

## ADDRESS TO THE SOCIETY OF B'NAI B'RITH - (1941 [1926])

Most honourable Grand President, honourable Presidents, dear Brethren,-

I thank you for the honours you have paid me to-day. You know why it is that you cannot hear the sound of my own voice. You have heard one of my friends and pupils speak of my scientific work; but a judgement on such things is hard to form and for a long while yet it may not be reached with any certainty. Allow me to add something to what has been said by one who is both my friend and the physician who cares for me. I should like to tell you shortly how I became a B.B. and what I have looked for from you.

It happened that in the years from 1895 onwards I was subjected to two powerful impressions which combined to produce the same effect on me. On the one hand, I had gained my first insight into the depths of the life of the human instincts; I had seen some things that were sobering and even, at first, frightening. On the other hand, the announcement of my unpleasing discoveries had as its result the severance of the greater part of my human contacts; I felt as though I were despised and universally shunned. In my loneliness I was seized with a longing to find a circle of picked men of high character who would receive me in a friendly spirit in spite of my temerity. Your society was pointed out to me as the place where such men were to be found.

That you were Jews could only be agreeable to me; for I was myself a Jew, and it had always seemed to me not only unworthy but positively senseless to deny the fact. What bound me to Jewry was (I am ashamed to admit) neither faith nor national pride, for I have always been an unbeliever and was brought up without any religion though not without a respect for what are called the 'ethical' standards of human civilization. Whenever I felt an inclination to national enthusiasm I strove to suppress it as being harmful and wrong, alarmed by the warning examples of the peoples among whom we Jews live. But plenty of other things remained over to make the attraction of Jewry and Jews irresistible - many obscure emotional forces, which were the more powerful the less they could be expressed in words, as well as a clear consciousness of inner identity, the safe privacy of a common mental construction. And beyond this there was a perception that it was to my Jewish nature alone that I owed two characteristics that had become indispensable to me in the difficult course of my life. Because I was a Jew I found myself free from many prejudices which restricted others in the use of their intellect; and as a Jew I was prepared to join the Opposition and to do without agreement with the 'compact majority'.

So it was that I became one of you, took my share in your humanitarian and national interests, gained friends among you and persuaded my own few remaining friends to join our society. There was no question whatever of my convincing you of my new theories; but at a time when no one in Europe listened to me and I still had no disciples even in Vienna, you gave me your kindly attention. You were my first audience.

For some two thirds of the long period that has elapsed since my entry I persisted with you conscientiously, and found refreshment and stimulation in my relations with you. You have been kind enough to-day not to hold it up against me that during the last third of the time I have kept away from you. I was overwhelmed with work, and demands connected with it forced themselves on me; the day ceased to be long enough for me to attend your meetings, and soon my body began to rebel against a late evening meal. Finally came the years of my illness, which prevents me from being with you even to-day.

I cannot tell whether I have been a genuine B.B. in your sense. I am almost inclined to doubt it; so many exceptional circumstances have arisen in my case. But of this I can assure you - that you meant much to me and did much for me during the years in which I belonged to you. I ask you therefore to accept my warmest thanks both for those years and for to-day.

Yours in W. B. & E

Sigm. Freud