

## Appendix A

### Mohammed Atta's Letter

00:33 29Sep2001 RTRS-Text of suspected hijacker document

WASHINGTON, Sept 28 (Reuters)—Here is the complete text of the four-page document found in the luggage of Mohammed Atta, the 33-year-old Egyptian who helped hijack one of the two planes that hit the World Trade Center in New York on Sept. 11. This is a Reuters translation from handwritten Arabic. Portions in square brackets are explanatory additions. Other bracketed portions are bracketed in the original.

#### The Last Night:

1. Making an oath to die and renew your intentions.
  - Shave excess hair from the body and wear cologne.
  - Shower
2. Make sure you know all aspects of the plan well, and expect the response, or a reaction, from the enemy.
3. Read Al-Tawba and Anfal [traditional war chapters from the Holy Koran] and reflect on their meanings and remember all of the things that God has promised for the martyrs.
4. Remind your soul to listen and obey [all divine orders] and remember that you will face decisive situations that might prevent you from 100 percent obedience, so tame your soul, purify it, convince it, make it understand, and incite it. God said: "Obey

God and His Messenger, and do not fight amongst yourselves or else you will fail. And be patient, for God is with the patient.”

5. Pray during the night and be persistent in asking God to give you victory, control and conquest, and that He may make your task easier and protect us.
6. Remember God frequently, and the best way to do it is to read the Holy Koran, according to all scholars, as far as I know. It is enough for us that it [the Koran] is the words of the Creator of the Earth and Heavens, the One that you will meet [on the Day of Judgment].
7. Purify your soul from all blemishes. Completely forget something called “this world” [or “this life”]. The time for play is over and the serious time is upon us. How much time have we wasted in our lives? Shouldn’t we take advantage of these last hours to offer sacrifices and obedience?
8. You should feel complete tranquility, because the time between you and your marriage [in heaven] is very short. Afterward begins the happy life, where God is satisfied with you, and eternal bliss “in the company of the prophets, the companions, the martyrs and the good people, who are the best company.” Ask God for his mercy and be optimistic, because [the Prophet], peace be upon him, used to prefer optimism in all his affairs.
9. Keep in mind that, if you fall into hardship, how will you act and how will you remain steadfast and remember that you will return to God and remember that anything that happens to you could never be avoided, and what did not happen to you could never have happened to you. This test from Almighty God is to raise your station and atone for your sins. And be sure that it is a matter of moments, which will then pass, God willing, so blessed are those who win the great reward of God. Almighty God said: “Did you think you could go to heaven before God knows whom amongst you have fought for Him and are patient?”
10. Remember the words of Almighty God: “You were looking to the battle before you engaged in it, and now you see it with your own two eyes.” Remember: “How many small groups beat big groups by the will of God.” And His words: “If God gives you victory, no

one can beat you. And if He betrays you, who can give you victory without Him? So the faithful put their trust in God.”

11. Remind yourself of the supplications and of your brethren and ponder their meanings. (The morning and evening supplications, and the supplications of [entering] a town, and the [unclear] supplications, and the supplications said before meeting the enemy.
12. Bless your body with some verses of the Koran [done by reading verses into one’s hands and then rubbing the hands over things over whatever is to be blessed], the luggage, clothes, the knife, your personal effects, your ID, your passport, and all of your papers.
13. Check your weapon before you leave and long before you leave. (One of you must sharpen his blade and you must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter).
14. Tighten your clothes well [a reference to one making sure his clothes will cover his private parts at all times], since this is the way of the pious generations after the Prophet. They would tighten their clothes before battle. Tighten your shoes well, wear socks so that your feet will be solidly in your shoes and do not stick out. All of these are worldly things [that humans can do to control their fate, although God decrees what will work and what will won’t] and the rest is left to God, the best One to depend on.
15. Pray the morning prayer in a group and ponder the great rewards of that prayer. Make supplications afterward, and do not leave your apartment unless you have performed ablution before leaving, because (The angels will ask for your forgiveness as long as you are in a state of ablution, and will pray for you). This saying of the Prophet was mentioned by An-Nawawi in his book, *The Best of Supplications*. Read the words of God: “Did you think that We created you for no reason” from the Al-Mu’minun Chapter.

### The Second Step:

When the taxi takes you to (M) [this initial could stand for *matar*, “airport” in Arabic] remember God constantly while in the car. (Remember the supplication for entering a car, for entering a town, the supplication of place and other supplications).

When you have reached (M) and have left the taxi, say a supplication of place ["Oh Lord, I ask you for the best of this place, and ask you to protect me from its evils"], and everywhere you go say that prayer and smile and be calm, for God is with the believers. And the angels protect you without you feeling anything. Say this supplication: "God is more dear than all of His creation." And say: "Oh Lord, protect me from them as You wish." And say: "Oh Lord, take your anger out on them [the enemy] and we ask You to protect us from their evils." And say: "Oh Lord, block their vision from in front of them, so that they may not see." And say: "God is all we need, He is the best to rely upon." Remember God's words: "Those to whom the people said, 'The people have gathered to get you, so fear them,' but that only increased their faith and they said, God is all we need, He is the best to rely upon." After you say that, you will find [unclear] as God promised this to his servants who say this supplication:

1. They will come back [from battle] with God's blessings.
2. They were not harmed.
3. And God was satisfied with them.

God says: "They came back with God's blessings, they were not harmed, and God was satisfied with them, and God is ever-blessing."

All of their equipment and gates and technology will not prevent, nor harm, except by God's will. The believers do not fear such things. The only ones that fear it are the allies of Satan, who are the brothers of the devil. They have become their allies, God save us, for fear is a great form of worship, and the only one worthy of it is God. He is the only one who deserves it. He said in the verses: "This is only the Devil scaring his allies" who are fascinated with Western civilization, and have drunk the love [of the West] like they drink water [unclear] and have become afraid of their weak equipment "so fear them not, and fear Me, if you are believers."

Fear is a great worship. The allies of God do not offer such worship except for the one God, who controls everything. [unclear] with total certainty that God will weaken the schemes of the non-believers. God said: "God will weaken the schemes of the non-believers."

You must remember your brothers with all respect [?]. No one should notice that you are making the supplication, "There is no God but God," because if you say it 1,000 times no one will be able to tell whether you are quiet or remember God. And among its miracles is what the Prophet,

peace be upon him, said: ("Whoever says, 'There is no God but God,' with all his heart, goes to heaven." The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: ("If you put all the worlds and universes on one side of the balance, and 'No God but God' on the other, 'No God but God' will weigh more heavily." You can repeat these words confidently, and this is just one of the strengths of these words. Whoever thinks deeply about these words will find that they have no dots [in the Arabic letter] and this is just one of its greatnesses, for words that have dots in them carry less weight than those that do not. And it is enough that these are the words of monotheism, which will make you steadfast in battle [unclear] as the prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions, and those who came after them, God willing, until the Day of Judgment.

Also, do not seem confused or show signs of nervous tension. Be happy, optimistic calm because you are heading for a deed that God loves and will accept [as a good deed]. It will be the day, God willing, you spend with the women of paradise.

Smile in the face of hardship, young man/For you are heading toward eternal paradise.

You must remember to make supplications wherever you go, and anytime you do anything, and God is with his faithful servants, He will protect them and make their tasks easier, and give them success and control, and victory, and everything.

not express a politics, but a metaphysics, a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history through ever-escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil."<sup>64</sup>

This absolutist, all-or-nothing stance of religious struggles, an attitude that is not interested in the adjudication of differences or in presenting demands that can be answered in negotiation with enemies, strives to achieve the dominion of one faith over all of mankind. Such an attitude insists on imposing the emotional and cognitive beliefs, the deep-seated existential mode of religious subjection, on the entire world. It not only denies the right of the other to have opposing or even different beliefs; it denies the right of those who hold such beliefs to exist at all.<sup>65</sup> Pragmatism, compromise, negotiation, weighing and averaging, giving and taking, play no role in this project, and media communication and propaganda serve merely to aid and accelerate the anticipated redemption of the world through Islam. At the same time, while the televised broadcasts of al-Qaeda leaders comprise religious enunciations to the world, their insider speech seems to address their believers who are increasingly deterritorialized and globalized, fortifying their faith and resolve for action. Whatever the audience, these messages often seem to function like enunciatory acts for the imminent reign of the deity, thereby testifying to the eschatological sources of the terrorist program. This inexorable, all-or-nothing stance mimics the absoluteness of death, and death in various modes of resolution features largely in the killings committed by this movement, and will be discussed in this book in various places, but particularly in Chapters 2 and 3.

Violent acts of sacralized murder, "death, evil, sacrifice, or the sublime," in the words of Terry Eagleton mentioned earlier, slowly begin to enter our discourse. I realize this on rereading, now in 2009, some of the lines I wrote here immediately after September 11. Yet we are still groping, years after this event, to grasp this particular convergence of political militancy and submissive piety, a piety whose psychological roots will be discussed in Chapter 4, whereas its ethical structure will be explored in the last chapter of this book.

## §I Evil as Love and as Liberation

### *The Mind of a Suicidal Religious Terrorist*

The letter to the hijackers that was found in Mohammed Atta's luggage in the car that was left at Logan Airport before the World Trade Center attack is a striking document.<sup>1</sup> A highly revelatory testimony, it may provide us with some understanding of how the mind of a suicide killer works. As psychoanalysis, indeed society, faces the emergence of new kinds of mass-destructive attacks on human beings, we must seek whatever additional knowledge we can about the states of mind that are conducive to such attacks. In particular, I believe, we should try to comprehend the mentality behind intensely religious self-sacrifice. We need to learn more about the psychodynamic issues involved in a decision that caused (and may go on causing) horrible suffering and grief to masses of people. We need to inquire what are the themes linked with and explanatory of this kind of evil.

In their anthology of studies by religious theorists and political scientists who authenticated and translated the letter from the Arabic, Hans Kippenberg and Tilman Seidenstricker describe the letter as a collection of rituals. The purpose of the letter and the mandated rituals, in their view, was to transform a young Muslim into a warrior, instilling spiritual motives that create inner peace, fearlessness, obedience, and lack of feeling during the killing.<sup>2</sup> But the letter is more than a document tracing the initiation and transformation of a man into a warrior. Had it only been a means of contacting and fortifying the minds of terrorists about to commit an act of mass destruction, we would expect such a document to be filled with a raging rhetoric of hate, a cry to destruction and annihilation. Instead, we hear a voice that reassures, calms, calls for restraint

and thoughtful control, and appeals for a heightened consciousness in its readers. One might say that this is the voice of a wise father, instructing his sons in the steps they are to take on a mission of great importance, and reminding them of the attitude suited to accomplishing that mission. The letter calls for the terrorists to wash and perfume their bodies; to clean and to polish their knives; to be serene, confident, patient, and smiling; and to remember and renew their intentions. It reminds them that the task before them demands their attentiveness and, even more, their devoted adherence to God.

The letter frequently mentions love of God and God's satisfaction with the act to be accomplished. Essentially, it details some things that have to be done in order for the terrorists to gain entry into God's eternal paradise. We know that these acts involve the murder of human beings, those who are considered the enemies of God, as well as the self-annihilation of the terrorists themselves, who are going to be tools for the elimination of other humans. But the letter does not spell this out. While doing the work of killing and destruction, the doer, God's faithful servant, must remember to make supplications to God wherever he finds himself and whatever he does. Basically, the letter describes a ritual at the end of which the supplicant is to receive God's approval by doing what pleases God—purifying the world of contaminating infidels. Again, this is not mentioned in the letter. What is indeed stressed is that, if one is to merge with God, the most elevated Being human thought can envision, one has to perform the act accurately and mindfully.

How can we explain the tone of the letter? Can it teach us something about the state of mind in which the terrorists were steeped, either by themselves or by others (by special "training," including the formulating and reading of the letter we are studying)? What is the mental atmosphere of anticipating and preparing for such a destruction of other and self? What is the place and role of a smiling, calm, confident state of mind with which one passes from life into death, a state of mind so diametrically inverse to the turmoil, terror, and rage that would be the expected accompaniments to committing such destruction?

### The Son's Supplicating Love for the Father

I have always been deeply impressed by the intimate, loving discourse a believer holds with God while praying and supplicating. Particularly

poignant to me is the theme of a son praying to his God-father. One can practically hear the sweet plaintive murmur of the Psalmist, "My God, so numerous became those who hunt me, so many are those who stand over me, who say to my soul, you have no redemption in God, and You, my God, giveth back to me my breath and saveth me with Thy love."<sup>3</sup> And one is riveted not only by the music but also by the lyrics of Jesus Christ's love songs to God in Bach's *Passion According to St. Matthew*, "Dein Mund hat mich gelabet mit Milch und süßer Kost" (Your mouth has fed and replenished me with milk and the sweetest nourishment). Both the psalm and St. Matthew are profound works of great beauty and inspiration, where joy and pain intertwine.

The letter to the terrorists does not speak of hatred. It is past hatred. Absurdly and perversely, it is about love. It is about love of God. We can palpably sense the confident intimacy of a son close to his father and the seeking of a love that is given as promised and no longer withheld. If this feeling is sustained inside one, it does not have to be demonstrated externally. The letter is a reminder: "Everywhere you go say that prayer and smile and be calm, for God is with the believers. And the angels protect you without you feeling anything"; and, "You should feel complete tranquility, because the time between you and your marriage [in heaven] is very short." Inasmuch as nothing further is said about that marriage, and particularly whom one will marry (the famous paradisiacal virgins are not mentioned at this point), the idea that the marriage is that of the son(s) to God does not sound absurd at all.<sup>4</sup>

The thought that there might be a root affinity between the theme of a son's love for his divine father and the underlying theme of the letter feels quite unpleasant. Do these motifs of religious devotion and intimate communion and of using "God" to inflict mass killing and destruction spring from the same psychic source? And do they bear on the image of the father as the one who opens windows to the outer world, and who offers—to his daughter as well as to his son—liberation from domesticity and the mother's absolute power? Is there any similarity between the father of freedom and creativity and the father who loves those who kill his enemies and chooses those killers as his accepted sons? In both cases, the "father" not only dispenses empowerment and inspiration, he also imparts a sense of joy and fulfillment, the joy of deliverance from a too-enclosing life and the opportunity to identify with ideals. Jessica Benjamin's words thus acquire an added resonance: "Identificatory love is the

relational context in which, for males, separation and gender identification occur. The strong mutual attraction between father and son allows for recognition through identification, a special erotic relationship. . . . The boy is in love with his ideal. This homoerotic, identificatory love serves as the boy's vehicle of establishing masculine identity and confirming his sense of himself as subject of desire."<sup>5</sup>

What we have here however, is identificatory love that goes awry and is amplified and perverted by divine aloofness and difference. The state of ecstasy that comes with doing God's will and the rapture of merging with Him is known to be a joyous experience. "Those who dismiss 'evil cults' have no idea how rapturous this state can be and how no other pleasure can compare with it," said a disciple in Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's community, when describing "true bliss and abundant joy."<sup>6</sup> William James called the ecstasy found in doing God's will the "joy which may result . . . from absolute self-surrender."<sup>7</sup> Such a religious experience of transcendence bathes one in a sense of truth that is absolutely convincing and sublime. And it usually involves both a disciple and a guide in "the ecstatic merger of leader and follower."<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the shadow of an anonymous guide and leader who issues loving paternal injunctions falls upon the letter and is part of the liminal state of transcendence we are dealing with here. Being immersed in such an altered state of attention and receptivity engenders a sense of profound psychic unity and ineffable illumination. Such a state can be so intense and all-encompassing that it makes time and death disappear. Human beings have always sought such states, often through religious or secular mysticism, with the help of cultural rites, drugs, oxygen deficit (through rapid breathing), sleep deprivation, or some other form of an imposed ordeal. These states may also be experienced in such familiar activities as song, dance, sexual love, childbirth, aesthetic effort, mechanical flight, artistic and intellectual creation—and going to war. We know that in such states the self feels uniquely alive, integrated, and in touch with larger, cosmic forces. We also know that one who creates rituals for manufacturing experiences of transcendence can thereby create a bond that allows group-sanctioned action, including violence and even murder, to be committed with ease and even joy.

Such a smooth passage from life to death obscurely connects in our minds with a mutation, a sweetening of dying, either by loss of self or by "well-intentioned" killing, in a sickening marriage of love and murder (a

combination we read about in the reports of some serial killers and murderers). When such a state of mind prevails, love can smoothly glide into murder. We are faced with a most hateful action that is performed in a spirit of devotion, a kind of beatitude that culminates in literally killing, not only others but also the self. Obviously, this is not the misfortune of being killed during a battle, or an outburst of murderous rage. Neither is it the choice a martyr makes to sacrifice his life when being assaulted by heathen torturers.<sup>9</sup> What we have here is martyrdom that is murderous; militancy that is sacralized; a symbiotic, simultaneous killing and dying, where approaching intimacy with God the Father requires becoming one with one's victims, "marrying" them in death and destruction. The language of the letter belies explanations for the terrorist acts as secular political actions, pointing to a transcendent mystical experience of a special nature. This mystical experience, I suggest, hosts *the transformation of self-hatred and envy into love of God*, a Love-of-God that promotes the obliteration of those parts of the self that are antagonistic to the sense of compulsory purity.

Robert Jay Lifton, in his illuminating study of what he calls "death imagery," talks about universal symbols of pollution and defilement as signifying being contaminated and soiled with "death-taint and total severance." Purity, on the other hand, signifies "life-continuity and unbroken connection." The process of purification would then represent the transformation from death to life.<sup>10</sup> In the cases where purification means killing—paradoxically, by purifying the defiling elements so as to wrest life out of death—one arrives at death once again (I talk about these phenomena at greater length in the next chapter). The detachment from and contempt for human life displayed by the terrorists, coupled with a fervent, extreme love for God, is substantially different from the "love" many a serial killer has professed feeling for his victim(s). Serial killers speak about their inchoate longing to enter the other, particularly the other's body, even (or especially) after the victim's death.<sup>11</sup> Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the Hamas leader who inspired the momentum of the suicide bombers against Israel, seems to articulate the difference between the serial killer and the suicide bomber: "Love of martyrdom is something deep inside the heart. But these rewards are not in themselves the goal of the martyr. *The only aim is to win Allah's satisfaction.* That can be done in the simplest and speediest manner by dying in the cause of Allah."<sup>12</sup>

### The Father, Hypermasculinity, and the Disappearing Woman

Let us consider again the transformation of (self-) hatred into love of God. We know from the press that Mohammed Atta had an overbearing, self-confident, successful, moderately religious father, who, on being told what his son had been involved with, expressed disbelief at the idea that his son, whom he used to scorn for not being manly enough, could execute such an act.<sup>13</sup> People who knew him, the press tells us, say that Atta was painfully shy with women. We read in his will, written in 1996, that he requests that no pregnant woman or other unclean person should approach his body, and that his genitalia be washed with gloved hands. In the years leading to the attack, taciturn, humorless, introverted Mohammed Atta had become increasingly pious and austere, frequenting Hamburg's Big Mosque. He was, witnesses tell us, a dour presence in school and in the house of his German hosts.<sup>14</sup> Atta, who was often repulsed by people's small pleasures, was also harsh and demanding toward himself in matters of religious observance, with no smile to lighten his sullen face. In particular, everything having to do with the sexual body was felt by him to be defiled and therefore untouchable.

One afternoon I found myself in a massive mujahideen demonstration in Trafalgar Square in London in November 2000, where a young British convert to Islam was holding a speech. The argument this man employed to explain why he had converted to Islam and joined the mujahideen had to do, as I had anticipated, with sexuality. He stridently lashed out at the rottenness of Western society, a society "poisoned by homosexuality, adultery, fornication, sexual license." He was screaming, with rage and fear, that sexual sinning must come to an end for it destroys the world. The new light he was seeing, the Truth he found in Islam, he said, helped him find a remedy to the sexual ills of British society. His discourse, centered on sexuality, was antisexual, antiheterosexual, and manifestly antihomosexual. As Catherine Liu put it: "Mohammed Atta's phobic reaction to sexually integrated society is a symptom of his being both inside and outside of secular modernity. It is his negation and wish to annihilate this complex configuration that becomes the measure of absolute violence. . . . Atta's murderous mindset has everything to do with contempt for women. The cult of purity is maintained psychically at the expense of real women."<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, women do not exist in this "masculine" letter (even the famous virgins are mentioned here in one auxiliary phrase that speaks of their

waiting for the heroes in their beautiful clothes, hardly a very sexual or intimate description). The culture of hypermasculinity and the ideal of warriors who purify the world of contaminants (whom bin Laden contemptuously equates with women), absolve these men of the need to articulate the desirability and potential power of women.<sup>16</sup> If there is no acknowledged emotional need for woman, there is no dependency and no envy.<sup>17</sup> There is only a liberation from the primordial fear of being tempted to lean on a woman and thereby become softened, engulfed, and emasculated. Modern, strong women typify a world out of order and threaten the sexual security of these men. The banishment of women reinforces the pervasive homoerotic grouping among Islamic extremists, where the desired loss of individuation that is feared with women is given free reign and finds its place in a devout submission to God. This shift (from women to homoerotic bonding around an idealized male divinity) marks a specific regressive-transcendent trajectory that is altogether different than falling into an engulfing maternal womb. The frightful sliding "down" toward the feminine and maternal can be replaced—or even, shall we say, superseded—by an ecstatic soaring "upward," toward the heavenly Father, who is imagined to be waiting there to redeem his sons' troubled souls and sweep away the doubts of their former selves. It seems as if the primitive father of Freud's primal horde has been resuscitated or, better, is still alive, and has come to embrace his sons—provided they unite against "woman," that is, against the feminine principle of pleasure and softness (found both in Islamic women and in Western society, which is seen as feminized). Instead of rebelling against the oppressive Father and against the frenzied death the Father demands, there is a giving up of oneself to Him, a total submission.<sup>18</sup>

### The Letter: A Second Look

In our first attempt to apprehend the atmosphere of the letter we came upon a generalized mood of loving reverence of God and an overarching desire to unite with Him (in prayer, in the right action while living one's last hours of life, and in concrete union with Him in paradise). In our second look at the letter, we search for the particulars. We observe that the letter is a blend of precise technical details and meticulous preparations (although clearly the detailed planning was made and learned earlier and at this stage is assumed to have been mastered and internalized).

The technical preparations were meant to be coupled with spiritual rituals, on which the letter adds repeated reassurances and promises. The text seems to be a last-minute message, a reminder to fortify the spirit and to rehearse once again the sequence of the religious acts that have to be performed at each stage, from the night before the attack until the moments of taking over the plane and its passengers. Thus we find interwoven a sacred ritual of self-consecration and of preparation of the body, formulated with an air of festivity and grave devotion; itemized details alternate with metaphysical language, in turn followed by still more particulars. The small details (e.g., how to wear one's shoes, how to tighten one's clothes) are far from being mere behavioral indications: they are all taken from ancient laws and are heavily laden with religious significance.<sup>19</sup> Most important, the addressees of the letter (always referred to in the plural, as a group of brotherly peers) are constantly reminded of a very special kind of *knowledge* they possess, exclusively and omnipotently; they are called upon to renew their "intention" and to elevate their spirits and minds to a higher plane.<sup>20</sup>

We have noted the conspicuous absence in the letter of hateful expressions or of any overt rage and violence; on the contrary, it contains expectant, even loving, imagery. Gradually, however, we become aware of a different state of mind, one that is not merely a joyous mood suffused with the desire to affiliate with God. We realize that, by their being told to pray incessantly, to occupy their minds with repetitive mantras of the One and Only God, and inwardly to articulate thousands of supplications to Him, the terrorists must be transported into a state of self-hypnosis and merger, a continuous trance, an intense, depersonalized relating to the godly object. They are immersed in a state of total alienation from the outer world, which has become a "thing," as the letter commands: "Completely forget something called 'this world' [or 'this life']." This state metamorphoses the passage from life to death, normally experienced as fatefully final and irrevocable, into a smooth, weightless step, as if one were passing from one train car to another, from one room to the next. The felt shift in the sense of death is both frightening and exhilarating. Death, the irreversible cessation of one's life, the ultimate dark unknown that inspires in us horror (or a peaceful or not-so-peaceful withdrawal into ourselves, occasionally coupled with a sense of continuity with living humanity), ceases to be death. It becomes a smooth, weightless passing over a threshold toward the light.

The words that describe this transition into the "real (immortal) life" in God's paradisiacal lap convey the heady, intoxicating taste of omnipotence. Assuring the terrorists that it is only a matter of moments and of some actions that remain to be done, the letter entreats them: "The time for play is over and the serious time is upon us," indicating that real existence is yet to come; the group has almost reached it.<sup>21</sup> A powerful sense of fraternal communion adds to the joyous radiance of the impending event. The writer rhetorically asks, "Shouldn't we take advantage of these last hours to offer sacrifices and obedience?"<sup>22</sup> As the approaching future is visualized, there is a crescendo of hope, an opening toward rebirth: "because the time between you and your marriage [in heaven] is very short. Afterward begins the happy life, where God is satisfied with you, and eternal bliss." The passage between inferior, wasteful life and the desired "real life" is described as nearly *painless*: "And be sure that it is a matter of moments, which will then pass, God willing, so blessed are those who win the great reward of God." The passage between the two lives is *fearless* as well, for "the believers do not fear such things [as "their (the enemy's) equipment and gates and technology"]. It is only "the others" ("the allies of Satan") who experience fear. Painless and fearless, the passage between life and death is a fusion, a serene *Liebestod* (love-death)—and *Liebemord* (love-murder).

## Fear

*Fear* is conspicuously absent yet ubiquitously present in this letter. Fear is almost nonexistent in the state of mind described here, or, should we say, there is no visible anxiety (the terrorists' high performance level demonstrated in the use of planes and people (the passengers and the crew of the plane) in New York City and Washington, D.C., is obvious proof of that). The dynamics here form a process whereby all *anxieties*—past and present, and even those anticipating a realistically difficult future—all transmute into a *fear*, which is then narrowly directed toward God.<sup>23</sup> Such a process would have affinity with the paranoid process, in that anxiety, a more vague, complex, subjective affect, is exteriorized and simplified into concrete fear. Fear is a simpler affect that has a clear object, which is often magnified; it is a primitive reaction designed to ensure survival, but it can be most weakening and humiliating. The emancipation from fear and humiliation that have been transmuted into the fear of God



can be tremendously liberating and empowering. Fearing a person means paying a kind of tribute to him that is humiliating, since it is an avowal of that person's power over the person fearing him. As the Quakers say, to fear a human is degrading. This important point is picked up in the text: Fear "is a great form of worship, and the only one worthy of it is God. He is the only one who deserves it." Fearlessness, while maintaining fear of God, can be attained through the feeling that humans are small and contemptible. Their smallness makes them not worthy of being feared. The possibility that one can achieve liberation from anxiety by transforming it into a unitary, homogenizing fear of God is translated in the religious-terrorist discourse into the notion that fear should not be wasted on trivial mundane matters. Elevated to a momentous role, fear creates a categorical difference in a person between himself as the one who fears and the one whom he fears, between those who fear and those who are feared.<sup>24</sup> Fear and idolization are not too far from each other, and fear becomes a form of worship.<sup>25</sup>

By instilling fear and terror in their enemies, the terrorists diminish them and strive to turn them into their own (the terrorists') potential worshipers, in a way analogous to how the terrorists themselves worship God. Feelings of helplessness and confusion—about the grisly act they are about to commit, about the identity they have chosen, all superimposed on fears from the earlier phase of their lives when they had presumably attempted to assimilate the "fearless," godless modern world—have been submerged. Under the auspices of a loved-feared God, any pang of conscience disappears.<sup>26</sup> A corrupt, disdainful, persecutory superego has been instantiated in the image of "the only God."<sup>27</sup> Projecting upon the figure of God their own corrupted (defeated and resurrected) wills, the terrorists acquire absolution from all moral constraints as well as permission to destroy human lives and to launch terror in the lives of those they do not destroy. As Robert Lifton says, "The sense of transcendence and infinity can be pursued all too easily by means of murder and terror, no less than by love and creative work."<sup>28</sup>

The act of legitimizing and condoning butchery by constructing a particular God, a feared and loved Father who does not command "Thou shalt not kill," who does not say "no" to dissoluteness and crime, who has (in Lacan's language) become the imaginary father,<sup>29</sup> has to be complemented by considering a large number of human beings as nonhuman. Before exploring this subject, however, let us first elaborate on the altered

state of mind in which mesmerized fear is offered to God. We have mentioned the conspicuous element of body management and care in the letter. We know that harsh ascetic practices heighten religious (or political or sexual) fervor.<sup>30</sup> The letter speaks of the making the body into a clean, shaven, perfumed, aestheticized instrument that moves in a world whose immediate and human significance has become remote and inaudible through the terrorists' incessant incantations and repetitive bisyllables.

### Psychic Numbing

Being immersed in a state of intense focus on God in word and thought, not ceasing to attend to His presence for one minute, sustaining a kind of numbed, awed adhesion, yet at the same time functioning with extraordinary vigilance and competence, may be likened to cold, psychotic paranoia at its height. The subject adheres to the idealized persecutory inner object, while the world, having become insignificant and contemptible, vanishes into derealization. We tend to stress the persecuted, self-referential, hostility-imputing quality of experience in paranoia, but we often forget another dimension that marks this state of mind: solemn reverence and grandiose adoration. Kohut apparently spoke about such a state of mind. Regarding it as a way station in the regression toward psychosis, he wrote about "disjointed mystical religious feelings; vague awe."<sup>31</sup>

The severance of the outer world from human meaning, made possible by a persistently cultivated contempt for that world (the descriptions of Atta's facial expression, body posture and emotional stance toward his hosts and costudents in Hamburg illustrate this well). Such contempt enables terrorists both to focus on monitoring the instrumental tasks at hand and to remain immersed in an intensely religious state of mind, which by its acuteness screens out all undesirable affects and thoughts. According to Lifton, it is "a numbing process . . . similar to that cultivated among Japanese soldiers during WWII in serving the Emperor," as well as among the Nazis, for whom "the soldier was to steel his mind against all compunctions or feelings of compassion, to achieve . . . a version of the 'diamond mind' that contributes both to fanatical fighting and to grotesque acts of atrocity."<sup>32</sup> In addition to its capacity to enhance functioning, a mesmerized, mechanized mind likely feeds on hatred turned into dismissive contempt. It uses the power of contempt to chill any heated feeling, any affiliative, compassionate emotion. But for religious terrorists

the mental process does not stop there. Another phase is ushered in when the loathing and despising, the building blocks of contempt, are transformed into a state of enthrallment and deep, total love for the superior divine power. The intriguing process whereby contempt becomes love and adoration challenges us to try to imagine the nature of such love.

The all-or-nothing nature of this love led Karl Abraham to call it "pre-ambivalent," and to place it in a pre-Oedipal stage of development.<sup>33</sup> We also get the sense that such love, rather than expressing itself on an "horizontal" axis of an imagined affiliation (compassion, nurturance, attachment, etc.), is located on the "vertical" axis of total self-(un)worth, superiority, and inferiority, which spans affects such as shame, humiliation, degradation, pity, awe, and veneration. A first step in understanding this affective grammar is to consider the blend of contempt and "love" found in the most blood-curdling phrase in the letter: "*you must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter.*" This phrase is well beyond anger or hatred. It is the utmost in disparagement. What is it that is transformed into the magnanimous pity for animals, creatures that live and breathe but are devoid of a human soul and mind? Is it the basic human sense of solidarity, or is it contempt? One has some duty toward one's animals (the expression "your animals" resonates with an image of wild, lustful predators, which have been tamed and brought under one's control over life and death, but also with that of the sacrificial animal).<sup>34</sup> By having mercy on one's animals, one is imitating God, who rules over life and death and who takes pity on His creatures. One's moral righteousness is set in place. Although one's animals are one's possession, one's "nobleness" and "morality" will not let him hurt his animals unnecessarily, even at the moment they need to be slaughtered.

### Concerning the Theme of Evil

Sitting at a window in a New York City restaurant a few days after 9/11, watching the human faces passing by, I found my mind straining to reconcile two opposing and impossibly jarring attitudes. We all seem to hold a basic assumption that these are faces of human beings, who, in the most taken-for-granted and unquestioning manner, command our respect, and who, we feel, though we are not aware of it all the time, are intrinsically dignified, even sacred. How can we put in this same place the sustained striving of the terrorists to erase and wreck these faces, to annihilate the

bodies that carry them? I found myself making a huge mental effort to move from our deeply inculcated view of humans as absolute entities to the view of humans as tissues to be squashed. It is the latter view, I realized, that is absolutely necessary to reach the state where all sense of crime, sin, and evil is eliminated.

How does one legitimate hypercriminal behavior? How does one make the passage from the abhorrence to killing human life to the experience of killing as good and noble and therefore sanctified? Apparently a tremendously subversive process is at work, a process that culminates in a radically altered perception of human beings, who must be made to seem other than how they are normally perceived. As Paul Oppenheimer writes, the eyes of the evildoers and their followers must be "taught to see the ordinary as freakish and [subsequently] to consider the freakish as horrible and as worthy of extermination as insects and diseases. Any sort of violence . . . becomes intelligible and necessary when dealing with creatures, formerly considered human, who are suddenly shown to be poisonous."<sup>35</sup>

When we listen to the explanations of such authors as Roy Baumeister,<sup>36</sup> who speaks of evil as being the result of an incremental accumulation of pressures, rewards, the need for acceptance, and the process of losing one's identity to the group, we recognize that certain configurations of social, political, historical, and group circumstances indeed promote this kind of experience. Yet what interests us here is a particular register, to wit, the *psychic* process that builds a perverse killer-discourse, the discourse of evil that transgresses human bonding, self-existence, and death at the same moment. In a way, it can be described as the passage from the human to the superhuman. To experience humans as small dots, so to speak, to be cleaned from one's windshield, and thus to be gratified of having done the right thing can easily be visualized as the view from God's eye, to paraphrase Thomas Nagel. As must be clear by now, we are specifically interested in the process that leads from the human to the "superhuman."

In particular, I believe, we should try to get in touch with the experience of authentically accomplishing the highly religious task of sacrifice of the other and of oneself. It seems plausible to assume that Islamist terrorist acts are authentically religious;<sup>37</sup> they are performed with faith in the sanctity and rightness of the acts, even if other factors, such as social pressures and incentives and particular historical and cultural circumstances,

play their role too. What psychodynamic issues are involved in a decision that caused, and in all probability will go on causing,<sup>38</sup> horrible suffering and grief to masses of people? We need to inquire about the themes that are linked with, and explanatory of, this kind of evil. Obviously, the present analysis in no way implies that evil is found only within Islamic fundamentalism, or even only within religious fundamentalism in general. Michel Foucault and Hanna Arendt, among others, have written illuminatingly about the nonpersonalized, noncentralized, and banal aspects of power (Foucault) or of evil (Arendt). Innumerable politico-economic situations and decisions of the West should be considered evil. Giving priority to economic and antiecollogical considerations over human lives and well-being, as well as environmental considerations, or using a military situation or religious narratives to oppress another people, are forms of evil, examples of which abound.

The term *evil* has been minimally dealt with in the psychoanalytic literature because of a justified wariness of using terms whose provenance is theology, terms that lend themselves to the reification and hypostatization of their *designatum*, such as seeing evil as a power incarnated in nature, Satan, or the Devil. Worse, such terms may be said, in addition, to lend themselves to the demonization of human beings whose psyches are the same as ours. Hence, by talking about human beings as evil, it is argued, we do to them precisely what they are doing to us. Most of us, I believe, would see evil as not existing in itself, but rather as a sequel to a multitude of factors, a process that is most often gradual, and that, in addition, requires complex judgments about the meaning of human acts. "Evil" may sound too allegorical or too concrete, too essentialist or too objective, too impassioned or too intimidating for psychoanalytic ways of thinking, which are oriented toward the study of individual subjectivity.

A case in point is Melanie Klein, a profound thinker on destructiveness, envy, hate, and violent impulses, who nevertheless does not use the term *evil* in her writings. Klein famously uses the term the *bad object* or *bad objects* to designate inner presences or presences in the psyche that are the result of the internalization of experiences with real others that have been colored by fantasy and inner structures. A bad object notably should not be confused with a human being, since it denotes an internalized figure, or rather, the subjective cluster of experiences and beliefs created out of certain affects lived in fantasized relations with an other.<sup>39</sup> The bad object is a cluster that is crystallized out of bad experiences and

serves as a carrier and evoker of experiences of frustration, abandonment, persecution, or the projection of violent affect. The bad object is a human representation that is subjectively (and internally) experienced as "bad" but that objectively may not be bad at all. More precisely, it may not have intentionally done anything bad to the person who harbors it. When this event then plays itself out on the outside, between people, the ability to perceive the other as a whole object may be compromised, and the other becomes a "part object," a representation of a person that is distorted and compressed into a truncated, simplified part of a whole and complex representation of a human being. Seeing a person as wholly good or wholly evil, vilified or idealized, means slicing him or her into a wholly good and/or wholly bad part and ignoring the other parts that make for the complexity and ambiguity of a live human being with a subjecthood of his or her own.

The Kleinian notion of the bad object is individual and subjectivistic, whereas evil is, by definition, something objectively bad and blameworthy that has been perpetrated on another person (occasionally on one's own self). In contrast to the subjective experience of the bad object, only an objectified judgment can designate an act as evil. Judging acts as evil from an external vantage point parallels the repeated observation that, for the most part, evildoers do not themselves consider their acts to be evil but rather necessary; occasionally, they even feel they do what they do for the good of their victims, or for the glory of God, Nation, or Party.<sup>40</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that very few psychoanalysts have addressed the subject of evil. Fewer—in fact next to none—have written on the conjunction of religiosity and evil. Among the first group, two authors stand out: Christopher Bollas and Sue Grand. Bollas writes penetratingly about the serial killer as a "killed self," a child who has been robbed of the continuity of his being by abusive or murderously abandoning parents. This person goes on "living" "by transforming other selves into similarly killed ones, establishing a companionship of the dead."<sup>41</sup> Bollas also distinguishes between the passionate murderer who is driven by rage and the murderer who "lacks a logical emotional link to and is [emotionally, not necessarily physically] removed from his victim."<sup>42</sup> Sue Grand writes about traumatic experiences, which, for the perpetrator, are acts of "rape, incest, childhood beatings" that are often committed by close family members.<sup>43</sup> The evildoer here is a survivor of unspeakable trauma that has resulted in unformulated, incommunicable loneliness. Deadness

and vacuity have become the defining characteristics of the perpetrator's identity, and evil is "an attempt to answer the riddle of catastrophic loneliness."<sup>44</sup> Grand speaks of a vacuous no-self that is so derelict as to drain both perpetrator and bystander from the desire or the illusion of "understanding" the "no-self"; on the contrary, "the no-self is in the presence of others who confirm the truth of catastrophic loneliness, even as these others do not know this loneliness."<sup>45</sup> Evil for Grand is thus an opportunity to be in the only context that makes it "possible to achieve radical contact with another at the pinnacle of loneliness and at the precipice of death."<sup>46</sup>

Both Bollas and Grand have given us illuminating studies of evil, evil done by one human being to another, but the species of evil that is committed specifically in the name of religion has not received attention in psychoanalysis. Evil can be perpetrated with passion or with detachment, in the privacy of a twosome or in a group; evil can be done for self-serving purposes or out of belief in an ideal. Evil done for idealistic purposes (including nationalism, social utopias, and other not necessarily religious idealism), I will later suggest, possesses a dynamic of its own. It is time psychoanalysts began reflecting on the phenomenon of evil that is committed in the name of idealism and specifically in the name of religion, and ponder the context for organized acts of terror executed by groups mostly of men in the name of God. At this point I am addressing the affective transformations that enable one to do evil specifically out of love for an idealized object, deferring a more general analysis of evil to Chapter 3.

Thinking about evil requires a tremendous effort of the imagination and a willingness to incorporate this phenomenon into one's thinking. It is no easy task to enter deeply into what it feels like to be immersed in violently disinhibited, or superhumanly entitled, or radically contemptuous and hateful, or ecstatically numbed states of mind. Our attempts to immerse ourselves in such states meet with an instinctive pull to repudiate them and cut them off from consciousness, thereby alienating them into a foreign or inscrutable presence, or bloodless cerebral knowledge. But this sense of alienness can imminently change into a looming sense of dread and threat. The ruthlessness and intended severance of any compassion in acts of evil jar with professed ideals of human affinity. After all, it is precisely by its lack of compassion that perverted religiosity, socially expressed as coercive fundamentalism, distinguishes itself from more moderate forms of religious sensibility that preaches and commands compassion. A psychoanalytic sensibility, the imperative that nothing human

shall remain alien to us, compels us to uphold the effort to understand something that is meant precisely to annihilate understanding and replace it with mindless obeisance. Fundamentalist terrorism aims at fighting the very stance that opposes, or even tries to comprehend, fundamentalist terrorism, and in this sense, terrorism attempts to terrorize thought itself. Terrorism "aims to disrupt its targets' customary and trusting relation to perception."<sup>47</sup> It is against this impediment that psychoanalysts need to examine the phenomena encompassed by the term *evil*. Evil is a conspicuous manifestation in human life, a central dimension of existence.

Evil, as Paul Oppenheimer notes, has begun to appear again in the press because of the "growing awareness that it is the only word capable of bringing certain awesome events into our sphere of intellectual proxy, of diagnosis."<sup>48</sup>

### Some Sources for the Killing

What we have read in the press about the life trajectory of Mohammed Atta tallies with Lifton's descriptions of the adherents of the Aum Shirin-kyo cult, who were dominated by their leader, Shoko Asahara, to execute plans of mass murder.<sup>49</sup> Most of the cult followers were quite intelligent, though not brilliant. They were moderately successful in their education and career; for various reasons, they remained stuck in middle positions in the West where they did not enjoy great success (in Western terms),<sup>50</sup> and they found themselves outside their traditional lives and families, without, for the most part, having built families of their own. With time, their conflicts with identity, identification, and self-definition became unbearable, and their frustration, helplessness, sense of masculine failure, and self-loathing became massive. In many cases, the distress accompanying such an emotional stalemate goes on for years, until a magical solution comes along that offers the wonderful cessation of the conflict and an end to the need to continue toiling to achieve success and recognition. There is a significant structural similarity in both groups.

### Manic Triumph

A solution that bypasses physical and psychic reality is by definition manic, as in turning to otherworldly, messianic means to accomplish one's ends. An activity is manic when it is carried out with the conviction

fundamentalism we have named—the search for meaning and the avoidance of fear.<sup>38</sup> In her historical account, Armstrong first explains fundamentalism as a quest for transcendence in a world that has become devoid of spiritual values, but then she gradually switches to portraying the fundamentalist mind as above all tormented by danger and angst that cannot be assuaged by purely rational arguments. This interesting shift from positive meaning-giving and spiritual enhancement to negative apotropaic protection, is significant. The attempt to curb a sense of persecution, escalating anxiety, and revulsion at the present state of affairs, and a sense of dread of the unknown and of the enmity of the world at large, perhaps more than the effort to give spiritual meaning to life, is what helps create fundamentalism.<sup>39</sup>

### Submission, Verticality

The danger that is being propagated in the writings and broadcasts of the jihadists is conceived in the fundamentalist world differently from how it is seen from an outsider's perspective.<sup>40</sup> From within fundamentalism, there is a sense of urgency regarding the moral and social decline from better times to the present situation of corruption and license, even, or especially, in relation to the fundamentalists' co-religionists. The danger fundamentalists fear and warn against is that God's truth and righteous values will become eroded or forgotten and the world will sink into sin and chaos. To psychoanalytically minded outsiders, however, the danger the fundamentalist mind evades has to do with annihilation anxieties, weakness, and shame, as well as with the personal confusion (Erik Erikson called it "identity diffusion") that comes with sociogeographical dislocation and the differences and contradictions among cultures.<sup>41</sup> For the fundamentalist, combating the danger is what deepens his religious faith and supports his pride; for the nonfundamentalist, by contrast, it is precisely the endangered, combative cast that turns the sense of the sacred, the sense that the world is suffused with invisible meaningfulness,<sup>42</sup> into a dangerous fuel that stokes fundamentalist passion.

The shift from religious devotion to fundamentalism parallels the deterioration of the sacred into an alien, persecutory presence.<sup>43</sup> Whereas the religious sense of the sacred is the facing of the numinous and the sublime by letting oneself go and being open and receptive to a sense of deep

meaningfulness and benign presence, fundamentalism is a sense of being held tight, enveloped by a comforting straitjacket. Notably, the sense of the sacred can involve the deity of a particular religion or can engage a more generalized sense of the numinous as the experience of transcendence and of ethical and spiritual meaningfulness. The sense of the sacred and transcendent is precious, and many of us would agree that life is poorer without it. Fundamentalism, however, is the self-rejecting submission to an ideal authority, a submission that finally, on psychoanalytic accounts, turns out to be subjugation to an alienated (because projected outside of oneself), horrifying aspect of oneself. This kind of submission promises great benefits to those who submit, namely, achieving not only safety in life but attaining an ostensibly far greater reward. Fatema Mernissi summarizes her researches into the Islamic history of thought by holding that *Islam gave the faithful the promise of immortality in exchange for total submission to God.*

The Arabs (in Mohammed's time) were to become immortal. A great Beyond opened to them the royal road to the conquest of time. They would no longer die. Paradise awaited them. Because the child born of the womb of the woman is mortal, however, the law of paternity was instituted to screen off the uterus and woman's will within the sexual domain. . . . The new code of immortality was to be inscribed on the body of woman. Henceforth the children born of the uterus of a woman would belong to their father, and he is certain of gaining Paradise if he submits to the divine will.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, men are promised security until the end of time, at the price of total repudiation of women and total submission to God. While woman is a repulsive reminder of mortality and the finitude of the flesh, God is the promise of paradise and eternal life. Life and death become highly symbolized. Temporality, earthliness, feminine desire are all linked in the fundamentalist mind and must be obliterated. Devaluation of the present and a forcefully sustained hope for a glorious future is a hallmark of cults and totalitarian movements. In the fundamentalist world, desire for anything that is not divine is a dangerous subversive force. Islam promises peace at the price of the sacrifice of desire (*hawa*), which is considered in the Muslim community as the source of dissension and war. "Desire, which is individual by definition, is the opposite of *rahma* [grace, mercy], which is an intense sensitivity for the other . . . for the group."<sup>45</sup>

### Nonearthly Vertical Desire

What Mernissi does not attend to, however, is the desire that grows and luxuriates on the stump of lopped off "earthly" desire. As Altmeyer and Hunsberger point out, "Those who espouse this ideology have a special relationship with the deities."<sup>46</sup>

It is this "special relationship" that is of interest to me here, since I assume that fundamentalism is not just strictness, rigidity, and literal adherence, but is suffused with a libidinal dimension of desire. For the fundamentalist, keeping the laws is a practice with a fourfold advantage: it is the Truth; it protects him; it gives him a special relationship; and it "marries" him vertically with superior perfection.<sup>47</sup> Verticalization of difference engenders vertical desire. On this view, the starkly opposing terms, the polarizations which suffuse fundamentalist thinking, come to assume higher and lower positions on a vertical axis. Such binary oppositions, which deconstructionism has shown to be characteristic of Western modernism, always strongly privilege one term of the binary opposition, which then dominates and controls the other term. Binarism, whether in feminism, race theory, or colonial theory, always results in creating a hierarchy of power. This applies to fundamentalism too. Inscripting inequality, *fundamentalism is not only a psychic mode of separation; it is also a psychic mode of inequality.*<sup>48</sup>

Within this mode, the black-and-white division creates a vertical ladder, on which the nonbeliever is profoundly unequal to the believer, man is eternally unequal to God, and woman is unquestionably unequal to man. When we think about fundamentalism, we tend to be aware of woman's inequality to man and the nonbeliever's inequality to the believer, but we tend to forget *the believer's inequality to God*. In fundamentalist regimes, God rules over men, while men rule over women. Being oppressed by God, oppressing women, *fundamentalism is an oppressed oppression*. Although so persistently present as to be invisible, so totalistically embraced as to be sacralized, this inequality generates a desire aimed at overcoming both the distinctions and the verticality. The striving to overcome verticality through mystical reunion and kill all obstacles to this trajectory can generate deep faith and powerful hope.

Certainty and fundamentalistic knowledge are linked to a desire that springs from the so-called verticalization of difference, whereby differ-

ence is scaled and graded perpendicularly. Whereas heterogeneity spreads and sprawls "horizontally," encompassing different kinds and species, difference in the fundamentalist order is sharply circumscribed. Cognitive simplification is the underside of archaic emotional intensity. In this vertical mode, there are purified, triumphant, superior believers, and puny, defiled, noxious nonbelievers. The exorbitant, absolute distance between the two, the extremes of exaltation and degradation, mark this verticality. It is the distance between self-loathing and adoration. Rather than the rebellious son fearing castration by the father and overcoming it,<sup>49</sup> what is at stake here is the subjection to a lethal ideal, a regression to the archaic phallic father. Such subjection involves more than a "castration," if by castration we mean the curtailment of vital assertion and individuation, immobilizing the fighting of "the father," the interrogating of ossified tradition, and overcoming the anxiety of transcending it. In other words, submission to the father involves more than a castration, since such submission effects wholesale investment of all of one's (and one's group's) energies in fighting *for* the father's sake, rather than fighting *the* father.<sup>50</sup> Such submission leads to a vicious circle whereby more weakness follows capitulation and capitulation becomes more desirable as the weakness and self-rejection increase. Eric Hoffer writes that "the revulsion from an unwanted self, and the impulse to forget it, mask it, slough it off and lose it, produce both a readiness to sacrifice the self and a willingness to dissolve it by losing one's individual distinctness in a compact collective whole."<sup>51</sup>

The transformation of abject self-hatred into exalted love occurs through a vertical mystical homoeros. It is an adoration, a "looking up to" an absolutely superior Being, who represents everything that is desirable. It is the striving to make oneself continuous with Him in a spiritual union that has all the ecstatic desire of sexuality. The woman below the fundamentalist is treated as a physical necessity while the God above us is transfigured into an infinity of longing. Desire can only be understood spiritually, between male substance (man) and male essence (God).

"Whereas the ego submits to the superego out of fear of punishment, it submits to the ego-ideal out of love," writes Freud.<sup>52</sup> Thus, at the core of variously structured fundamentalist groups, we find psychodynamic processes involving transformations of fear, hatred, and (notably) self-rejection into idealizing love. These projections and transformations of hate, and the idealization of a religious persecutory object, temporarily purchase

respite from fears of destructiveness and inner persecution. Since what is involved is a thorough transformation of a persecutory object into a loving one, this process cannot but be profoundly paranoid and destructive.

### The Fierce Struggle with Self-Hatred

Erez, my patient of long ago, a tempted but warring antifundamentalist, whose story will be told later, hated himself so much that he often felt he wanted to leap out of his skin, his body, his shape. He wanted to become a woman, or just "somebody else," at the same time as he was also terrified of being transformed by God into a "something else," a different creature, maybe a small animal. Erez's case was that of an extended act of liberation from his individual fundamentalism, so to speak. Erez's liberal cultural background (he did not grow up in a fundamentalist or even religious home), his prolific fantasy life, and his trust in the analytic process allowed him to liberate himself from the terrible inner tyrant by whom he was dominated. Erez's analysis provided a rare glimpse at "fundamentalism" as a process that begins with self-hatred and abjection, with the perception of oneself as being victimized and hence weak and ineffectual. Harsh rules and minute rituals are erected in an effort to steel oneself against the weakness and in order to get rid of one's sense of being bad in some way. At the same time, the obsessive rituals are not sufficient to ward off these affects, and an inner war is ignited between the feeling of being bad, a sinner, and the feeling of being wronged and humiliated, including the hate and compensatory aggression this arouses. As these struggles are going on, one's Inner Protector is still at work, assuaging miserable feelings of loneliness and the constant fear of predatory attacks. Coming to realize that the source of one's greatest fear is the very same entity that is supposed to be one's protector and sponsor is sometimes terribly difficult to achieve. I was fascinated and sometimes in awe of Erez's battle to become aware of this fact. Analysis enabled this person, who had entered analysis as an isolated, fantasy-ridden youth to gain a sense of being part of the human community through coming to enjoy "horizontal" human acceptance. Concomitantly, Erez became able to modulate his characterological violence, since our work made it possible for him to gain a sense that he was redeemable, that is, that his sins, including his violence, were not bad enough to weigh him down and rob him of his powers to challenge his persecutory inner self.

Walter Davis contributes to our understanding of the internal object—basically one's own creation—whose condemnation can demolish the person within whose psyche it dwells: "In depth destructiveness is what happens when a subjectivity defined by self-loathing finds in cruelty the only release through the free projection of all the hatred one feels toward oneself in one's inner world upon a host of objects. . . . Elation then beckons with the discovery of new targets, richer occasions, with but one proviso—the feast of aggression must never end."<sup>53</sup>

Davis sees humans' core anxiety as *the inability to reverse inner destructiveness*. From an opposite angle, Michael Eigen touches on the same central configuration by suggesting that self-hatred should be transformed and made psychically useful by our directing aggression against the self: "We keep ripping at what pains us. We take inner baths, try to clear away barriers. . . . Soul rubs and shines itself by immolation-demolition. . . . We must learn to kill ourselves without end without doing ourselves real injury. We may discover ways of 'killing' ourselves that make us better people."<sup>54</sup> Eigen talks about purification through ascetic self-castigation, which, he believes, can relieve the torturing experience of one's destructiveness and self-loathing. By beating oneself, one cleanses oneself of one's torturer; by flagellation of self-body, one becomes pure, one shines. The similarity between religious asceticism and fundamentalist purification rites is unmistakable; there is a continuity, though not an equivalence, between self-denial for the purpose of spiritual purification and destructive acts that are paradoxically aimed at crushing destructiveness, in those moments when, as Eigen says, "good deeds can no longer deflect destruction from oneself."<sup>55</sup> One then has to purify oneself in order to destroy the destroying other within oneself. Eigen equates cleansing parts of oneself with "killing" those parts. One kills those parts in order not to feel that one is bad, or weak, or despicable, or irredeemably fallible. The fantasy circulates that one is being purified as a way of dying in order to be reborn ("A new heart create for me, O God" prays the Psalmist). Such dying/killing preempts a more fantastic, terrible death, death as a final verdict on one's worthlessness. Although the dividing line between religious devotion and religious fundamentalism is crucial, the continuity between them becomes more visible the closer we look at them. There is a certain structural resemblance between the intimate, loving discourse a believer holds with God while praying and supplicating, and the intimacy that is acted out in fundamentalist desire.

In my clinical experience, I have witnessed many painful moments that I came to realize can be seen as the core, or at least one of the kernels, of the gravest human ills, namely self-loathing, or self-hatred, the disguised or direct searing, amplified recognition of the destructiveness within. A profound rejection of oneself, of one's very being, is synonymous with deep shame that is internalized and affirmed. After all, we internalize the ways we are treated by others and we treat ourselves in accordance with how we are being treated. Usually it is well into an analytic process before one encounters the inner sense of worthlessness, of self-condemnation and revulsion, and realizes the extent to which this sense impacts behaviors and feelings. Shame and self-rejection can be disguised by rage, by a compensatory sense of entitlement, by seductive charm, or by aggression and bravado. Intense shame is most often repressed, or dissociated, or denied in many other ways so as to protect self-esteem and prevent psychic catastrophe.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes the analyst gets a strong glimpse of these feelings at moments when she senses the patient's overt or hidden vulnerability, or recognizes the confused mixture of self-aggrandizement and self-deprecation. Some great narratives of protracted analyses with very damaged people wind up reaching the pit of self-hatred and self-persecution, which is where trauma worked to create the original wound and illness, and which is the site where work must be done for the person to heal.<sup>57</sup>

In clinical work, we see how states of self-loathing breed the worst kinds of illness and paralysis, eventuating in wasted lives and damaged bonds. The "self" in self-loathing refers to the self as that which is hated, hating all selves as selves and avidly seeking to submit to a transcendent collective that will swallow it and make it into a no-self, a fungible unit that has at last found peace of mind.

To further clarify these processes of purification and self-absolution, let me delineate their progression toward increasing destructiveness. In the next chapter, I wish to spell out stages of purification as the growing efforts at eliminating bad feelings about oneself, and to elaborate how religion can provide potent means toward accomplishing this procedure.

### §3 Purification as Violence

There is a paradox at the center of religion. While it functions as a source of meaningfulness and spiritual inspiration, while it represents an institution that bases salvation on the doing of good, it can also be a notorious breeding ground for fundamentalist intransigence and may further deteriorate into coercive militant homicidal and suicidal violence. How are we to understand this paradoxical inclusion of goodness and murderousness? Why is religion so often associated with violence? Furthermore, why is sacrifice, a form of sacralized violence, accorded such a central role in religious traditions? After all, sacrifice, considered by many scholars as the foundational religious gesture, is killing that is surrounded by an aura of the holy. It is a destruction of life, whether of a human or an animal, that is meant to please God, to bring peace, or, in the case of Christ, to redeem humankind.

Most religions are permeated with images of cosmic war as the ongoing and perennial situation of the world, a war that is often believed to endure as long as the world does. The theme of a cosmic mythical war waged between two forces, good and evil, light and darkness, points to an irreconcilable conflict that has to be battled to the end. Battle, or conflict, is a crucial part of the human condition, whether the conflict obtains between groups of people, within a person's inner world, or between the joys and sorrow of life, its pleasures and its finitude. Since religion deals with the meaning of human existence, the conflicting aspects of life and the need to protect it, religion provides a powerful means of visually dramatizing these conflicts and of indicating courses of action to resolve them in a manner that seems clear and promises simplicity.