a superlative degree– their kinship as *the most necessary condition* for the successful outcome of the story of Jacob's life, which ends with the emergence of the people of Israel in historical time. In other words, God chooses the two brothers to be twins because it emphasizes that this new people is the product of the conflict of two different qualities which are *at the same time* completely related to, and completely different from each other. But this, too, is not enough: the two qualities must have the greatest possible critical proximity to each other, having come from the same womb, and in addition, the moment of this double birth must also coincide to the greatest possible extent, and this condition can only be met by the birth of twins. Consequently, this new people –of Israel– leaves a unique mark in the history of humanity: it is a symbol of the incessant conflict between two 'absolutes' as one ultimately complements the other, precisely because of this conflict between them. Beyond the relative psychological analysis of the twins, attempted by A. Adler, for any dialectic to function, a pair of opposites is required. The people of Israel seem to be the absolute realization in space and time of a transcendental *yin and yang*, the mixed (earthly and transcendental) product which Divine Providence provided, and Isaac envisioned emerging from the hairy hands of Esau as they embraced the body of the disguised Jacob.

Ultimately, perhaps we could say that the difference between Jacob and Esau –although perfectly complementary– is so great between them that we cannot really say that they are twin brothers. Perhaps it would be better to say that these two brothers are nothing more than a *binary system* of two different (in quality and composition) planets (worlds) tightly orbiting the star of Israel, eternally attracted by its enormous gravitational pull.

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accepts Abel's offering, He nevertheless allows him to be killed by his brother, whose offering, on the contrary, was not accepted. This also begets the result that the righteous Abel dies heirless, and thus with his death any possibility of genealogical continuity is extinguished. On the contrary, the unjust and murderous Cain is allowed by God to live and multiply, at least until the time of the Great Flood, when it is said that his 'sinful' generation is destroyed by the waters of the global deluge. It is also important to emphasize that the entry into historical time of God's special system of justice coincides with the entry into death as the final common experience for all humanity, with Abel being the first to encounter his biological death. On the other hand, we can also say that Abel is simultaneously the first man (after the Fall) whom –at the moment of his death– God has fully accepted, since He has fully accepted Abel's offering during the sacrifice, which was the occasion for Cain's wrath. In other words, Abel is the first example of a man with good *completion*: Abel is witnessed as the first man to have a true experience of his personal salvation. As we see here, Abel's complex story demonstrates the –often dark and incomprehensible to man– justice of God.

This miraculous event seems to take place in this direction: the planet-Jacob 'chasing' the planet-Esau, grabbing its heel. In this way, this triple cosmological system of Jacob-Israel-Esau takes shape into the historical time.

IV.4. Jacob's Relationship With Laban, Focusing on Laban

In our analysis of Jacob's relationship with Laban, we saw Jacob as the *trickster* of his generation, who –as he responds to the deceptions of his uncle, Laban, with his own deceptions– ultimately manages to effect the necessary separation of his tribe and people from Laban's tribe and people, thus making possible the emergence in the immediate future of the new people of Israel. The transformation of Laban's flocks into Jacob's flocks marks precisely the passage to this novel people: the deceptions of the trickster Jacob are ultimately justified in the light of a homeopathic act of transcendental magnitude.

Often in the biblical literature dealing with the figure of Laban (as is always the case, in contrast to the figure of Jacob), we observe that Laban is not generally held in high esteem and is usually considered an example of a dishonest man, corrupted by wealth and power. To reinforce this general condemnation of his person, scholars often refer to actions of his that are characterized by obvious cunning and a transgressive spirit, such as, for example, the fact that Laban deceives Jacob, convincing him that he is marrying his beloved Rachel when in reality it was her sister Leah, who was waiting for him in their bridal bed. Such actions are certainly deeply repugnant and morally reprehensible, and they certainly do not honor the one who commits them. Moreover, we generally find it rather easy to justify the deceptions that Jacob commits in response to the deceptions to which he is subjected by Laban's evil desire, accepting (perhaps unconsciously) the logic of 'an eye for an eye,' a logic deeply ingrained in the global cultural tradition, originating from very ancient times in the history of humanity.[170] In fact, this logic survives today –also written into the Old Testament, from which we mainly know it– while at the same time it has often constituted a controversial point as a moral stance and a recurring reason for negative (albeit rather superficial) criticism by all those who are not convinced of what the Bible's message really is for humankind today.

However, we believe that, through the example of Laban, we can construct an interesting reasoning concerning the role played by the 'villain', the 'bad guy' in a story. More specifically, for Laban, although we do not disagree that the biblical narrative often correctly describes him as a person of questionable morality, the same biblical narrative seems to show that it is ultimately 'thanks' to the 'bad' actions committed by Laban that Jacob reacts with other 'bad' actions that respond to those of Laban, which in turn result in the undeniable 'good' of the very important separation of Jacob's family, wealth, and people from Laban's family, wealth, and people. In other words, the 'villain' of the story leads us –through his actions– towards another general 'good', which seems to have no other way of occurring. From this perspective, in terms of the story of Jacob, can we finally understand the 'bad' Laban as the necessary (God-sent?) catalyst for the final triumph of 'good'? If this can be said, what can Laban's place in our consciousness ultimately be, especially when his actions connect us to the manifestation of the Divine Economy in the world?

It is well known that both the Old and New Testaments do not let us forget that nothing can happen without God's permission, as He works fervently towards the overall salvation of the fallen world. By this logic, nothing can be truly evil, since all creation works to serve the salvific economy of the almighty God. Therefore, we should rather replace the adjective 'evil' with the noun 'trial.' Thus, in God's eschatological plan for the final salvation of humanity, nothing can truly be evil, but all things in the world, bad or otherwise, are a test for humankind, since we can never be completely sure in advance about which action will bring about the most positive (beneficial) result for us (and for all humanity).

As we reflect on Laban, before we easily side with the 'winner' of history, i.e. Jacob, succumbing to an uncritical moralism of 'good' versus 'evil', let us dare to move away from this black-and-white (Manichaean) view of man so as to focus instead on all the shades of gray with which every story is always painted in reality. Could we then perceive Laban as *God's voluntary instrument*, in order for Jacob to psycho-spiritually mature in the land of his self-exile before returning to the land of his father and finally realizing his true destiny as the third patriarch? If this

[170] Specifically from the era of the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1827 BC).

is true, can we then imagine Laban not as 'evil' but as a man who is *tested* as he progresses towards his final (by God inevitable) salvation, just like Jacob himself, and ultimately just like anyone in any era?

Perhaps such reasoning is ultimately not so difficult to be accepted, especially since –as far as Laban is concerned– the final positive outcome of Jacob's story seems to justify, in a way, all the actors in this story. After all, Laban is never described in the biblical text in terms of 'absolute evil'; rather, he often simply seems like a clumsy and cunning man, who, however, never becomes completely disliked. In fact, it is also important that we read about his own 'suffering', which he suffers from Jacob's deceptions against him, which mitigates any guilt he may have. The story of Jacob's relationship with Laban thus acquires for us these aforementioned desirable gray shades.

IV.5. Jacob's Wrestling With the Angel as God's Challenge/Invitation to Humanity

The night of Jacob's vision, where Jacob wrestles with that unknown man, is a milestone in his life. For us, it is the moment of Jacob's real confrontation with his (archetypal) *Self* – a transformative moment, which acquires particular depth because it is simultaneously, on the one hand, an indication of spiritual elevation and, on the other, the existential moment where Jacob is introduced to the experience of his own finitude. At the end of his wrestling with the Angel, Jacob limps because his thigh was touched by his divine opponent. In order to emerge (resurrect) to the height of his calling as the third patriarch, he must first be precipitated into the depths of human suffering (crucifixion). The High must meet the Low, the book of Genesis seems to narrate, in order for man to become worthy of his true destiny.

In any case, the biblical text narrates Jacob's encounter with something foreign, something unfamiliar. The Angel, by nature and order different from Jacob, acts as a *transitional factor*, a necessary catalyst, in order for Jacob *to get to know* the very core of his authentic self. Only through the unfamiliar, as Lacan also argues, can the individual recognize themselves: the Angel is the 'magic' mirror in which Jacob recognizes his true and completely personal reflection. The encounter with this reflection is –according to the book of Genesis– the most important, since it is then that each person finally recognizes the real reason for their existence, the purpose that each of us is called upon to fulfill while living in the world.

However, this personal encounter with the unfamiliar (Divine) does not occur without its risks. Jacob's wrestling with God –who is represented by, or identified with the Angel who ultimately constitutes the reflection of Jacob himself in the mirror of his soul– constitutes a struggle that is reduced to a stake of an existential order. This is where the question arises: ultimately, which God exactly is Jacob fighting against at that moment? Exactly which God is he facing, face to face? How exactly does Jacob perceive the characteristics of the personal God? Ultimately, how exactly does each person's personal God –i.e. the absolutely personal way in which each of us perceives God– differ from the true God?

In our study, following indications that seem to be implied in the biblical text of the story of Jacob's life, we expressed certain reasonable propositions regarding the possible manifestation of pathological behaviors in Jacob. Thus, we suggested that there is a reasonable possibility that Jacob is, on the one hand, a case of a narcissistic personality, which arises from feelings of inferiority (mainly towards his twin brother) and which were simultaneously expressed through megalomaniac tendencies (e.g., to become the next patriarch at all costs) and, on the other, we saw the possibility that Jacob manifested an episode of neurotic depression the night before he met Esau (and his justly expected rage), shortly before Jacob experienced the transcendental experience of his wrestle with the Angel. Furthermore, in our study we argued that Jacob may belong to the category of so-called *schizoid* personalities, which –if indeed true– brings us even closer to the perception of Jacob as a typical cultural example of a *trickster*. But, were all these borderline personalities not considered by the world to be idiosyncratic ("sui generis") or "shallos" (see: divine fools)?

All of the above outline the psychodynamically fluid personality of Jacob. The biblical text often presents him in a state of mental anguish, either indirectly –implying, for example, that it occurs during the moments of Jacob's deceptions towards his father and brother– or directly, in an almost clear way, as for example when he narrates the fear of death, which he feels the night before he is again confronted with his angry brother. But also during the period of his twenty-year self-exile, Jacob faces many sufferings and the hostile disposition of his uncle who plots deceptions against him, to which Jacob responds with new deceptions. It would not be unfounded to claim that Jacob is a

disturbed person who often exhibits behaviors of unstable moral character. Although the biblical text does not fail to tell us of God's frequent favor towards Jacob, ultimately, in which God exactly does he believe?

The question of the connection between the expression of unhealthy religiosity and the manifestation of psychopathological behaviors in an individual is a question of critical importance. We saw earlier that, as Loewenthal argues, a person's religious faith –when marked by the simultaneous manifestation of negative mental behaviors by that person, such as guilt, shame, and/or anxiety– can ultimately lead that person to depression and a generally negative perception of God. Furthermore, by using two complementary definitions of Aaron Beck of what constitutes depression, we showed the possibility that Jacob did indeed manifest some form of depression shortly before experiencing his wrestling match with the Angel, on the night before his meeting with Esau. Furthermore, we have seen that whenever a person manifests an excessively negative perception of God, a perception that –as Exline notes when writing about intrapersonal struggles[171]– is based on fear and anxiety about a divine punishment, then we can speak of the expression of a mistaken or even pathologically unhealthy religiosity which, in extreme cases, can be close to the manifestation of serious mental illnesses, such as monomanias, obsessions, or even schizophrenia. Although Jacob never reaches these extremes, we can nevertheless accept that he sometimes displays behaviors that are either morally or pathologically problematic. Jacob at times resembles a detuned compass which, although always inclined towards good, sometimes leads him towards the morally wrong choice, bringing pain either to the important people in his life or to himself. The biblical narrative presents Jacob turning his attention to God, praying to Him many times, especially when he experiences those critical moments when his psycho-emotional state is not positive. But which God does Jacob ultimately believe in and pray to when he manifests morally reprehensible behaviors and possibly mental pathologies?

To such questions, a first and general answer is that we do not all believe in the *same* God, and indeed at *the same time*. Since in Christian theology it is accepted that the true God is omnipotent, therefore He can be everything (in distinct or simultaneous time, i.e. everything at every moment, or something at one moment and something else at another), then it is possible to think that God condescends to the way in which each person perceives Him, and will 'answer' them in each person's own 'language.' Thus, God can be a punisher for one and, at the same time, a God of infinite love for another, with God 'listening' to the completely different ways in which these two people perceive Him. For God, since everything is possible, we speculate that perhaps it ultimately does not really matter how each person perceives Him; what is probably of primary importance is that each person attempts to refer to Him, regardless of the way in which they refer to Him: loving (God as perfect love, to which every person is attracted and for which every person is worth *fighting to acquire*) or punitive (the God who allows evil in the world is a God to be avoided by man, therefore a God-enemy for man, a God whom man must deny and/or *fight against*).

What we observe here, however, in both cases, is the following: even if God is the most desirable pole of attraction for one person, or the most logical reason for absolute denial for another, in both cases these two mutually opposing people end up at almost the same point: they *wrestle*, they *fight* with a point of (positive or negative) reference always to God. Perhaps for the true God, the direction of this reference of each person to Him is not ultimately so important: perhaps the most important thing is that the almighty God *always converses* (either in terms of peace or in terms of war) with humankind. Perhaps for God, *all* the ways in which people refer to Him are ultimately beneficial because *every way* continues God's dialogue with each person. Since this dialogue with God always occurs for all people, perhaps this means that this is the way in which God secretly always works *in favor* of each person, i.e. for their salvation. No human reproach –even the harshest– against the true God can fail to be understood by Him, thanks to His omniscience, so as not to be forgiven by God, thanks to His omni-mercy. According to Christian theology, it is impossible for God not to already know all the thoughts of every person even before they are expressed, just as it is equally impossible for God not to know the motives and the deepest reasons for all the thoughts and all the actions of every person since God is by definition *perfect*, in a position to know the past, present, and future of every person's life in advance.

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[171] J. J. Exline (2013), «Religious and Spiritual Struggles», *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, Vol. 1, No. 25, pp. 459-475.

But should we then say that everything –all actions and all thoughts of humankind– is ultimately justified, whether or not they are just or unjust? Although we seemed to insinuate earlier that, on the transcendent and beyond-human-time divine level, this may be true, it is impossible to argue that such a thing must also be true on the human plane. Strictly the opposite: human justice must intervene for the benefit of the victim whenever injustice occurs in the world. However, human justice always remains exactly that: human, therefore created, imperfect, and finite. Since omniscience is not part of the human experience, we believe that we must listen to humankind's inherent doubt about the world, as well as leave the final judgment of things in other hands much more capable than our own.

Ultimately, how are we to understand the relationship of Jacob, a man full of passions and imperfections, just like all individuals, with God? Evdokimof emphasizes the importance of the 'yes' with which an individual responds to God's call.[172] This 'yes' must be said with freedom – must be a personal decision of each individual. Jacob certainly says 'yes,' which is why he wrestles with his God to conquer this 'yes.' Perhaps, however, as we saw earlier, ultimately an individual's 'no' to God does not entail absolute loss. Perhaps even this refusal, since it is also related to God, even if this seemingly means rejecting Him, is able to produce something beneficial for the individual who says 'no' because this rejection does not stop God's relationship with him. God never comes into complete discord with man, but it seems that man can never come into complete discord with God either, as God is the archetypal image within him. Since we believe that everything is part of God's creation, this means that both the 'yes and the 'no' are God's. The only difference between man's 'yes' and 'no' towards God lies in the fact that they follow different paths through which man is ultimately led secretly and/or apophatically towards his true destiny. However, whether you approach God or distance yourself from Him, He is present ("Vocatus atque non vocatus Deus aderit").[173] Therefore, God tempts humankind, but humankind also tempts God,[174] which is probably why a constant struggle and *wrestle*[175] is required.

Perhaps the only situation that brings God to an 'awkward' position towards humankind is every time they respond to his personal call, which is always called by God, with an undecided 'maybe.'[176] Perhaps it is precisely this 'maybe' that leaves room for Evil to act upon the world, but perhaps it is precisely this action of Evil (which acts only because it has always been permitted by God) that wants to force individuals towards a 'yes' or a 'no', that is, towards the clarity of a personal position towards oneself and the world. It is through this position that man's dialogue with God can finally continue, a dialogue that ardently desires to continue leading man towards his absolutely personal purpose.

Since even for Jacob himself the fact that he fought the Angel/God and survived this wrestle as a 'victor' does not automatically make the fulfillment of his destiny accomplished, without saving him from the rest of his future suffering until the end of his life, we think that it is *the wrestling itself*, *the struggle itself* that has great significance for man. In other words, we can perhaps discern in the biblical narrative of Jacob's wrestling, God's permanent challenge to every individual to wrestle with Him. And this challenge is perhaps offered as an invitation, even regardless of whether each man actually manages to fulfill his destiny. The common idea that every human life is an unstoppable struggle may thus acquire –in the light of this perspective– an unexpectedly new meaning.

IV.6. The Dream of the *Ladder* as the Monument of Synergy Between the 'Above' and the 'Below'

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[172] Π. Evdokimof [P. Evdokimof] (1972), *Η Πάλη με τον Θεόν* [*Wrestling With God*], Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institution of Patristic Studies.

[173] Psalms 138, 7–10.

[174] Η. Β. Οικονόμου [H. B. Oikonomou] (1970), *Πειρασμοί εν τη Παλαιά Διαθήκη* [*Temptations in the Old Testament*], Athens.

[175] Acts 26, 14.

[176] We can perhaps argue that this undecided 'maybe' leads man to an inertia, to a standstill, to a lack of action (more on this see Dolto, 1996/2002). Here we think that it is probably not a coincidence that one of the seven deadly sins is *sloth* (*acedia*), that is, the spiritual and physical laziness that man can manifest. In fact, we observe that the aforementioned symptoms of inertia, inaction and standstill, which match the state of sloth, also match the symptoms that appear in people suffering from depression (more on the relation between *acedia* and *depression* see Koufogianni-Karkanias, 2012). Thus, perhaps we should ultimately –together with the School of Existential Psychology– treat depression primarily as a disease of a psycho-spiritual nature. This disease of the spirit carries an enormous danger for humanity, because it renders it inactive in the face of the action of Evil in the world. However, as we argue in this paper, even then, hope for the healing and *completion* of man is not lost.

Among the most pivotal dreams in the Old Testament, Jacob had the dream of the Ladder on the first night of his twenty-year self-exile. This biblical narrative can be seen as both a personal dream of Jacob, foreshadowing the hope for his personal *platysmos*, and a collective dream of humanity, signifying the relationship between heaven and earth, the spiritual and the material, God and humankind. Since Jacob had this dream and the Old Testament recorded it for all to read, it is as if we have all dreamed it. According to Christian theology, this dream is a vision of an ideal state for humanity, where the dialectic of 'above' and 'below' is in a relationship of constant communication. Both Jacob and all of us who participate –through his own eyes– in his dream are confronted with the visualization of personal responsibility: no excuse can now be valid that satisfactorily explains why one chooses the path to the 'below'.

However, we would say that the focus on the path to the 'above' is not the complete message of this dream either. We do not believe that the Ladder simply urges us to favor the path 'upward' over the path 'downward'. We believe that this is a dream that speaks of the collective and personal effort to find an excellent balance between these two visualized paths. The dream of the Ladder suggests the *synergy* of the 'above' with the 'below' and not the monistic focus on one of the two. In other words, it seems to speak of the very experience of being a human, with all the 'ups and downs' in one's life.

The balance we are talking about here does not concern an 'equal equation' of the 'above' and the 'below', a perfect dynamic where one cancels out, in a way, the other. The platysmos of the human soul, which the dream of the Ladder speaks of, proposes to each person the courageous exploration of the height and depth of their self, without 'neutralizing' either of the two: the dream proposes the acceptance of the paradoxical *imperfect perfection* of each one of us, and this paradox is the way in which Jacob, too, connects with his God in the book of Genesis.

IV.7. The Reconciliation of Jacob with Esau as the Timeless Triumph of *Teshuvah*

As we witness the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis, we become partakers of the triumph of the process of *teshuvah*: the repentance expressed by Jacob towards his brother who deceived him also concerns the deceived Esau himself. Between the two brothers, thanks to teshuvah, a new agreement blossoms: there they recognize in each other their difference, but also the complementarity that exists between the twin brothers. As we said earlier, the spiritual essence of Jacob recognizes and respects the material essence of Esau, and vice versa. This mutual recognition and respect, which begins to be expressed between the two brothers, gives space for the emergence of the mixed entity, which Isaac envisioned earlier, as he felt the hairy hands of Esau on Jacob's hairless body.

However, part of the work of teshuvah seems to be the simultaneous and necessary separation of this duality, but only after one part has been imbued with the other and after the two parts have first exchanged elements and qualities to the extent that this is possible. The twin brothers part ways, having developed a *friendship* between them. With them, two peoples also part, with the people of Jacob destined to be the people of Israel, a people of strife and a people of peace, an Esau and a Jacob together, so different from each other, but also so inseparably united, coming from the same womb.

But could we argue that every people is ultimately God's people, since every people is a dual people, a people of a paradoxical mixture of a *Jacob* and an *Esau*? There has never been in the past, there is nowhere in the present, and there will never be in the future a people in whose history there have not been (or will be) moments when they have acted more like Jacob, while at other times they have acted more like Esau. In its struggle in historical time, every people manages to continue writing its history for as long as it manages to reconcile precisely these contradictory, yet complementary, actions: Jacob asks forgiveness from Esau, Esau forgives Jacob, and vice versa, in perpetuity. Can every people ultimately hope for its *completion* only when it manages to truly incorporate within itself the ongoing work of its own completely personal teshuvah? We believe that these questions require further study.

IV.8. The *Completion* of Jacob as the Indicator for the Resolution of Transgenerational Trauma

The attempt to study and deeply understand the story of Jacob cannot be considered complete if it does not also include the attempt to study and deeply understand the accompanying story of Joseph, Jacob's beloved son. The story of Joseph goes beyond the scope of this paper; however in Genesis, it is clear that Joseph's story complements the story of Jacob, which we believe it 'resolves', leading Jacob to his glorious end.

But what exactly does the story of Joseph resolve? Although we have not dealt with this in our present paper, we nevertheless feel that the *metabolism of generations*,[177] of which Erickson speaks and which Pietikainen and Ihanus refer to in their work on the origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory, is crucial for the way in which we could understand the role of Joseph, as a first-generation descendant after Jacob, in terms of the final emergence of the people of Israel in historical time. More specifically, if we look closely at the acts of deception to which Joseph is both subjected by his brothers at the beginning of his life and which Joseph himself organizes against them when he encounters them in Egypt, we sense that we can understand Joseph as the next *trickster* after the trickster-Jacob. If this is true, then –in line with what we have demonstrated in our study, that the trickster-Jacob ultimately 'resolves' the problem of separating the new people of Israel from the old people of his ancestors– we should expect that the trickster-Joseph also resolves some other problem, of equally enormous importance for the new people of Israel. But what could this problem be, for which the story of Joseph offers a solution?

Intuitively, we assume (this requires further study as we have not dealt with this in our paper) that the problem concerns the resolution of a trauma which, so to speak, 'haunts' the generation of Jacob: we see this trauma possibly manifesting itself during the episode of the *Binding of Isaac* by Abraham, the first patriarch of the future people of Israel. We sense that some kind of moral error is established there on the part of Abraham, despite the fact that his act can be justified as an expression of obedience to God, in Whom he believes so fervently. Nevertheless, we sense that this is an excessively complex episode that should not be explained only in theological terms, as an episode that glorifies Abraham's faith: on the contrary, other equally complex psychic mechanisms are probably necessary to be analyzed in detail from the perspective of Psychoanalysis and the Psychology of Religion. For example, we should imagine that the fact that father-Abraham literally almost slaughtered son-Isaac causes enormous psychological trauma to Isaac. This trauma does not seem to be resolved anywhere in Isaac's story, so that he is 'liberated' from it, especially if we choose to see his story as detached from the story of his beloved son, Joseph.

We wonder whether –despite the fact that God intervenes redemptively at the last moment before Abraham's slaughter/sacrifice of Isaac– Abraham falls into the most serious offense of *pesha* against his son, and through him against his entire generation, since Isaac is to become the second patriarch. In other words, we wonder whether in the episode of the sacrifice of Isaac by the father and first patriarch Abraham, a trauma is manifested which is passed on to the next generation, whose representative is Jacob. Perhaps from this perspective we can derive interesting thoughts about the successive acts of deception, which Jacob himself either causes or is subjected to, but which, at the same time, are organized by Isaac himself in secret collusion with Rebekah. Could it be that the first –in our narrative– trickster is, in the end, the trickster-Isaac, who begets the trickster-Jacob, who begets the trickster-Joseph? We sense that it is particularly meaningful that the biblical text of Jacob's life in the book of Genesis, after the separation of his people from Laban's people and Jacob's reconciliation with Esau, opens a long parenthesis in order to tell the story of Joseph, which is full of new deceptions, before finally returning to the now elderly Jacob, to essentially tell his glorious *completion* and his biological death. Does the biblical text, then, ultimately want to imply that without the 'liberating' effect of Joseph's story on the generation that begins with Abraham, Jacob could not hope for such a fulfilled *completion*? Does this in turn mean that without the story of Joseph, a story that is interspersed between the life of Jacob and his *completion* –a moment that marks in historical time the official emergence of the people of Israel– the people of Israel could not ultimately emerge *as truly new and truly free* from the mistakes and traumas of the generations before its emergence?

The story of Joseph is not only characterized by events of deception, which are at the same time manifestations of *pesha*; it is also characterized by acts of reconciliation as a product of the effect of *teshuvah* between the sons of Jacob, but also between Jacob and his own sons who commit error. All, ultimately, ends up narrating the second and final renaming (on which we will insist in the next point of our discussion) of Jacob to *Israel*, shortly before his death, which marks his glorious *completion*. Does the grafted story of Joseph tell us the necessary effect of the trickster-Joseph as a healer of the transgenerational trauma (in a homeopathic way), which was established during the episode

[177] P. Pietikainen and J. Ihanus (2003), "On the Origins of Psychoanalytical Psychohistory," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 177.

of the Binding of Isaac? Could this episode also be the narrative of an 'Original Sin', almost in its literal sense, of the new people of Israel, which is still 'in seed', before emerging in historical time? Let us not forget that, since Jacob is ultimately identified with Israel, being the son of Isaac, we could eventually speak of the *Binding of Israel* by Abraham: such a formulation immediately invites us to partake in a different kind of theological and psychoanalytic reading of this episode. And finally: does the 'happy' ending of Joseph's story secretly signals him as the indicator for the resolution of this transgenerational trauma, i.e. the healing of this particular 'Original Sin', so that the generation of the fathers and previous patriarchs has been completely *purified*, with the result that this new people of Israel, in turn, appears *truly purified* in historical time?

IV.9. The (Final) Change of Jacob's Name to *Israel*, as the *Completion* of Jacob's 'Baptism'

As we have mentioned earlier in our study, it is striking that the biblical text describes a second time when God renames Jacob to *Israel*, shortly before his biological death occurs and after the story of Joseph has been narrated. If each moment of naming a person constitutes a 'baptism (i.e. a *rite of passage*) for the person, separating their life into a 'before' and an 'after', then it is worth wondering about the two different 'befores' and 'afters' of Jacob's life.

When, at the end of his wrestling match with Jacob, the Angel/God renames him for the first time *Israel*, we have shown that the Angel separates Jacob into the 'before' of his neurotic life, which until then was defined by the feeling of envy for his twin brother Esau, and into a transformative 'after', where Jacob enters the psycho-spiritual period of his gradual maturation to the progenitor of the people of Israel. As we know, at that point in the biblical narrative the story of Joseph is inserted, which we saw earlier as perhaps playing the catalytic role of resolving the transgenerational trauma that manifested itself during the earlier episode of the Binding of Isaac. At the end of the narration of Joseph's story, God appears to Jacob for the second time, repeating the act of renaming him *Israel*. There we see the final validation of Jacob's first 'baptism' into *Israel*, a validation that seems possible only *after* the transgenerational trauma is resolved. Thus, it is then that *Israel* becomes *Israel*, i.e., it is then that it is truly restored in history as God's chosen people. Here the 'before' is Jacob/Israel before the healing of the transgenerational trauma, while the 'after' introduces the cleansed Jacob/Israel into its historical future.

It is interesting to think that this experience of double 'baptism' (*renaming*) is not limited to Jacob, nor only to the people of Israel, but perhaps ultimately concerns all people. If, Christianly, the (first) baptism, which we receive at the beginning of our life, frees us from the responsibility of the Original Sin, introducing us to our new Self, perhaps we should see the entire subsequent life of each person as the necessary test (see penitential lifestyle), in order to be able to carry out the completely personal process of teshuvah in the face of all the personal and transgenerational traumas which concern the history of each person. In other words, it may be interesting to think of our life as a path towards a second –equally necessary as the first– 'baptism' which concerns the validation of our first name, i.e. of our first entry into our *self*.[178] Perhaps the first 'baptism' marks the promise of a second one, which should be understood as the final point of the transformative journey that constitutes the personal life for each one of us. Perhaps only then can we speak of true *completion* of the 'baptism' (i.e. of each person's individual 'dying' and 'rising', according to Christian theology), only when the promise given in the first 'baptism' has been tested and 'fulfilled, i.e. only when the person has approached their entire life as the necessary condition for personal transformation until their biological end.

In his wrestling with the Angel, Jacob looks the Angel in the face and wins his first renaming, his first 'baptism' into *Israel*. This means that Jacob looks at *Israel*, i.e. his absolutely personal goal, directly in the face, with absolute devotion and trust (faith). Perhaps this gaze directly into the eyes of our 'adversary', who is none other than our personal destiny, is the key to every existential transition ('baptism') or *self-transcendence*. And perhaps it is for this reason that God chooses to rename Jacob a second time into Israel because –in reality– He marks in Jacob himself (but also before humanity) the final realization of an individual's personal destiny. In this way, a biblical narrative is delivered to us that is deeply imbued with the spirit of an authentic Theo-humanism.

[178] Carl Jung has written extensively about this "journey," distinguishing between *self* and *Self*.

PART FIVE: *SELECTED POINTS, RESTRAINTS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH*

In this paper, under the lenses of Psychohistory, the consistent focus of our work has been the life of Jacob from his birth to his renaming to *Israel*, following the text in the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis. We approached this life as Jacob's struggle with his personal destiny, which is to become morally and objectively worthy (in the face of God and men) for his transformation into the progenitor of the newly emerging people of Israel. This is a completely personal battle for Jacob, which tests his religious faith and harshly examines his moral values. Jacob may be a case of a schizoid individual, a condition that sheds new light on his possible identity as a *trickster*. At the same time, we discern the possibility that Jacob was experiencing an episode of neurotic depression on that night of his wrestling with the Angel. We distinguished three stages in the entire transformational process of Jacob: from the primary state of envy, which he experiences for his brother, a state that leads him to neurotic depression, to a higher state of psycho-spiritual maturity. Later, in Jacob's life, at the end of his twenty-year self-exile in the land of Laban, the reconciliation of the two brothers contributed to Jacob's *completion*. Finally, Jacob's second return to the land of his father, combined with the moment of his second renaming to *Israel*, establishes his *perfection*.

Despite the challenges, we believe that both the science of the Psychology of Religion and the tool of Psychohistory were very satisfactory choices for carrying out the study of the life of the biblical Jacob. Working within the framework of *postmodern religion*, we approached our study as another possible narrative on this life. We consider our choice to break the biblical narrative of the life of Jacob into sub-stories to be successful in principle, where each of which sheds light on a specific part of the overall story of Jacob. We believe that this strategic choice provided clarity to our study.

We note the real difficulty of establishing a completely objective position as scholars, since the attempt to translate the theological language of the biblical text concerning Jacob into another modern, scientific and psychohistorical language necessarily passes through the filter of our own personal and completely subjective language. However, we considered ourselves indeed in a good position to deliver an interdisciplinary study of the biblical narrative of the life of Jacob, whilst taking advantage of our interdisciplinary professional engagement with the (performing) arts and literature.

Similarly, we recognize our deficit in what concerns a pre-existing theological and/or psychoanalytic/psychological education and/or an education in the science of History and/or Biblical Studies. Nevertheless, we believe that it is possible through the present paper to offer a new critical look at the biblical narrative of the life of Jacob, thanks to our interdisciplinary approach. All attempts at psychoanalytic research of historical personalities, especially when they are accompanied by assessments that these personalities may suffer from possible types of mental illness, as is the case in our own paper, should be treated with caution, and certainly without any criterion of objective truth being able to be fully confirmed. On the contrary, studies like ours should be approached as hypothetical propositions, which, however, may lead the modern reader to useful reflections and in general to valid research outcomes that are tested by the criteria that any scientific research should satisfy. We reflect that the entire story of Jacob, with the parallel proper attention to all the persons involved in his life, can offer a fertile field of scientific research on the issue of God's eschatological soteriological action on humanity, while also problematizing the way Evil (and a story's 'bad guy') might be eventually helping –in the context of Christian theology– the fruition of humanity's salvation.

Our paper constitutes one of the multiple possible narratives that can emerge from the engagement with the life of Jacob. Inherent in the very concept of *midrash* is the concept of a perpetual translation of one language into another language. We believe that there is the potential for the production of multiple other –as yet unexplored– narratives by the scientific community, which concern the biblical story of Jacob. The present paper in no way exhausts the scientific, literary, psychoanalytic, etc., research inspired by the miraculous life of Jacob, as described in the biblical language of Genesis. On the contrary, we are convinced of the multiple other future possibilities of scientific research of this text and this life, through a variety of initial research questions.

The relationship between healthy and unhealthy religiosity and mental health in general, a relationship that we touch on in this paper, still offers a very broad scope for more scientific research; in fact, it seems to be a vitally important topic that constitutes, in our opinion, an urgency, since we believe that many of the current (geo)political,

social, cultural, spiritual, emotional and psychological conflicts in the world are heavily informed by a very problematic relationship of modern man with religiosity and spirituality in general.

We believe that the study of biblical dreams offers another huge field for future research, both from the perspective of Literature and from the perspective of Psychoanalysis. Both disciplines are directly related to the study of the function of language. The comparative study of these languages with the language of biblical dreams can offer fascinating future scientific research. Especially the literary/anthropological figure of trickster-Jacob can be connected to the psychoanalytic finding of schizoid individuals, towards the production of truly interesting further scientific work. In this context, we think that there is real scope to explore the special role of the story of Joseph, allegedly grafted into the story of Jacob in the book of Genesis, possibly carrying a special function towards resolving an transgenerational trauma that seems to run through Jacob's family. As we mentioned earlier in our paper, we speculate that the source of this trauma is based on the episode of the *Binding of Isaac* by Abraham, but this should be investigated thoroughly to attest whether it could constitute a testable hypothesis.

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