

The Couple - Creator of History

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מכּוֹן מַנִּיטוּ

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Dualism and History

According to Jewish tradition, the concept of the couple does not stand for a concrete reality; it is also imbued with significance, purpose and function. Human history, too, has a final purpose, and there is a connection between these two concepts. The fact that human nature is dualistic and that the nature of being in this world is dualistic, is intentional;¹ and, if history has a direction, it has to do with this sense. This poses a series of questions. It appears that history has a premise of a finalistic nature since its very beginning.

The questions, as shown by the texts herein discussed, could be analyzed or read from different perspectives. The presumption of such a philosophical query is not necessarily finalistic; other exegeses are possible. The most classical perception, however, from the perspective of Biblical teaching and Jewish tradition of what history illustrates – with the reality of the couple being its main vessel – is expressed by a finalistic vocabulary and messianic frame of mind.

¹ According to Rav Ashkenazi, the notion of the 'couple' also stands for a dualistic nature. Although the Creator is one, creation is dualistic by nature: it is comprised of impersonal object and a personal subject (body and soul), of form and matter, of masculine and feminine, etc.

In order to understand this, we must first analyze the term used by the Hebrew to describe "history". In modern Hebrew, teachers use the term *historiah*, borrowed from occidental terminology, when they speak of history in its western sense, namely the history of events, the effort of historians to define the structures and laws that delineate the significance of those events. However, the Hebrew word *toladot*, which conveys the original Hebraic mentality, has a completely different sense: it signifies "history" but in the sense of "engenderment". For the Hebrew consciousness – and this constitutes one of its most basic intuitions – what matters in history is not essentially the events; for events instantly become memories, and therefore have no substance as regards to the destiny of the individual being. The history that has meaning is the history of the identity of the human subject, of his being, and not solely the events that he causes or by which he is affected. This history is the history of the transformations of the human identity. It has a direction – from a starting point towards a finishing point, regarded as messianic, therefore having a finality.

For the Hebrew man, if history has a meaning, it is that of a direction and of the engenderment of a human identity, called by the prophets of Israel "the son of man", [*ben adam*] an expression that should be understood in the fullest sense of the term: not only engenderment, reproduction, multiplication, but literally an effort to create from the original identity a human identity in which the problems, conflicts and contradictions of our world are resolved. This messianic aspiration, the success and fulfillment of history, or the Messianic Identity – of which the word is "shalom", which appears very early in Biblical teachings – is the vital problem which the couple is set to resolve.

The couple is presented by the Bible in order to reveal and indicate this finality of history sought by the messianic aspiration. Paradoxically perhaps, the first couple in the Bible is not so much the male-female couple – the first man and woman – but the first two brothers. History begins with Cain and Abel. The global consistence of the Biblical narratives – historical in essence, but also outlining the dispositions of the law – aims at teaching the principles of a certain contemplation of history that culminates in this messianic aspiration: to render possible the brotherhood² of all mankind.

² In the original French – la Fraternité, or affectionate brotherhood.

The same concern and quest occupy a very important place in the life and essence of the engendering couple, the parental couple, man and woman – *ish* and *ishah*. However, the messianic objective essentially aims at the effort of procreating the son of man [ben adam], a being capable of 'being a brother'. This constitutes a **coherent setting** around which, through a number of texts and analyses, we can address the question of the way in which the couple is to engender, construct and create history, **to what purpose**, as well as to comprehend the nature of history and why is history needed in order to achieve this goal?

The 'duality' of the individual being precedes that of the 'duality' of the couple; it is the scheme of all being. In the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 61 A), we find a teaching of Rabbi Shimon ben Pazzi expressing a certain duality: "Woe is me because of my Creator [yozri], woe is me because of my evil tendency [yizri]!" This duality is expressed in the two *yods* of the word *vayitser* (Gen.2:7): "He gave form / modeled", referring to a profound existential duality and gap between the project and vision of the Creator and the reactions of Creation [*habria'a*], which are always in clash. Hence the drama of the human condition, the perpetual anguish and distress which are produced by different categories of 'couples' or pairs: the man-woman couple, the individual-society couple, my society-the other's society couple, etc. When applying this duality to morality, with the good inclination battling the evil inclination, what history could provide a positive solution to these opposing destinations which produce the problem – not that of tragedy – for then there would be no solution – but of drama – with the final destination of *aharit hayamim*, the "end of days". The messianic optimism does not **consist in** simply hoping for a solution that resolves this drama, but above all it is concerned with constructing this solution. The revelation of the Torah does not merely constitute the 'identity card' of the venture of history – which is engendering the 'son of man' – and the beginnings of this venture and the ways in which it has assumed its significance in the unique identity of Israel; it also gives the principles of action, the means to that end. In other words, for the Jews, the Messiah is not only to be awaited for; his epoch should be created, built. On the individual level, it is perhaps a belief; on the collective level, however, it is the historic effort to engender a certain 'form of being'³, capable of resolving the quandary of history,

³ "Manières d'être homme" – "forms of being man", is one of the many idioms coined by Rav Ashkenazi.

thereby fulfilling the desire for peace. *Shalom* is the keyword of the Jewish messianic and prophetic tradition.

Jewish tradition often uses an expression that traverses and connects all these themes: *aharit hayamim*, which is usually translated as "the end of time", in the sense of the termination of history. But what happens after that? Nothingness? An eschatological catastrophe? This is not the Hebraic vision: it does not mean a "termination at the end of a series of days" after which there would be nothing. In Hebrew, this term means something far more precise: there are the days, times and epochs – history as we know it; and then there is *aharit hayamim*, which comes after those days, after the effort accomplished by history. After that effort made throughout history, the world does not cease to be; it only begins, in its truest sense. The object of the entire effort of history, 'throughout its days', is to succeed in engendering the being or identity of the 'son of man', of a messianic essence, a being capable of 'being a brother'. Once this being is engendered, the true world can begin – a world in which the fundamental contradictions of human nature, that "dualistic" quality, will be finally resolved, and true joy will at last be made possible.

Hodesh and Shanah – Israel and the Nations

In order to define the plan preceding any form of being in a group, the Talmud cites a verse from Genesis (1"16): "And G-d made the two grand luminaries, the great luminary to govern the days, and the small luminary to govern the night." זָהָרַת

G-d thus made the two grand luminaries equal, and yet it is immediately written: "the great luminary and the small luminary". The Talmud comments: the moon, the small luminary, said to the Lord: "How can two kings avail themselves of the same crown?" – In other words, could there be a world where total equality exists of all beings, where all that is in existence **bears** the same crown, become equated? It seems inconceivable, for in a world where two totally equal beings exist, one of the two is in fact redundant. In Hebrew, the word that signifies "equal" is *shaveh*, and the word that designates "in vain" is *shav*, so that they have more or less the same root: in the semantic mentality of Hebrew, if two things are completely identical, one of the two is superfluous. The concept of equality – the total equality of values – does not exist,

in so far as the problem of human identity is concerned. There is no equality, only a balance of dignity; there can be equality of dignity but not a true, concrete and absolute equality of form.

What the moon therefore says is: "You have created us equal, but it is not possible." This is the language Creation uses versus that of The Creator. In order to exist, one has to be created; in order to be created, one has to be other than G-d – and 'other' inevitably means being diminished. A profound existential problem emerges from this text.

G-d replies: "Go and diminish yourself!" And the moon replies: "Must I be reduced merely because I have spoken a logical, normative truth?" One of the commentators asserts that this retort is a strategy of Creation, in attempt to break the impossibility of being. However, G-d replies: there is but one possible strategy – the moon must reduce its size in relation to the sun. G-d has made two grand luminaries, but in the end the moon must diminish itself, so that the history of the world could commence.

Another commentator suggests an alternative. Another solution could have been made possible: G-d could have enlarged one of the two luminaries so there would not have been the drama of the diminished being, but instead, an apotheosis of the being that would become greater would have taken place. There would not be the drama that is felt because of the disparity between one subject and another in every couple – which is the drama of history. However, the text at hand teaches us that it could not have been otherwise. Enlarging one of the two would be making Creation equivalent to the Creator, which would be an obstacle to the plan of creating otherness. In order to create 'the other', it should first be diminished.

G-d then wishes to soothe the moon: "Your destiny is to govern both by night and day." Obviously, the diminished moon is the luminary of the night, signifying light in times of darkness, whereas the non-diminished sun signifies light in full daytime. In addition, the moon will also be present during the day, everywhere, on the other side of things, becoming subject as well as object. This does not satisfy the moon. "What good is a lamp in noontime?" Its light is lost in that of the sun. So, G-d consoles the moon for the second time: "You will start history; Let Israel count its years and days according to your dictate."

Here reference should be made in passing to one of the problems of the Jewish calendar. In the effort to find a balance between the rhythm of the moon and that of the sun, the Jewish calendar is the only one in which the years are solar while the months are lunar. The *Midrash* relates to this in its tale of Abraham's discovery of the principle of G-d's unity: during the night, he saw the splendor of the moon, so he worshipped the moon; then, in the morning, he saw the splendor of the sun and so he worshipped the sun. The following night, when the moon returned, he said to himself: it can be neither the moon nor the sun but some greater power beyond them. Abraham's unique identity as set forth in this text is passed on to his offspring, but there is a continuous differentiation or selection within the Hebrew family, which separates Isaac from Ishmael, Jacob from Esau. While Ishmael chooses a purely lunar calendar, Esau takes upon himself to abide by a purely solar calendar. The calendar that combines the two 'luminaries' is that of Jacob alone.

In this context, the *Midrash* compares the civilizations and nations of the world to the solar cycle, whereas the identity and history of Israel are compared to the lunar cycle. Moreover, the consolation of the moon is that history – true history, which within the Biblical coherence is viewed as the history of the people of Israel, and of the engenderments – would be counted according to the phases of the moon and not of the sun. What is the essential difference between them? In Hebrew, the solar year is called *shanah*, a word connected to the word *sheni* which means second, from the root *shanot* – to change, to modify. In this term lies the fact that the 'second' is radically 'other' than the 'first', replacing the first [and not just following it]. Each solar year, once its cycle is completed, disappears and is replaced by a second consecutive solar year; therefore this time repeats itself. It is the history of events, the history of nations, the history of a cyclical **durance** where nothing ultimately new really happens. Ecclesiasts (1:9) says: "There is nothing new under the sun". Since time is governed by the sun, nothing new can actually take place in its cycle. It is very different from the time governed by the moon: the word which denotes the lunar month in Hebrew is *hodesh*, which is related to the word *hiddush*, meaning "renewal", renewal of identity which regenerates itself while remaining itself. The identity that is divided dies, sending us back to the various myths of the repetition and dying of time within the framework of the solar cycle, paralleling that of the history of nations. The time of Israel, conversely, is a time of *hiddush*, time of engenderment and not of events.

That is then the consolation that G-d offers the moon: "Through you history will be counted" – you will become the vehicle of history. It is thanks to the moon that the two luminaries become a couple rather than a vain, redundant equality.

Moreover, the great human civilizations which the Jewish vocabulary refers to as "the empires" (*malchuyot*), always experience stages of birth, growth and an end: their history is the history of a series of concluded events, leaving but a few remnants in the museums of the world, in archaeological findings, in certain peoples that are the living remains of ancient civilizations. Each empire, like the solar year, is replaced by another. The history of Israel, like the lunar month which is perpetually renewed through the years, traverses the history of the empires. These are two different types of history then: one, following the sun, is the history of events; the other, following the moon, is the history of human identity. An attentive reading of the Bible highlights the fact that the major factor in the historical part of the Bible is not so much what occurred in terms of events – even though they might shed light on the situations to be resolved - the importance lies in the genealogies, in other words, the modification of the human identities through the act of engenderment. This is the nub of our problem, that of the engendering couple and the brother-couple; here lies the significance of history. The meaning of history is the attempt at a successful engenderment.

In spite of the consolations that G-d proposes, the *Midrash* tells us that the moon replies very shrewdly: "But the day too [there is a solar count too]". The fact is that during the solar cycle it is impossible not to count the days and years, for the solar civilizations also have their own chronology and the appearance of history.

Then G-d adopts a radically different approach, saying: "Go, and righteous will be called by your name." This reply shifts the story from history to ethics. There is a moral objective in this venture: righteous men must be produced, and those righteous "will have your virtue", they will be "called by your name". For example, *Ya'aqov HaKatan* (the Small), *Shmuel HaKatan* (the Small), *David HaKatan* (the Small), all have the virtue of agreeing to be diminished so that history can take place through them. G-d reveals to the moon that there is an inherent moral purpose to history: it must succeed in "producing" the being capable of brotherhood, of accepting to be the "smaller" of two, the "smaller" in relation to the other. In the liturgy of *Rosh*

Hashanah, the Day of Judgment, the community of Israel is defined as the "little sister", *ahot ketana* (see also Song of Songs, 8:8).

Even this morally oriented consolation does not appease the moon. Seeing that she is not reassured, G-d finally says: "Bring forth a sacrifice for me, for I have diminished the moon." This refers to the sacrifice of *Rosh Hodesh* when, on each day of new-moon, a sacrifice of expiation was brought to the Temple of Jerusalem. The Talmud explains that this sacrifice had to be brought as an offering for one's sins, an evil that one is unaware of, and which only G-d Himself knows. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say "that G-d alone recognizes".

Beyond these two teachings, a distinctive commentary emphasizes the fact that the sacrifice of *Rosh Hodesh* is not formulated in the Bible in the same way as the other sacrifices. For all the other sacrifices it is written: *lashem korban*, "for G-d a sacrifice"; for the sacrifice of *Rosh Hodesh*, on the other hand, it is written: "a sacrifice for G-d" – not a sacrifice that one brings *towards* G-d, but a sacrifice that one gives in G-d's stead – for G-d. The sacrifice of *Rosh Hodesh* is conceived, then, as a sacrifice that should have been made by G-d Himself. It has to be brought every month in order to expiate the evil that is the tragedy of the being, the world, and for which no one knows the responsibility, or the liberty, or the culpability, neither the beginning, nor the end.

Returning to the issue of the couple - originally, the identity of the couple was that of a duality of equal to equal; but since the two polarities were mingled, void, lost inside one another, the result was that there was no being as such. Under these circumstances, there could have been no Creation, there could have been no world. For history to begin, Creation had to delegate a part of its being - that I will call feminine, an object-being in relation to a subject-being - in order to exist. Jewish tradition calls this vehicle a 'shift of being' or *mesirout nefesh* [= self-sacrifice] which is that part of being that experiences need and want and asks to be fulfilled. In other words, for history to happen, there must exist a being who is willing to sacrifice a part of itself, and set it free; thus the objective of the life of a couple is to re-acquire that part of being that had been renounced.

This is the greatness of women. The greatness that makes it possible for a couple to exist is to accept that diminution of being, and it is not the man who makes it possible for the couple to exist, it is the woman; here is perhaps the mystery which, on the

feminine side of the couple, attests to G-d's intervention. The Talmud couches it in its own vocabulary, not as a statement in itself, but as part of a cohesive teaching: "it is the trace of a mystery because of which there is something incomplete in the being". In truth, both man and woman, each in their own way, are Adam diminished, the one in *ish*, the other in *ishah*; but all this is more clearly sensed, perceived through the feminine identity.

Time, thus, for Israel, is of the same essence as the moon; Israel is feminine in relation to G-d, Israel is the little brother in relation to the big brother, but a little brother that is really the elder, since it is through him that is produced that form of being a man which is sought throughout history, that of the "brother-being".

Coming back to the story of Cain and Abel, the first twin brothers in history, let us look at the first chapters of Genesis which recount an attempt at civilization beginning with the first man and ending with the failure that led to the flood. It is here that the strategy of the Creator is employed for the engendering, through all the provisional failures, of a possible being, one who is capable of becoming a brother. Long before the history of man begins, the Torah says (Gen. 2:4): "This is the history of the Heavens and the Earth" (in Hebrew; "This is the engenderment of the Heavens and the Earth"); the entire universe is preoccupied with begetting a creature that can epitomize the ultimate, total dignity of Creation, thus implementing the project of the Creator.

As regards the engenderment of Cain and Abel it is written: "And man knew Eve his wife, she conceived, and gave birth to Cain" (Gen. 4:1). Cain's name is a proper name, that of the eldest son born to the first man. In the same way that Adam (in Hebrew) means man, Cain denotes a certain manner of being the son of man. Based on the end of the verse ("I have acquired..."), one commentator explains that Cain had acquired his name from the Creator Himself. The engendered being, the object of the history of engenderment, is already there: it is the son, and he achieves self-awareness as an acquired being – which is the essence of his name – for he is begotten by man.

However, in the second verse: "she continued to give birth to his brother, Abel." The first twin couple makes its appearance. Why is there not then a solution to the problem of history? Why is the equation of fraternity - that equation which the Patriarchs of Israel will invest all their efforts to resolve – not solved here? The term 'brother' appears here only as a guideline of the historical account for the

engenderment of the identity of Israel, as if the object of history is indeed to succeed in procreating the brother, a being able to become the true brother or sister of all, since our being from the beginning of Creation is a "dual" being.

In English we read: "she gave birth to Cain... and again she gave birth toAbel." However, this is not what the Hebrew text means. In Hebrew it says: "And in addition she gave birth to his [Cain's] brother, Abel". After giving birth to Cain, she gave birth to an additional being – the brother. Evidently there is here a prefiguration of the identity of Joseph, who is also named "the one who is additional" (*tosephet*), who is extra, who is added – and who, as a consequence, assumes the position of the moon in relation to the sun, a position which he takes up when he sets off on his search for his lost brothers. It is the very history of Joseph, whose name carries in it this same root - "to add": he is the brother, and he seeks among the others those who are capable of brotherhood. In the way that he is born, it is his very nature to be brotherly for he is put into this world in addition. This is what the Torah wishes to emphasize here: "And in addition she gave birth to his brother, Abel". The son is Cain, but there is an extra being beside him who is not the son, but the brother. It is not simply a matter of recording a birth, but the designation of a different identity: the son was begotten by the engendering couple, his is the aspired being; but once the "brother-being" is begotten as well, history begins. Together, these two will form the couple that will be the vehicle of history.

The identity of these two men - Cain and Abel - is in no way the same; their relationship is ambiguous. Their intersubjectivity reflects two different problems: Cain's problem, his challenge, is to prove that he is capable of creating a place in his world where the other, his brother, the additional element, can also feel at home. Abel's problem, his attribute, is quite different: it is the attribute of the educator. For Abel, the son is clearly Cain and he feels himself redundant, whereas for Cain, the opposite is true he is the being and the other is in excess. These are two anthropologies, two kinds of moralities, two radically different theologies. We know that subsequently Cain will be the one to bring the "surplus" of the harvest to G-d, which is why he will be disqualified: he gives what is left over to the one whom he considers superfluous. For Cain, G-d is redundant, as if he were saying: "I am the being, and then there is G-d, who is secondary." Cain's offering is the contribution of the surplus, given at the end of the harvest, an inferior offering given to the one who is

deemed less important. Whereas for Abel - who knows that he is in addition, and has assumed the position of the 'other' in the couple, the other - G-d in this case - is the essential, and he offers Him the best part of the firstborn of his herd, he gives what is essential to the One whom he deems more important than himself. There are in fact two concepts of being here, two fundamentally different perceptions of the world: Abel does not need to make an effort to try and become a brother; it is his very being; his effort lies in educating Cain and making him capable of becoming "someone's brother". History, however, shows this to be impossible. Within the Biblical coherence, there is no other equation of history than to arrive at engendering a son of man capable of becoming a brother.

That history has failed. Abel is eliminated because Cain is not able to accept the supplementary being that exists by his side. By his very name, the world is his: and in his world, the other is superfluous. As long as the other does not inconvenience him, he is tolerated; but as soon as he poses a moral problem, he becomes troublesome and is therefore eliminated. When G-d accuses Cain, he says: "The voice of the bloods (in Hebrew the plural is used) of your brother cry out". The *Midrash* explains: "The voice of the descendants of Abel that Cain has slain". A crime has been committed, and it is very serious; but worse still, Cain had eliminated history; he has prevented Abel's descendants from making efforts to advance history from one generation to the next within the natural engenderment of mankind, efforts to achieve interrelationships so that mankind can live in brotherhood.

The problem is the same for the engendering couple. This theme is particularly clear in the history of the Patriarchs where we witness a kind of obsession: the Patriarchs constantly say that their wife is their sister.

In a superficial reading, we could simply understand that the Patriarchs had to do some traveling around: Abraham has to go to the land of Jerusalem, then to Egypt; Isaac goes to Abimelech; Abraham's wife is beautiful, which explains his strategy: "Pray say that you are my sister", he says to Sarah. However, this direct reading is impossible within the Biblical coherence. It is even more inconceivable if we take into consideration that Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah ninety at the time! These two old people were worried that the Egyptians would take ninety-year old Sarah because she was beautiful? Clearly, the Bible is talking about another kind of beauty, so what is the meaning behind this story?

The Bible was revealed in response to the problem of sacrifices offered in Egypt, a place of total impurity in ancient times, a place of paganism. In this context, the Hafetz Hayim (Israel Meir Hakohen, named after the title of his principle work, Lithuania, 1838-1933) asks himself: How is it possible that G-d had asked for the first sacrifice of the sanctification of Israel to be carried out precisely in Egypt? To which he replies: there are two kinds of love: the love of a husband and wife – which is permitted inside and forbidden outside (this love is permitted in one's intimate life, in the privacy of one's abode, and forbidden in public) – and the love of a brother to his sister – allowed outside, forbidden inside: it is a legitimate love within the confines of exterior life, but forbidden in the confines of intimacy. He cites a verse from Song of Songs where the couple formed by Solomon, the man of peace, and the woman of Song of Songs, seeks the solution to the problem of fraternity. She says to her beloved: "Who will make you as my brother" (Song of Songs, 8:1) so that even if I meet you outside, I can kiss you, without being despised. As long as these two kinds of love are not achieved, the project of the couple is not yet fulfilled.

In the first man, there was already a mutation of identity: he is no longer male and female as in the stage of animal procreation where there is no history, but reproduction; this is already the relationship of *ish* and *ishah*, husband and wife. A formidable mutation, because the engendered son will set history in motion. However, there is a drawback: after the progression from male-female to the husband-wife stage, the brother-sister equation could not be achieved. When the Patriarchs of Israel recommence the history of mankind, of human identity, taking it up from the point where Adam had left it, it is this problem that they must resolve. Once their identity had been constituted, when they had reached a stage of sufficient maturity, they began their journey to bear witness, they went to the borders, and Abraham said to Sarah: "Since we have reached the borders and arrived at the civilization of the sun, here you must say that you are my sister." At first, Sarah does not understand his intention, but Abraham explains to her that human destiny itself is in jeopardy. In order for humanity to survive, it is not enough for us to be husband and wife - we must reach the level of brother and sister. The solution for the difficulties of the engendering couple, the solution to the problem of the "husband-wife" relationship lies at the "brother-sister" level. It is this solution which is explored through the identity of the Patriarchs. Abraham wants to convince Sarah that the time for true brotherhood has come, but the Philistines do not understand it (Gen. 20). The entire dialogue is

extremely humorous. "For you have said that she is your sister; we believed that it was your sister, and lo and behold it is your wife." To which Abraham reiterates: "She is indeed my sister, but you cannot fathom it."

We await the time when one can say: "You are my sister", to which she replies: "You are my brother". Here we have already arrived at the story of Isaac (ibid, 26). Isaac has gone to the Philistines and out of the blue suddenly says: "All is well, it is perfect..." and in the next verse the king of the Philistines looks out of his window and sees "Isaac laughing with Rebecca his wife." He believed her to be Isaac's sister, and suddenly he sees them in a very compromising situation... Rashi comments: He saw them having intimate relations as a husband and wife, whereas Isaac had told him they were brother and sister. Isaac is called in Hebrew "the one who will laugh": when the problem of humanity is resolved, humanity will be able to laugh. Until then, there is an incapacity, an impossibility of laughing fully. For Isaac, however, the problem has been resolved and therefore he can laugh. It is a messianic moment. Later, when Potiphar's wife describes Joseph (Gen. 39:14) as: "This slave you have brought us to produce laughter", she will then complain: "but he did not want me." It is the demand for the impossible laughter, impossible as long as the moral problem of the engendering couple is not resolved. As long as humanity remains at the "husband-wife" stage - albeit a formidable achievement for humanity as a whole - certainly marriage has not yet begotten the couple who, alone, can prompt their children to become real brothers among themselves. The problem of the brotherhood of the children cannot be resolved unless the engendering couple has resolved it with each other. The one is the necessary outcome of the other.

In their history, the Patriarchs again assume responsibility for the problem of the couple as vehicle of history, in order to advance it to the brother-sister level, a condition for the historical enterprise, properly speaking. The relationship between husband and wife could be seen as an individual problem, the life of the private couple; the couple of history, however, is the brother and sister, brother and brother type. In the history of the Patriarchs, the story of Cain and Abel is played out again and again until a solution is ultimately found. This solution appears in the reconciliation of Joseph and Judah, the peace achieved between Joseph and his brothers; at that moment, the children of Israel become real brothers.

Abraham did not succeed in resolving the problem of brotherhood with Lot. They had departed together from the civilization of Mesopotamia, and together, on a parallel path, they traveled through the Land of Canaan. Then they had to separate, because there was a quarrel between Lot's shepherds and Abraham's shepherds. In consequence, Abraham says to Lot: (Gen. 13:8): "Let there not be a quarrel between you and me and between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are men-brothers." However, this venture fails. (In reality, they were not real brothers: Lot was Abraham's nephew, but they came from the same family, and resembled each other like brothers – their features were so identical that physically it was difficult to distinguish between them). What was the subject of their disagreement? The *Midrash* describes it very precisely: Lot's shepherds let their herds graze in fields that did not belong to them; Abraham's shepherds argued with them because they did not want to have their own herds graze there. Their solution was to part ways: "If you go right, I shall go left, and if you go left, I shall go right." According to the *Midrash*, this incident occurs before Abraham's journey to Egypt with Sarah. Abraham searches with whom he can become brothers; in Lot this possibility was latent - but it fails. So, Abraham undertakes to solve this problem within the engendering couple itself: a couple must be produced that is capable of brotherhood, so that a man might be begotten, the son of man capable of being a true brother to all.

There is another failure: the two brothers of the next generation, Isaac and Ishmael, do not love each other. But this process is far from being complete, for the next set of brothers, Jacob and Esau, hate each other. However, beginning with Jacob, the solution emerges. The rivalry continues, and it is still serious, persisting within Jacob's family. The animosity between Joseph and his brothers should be analyzed in itself; but hatred is averted, and reconciliation is ultimately achieved. The messianic identity is then engendered and history can commence.

The frequency with which the term 'brother' appears in the story of Joseph is striking. For example, when Jacob learns that his children are plotting against Joseph because they fear a rivalry that continues the selection (Joseph is undoubtedly his father's favorite son) even though the identity of Israel is already complete, Jacob sends Joseph into the lion's den (Gen. 37:14): "And Jacob said to Joseph: Go and see to the peace of your brethren and the peace of their herds, and bring me back word", namely, "bring me a reply". The task that Jacob assigns his son is very clear: Joseph is

the one capable of brotherhood, for he is the one born as "surplus" – and was so named by Rachel his mother: "So that G-d may give me an additional son". He is called Joseph, so that the term brother – the one who is in addition to the son - is inherent in his name; he is regarded as the epitome of brotherhood, carrying within him the identity of a "being-brother", a trait that can help him construct it in the other brothers. This is why Jacob sends Joseph to seek out his brothers.

We often wonder why Joseph never "brought a reply" to Jacob. Joseph typifies the man of exile: he left his paternal home, it is thought that he must have been devoured by wild beasts. Jacob knows instinctively that he is alive, but he does not know where he is. When Joseph reveals himself, the identity of Israel is revived. From the moment Jacob sends Joseph to determine whether the brothers are indeed brothers, every word is important. Joseph does not give any news to Jacob until the moment when he reveals himself to his brothers, later in Egypt; we wonder at his prolonged silence, his cruelty towards his father. However, Joseph was a man who had been assigned a mission, and he cannot present his full account to Jacob as long as he cannot come and tell him that there is peace within the family and that his brothers are indeed real brothers.

When Judah meets Joseph (Gen.45:18), Judah, his brothers' spokesman, approaches Joseph and says: "You are like the Pharaoh", - this is more than etiquette: Joseph presents himself as the Pharaoh to the point that it is not clear anymore if it is really Joseph, or whether by now it is Joseph become Pharaoh. Judah, the man faithful to his Hebrew identity, stands before the man of the Diaspora, the man of the dual affiliation who has become Pharaoh's minister. Judah might wonder whether he has become Pharaoh or is still Joseph. As long as Joseph does not take off his mask, it is impossible to ascertain whether he is not as dangerous as the Pharaoh. Joseph, for his part, knows that he is Joseph and not Pharaoh. Judah says: "Let your servant say a word in the ears of my master." This is the 'word' that Jacob had awaited all these years, that he had asked Joseph to bring back to him ("is there brotherly peace amongst you?"); Judah could say it only when he had heard it from Joseph's mouth. It was to be feared that Benjamin would be imprisoned or put to death by this Joseph-Pharaoh, but here Joseph says to his brothers: "I shall keep Benjamin, but you, go in peace to your father." Everybody was gripped by anxiety, and all at once the brothers hear this Pharaoh say: "You may go in peace". After this word of peace, Judah

understands that it is Joseph. It is at this moment that Joseph reveals himself and lets Jacob know that he is alive.

The entire objective of this story is to succeed in creating true fraternity. When that happens, the history of the children of Israel can commence, and give testimony to the ability to make peace not only, as in the case of the Patriarchs, on the individual level, but on the level of the collective identity of a society, of a nation.

However, the history of Israel does not conclude there. It is the history of an enterprise: to create the "being-brother", to create the fraternity, the only solution to the problem of the couple, itself the vehicle of the problem of history. This issue could be presented from many angles, but it is always the same issue in the Bible, in the teachings of the Patriarchs, the prophets, the rabbis, in Jewish tradition in its entirety. From the very beginning until the very end it has always been and will always remain the crux of the matter: to comprehend the essence of the messianic identity and learn the working guide for creation of the "being-brother", so that history can be fulfilled and humanity can really begin the life that comes "after the days" – so that we do not stay in this effort of engenderment in which we are living, like a still unborn fetus.

The same problem existed between Jacob and Esau; they are twins – the greatest intimacy possible - but although twins, they are not equal. For equality, as we have seen, does not exist. Jacob looks for ways to resolve the conflict; he renders himself "small" and tries to solve the problem of fraternity but comes up against his brother's rivalry, his brother's hatred. He tells Esau, the new Cain of this story: "Me, your servant, and you, my master". Esau, however, demonstrating poor taste, takes this at face value! He, in turn, says: "Me, the master, and you the servant". Jacob has posed the fundamental equation that must be resolved in history. The empires-civilizations have proposed four solutions; only one was offered by Israel, but that is the only one that can succeed.

In order to understand this, let us start with the Hebrew terms. In Hebrew, when a person is presented, the subject has no gender. The "I" is *ani* both in the masculine and the feminine. When the feminine being assumes the position of the subject, it is equivalent to the masculine being. The "you", however, for a woman is *at*, and for a man, *atah*, a word that carries the feminine inflection of Hebrew within it. Thus, in the masculine we add *a*, the feminine form, in order to stress the fact that if a man assumes the position of object, he is even more so in the feminine position.

This idea is found in the already cited dialogue between G-d and the world in the form of the moon, a dialogue which expresses both the drama of the "identity gap" that is at the heart of the problem of history, and the idea of the sacrifice of expiation. The *Tosafot*, the prestigious commentators of the Talmud, presented with this tremendous text, ask: "How is it that the text says: "the moon said", putting the subject in the feminine ["moon" is a word in Hebrew that could be viewed as both masculine and feminine]", whereas in the language of the Bible "moon" is always designated in the masculine? They quote a verse from Joshua: "The moon has stopped" - where the verse appears in the masculine form. This is not a grammatical question. It means that whenever the moon takes on the masculine role, time stops, history stops, there is no more history. However, we have a *Midrash* based on a verse from Song of Songs (5:2): the spouse says to his beloved: "My sister, my companion, my dove, my perfection." The *Midrash* indicates: don't say my perfection (*tamati*), but *teomati*, "my twin". This is what G-d says to Israel: "You are my *teomati*, my twin"; this means, according to the *Midrash*, "Neither am I bigger than you, nor are you bigger than me". Yet there is this provisional time, this world, where, in order for history to take place, there is an inequality of being; this means in essence that in this world we must be the sons in relation to G-d; but in the world to come, we will have to be brothers – "neither am I bigger than you, nor are you bigger than me" – in relation to the Creator Himself. However, while history is still in progress, we must first prove that the son is capable of becoming a brother. This depends on the engendering couple; are they capable of being brother and sister, and not only husband and wife?

The first of the four possible solutions to the subject-object problem is that of the civilizations that might be called totalitarian: since we need a subject and an object, I prefer to be the subject, and make you my object. Me-I and You-you. To my mind, the Western world is tormented by this solution, this attempt. We find here Hegel's dialectic which denotes the equation of the master and slave; since history commands that there be a master and a slave, I prefer being the former and let you be the latter. Or as the Marxist strategy portrays it: I am willing temporarily to be the slave, knowing that ultimately I will end up the master.

The second alternative is proposed, if only theoretically, by Christian civilization. I stress the term theoretically, because concretely, in its application, things have turned

out quite the opposite. It is the opposite possibility: I will be the slave, and you will be the master. Since there must be slave and master, I prefer being the slave and let you assume the position of master; thus, the sin will be only yours and not mine. The Christians did not see their faith in this light, but it is the logical conclusion of their doctrine.

A third solution is the temptation of the Far East: stop history altogether. If each gesture leads to the evil of I-subject and You-object, it is better to have no subject at all. You-object and I-object. We shall stop time itself. Stop history, for each act leads to evil, and there is no solution. Up to a point, this is the greatness of Buddhism, but also its unreality: Buddhism inevitably can live only within the boundaries of history.

Then, there is the fourth solution, the one sought in the family of the Patriarchs: both will be subjects, each will call the other "my master". If it is reciprocal, the problem is solved. Each will address the other as "my superior". If each really treats the other as "my master", there is no slave. It is the endeavor of the "being-brother", where each calls the other *adoni*. In spoken language, this formula has assumed a banal politeness so that in English, for example, everyone refers to the other as "Sir". If people only knew what they are saying when they pronounce this word... This is what Jacob proposed to Esau: he said to him *adoni*, Sir, but Esau took it seriously and said: "Alright, so be my servant." This problem was taken up again in the family of Jacob's children by the "being-brother" Joseph; thus a first messianic tradition evolved – that of the Messiah son of Joseph; in other words, the son of the "being-brother" in the manner of Joseph – that precedes the second tradition, that of the Messiah descendant of Judah, the Messiah who is the son of David. In the meeting between Joseph and Judah (representing the two messianic tendencies) and through the fact that each of them says Shalom, the problem of brotherhood is resolved. However, these men can be engendered only in a family where the mother knows that she is the sister of her husband. This is the Jewish family.