

# **Almanac**

## **of psychoanalysis 5**

**Names-of-the-Father  
in Religions and Cultures**

**July 2006**

**The Israeli Group of the New Lacanian School  
of Psychoanalysis N.L.S**

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## THREE NAMES IN THE INEXISTENT SEMINAR

Gil Caroz

In his “Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father”,<sup>1</sup> Lacan distinguishes and ties at the same time, different versions of God. Among these, it might be interesting to isolate three, pinned by Lacan starting from three names given to God.

### The Animal

The first of these versions which we will isolate, is apprehended starting from the name *Elohim*.

*Elohim* designates in the Bible a proper name of the unique God, but we find it there, equally employed as a common name.<sup>2</sup> Originally, *Elohim* was, in effect, a common name. This is the plural form of the word *El* which signifies, in all Semitic languages, “divinity, god”.

Lacan, for himself, designates by the name *Elohim*, the ancestral animal which commemorates the times of creation. Thus, “God of the corner”, to which, following Lacan, it was common practice to sacrifice one’s small child before the birth of monotheism, carries the trace of this ancestral animal. Lacan is referring here to the commentary that Raschi makes regarding the sacrifice of Abraham, designated in the Jewish tradition as the “sacrifice of Isaac”. Following Raschi, indeed, this primordial *Elohim* is represented by the ram sacrificed in the place of Isaac; “the ram was there”, says Rachi, “ready to be sacrificed since the six days of creation”<sup>3</sup> – and not “the seven days” as Lacan says in page 100.

1. LACAN J., *Introduction au Noms-du-Père, Des Noms-du-Père*, (in French) Paris, Seuil, 2005. The quotations in the text which have no reference come from this text. Each time the page is indicated.
2. *The Hebraic Encyclopaedia*, item: El (in Hebrew).
3. *Berechith with the commentary of Rachi*, (in Hebrew and French), Jerusalem, ED. Gallia and Yerid haSefarim, 1998, p. 277.

4. *The biblical Encyclopaedia*, item: El-Shaddai (in Hebrew).
5. LEIBOWITZ Y., *Short biblical lessons*, (in French), Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1995, pp. 89-90.
6. *Berechith with the commentary of Raschi*, p.189.
7. Jacques-Alain Miller commented this point in his lesson "On the nature of semblants", 27 of November 1991 (unpublished).

A second, rests on the Hebrew word *Dai* which means "enough" or "sufficient", "*She-dai*" wishes to say literally "that enough". It is in this sense that Maimonides interprets *El Shaddai*, as the "God who is sufficient to himself", the God of which the essence is found in himself and not in the functions which it fulfills in the world.<sup>5</sup> This commentary sends back to *causa sui*, which constitutes, following Lacan, an absurdity to the degree that "there is no cause but the one following the emergence of desire and that the cause of desire could not in any way be held as equivalent of the antinomic conception of the cause of itself" (p. 77). Raschi, for him, interprets the "enough" of *El Shaddai* in a manner a little bit different and in the following way. *El Shaddai* would mean: "I have enough divine power for all the creatures".<sup>6</sup> This last interpretation maintains the idea, inherent in the Name of *causa sui*, of a "passage without suture" between the universal (all the creatures) and the particular (God).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the idea also suggests the notion of God of which the cause is not of itself, because it implicates a pact with the other, in this case, the creatures. Therefore, this last interpretation seems to better tackle the commentary of Lacan concerning the relation of *El Shaddai* to Abraham, starting

*shadd* signifying "breast";<sup>4</sup>

the family. This interpretation seems to converge with the meaning of the Hebrew word Based on the first, *El Shaddai* makes a reference to an archaic divinity of fertility and of There exist numerous exegetic attempts of this Name. We will uncover two of them.

Lacan apprehends a second version of God, starting from the name *El Shaddai*.

### The Pact

This God animal is equally that which Freud introduces into the scene (met en scene) with the father of the horde and of which he attempts to formulate the myth in his Totem and Taboo, that is, a father of "satisfaction without reins" (p. 87), a first metaphoric nomination of a "pure jouissance" (p. 89) which precedes the advent of the Law.

- 8. Exodus, *Old Testament*, 6, 2.
- 9. Genesis, *Old Testament*, 17, 10.

Let's start anew. There would be, on one side, a version of a father too alive, indulging in jouissance, "animal", that is to say, the "primordial ram" which Lacan named *Elohim*. There would be, on the other side, a version of a father, named *El Shaddai*, which is that

### Equilibrium and disequilibrium

We will recall here the distinction which Lacan makes between Judeo-Christian mysticism, which carries the trace of a God of desire, and other mysticisms which are more of the order of "plunging in the jouissance of God" (p. 90) among others, in the mode of sacrifice. Opposed to this version of God which we call here *Elohim* who sends Abraham to sacrifice, *El Shaddai* represented the one who bites off jouissance in order to open up desire. He uproots Abraham from his milieu and installs circumcision, not as a sacrifice but as a pact. It is in one of the chapters of Genesis, where the name *El Shaddai* appears in the Bible for the first time, that this pact is pronounced: "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised."<sup>9</sup> The cut of this piece of meat, a sign of the pact, introduces the lack inherent in desire.

We notice nevertheless, that the angel of the scene of the sacrifice does not intervene in the name of the *El Shaddai*. He is designated in the text as the "angel of YHVH". He does not prevent; the second verse of chapter 6 of Exodus situates *El Shaddai* as the Name which God gives himself at the time of Abraham: "I appear to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as *El Shaddai*, but my name of YHVH, I did not let them recognize."<sup>8</sup> With this passage as the point of departure, we can approach the angel which intervenes with Abraham and *El Shaddai*, who Lacan describes as being not only the God of desire, but equally that of the miracle, of the promise and of the choice because he intervenes in the birth of Isaac, well after the menopause of Sarah.

from the intervention of the angel in the scene of Sacrifice. In fact, the angel of God comes to stop the practice of sacrifice of the child, and in that sense he is the God of the "saying no", or if you wish, of "saying enough" to jouissance.

10. MILLER J.-A., "On the nature of semblants", 27 of November 1991 (unpublished).

To take a step aside and get out of the balancing between a father too alive and his opposite, the dead father, between these two names of God, *Elohim* and *El Shaddai*, we

### The Hole

This father of the superegoic demand traces thus the limits of the paternal metaphor and of the Name-of-the-Father as having the value of the universal Law. Jacques Alain Miller<sup>10</sup> shows this well: if the jouissance finds itself barred by the paternal metaphor, it is because, by this operation, it finds itself displaced. In other words, if the father comes to partition (barrier) the jouissance of the mother, it is because he takes to his charge/handling the jouissance. This is a way of stating the notorious effect of the murder of the father in Totem and Taboo, that is to say, that it makes the oppressing father even more present.

(p. 90).  
 escape in the face of desire of the father, for which the subject substitutes his demand". transmutation of jouissance of the father into desire does not necessarily engender happiness to the neurotic, because "the neurosis is inseparable, in our eyes, from an generating a certain effect of mortification of desire. Further, he will say that this Besides, we suspect that such equilibrium between the Law and desire is not without should we not ask the question of knowing why it produces more neuroses?" (p. 89). "if this is supposed to give an imprint of the formation of desire in the normal child, puts into question the possibility of this normalizing equilibrium. And, indeed, he says, as a Freudian myth without forgetting that the "myth lies" ("le mythe ment"). Lacan law and desire" (p.89), in other words an Oedipal equilibrium which Lacan also qualifies *Elohim* and *El Shaddai* establish, in fact, an equilibrium: "the equilibrium between the We could stop here and the world would keep turning around. The dialectic between biological origin" and this biological origin is represented by the animal father. remainder. "That which its falling must be provoked, says Lacan on page 101, is the of the pact which separates desire from jouissance" "by a central gap" (p. 80). Separation which is a moment of angst and which implies a cut in the meat and the falling of a

11. SCHOLEM G., "The name of God or the theory of language in mystic Kabala of language", *The name and the symbols of God in the Jewish mystic*, (In French), CERF, 1988, pp. 78-79.

We will remark, in the relation between YHWH, the impronounceable, and the plurality of Names which designate it, a resonance with the pluralization that Lacan makes of the Name of the Father. And let us recall that it is starting from the series of individualized fathers that Lacan considers the father as "naming". Each father in the series of fathers

pronounce therefore a plurality of names in relation to and in place of the impronounceable "Elohim" and very often "Ha-Shem" which signify very simply "The Name". He will of this impronounceable Name, the Jew will pronounce the names "Adonat", sometimes in regards to these heavy significations linked to *Elohim* and to *El Shaddai*. In the place hole in the chain of signifiers and of significations which are linked to it: a hole precisely is not without consequence. In effect, if YHWH is impronounceable, it hollows thus a YHWH is therefore impronounceable. Let us stop for a moment at this particularity that

letters alef, he, vav, yod which figure in the names YHWH and *Ehye*.<sup>11</sup> which is not even written in the Bible; another name which would be composed of the another Name, even more primordial, "the original source of all the other names" and to the point of arguing that YHWH is not only impronounceable, but also that it hides pronounce. It is interesting to note here that certain Kabbalists go further with this, up already open to reading" (p.87), but it possesses a particularity: it is forbidden to particularized name of the God of Israel. Like all proper names, in effect, it "is a mark used as a common name and as a proper name. YHWH, on the contrary, is the very As we have seen, *Elohim* responds in the Bible to a double usage, he is at the same time

3, 14. "I will be what I will be", which we can find in this verse so commented upon of Exodus the root of the Name "*Ehye*", this signifier which returns upon itself, *ehye asher ehye*, never have pronounced it" (p. 91). He is referring to the Name "YHWH", which evokes unique lesson on the Names of the father, when he declares with subtlety: "I would must introduce a third Name of God. Lacan makes an allusion to this third Name in this

12. MILLER J.-A., "On the nature of semblants", 27 of November 1991 (unpublished).
13. LACAN J., "RSI" (lesson of April 8, 1975), (in French), ORNICAR?, N.5, p.54. Vincente Palomera discussed this going through from the father as universal to the particularity of the naming father, during a lecture that he gave in Brussels, on the 14th of January 2006.

Translated by Yoivat Elberbaum and Anette Feld

is naming to the degree that he makes of himself an agent of an act which consists of giving not only his own version of desire, but equally, his modality of "knowing how to do there" (savoir y faire) with jouissance. From that point on, the Names of the series are no longer metaphors, but names "where the father and the jouissance are included together";<sup>12</sup>

This traversal of a unique Name towards the series of Names of the Fathers requires a passage through a hole in the symbolic – and this is to the detriment of the support which one can take on the universal value of One Name. It is in this hole that "anyone" can place his version. Lacan said it better: "The Jews explain well what they call the father: they stick him in the point of a hole that one cannot imagine. I am what I am, that is a hole, no? A hole (...) it engulfs and then there are moments where it spits out. It spits out what? The name, the common name of the father [...]. The incisive (vif) point, is that everything rests on one, on one as a hole, which communicates its consistence to all the others."<sup>13</sup>