Father-son relationships in a cross-cultural view

The Choice-preference, envy, competition, or alliance

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תרגום: אסף פרוש

Rise, my son, and receive from your father

The blessing of his loving wrath

(Goldberg, 1960, 211)

Freud has claimed that there exists a universal conflict between father and son, and he based this claim on the Greek myth of Oedipus, his father Lios, and mother Yokasta. According to Freuds' interpretation of this myth, every son seeks to kill his father in order to be able to sleep with his mother, and every father seeks to kill his son in order to prevent this from happening. The American psychologist Bruno Battelheim claimed that in most traditional cultures there are no grounds to support what Freud had assumed regarding animosity between father and son. In Battelheims' opinion, that non-verbal tension that exists between fathers and sons, which Freud had diagnosed as universal and based on sexual jealousy, was, for the most part, a characteristic of the relationship between fathers and sons in Vienna in the 19th century (Bettelheim, 1954).

The historian Joseph Haim Yerushalmi (1993) went a step further than Battelheim, and regarded the complex relationship between Freud and his father, and Freuds' own unresolved Oedipal complex, which, according to Yerushalmi, had overly influenced his work and his interpretation of Moses, so much so that he hadn't seen any other motifs and myths that might exist in the psyche and in Judaism itself. According to Yerushalmi, the Oedipal conflict does not characterize Jewish conception, rather, the Jewish father is happy to see his son rise above him in achievement – as is written in the Talmud, "In every man he be jealous, except his son and pupil". He claims that a conflict between a father and son in Judaism does not revolve around the mother, and as such, is not Oedipal in nature. And indeed, as we read the book of Genesis we do not find the motif of open rebellion of the son against the father, something Freud had perceived as the central motif in mans' psyche, and which the Greek mythology is ripe with.

What significance does the lack of conflict between father and son have in Jewish mythology? In order to answer this question, this article seeks to investigate the relationship between father and son in the Bible, in contrast to the Egyptian mythology and the near East myths that had preceded the Jewish scripture, and in contrast to Christian doctrine which had followed it. This will be in accordance with Jungian thinking and inspired by Jungian analyst Erich Neumann. In his book "The Origins and History of Consciousness" (1954), Neumann describes these ancient myths which, to his understanding, are a symbolic representation of human psychic life, and through them he illuminates on human consciousness.

The Terrible God and the Chosen Son

The Father archetype and the God archetype are closely related to one another, and in fact, one can see the God as a "God-Father": in Jewish prayer we turn to "our father, our king", in Christianity the God-Father identity is especially salient when we look at the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In all the ancient cultures, the father is burdened with the task of initiating the son to the values of society, the values of culture, and of religion, that are imposed by the ruling God. The demand to obey the God, is tantamount to the demand to obey the Father – who, in turn, prepares the son to obey the Divine. On the other side of the coin, we see that the myth of the God who demands obedience encourages the society to establish a code wherein the son must obey the father.

The Oedipal rebellion myth relates to the sons' struggle for independence and individuality. But the cultures of ancient civilizations are mostly based on a collective, tribal sense of self, and has no place for individual uniqueness. So too in Judaism in biblical times: the Bible describes a people in the becoming, where the uniqueness of the individual may risk the tribal unity. It seems that this was the foundational reason Jewish culture was based on the father-son covenant, that runs parallel to the God-People covenant, which reinforces the acceptance of a value system, myths, and the laws of the archetypal father, and of the culture; a system that does not allow for rebellion against the father and his values. This covenant is imprinted on the son immediately following his birth in the form of the circumcision.

In the Bible the Jewish god is described as intolerant of disobedience: whosoever will break his Law will suffer the consequence. After Cain, a whole generation was punished in the Flood, and so too were the people of Sodom. Obedience to God is absolute. He who disobeys his Law may be punished with death. An example both salient and cruel is the consequence of a rebellious son who was stoned to death. And yet, the Jewish history relates to the compassionate, forgiving, merciful, and beneficial aspects of God as well. One may say that the Jewish god represents a very strict super-ego and the Terrible God archetype. God is the one who shapes the destiny of his People: the people, for instance, don't get to decide whether they should leave Egypt or not, whether to accept the Tora or not. And so, the person who struggles with Jacob at night in the Yabock pass, may be seen as a representative of the God-Father in a struggle with his Son. This kind of attempted destruction is seen also in Pharaohs' urge to destroy all the first-born sons that are born of Israel. The God-Father that was willing to destroy Moses when he along his way if he doesn't obey, is the same one who commands the binding and death of Isaac.

In his book *"Symbols of Transformation"* ([1912] 1970, 57), Jung states that the Father image is the ruling one in most contemporary religions - in Judaism this is expressed as omnipotence and persecuting paternalism, and in Christianity is expressed as loving paternalism – whereas in the more ancient religions, the dominating image was that of the Mother.

The dominance of the God-Father who shapes the fate of the Son – who has no opportunity to protest or rebel – is sharply expressed in the story of the Binding and Sacrifice of Isaac, and in Abraham's blind obedience to God. In the story, God is violent to both Abraham and Isaac, and Abraham is violent towards Isaac. The God-Father can be violent to the Son, but the Son will not object. Abraham does not object to god, and Isaac does not object to Abraham. The Son has no option to rebel against his Father and to take charge of his own destiny. The terrible obedience required in the story of the Sacrifice, an obedience that is seen as the zenith of faith, attests to this. In the Midrash, Isaac is described as a passive person, whose passive position in life was greatly fashioned by the trauma of the Binding; he is even regarded as holding to his destiny to be sacrificed in order to see his fathers' will fulfilled. His post-traumatic passivity can be explained not only through the trauma of the Binding itself, but the very demand of him to give his life away, to be denied the right to rebel, protest, and even to foster the desire for a full life.

We see in these stories the remnants of more ancient myths that trickled into the Bible, while being reshaped and adjusted into the biblical Father-Son relationship. A further requisite comparison is between the biblical God-Father who goes against his Son, as in the story of the Binding of Isaac, to the father complex characteristic in ancient Greek culture. Greek mythology is ripe with paternal violence toward the son fueled by fear of the sons' impending powers: even the very first generation of creation we see Uranus and Chronos attempting to annihilate their sons right after being born. The story of Oedipus who was saved from the violence of his father Lios, who wishes to destroy him, compares to the story of Theseus and Jason, who as teens were sent on dangerous missions by their (substitute for) fathers – in order for them to be destroyed. And yet, in the Bible there is no reference to the fear of the son taking

the place of the Jewish god-father. And thus, it seems that the destruction impulse of the biblical God-Father[i] that we see toward the Son does not stem from the Fathers' fear of his Sons' taking his place, but from a different reason.

The relationship between the biblical God that is initially described with controlling and domineering qualities, that can be seen as stemming from His will to manifest a Covenant of continuity of the father-son relationship, and his son, evolve into what can be seen as preferential treatment. Indeed, gradually, the over-powering, destructive, archaic position that God had begun in relation to his Son, starts to soften: the Flood was a turning point where God promises not to destroy His people; the Binding of Isaac was a turning point after which sacrifice was altogether forbidden, as opposed to customs prevalent in the near east; Moses manages to sublimate Gods' urge to annihilate the sinning Israelites; Jacob who struggles with the angel starts as a story of destruction and becomes a story of initiation. When the angel could not over-power Jacob he does leave a mark on his body – a stamp of mans' vulnerability to the awesome power of God, and at the same time a mark of being chosen. In fact, all three of the Jewish fathers were chosen to be the Fathers of the nation.

The meaning of being chosen in biblical times is very different from the contemporary meaning where a person may choose his own unique path and even destiny. In the Bible, man is given choice only on the condition that he accepts the supremacy of God and of the religious tradition over man. Being chosen is to fulfil Gods' will over His people. The Leader does not choose to lead, rather it is the Will of God that determines. And God does not accept refusal to assume the role, as is seen

when God persecutes Moses until he finally agrees to accept his calling as leader of the People.

The ancient mythology of Egypt is also based on the father-son covenant rather than the Oedipal rebellion, and tells about the covenant between the God Osiris with his son Horus; this model precludes the father-son relationship in Christianity. Every individual in ancient Egypt was considered to be Horus, the Son, in life, and Osiris, the Father, in death.

The father-son covenant has another significance in ancient times: to further establish the pact between Males, to bolster the patriarchal dimension in society, as opposed to the rule of the more ancient Great Mother-Goddes. In Egypt, Isis was the Great Mother-Godess, and the father-son covenant between Osiris and Horus was meant to allow the rule of God-Kings, the emergence of the Patriarchat, out of the Mother-Godess Matriarchat. The same is true in Greek mythology: the Supreme God is Zeus and under him are three other Male Gods who divide cosmic control amongst themselves.

Comparing the Father-Son covenant with the Mother-Son covenant

We have thus far dealt with father-son relationships, but, as mentioned by Yerushalmi, the Fruedian Oedipal complex includes incestual yearning toward the mother. According to Jung, the incestual-Oedipal yearning of returning to Mothers' womb represents the psychic longing to return to pre-conscious existence, a

primordial state expressed in early Great Mother-Goddess myths. The mythic victory of the Great Father over the Great Mother means the establishment of rational consciousness in place of the more sensual, irrational, emotional lifestyle; it means the dominance of the conscious over the unconscious; the dominance of culture over nature.

According to this Jungian perspective, the absence of the incestuous urge towards the Mother in the Bible may be understood if we consider the danger which Returning to the Mother poses on a society where the Great Father has yet to establish his victory and dominance over the Great Mother.

In fact, in Judaism as well we find the process of establishing the Patriarch - when the Bible had disempowered women and enforced the Father-Son covenant. The dynasty is patriarchal, the chosen one is always a male, whereas women are mere companions to the men. God is a single Male whose exclusive singularity is emphasized by the lack of a Goddess by his side. The Bible, which had negated paganism, negated the rule of the Great Goddesses, and elevated the monotheistic male God. The importance of the Father-Son covenant does not allow for the rebellion of the son against the father in the Bible, and does not allow the mother to have any sort of significance as being an object to be longed for – something that might have allowed her to have the same status as the father in a family in those biblical times.

Nevertheless, the Jungian perspective shows that we can still find hints of Oedipal struggles in the Bible: it is told of the indirect rebellion of Rueben who had slept with

Bilha, his father Jacobs' mistress. Other clues are found outside the Book of Genesis, in the relationship between God and his People: when the People rebelled against God and his Word in the desert, as they made complaints against Moses and the Lord, as they crafted the Golden Calf, as they worshiped idols and had relations with the Medien daughters. For these indiscretions the People was punished severely, with destruction and plague, because the Lord will not have any complaint or rebellion – his immediate response is the will to destroy the People. We may see the Peoples' rebellion in the desert as expressing rebellion against the Father, and the wish to return to paganism as a return to the Great Mother.

Only in a much later stage in the development of Jewish literature, in the Zohar (dated around the 13th century), we find a myth where the Mother is given a more explicit place, where the divine powers that rules the kingdom of reality is God the Father (the Holy One, Blessed Be He), the Mother (Shechina), and the beloved Son, described as the Chosen One, which is the Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai (Rashbi) (Hellner-Eshed, 2009). Rashbi is the principal character in the Zohar, who accepts and passes on the Divine Abundance. In this sense he recalls Jesus, the Son of God in Christianity, who acts as a human bridge between the human and the divine.

Contrary to Judaism, in other ancient myths of the Middle-East, the Great Mother Goddess is a nature goddess who rules over her sons-lovers. She controls their destiny, whether they live or die. For example, in the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Tammuz, or in the Greek myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, or the Phrygian myth of Cybele and Attis, and lastly in the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris.

The covenant between the Father and the Son, such as described in the Egyptian myth and in the Bible, was meant to redeem the male-paternal from the Mothers' control, to develop a human consciousness with values and culture that will stand against the unconscious nature of the Great Mother Goddess (Neumann, 1954).

I maintain that in Christianity we can find both models acting in the same time: the Father-Son relationship, and the Mother-Son relationship. The Mother-Son relationship is found between Jesus and Mary: he was born of her alone, with no biological father, and in that sense he is hers alone, with no paternal intervention. Even though Mary was never officially recognized as part of the Christian pantheon of the Holy Triniti, she does essentially play a leading role in folk Christian ritual. Thus we find in Christianity a myth of the Great Mother who has no need of a man – she is the autonomous mother who fertilizes herself. Christ the Son is found in the iconography as an infant in his mothers' lap, an image that points to his existential position as a Mothers' son. He then appears in a mothers' lap a second time, when he was pulled off the cross. This is the image of the Pieta, when the Son returns to the Mother. His relationship with Maria Magdalena, who bears his mothers' name, enhances the meaning of the Mother in his life twofold. In the Christian myth, Jesus is the groom and Mary is his bride. Thus the, initially incestuous, Mother-Son unity prevails, as Son-Lover relationship, which is interpreted as Holy Matrimony. The presence of the Mother in Christ is also seen in his facial aspect, which is essentially soft and feminine. Even the values he tries to instill are feminine in nature - love, compassion, humanity.

One can thus see in Christ an expression of a feminine manhood in a man who has not shaped his masculinity since he was raised in the Kingdom of the Mother. And yet, one can also see him as uniting within him the polar opposites of masculine and feminine. And ultimately, just as he never parted with the Mother when he eventually returned to her in the Pieta, so with the Father – he does not rebel or part with him. And even as he cries upon the cross, "Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?", a cry that may signify his return to the Mother when he was taken off the cross, this cry is more of torment and betrayal, not rebellion. It is said in the New Testament that the Father and the Son are one. The Christian Trinity is a masculine trio of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, where the Holy Spirit is a masculine-spiritual element. Even though in some of the scripture we find the relationship between Joseph and Jesus described as a father-son relationship, Edinger (1992), in his explanation of Christs' spiritual destiny, states that Jesus was raised without a biological father, but rather the archetypal Father, God, was the compensation for the lack of a personal father. I think that this explanation is valid when asking why there is no rebellion against the father in Christianity; the God-Father is far more powerful than the normal father.

It is interesting to see how, unlike other myths, in Christianity there is no contrast between Christ being the Son of the Mother, and his being the Son of the Father. There is some kind of enabling relationship between the two covenants, and there is no conflict between a relationship with the Mother and a relationship with the Father. It is interesting to note that the Ophites, one of the pre-christian gnostic cults, had a trinity of Father, Mother, and Son. It seems that Christianity found a way to combine

two of the most central archetypes in the psyche without having to rebel against either one. There is no rebellion against the Father nor the Mother, and there is no Oedipal conflict. Perhaps that is part of the secret of why Christianity spread like wild-fire across the world; its ability to answer the innately human need to maintain a relationship with the Father and the Mother as well, while existing as the Chosen Son of both Mother and Father. We can surmise that the Mother-Son relationship that survived from ancient times, managed to permeate through Christianity to the point where it was equal to the Father-Son relationship, which was central to Christianity from the beginning, as it was influenced by Judaism.

Even though Greek culture and Jewish culture have in common the exaggerated power of the patriarch over the matriarch, Greek myths do have the full-fledged Oedipal complex, while Judaism does not. The Greek Mythology depicts a state of affairs wherein the physical-forceful masculinity is reinforced and the struggle between generations is a struggle over power and control between the Father and Son, while in the Bible the struggle is between the God and the People. Monotheistic Judaism establishes the reinforcement of the patriarch by creating a spiritual, value-based culture, through the Bible. In ancient Greek culture, on the other hand, there is no abiding Law of Scripture: there are myths, but there is no literature of rules and values[ii]. Zeus does not demand adherence to any moral laws, but rather to be worshiped.

In ancient Greek culture, the father wishes to destroy the son because his actual, physical existence threatens him, not because the son disobeyed his commandments. That is the complex of the father Lios, whose Oedipal son fights him in order to be

saved of him. Since the God-Fathers in Greece do not require values, civilized etiquette, or ethics of man, the struggle of the son against the father is forceful, actual, personal and familial – and not cultural or symbolic. In Judaism, on the other hand, there is no struggle of the son with the personal father. Rather, the God-Father wishes to destroy his People when the Son-People sin against the Lord's values and covenant. From this we may understand that the archetype of the Father-Son relationship is manifest relative to the culture it is in, and is influenced by the cultural collective sub-conscious: the cultural collective unconscious of the Greek mythology is different from that of Judaism.

Conclusion: From the Chosen Son, to the struggle between brothers, and back to Oedipus

We have seen that in Judaism there is no power struggle between fathers and sons, as opposed to the Greek mythology where the stronger one rules. In Judaism, the God-Parent decides who will be the most fitting and worthy Chosen Son, where his destiny is a spiritual one. The more important values are of the archetypal Father and divine collective Self, not the desire of the Son to rule, or the individual ego desire to be Chosen and lead; this is related to the anger of Josephs' brothers when he was ego-centric and condescending because of his dreams, and the punishment thereafter.

And indeed, Yerushalmi (1993) describes fratricide, the Cain complex, as a more primal motif than patricide, and as a very prominent motif in the book of Genesis; a strange fact that Freud had overlooked this.

Rather than the Oedipal rebellion, the Bible has the repetitive motif of jealousy between brothers [iii].

The murderous fraternal envy seen in the Bible stems from the fact that fathers had discriminated and found one son more worthy than others, and one can say that in such cases the brother steered his rage and aggression away from the father and to the Chosen brother. This discrimination is the shadow aspect of the Choice. Thus Cain steers his rage away from the God that chooses Able, and so with the sons of Jacob who direct their rage to their brother Joseph. In both cases fraternal envy ends with murderous rage and fratricide, rather than patricide a la Oedipus.

In the same vein, we find the central myth of ancient Egypt where Set struggles with his brother Osiris and murders him; in Christianity, the crucifixion can be interpreted as the jealousy of both Romans and Jews, parallel to fraternal envy in the Bible: Christ is the Chosen Son, he receives a destiny, with no brothers to compete with, and as such he portrays Christianity being chosen over Judaism. Thus, one may view the struggle between Judaism and Christianity, and later Islam, as a struggle between brothers over who will be the ruling religion (Kam, 2001, 349): the tension of the conflict over choice and preference of the One Brother, was steered towards a struggle between Peoples.

And yet, the historical process of the appearance of new religions or cults can be seen as a repetitive Oedipal rebellion of the New against the Old, and in this context regards the Jewish religion as Father, and the Christian religion as Son. Neumann

([1949] 1990) writes of the inner voice which brings forth new knowledge that always and with no exceptions bears the character of the Son, rather than the voice of the Father which is of current law, and the murder of a father by his son is always symbolic of the inner history of humanity and man. And as opposed to Yerushalmi,

Neumann claims that this relationship persists not only between religions, but within religions as well, giving the example of the murder of the Pope, who is the Father, by the heathen Luther, in Christianity; and in Judaism, "rebellion of the Son" who is the Hasidic movement, against the paternal position of the rabbinate. One can easily add Absaloms' open rebellion against David, his father, and the Jewish interpretations of the text who recognize a rebellious aspect in Abraham, when he broke his fathers' idols.

The Jungian perspective does not treat the story of Oedipus and the struggle-connection dynamic of the Father-Son-Mother triad, as a solely familial drama (Netzer, 2011, 164), but rather an intra-psychic, archetypal drama, wherein the Son strives to merge anew into the Mother aspects of the psyche, on the one hand, while struggling with the Father-authority aspects of law and value, on the other. These two forces are active in both psyche and society at all times. The various myths, of various cultures, reveal that this relationship is culture-dependent and is not a universal phenomenon as Freud had suggested. Each culture emphasizes the authority of the Father differently, as well as the possibility or necessity of rebellion, differently. Each culture emphasizes a different aspect of the force of attraction of the Mother.

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[i] Only in Pharaoh do we find this Oedipal fear: in the Midrash it is said that Pharaoh was afraid that a Hebrew child will take his place, and that's why he put Moses to the test in trying to discern between two different kinds of flame – a test that was basically meant to annihilate him.

[ii] The Greek philosophy, which developed in parallel to its mythology, was also based upon a masculine-father principle of rational mind, but this philosophy does not require one to be bound to a certain code of ethics spawned from the Law of God.

[iii] For more about fraternal rivalry, instead of Oedipal rivalry, see Feldman, 2007. In the Bible we also find sororal envy, mostly regarding questions of fruition: Rachel, who is barren, envious of her fertile Lea. And yet, we don't find any reference to hostile activity on the part of the envious.