



THE DIVINE STRUGGLE FOR “I” AND “THOU” V:

Self-Consciousness

IN THE LATTER HALF of the second millennium BCE (ca. 1400-1200 BCE), the bicameral mind of humanity began to disappear.¹ As a result, the bicameral kingdoms, led by kings who still heard hallucinatory voices, were seriously threatened. In the Middle East this

threat culminated “about 1180 B.C., [when] there was a major eruption or series of eruptions of the volcano on the island of Thera in the Aegean Sea, about 60 miles north of Crete. The major part of the island was suddenly under 1,000 feet of water; the rest of it was covered with volcanic ash 150 feet deep. A huge tsunami wave, estimated to be 700 feet high and traveling at 350 miles an hour, devastated the whole Aegean basin for miles inland; the events are recorded in legends of the great flood and of the lost city of Atlantis. Whole populations became refugees and there were huge waves of migration and invasion,” which led to the collapse of the bicameral empires.²

In this context the enslaved Habiru (Hebrews) made their exodus from Egypt, crossed the Sea of Reeds, and entered the desert. In the biblical story it was shortly after arriving at Mount Sinai that the voice of God called their leader, Moses (“child of God”), to the mountaintop, conversed with him there for 40 days, and then delivered to him the Tables of Stone and the written Torah (the teaching in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). This document included 613 commandments and has become the religious and cultural foundation for the Hebrews and their descendants for over 3,000 years.

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The Inauguration of Self-Consciousness

Significantly, the “I” of self-consciousness is employed in the Torah nearly 900 times.³ However, in the biblical account the primal usage of “I” occurred at the

foot of Sinai before the Exodus, when Moses encountered the burning bush “[a]nd God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:14). In this event the One-and-Only God inaugurated self-consciousness. Furthermore, in the biblical story this development is made more explicit when God subsequently uttered his voice at the mountain, because contemporary civilizations believed that surviving bicameral voices were uttered only at a mountain, tower, pyramid or ziggurat (“temple tower”).

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It was in this context that God gave the gift of self-consciousness to his people, and particularly to King David, who later used the “I” of self-consciousness repeatedly. It was in David’s own life that “[t]he journey through the wilderness . . . [was] gradually transformed into a journey to the unknown recesses of the self — to ‘the inward parts.’”⁴ For example, the Psalms “are filled with *I*s: the *I* of repentance, the *I* of anger and vengeance, the *I* of self-pity and self-doubt, the *I* of despair, the *I* of delight, the *I* of ecstasy.”⁵

Conclusion

The historic fact is that God replaced the possessive bicameral mind and initiated the self-conscious “I” in and for his Chosen People. The consequences of this gift will next be addressed.

Endnotes

1. See “The Divine Struggle for ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ IV: Possession,” *Outlook* (January 2010).
2. T. Buchan, “Stranger in a Strange Land,” *Zambesia* 8, no. 2 (1980): 153, 154.
3. See the online *Blue Letter Bible* for the occurrence of “I” in the King James Version of the Bible.
4. Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 197.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 199.