

God in the Mind

The Psychodynamics of an Unusual Relationship

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In 1963, I was living a triple life in the city of Córdoba, Argentina, where I grew up. From early morning until afternoon, I was a hematologist and the co-chair of the radioisotope laboratory at the Hospital Córdoba, a state and university hospital. In the late afternoon, I was teaching child and adolescent development at the newly founded (after the fall of the Perón dictatorship) Catholic University. In the evening, I worked in my private medical office as an internist. It was an intense and interesting life. Before I decided to study medicine, I had trained in normal school as a teacher. The training was superb. We studied the history, philosophy, and theories of teaching, from Plato to Maria Montessori. We studied what was available about child and adolescent development, in particular what facilitates learning and the role of the personality of the teacher. For three years we practiced student teaching under very rigorous supervision, focusing on our ability to reach children by engaging their curiosity and initiative, keeping in mind age-appropriate modes of learning and establishing emotional contact with them. Looking back, I can see now that my normal school training sensitized me to the subtleties of children's experiences and the need for a meaningful relationship as a condition for teaching and learning. At the same time, the study of the history of teaching alerted me to the many and opposing ways in which adults may look at children's experiences. By 1963, I was teaching the process of development from childhood to early adulthood at the university.

That October, I received an unexpected invitation. The dean of the Roman Catholic seminary wanted me to teach a course on the psychological foundations of belief and pastoral care. The seminary had updated its curriculum and considered that the future priests had to have an understanding of the psychology of belief and its vicissitudes. I found the idea fascinating and the project daunting. I asked for some time to think about it, check the available literature, and see whether I had it

in me to teach such a course. I collected everything I could find about the subject, from Freud to the literature on the scientific study of religion. I immersed myself in reading and came out with very limited knowledge. The psychological literature on religion offered abundant statistics about all types of religious subjects but little that could help us understand living human beings. Arnold Gesell, from Yale University, had documented the religious conceptions of children and their evolution as verbalized by them during his longitudinal studies. It was a solid start, but it did not offer access to the subjective experience of the children. The literature on pastoral care had documented observations about children's responses to religious teachings but did not provide an overarching theory of the inner workings of their minds. At the time, I had very limited knowledge of psychoanalysis but opted to read the classic authors' writings about religion. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1902) described aspects of the phenomenology of belief in adults. Jung's brilliant and complex descriptions were too abstract to help me make sense of ordinary folks. Adler had converted religion into values. It was Freud who came to my rescue. He had connected in the minds of children the invisible godhead to the visible parents and had offered convincing insights about the vicissitudes of conscious belief in relation to conscious and unconscious conflict.

While I was doing all this heady reading, a memory kept coming back to me. When I was 17 years old, I went with some classmates from the normal school to a local parish to teach poor children. I was teaching some aspects of the Catholic faith to a small group of eight- to ten-year-old boys and girls. The issue of heaven came up. A spirited ten-year-old said firmly, almost defiantly, that she did not want to go to heaven. I sensed a deep pain in her and waited for the class to be over to talk with her privately. She let me know that her mother was a "sinner," that is, a prostitute, and that she was sure her mother was going to hell. She wanted to be with her. The experience marked me. The little girl preferred hell with her mother over heaven without her. God came second to her mother. It was a lesson for me, the teacher in training. The conjunction of this memory and of Freud's refreshing insights about the inner workings of the mind convinced me that I had to listen and be creative. I agreed to teach the course and decide to recreate the story of the little girl. My seminary students, who were teaching children in Sunday school, were asked to take careful notes of their conversations with the children and to bring them to class for us to learn from them. Then, based on my knowledge of human development and my limited psychodynamic understanding, I tried to help the class figure out what each child's concerns were, what questions the child was wrestling with, and the modalities for dealing with that issue at a particular age. The course was presented as the building of a hypothesis about the process of dealing with an invisible God in the course of development. The children whose experiences we

attempted to understand provided support for Freud's basic assumptions about the formation of the God representation. The course proved to be a profound educational experience for me. It convinced me that I had been offered the possibility of studying a fascinating realm of human experience, a realm that awaited solid research and a theory to support it. I felt that I owed it to myself to study it in depth.

The Writing of *The Birth of the Living God:* *A Psychoanalytic Study*

At the end of June 1965, I left Argentina and came to live in the United States. I had decided to change my medical focus from internal medicine and hematology, specialties that I loved, to psychiatry and psychoanalysis, because I wanted to enter the private realm of the human mind. I was determined to carry out truly empirical research as soon as I could, in order to pursue my interest in the psychodynamics of religious ideation and feelings. I did not want a theory that I could not support with the words of actual people.

Immigration is no easy task. I had to learn English, a new lifestyle, and different ways of relating and of going about my business. I spent my first year as a rotating intern at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. Working in an ambulance gave me access to all social classes in New York and opened my eyes to the way people live in this part of the world. The next year, I started a residency in psychiatry at Boston State Hospital. I told the superintendent of the hospital, Dr. Milton Greenblatt, about my past teaching and my wish to start the research, on my own time, as a first-year resident. I also asked for a research supervisor who could help me. He agreed to my requests and offered me in sequence two top research supervisors. When I presented my research ideas to them, they looked at me in disbelief. No, they could not help me with such strange research. I went back to Dr. Greenblatt, who contacted Dr. Elvin Semrad, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a great clinical guru at Massachusetts Mental Health Center. He was not a researcher but was very interested in religion and agreed to talk with me whenever I requested it. Finally, I had an interlocutor. My commitment was to carry out research so carefully structured that its results would become acceptable.

The first step was to find whether there was an essential difference in the dynamics of religious ideation and feelings between "normal" people and mental patients. Once I had created the protocols for a pilot study, I selected five "normal" members of the staff and 20 patients, covering the 20 basic psychiatric diagnoses, and gave all of them the same interviews and tasks. The detailed examination of that extensive material in the course of the next two years convinced me that, from the point of view of psychodynamic processes, there was no essential difference between

“normal” people and patients with diverse pathologies, including psychosis. As in all of psychic life, the difference rested on the structure of their ego functions and the type of defensive processes they used to manage their developmentally formed representation of God and their wishes, fantasies, and fears in relation to themselves and their God and religious beliefs. I was ready to revise and improve my protocols and do the actual research.

I moved to Tufts–New England Medical Center to complete my residency. At the end of my second year, I applied and was accepted for training at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute. Dr. Paul Myerson, a psychoanalyst and the head of the department, and I made a mutually convenient contract for the fourth year: I would be the chief resident, and he would permit me to use the entire in-patient population to do my research. I was the winner in that arrangement because the service offered a very thorough evaluation of the patients, gave access to their families, and offered comprehensive notes from residents (who saw the patients six times a week), nurses, and occupational and art therapists about the communications and behavior of each patient. My research included a questionnaire about the family, another about God, patients drawing pictures of the family and God, and a two-hour taped interview covering all stages of development and significant life experiences, including religious experiences. When I had finished collecting the material, I had an enormous task ahead of me. I had to organize the findings, see whether and how they formed particular patterns, and find a theoretical approach to integrate it into publishable form. The effort took me ten years of steady work on my own time. I wrote extensive biographies of the patients, of their relationship with their parents and family, with God, and with themselves, and organized them as a narrative of the way they had put together their lives. It became clear to me that psychic life is organized internally around relationships and their internal representations. God was unquestionably a significant relationship that marked the life of the person, whether the person believed in an existing God or not. God, as an internal object, was there to stay because it had been integrated into the memorial processes that sustain unconsciously and consciously the sense of being oneself.

Now I had to create a theory to give a context to my findings. I returned to Freud as the pioneer who had found the connection between the child’s relationship to his or her father and the internal representation of God. I needed to find the meaning of the word *representation* in the psychoanalytic literature. After a comprehensive review, I became convinced that representations were memorial processes codified around the object and the self in dynamic interaction. They were susceptible to transformation under the influence of later experiences, which would reorganize them as part of the reorganization of the self in interaction with its objects.

Then I returned to Freud’s conception of the God representation. When I com-

pared my data with his, I found that he had ignored the mother's contribution to the representation of the divinity. My patients had incorporated their mothers into their God. They even incorporated themselves. So I dared to disagree with Freud because my evidence was documented in my patients' words, handwriting, and drawings. God is a relational object with all the advantages and trappings of other primary objects, as it is fit for significant objects enmeshed in the inner reality of the person.

In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1927) proclaimed that he and his followers did not need the illusion of a parental God in the sky. He presented the only acceptable God for psychoanalysts: "Our God, Logos, will fulfill whichever of these wishes nature outside us allows" (p. 54). Freud's notion of illusion contrasted it with objective scientific, secondary process truth. In that objective truth there is not much room for the dynamic processes that make us psychically alive and complicated human beings. Winnicott's notion of illusion, transitional objects, and transitional space opened a conceptual realm that allows us to find some compatibility between illusion and reality. In Winnicott's language, the mother found by the child cannot be separated from the mother created by the infant. In my 1979 book, I said, in reference to the purported antithesis between illusion and reality,

This is not so in the private realm of transitional reality where illusory and real dimensions of experience interpenetrate each other to such an extent that they cannot be teased apart without destroying what is essential in the experience. . . . Psychic life has a reality of its own where reality and illusion cannot be separated if the subjects is to survive [p. 227].

Thus, the child's spontaneous creation in the context of his family's dealings with the divinity, of a God representation based on his relationship with his mother, father, and himself, would, of necessity, encompass reality and illusion in varied proportions. A similar phenomenon takes place in the transformation of the representation of primary objects and significant people in the course of life, when new human relations call for some reorganization of the self.

The findings showed that in our Western culture, where a monotheistic God is ever present, people form a representation of God directly connected to their primary objects and their own sense of self. The representation may be used for believing in the existence of God or responded to with unbelief in an actual divinity. Dynamically, however, whether the person consciously believes that God exists or not, the deep unconscious and conscious connections between parents, self, God, and the culture permit the person to use the God representation in his or her mental life, whether he or she is aware of doing it or not. Through the mediation of exposure to religious words, actions, and cultural activities, aspects of the God

representation become conscious and ego syntonic or dystonic. However, the most significant aspects of the God representation are nonconscious and connected with aspects of equally nonconscious parental representations and their dynamics. The work of affects, wishes, defenses, and self-narratives linked to unconscious and conscious fantasies contributes, under the restraining power of ego defenses, to include such a God representation in the identity of the person and his or her mode of self-perception.

When I had finished studying the research protocols, I gave the book the title that best described the patients' experiences: The psychic God they had formed in their minds was kept alive by them and often was active, either opposing or cooperating, consoling or persecuting, helping or interfering with their lives. At times, God was simply there, quietly there. To include the developmental process of God becoming a significant psychic object I named the book *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1979).

The *American Journal of Psychiatry* noticed the book. Michael R. Zales (1980) recommended it "most highly to the student of psychoanalysis, to the student of religion, and to the therapist who has treated a patient's references to God as either neurotic or sacrosanct." The *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* described it as a "ground-breaking book" that "brilliantly rectified" the psychoanalytic lack of research on Freud's insights about religion (Barnhouse, 1979, p. 772). The psychoanalytic community largely ignored the book. The *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* offered the only review. To my pleasure, Howard F. Stein (1981) acknowledged my scholarship: "The first third of the book is a masterful review of the psychoanalytic literature on religion, from Freud through object-relations theory and on to the author's beloved Winnicott" (p. 125). Then, the criticism began: "Despite Rizzuto's explicit phenomenological and dynamic orientation, hers is a brief for religion. . . . Object relations theory is thus used as a crypto-Jungian basis for a psychoanalytic theology" (p. 126). Furthermore, my correcting Freud's stance on religion was a clear indication of my unanalyzed pathology: "There can be no compromise between the preoedipal and oedipal authoritarian character and the postoeidipal human chary of all belief. Any psychoanalysis which admits such a compromise reveals a lacunar resistance, an incompleteness of analysis in the analyst" (p. 127). Stein did not believe me when I opened the book with this phrase: "This is not a book on religion." Unfortunately—and fortunately—I had dared to challenge the obligatory Freudian conviction about the "maturity" of unbelief, a conviction that became obligatory for true followers of Freud.

Then, a myth appeared in the psychoanalytic community: I had been a nun! I have heard it so many times, to this day, that it must be called a myth. I saw it as an explanatory myth taking this shape: "She was a nun; therefore, she had to write about

religion.” It should be clear that I never intended to be a nun, I was never one, and I will never be. This myth speaks for itself about the following implicit prejudice: “She could not be a true psychoanalytic scholar interested in the psychodynamics of religion. She must have an ulterior motive certainly not properly analyzed.” Myth or no myth, one by one psychoanalytic institutes started to invite me to present my ideas and to listen honestly to what I had to say. Not infrequently, members of those institutes, in requested asides, confided to me some of their private religious experiences, and they often concluded by saying that they had never brought it up in their analysis. I was the first one to hear it from their mouths.

The academic community and those in the field of theological studies and pastoral care responded to the book by using it. Some people committed to the religious field criticized my work for limiting my research to exploring the psychical representation of God and not acknowledging the existence of an actual God. I had clearly stated that the psychoanalytic method is phenomenological and does not have the tools to decide on matters of the being or existence of a divine reality. University departments for the study of religion in the United States, Europe, and as far as Australia and Korea listed the book in their courses. Departments of psychology and child development also listed it as part of undergraduate and graduate reading. The questionnaires I had created were used and continue to be used for doctoral dissertations of all varieties. The psychoanalytic point of view in relation to the psychodynamics of religion was becoming a subject of academic research.

McDargh (1997) describes my work as “a new research paradigm for the psychoanalytic study of religion” (p. 181) and as a clinical contribution that “gives clinicians permission to look critically at the psychic functioning of religious images without the a priori assumption that all one will find there is a defensive function in the service of an arrested psychological development” (p. 182). McDargh compares my work to William James’s radical empiricism “to investigate the ‘real work’ that is done by an individual’s religious beliefs without a need to either attack or defend the ontological status of those beliefs” (p. 182).

My “empiricism” has prompted doctoral candidates and researchers to develop psychometrically sophisticated research tools to study the God representation, such as Lawrence’s (1991) “God Image Inventory.” I finished the book with a sentence expressing the desire that my work would stimulate research in many fields. My wish has been fulfilled in several fields, but it did not produce the printed psychoanalytic research I had hoped for. I had wanted to hear more analysts describe the respectful analysis of their patients’ religious beliefs as part of their clinical work and their exploration of their conflicts and their integration of infantile experiences into hidden or overt religious convictions.

A couple of years after the book’s publication, Stanley H. Cath (a psychoanalyst

and my former teacher) and his co-editors asked me to write a chapter for their upcoming book *Father and Child: Developmental and Clinical Perspectives*. I found the occasion propitious for returning to my research protocols, drawings, questionnaires, and interviews to find some answers for my chapter, "The Father and the Child's Representation of God: A Developmental Approach" (1982). Interestingly enough, the editors, disregarding my request, would not place the chapter in the section on development. Following classical Freudian tradition, they placed it in the section on "Cultural and Historical Variations." I had won a battle: My ideas were accepted as a psychoanalytic contribution. I had lost the war: I could not convince the editors that my work was significant in elucidating the psychodynamics of development.

Revisiting my research from a new angle was fruitful and rewarding. It showed me once more the great importance of exploring the diversity of each developmental moment in the relationship between parents and children and the exquisite particularity of the relationship between a child and his or her father. The developmental sequence I had presented was confirmed. The first God representation is made out of the real or wished-for mother of a small child. It may also include the child's obscure self-perception. At the time of early triangulation the child seems to need a stable couple to integrate the feelings of belonging to his or her parents, which can be transformed into a protective godhead. If trauma interferes and the couple does not afford the child such protection, a dissociation may occur in the God representation, and the child may carry parallel and different God representations, each with traits of one parent. During the excitement of the narcissistic phase, the father seems to provide for both boys and girls the model of a powerful being quite useful for self-aggrandizement. Soon, an aggrandized self-representation finds its counterpart in a God representation as an enlarged and idealized parental figure. The oedipal crisis finds the child with a complex God representation, multilayered with different components of the self-maternal-paternal representation. If during the sexual excitement of the period some aspects of the God representation itself become sexualized, a conflict ensues calling for the repression (in the psychoanalytic sense of the term) of the unacceptable aspects of it while enhancing the components of the God representation that are acceptable and ego syntonic. When this happens, the person develops a conflictual religious attitude toward God that will need analysis in order to find some resolution. Similar conflicts might have emerged earlier, but this is the most common in the clinical situation.

The resolution of the oedipal conflict, as Freud described so well, brings about the child's renunciation of wanting a parent for himself or herself and leads the youngster to the exaltation of the parents into a divine being. The child acknowledges that he or she is the parental couple's child, that they have brought him or her into the world. Here, my empirical findings did not confirm Freud's conviction that it is the father's

representation that is exalted into a God. Instead, the resolution of the oedipal dilemma uses the parents as an integrated couple to form a God representation. If the oedipal situation remains conflictual, the parents cannot be integrated as a couple, and that aspect of it cannot be used for the God representation. Furthermore, the three cases in which the paternal representation seemed to prevail in the God representation presented a clinical situation very similar to the Schreber case studied by Freud. Like Schreber's father, my research subjects' fathers had taken possession of their lives from their inception. They were overwhelming fathers, and that fact became manifest in the severe psychopathology of their children, male or female.

In adolescence, the task of revisiting and disengaging affectively from the parental representations (Blos, 1979) brings about a complex review of the parental figures and of the divine representation linked with them. In this sense, a normal crisis of late adolescence often involves a comparable religious crisis. From that moment on, even until death, each new major emotional encounter with people contributes to modifications of the God representation. Often they are silent and unnoticed; other times they appear as profound crises calling for a reorganization of the person's religious stance.

The clinical relevance of my work rested on the invitation to my fellow analysts to explore all aspects of the analysand's experience. The close connection between parental representations and religious mentation permits the patient to use his or her unspoken religious thoughts and feelings as a defense against difficult-to-handle transference issues and not tell the analyst about it. This may happen not only when negative feelings are predominant but also with idealizing and affectionate feelings. The patient may use private or public prayer as a process parallel to analysis in which the transference is split between the analyst and the personal God of the patient. Freud (1916–17) envisioned a situation of this sort when referring to patients avoiding the fundamental rule:

One hardly comes across a single patient who does not make an attempt at reserving some region or other of himself so as to prevent the treatment from having access to it. A man . . . kept silence . . . about an intimate love-affair, and . . . defended himself with the argument that he thought this particular story was his private business. Analytic treatment does not, of course recognize any such asylum. Suppose that in a town like Vienna the experiment was made of treating a square such as the Hohe Markt, or a church like St. Stephen's, as places where no arrests might be made, and suppose we then wanted to catch a particular criminal. We could be quite sure of finding him in the sanctuary [p. 288].

There is an amusing irony in this metaphor because the "criminal" hiding in St.

Stephen's church during analysis may be the patient's dynamically formed personal God, whom the analyst is not trying to catch because he or she is not searching for it.

The clinical and theoretical papers I wrote before I published the book and in the ensuing years focused on Freud's theories about God and the devil representation (1976) and on religious development (1980, 1991), object relations and religious issues (1974, 1992), religious issues during treatment (1993), Christian worship and psychoanalysis (1996a), treatment of the religious person (1996b, 2002c), belief as a psychic function (1997), the question of whether God helps (2001a), the relationship of the self to belief (2001c, 2002a), pastoral issues (1998a, 2004a), the relationship between gender and the representation of God (2002b), the cultural emergence of the concept of spirituality and its impact on psychotherapy (2005), mystical experience (1996c, 2004b), and my own background as a Roman Catholic (2004c) in relation to my psychoanalytic training.

My work was recognized by Division 36 of the American Psychological Association, which bestowed on me in 1966 the William C. Bier Award for "outstanding contributions to the Psychology of Religion." The following year, the American Psychiatric Association gave me the Oskar Pfister Prize, also recognizing my "outstanding contributions." These were welcome awards for a Freudian psychoanalyst, even when they came from institutions and fields that were not exactly my own.

In the late 1980s, I had several patients with anorexia and bulimia in analysis. Their difficulties in speaking and verbalizing their thoughts increased my already well-developed interest in the use of language in analysis. These patients taught me to listen to them in a way that was new and difficult and called for a deep personal involvement on my part. I wondered how Freud had listened to his patients. How did he conceive of the way they formed the mental representations they used as referents of their words? How did my patients come up with the metaphors they did? I felt the same type of moral intellectual obligation I had felt when I decided to explore his conceptions about the formation of the representation of God. So, as I had done then, I went to the sources in Freud. I dug out his little-known monograph *On Aphasia* (1891, 1953), where he wrote extensively about the formation of representations. It surprised me to discover that I was back to my original research, now from a completely different angle. The English translation of the monograph was not intelligible. I managed to make a photocopy of the original German edition and studied it with great effort until I grasped Freud's beautifully constructed model of representation and language. Freud returned to his monograph only on a few occasions. However, the echoes of his early thinking about the formation of thing representations are present in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893–1895) and *The Unconscious* (1915), in his method of free association, his understanding of transference, and his

understanding of the formation of the God representation in individuals and also in its transgenerational transmission in the course of history in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). I published several papers about the monograph: his motives for writing it (1989), its theoretical influence on his understanding of hysteria (1990b), and its repercussions on other aspects of his theorizing (1990a). The systematic exploration of Freud's conceptualization of representations (thing representations, as he called them) strengthened my conviction about the significant and lasting influence of bodily processed mental representations of parents and primary objects and their derivative, the God representation. The research confirmed my earlier ideas about representations and, in particular, about the God representation but also opened a new beginning for my work on the use of language in psychoanalysis. I became more aware of the extraordinary significance of the body in the formation of the representational mind and of our linguistic disposition to express our most ineffable experiences through fleshed-out metaphors (2001b). Metaphorical processes can give mental and linguistic shape to elusive aspects of corporeal experiences and other internally elaborated ineffable realities. Obviously, religious thinking and feeling also resorts to metaphorical thinking to give expression to the nonsensory realities of belief, prayer, and the relationship with a nongraspable divinity. Religious metaphors freely resort to bodily imagery to flesh out the relational nature of the "perception" of the divine being. One illustration is David's Psalm 143: "Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like those who go to the Pit. Let me hear in the morning of thy steadfast love, for in thee I put my trust."

How I Came to Write *Why Did Freud Reject God?* *A Psychodynamic Interpretation*

In April 1992, the exhibition "The Sigmund Freud Antiquities: Fragments From a Buried Past," sponsored by the Freud Museum in London to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Freud's death, came to Boston. The organizers wanted to present lectures from archaeologists, art historians, and psychoanalysts to provide a broader intellectual context for the exhibition. The previous year, as a member of a group of colleagues from the Psychoanalytic Institute of New England, East, I had published a paper on Freud: "Sigmund Freud: The Secrets of Nature and the Nature of Secrets" (Barron et al., 1991). We had to immerse ourselves in Freud's biography and life for five years and came to know him well enough to dare to write about secrets in his life and writings. When the program committee received the request that our institute provide a lecturer for the exhibition, the faculty proposed my name to the chair and suggested that I write an essay about Freud's motives for collecting antiquities. I accepted the assignment as a pleasurable challenge.

The exhibition presented the photographs of Freud's apartment taken by Edmund Engelman in 1938, at the time of Freud's departure for London. They graphically portrayed his working and living environment. His office was populated by an "audience" (as he himself called it) of antiquities he collected as the surrounding atmosphere for his listening to patients, writing, reflecting, and creating new theories. In selecting the artifacts for the exhibition, the museum's curator intended to demonstrate "that Freud's views on the history of civilization and the development of the human psyche were deeply rooted in his knowledge of archaeology and antiquity," as stated in the fact sheet. Freud's collection had more than two thousand ancient objects from Egypt, Rome, the Near East, and Asia. Sixty-five objects were selected to be shown in the exhibition. Included among Freud's personal possessions was a copy of the Hebrew Bible that his father, Jakob, had owned since 1848. He had given the original to his son Sigmund on the occasion of the latter's thirty-fifth birthday, the year in which a Jew reaches his full manhood (Roback, 1957, pp. 95–96).

I had seen the exhibition briefly the previous year when it was shown at the spring meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association in New Orleans. The Bible had caught my attention, but it was protected by a glass case, and one could see only the pages shown. When I agreed to give the lecture, I approached the organizers and asked permission to see the exhibition when there was no public around so that I could examine the Bible directly and at my leisure. They gave me permission to look at the copy, which was not the original but a reprint made in 1858, which Freud had bought as a used book. While looking at the Bible I realized that it was a truly unusual book with such an abundance of illustrations that I could not possibly do justice to it by quickly glancing at it. I had to find a copy somewhere else if I wanted to study it. It was a lucky year for me. The librarian of the Andover Library at the Harvard Divinity School, who knew me, found the three volumes of the 1858 edition, and because no one had ever used them, she allowed me to take the three volumes to my home. I had in my hand the exhibition catalogue presenting beautiful color photographs of the pieces in the exhibition. Going from the catalogue to the Bible and from the Bible to the catalogue, I saw striking similarities between the images. A mystery was emerging in front of my eyes.

I did a literature search and found two articles noticing the correlation of images, one by William G. Niederland (1988), published in German in 1988, and an earlier one by E. M. Rosenfeld (1956). The latter concludes, "It is not difficult to detect in his [Freud's] rich and almost complete Egyptian collection the old models of the Philippson's illustrations" (p. 104). The papers confirmed that I had made a valid observation. Now I was back to my favorite field of mental representations: What was in Freud's head that made him select "the old models of the Philippson's illustrations"? Was he aware of what he was doing? What affective ties connected

the biblical figures with the archaeological collection? What did the young child Freud feel for the illustrations in the book? Why was the adult Freud, as described in the exhibition and by himself, “compelled” to buy certain artifacts? Why was he so fond of them that he made some of his antiquity gods, as he said explicitly, his “audience”? A psychoanalytic Sherlock Holmes awakened in me (I used to introduce first-year residents to their psychiatric work in the Department of Psychiatry at Tufts–New England Medical Center by using the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle). As a psychoanalyst, I wanted to reconstruct the motives for his collecting and to find what lasting impact the Bible and its illustrations had on the child who saw them. I had no preconceived ideas of where this investigation could lead me. I had confidence in Freud’s method, even when I intended to apply it to the history and story of a person I could not analyze.

First, I wanted to find incontrovertible evidence that there was a correlation between the illustrations in the Bible and Freud’s collection. I photocopied every illustration in the book’s three volumes. Then, catalogue in hand, I began to compare. I could pair images with one another with little effort. The similarities jumped to the eye. Figures matched figurines and goddesses and gods. Landscapes and illustrations of ruins matched Freud’s wall pictures and actual stones from ruins. This could not possibly be a coincidence. Archaeologists and art historians were baffled by their inability to find an organizing principle in the collection. I began to think that the organizing principle could be found in the childhood representational memories of the illustrations found in the Bible. Yet many intriguing questions remained. Why was Freud compelled to replicate in his office in a three-dimensional form the illustrations of the Bible? What was the dynamic motivation for this compulsion? Which was the organizing affect that linked together biblical illustrations to archaeological artifacts?

In the summer of 1993, I went to visit the Freud Museum in London, not only to see as much as possible of the entire collection but also to see the actual Bible Jakob had bought, read, and even used to teach Sigmund and then, finally, gave to him with a moving dedication in Hebrew to celebrate his full manhood. I had already learned that Freud had paid no attention to his father’s gift and that late in life he had given it to his son Martin as a book of no significance to him. What I was learning doubled my curiosity and increased my enthusiasm for finding the meaning of the saga between father and son, Bible and collection, indifference to a deeply moving parental gift and Freud’s compulsion to give himself antiquities that resemble the figures in the Bible.

I was allowed to see every page of the original Bible under the watchful supervision of an assistant to the curator. Jakob had bound the Bible in leather to present it as a gift to his son. It is an incomplete Bible, not the three volumes I had with

me. Apparently, Freud's father had subscribed to the original publication by the Philippson brothers, presented as fascicles, each containing a book of the Torah. The Philippson Bible was a highly unusual publication. It was edited and published by two remarkable Jewish scholars, Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889), the rabbi of Magdeburg, in Germany, a city between Hanover and Berlin, and his brother Phoebus, a practicing physician. Their father, Moses, had studied in Frankfurt and become a scholar, translator, and publisher. He was a dedicated participant in Haskala, the Jewish intellectual movement dedicated “to overcom[ing] the inertia, ignorance, and religious formalism of the Jews of his period” (Philippson, 1962, p. 98). The brothers, particularly Ludwig, embraced their father's ideals and implemented them by publishing their unusual Hebrew Bible and a newspaper, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* (1837–1889), “the mouthpiece of German Jewry,” for years (p. 106). Jakob Freud had joined their educational effort by buying and reading their Bible throughout his life.

The Philippson Bible is unusual in several respects: Each page has the original Hebrew text in one column and the German translation in the other column. At the foot of the page there are explanatory notes with comments not only about the biblical text but also a “cultural commentary” that “informs, reasons [and] suggests reflection in order to convince” (Pfrimmer, 1982, pp. 226–227). They are informational about the objects described in the text and in the illustrations. The commentaries show the reader that “it is always necessary to consider a multitude of factors” (p. 260) in order to view problems from many angles. However, the most unusual feature consists in the illustrations described in the Bible's title page as “many English wood engravings.” The engravings are shocking in a Hebrew Bible that forbids images. The illustrations encompass trees to animals, Egyptian gods to Roman ruins, landscapes to camel caravans, and so forth—hardly what any good Jew could have expected in a Bible. The commentaries and illustrations were intended to open the mind of its Jewish readers to other lands, experiences, realities, and phenomena to help them join the world in which they lived and expand their horizons. It seems obvious that Jakob Freud had decided to follow the movement of the Philippson brothers by faithfully buying the fascicles of their Bible. His young son soon joined his father's interest, as documented by Freud himself in 1935, in an addition to *An Autobiographical Study* (1925): “My deep engrossment in the Bible story (almost as soon as I learnt the art of reading) had, as I recognized much later, an enduring effect upon the direction of my interest” (p. 8).

The “recognition” came to Freud four years before his death. He does not seem to have been able to find the deep connection between the objects he collected and the ones he had seen in the Bible as a child. Yet he had written about Leonardo, “What someone thinks he remembers from his childhood is not a matter of indifference; as a

rule the residual memories—which he himself does not understand—cloak priceless pieces of evidence about the most important features in his mental development” (Freud, 1910, p. 84).

I took Freud’s words literally. I decided to find the “priceless pieces of evidence” about his mental development. What developmental need compelled him to collect the antiquities? What psychic function did they perform in his adult life? Why did he have to remain unaware of them?

I decided that I had to reconstruct the object-related dynamics of his childhood, adolescence, and adult life to the best of my ability and see whether I could find experiences that could help solve the mystery. I had to reconstruct his family life and use the scanty words he left about his relatives during that period to access his character-forming childhood experiences. I left no stone unturned in his own letters and works, biographies, historical and statistical documents of the time, books about him, books about the Jews of his time, books about Příbor, his childhood town, its people, language, and an impressive Catholic Church. The exception to my search were the letters to his wife, Martha Bernays, that had not been translated and published. They are in the Freud Archives in Washington, and they were not available to me. My search was moved by the wish to find an answer to this question: Why did he need the antiquities? What psychic service did they provide for him?

My answer is brief: The antiquities brought to Freud’s office the affectionate and playful presence of his father, Jakob:

Freud the scientist, who demanded of men that they grow up and face the world alone, without the infantile crutch of an exalted father-God, could not himself do without the presence of his father. It must be granted that he sublimated his father’s presence into an age-appropriate collection of transitional objects in the shape of antiquities. They offered him what God offers to believers: the assurance of a constant presence and the joy of sublimated emotional contact with the enticing father. The way Freud “played” with his collection as an audience, his affection for the “grabby gods,” his smiling back at one statuette and “sacrificing” another, and his grateful acceptance of Athena’s protection at age eighty-two—these give witness to the double function of the antiquities: they were always there as a needed presence serving the same function that God’s presence has for the believer. They permitted Freud to retrieve the playfulness he shared with his father and provided a necessary complement to the debunking of God in life. He had denounced the failure of a father-God but kept a more ego-syntonic sublimation of his father’s protective presence in the form of the collection. The only protection that presence could offer was what most believers find so appealing about God: the simple fact that he is there. Jakob’s tender dedication [of the Bible] remained alive in the objects: “Your father who loves you

with eternal love.” It can be said that Freud was never alone as long as he was with his gods and his antique objects. Jakob remained with him in this sublimated form until his son joined him in death [Rizzuto, 1998b, p. 259].

What evidence did I have to support this drastic conclusion? First, Freud started his collection six weeks after his father’s death and continued collecting until his own death. He even opted to die not in his bedroom but in his office, where the antiquities were. Lynn Gamwell (1989) wrote in the catalogue, “To consider that he began his collection in some sense as a reaction to his father’s death seems unavoidable” (p. 23). Second, because of his traumatic series of deaths, losses, separations, and the inability of his father to provide for the family, Freud could not exalt his father into a believable divinity that could keep him company. Third, he could not use the maternal representation or the actual presence of his mother after his father’s death to offer him some internal consolation. Freud wrote very little about his mother and never said that he loved her. In my efforts to understand the relationship between mother and son, I placed in a file every word he wrote about her. It was shocking to discover that most quotations, dreams, memories, and associations connect Freud’s mother to death and to God (Rizzuto, 1998b, p. 226). When his mother died, Freud did not attend the funeral. Her death, as he wrote to Ferenczi, gave him “a feeling of liberation, of release, which I think I also understand. I was not free to die as long as she was alive, and now I am” (E. Freud, 1960, p. 400).

Freud’s complaint about God was always the same: God could not offer protection or consolation against the terrors of childhood or the tragedies of adult life. Such a God did not exist. The only choice for Freud, the mature man, the “godless Jew,” was to become self-sufficient, renounce the wish for consolation, and stoically accept reality as it is. That was his ego ideal. It was a necessary ego ideal. Freud’s early childhood and later life did not offer him lasting protection. He was born to parents who were mourning. The deaths of his paternal grandfather and of his maternal uncle and little brother, both named Julius, marked him for the rest of his life. In his childhood depression he found in his nurse a person who offered him the “means for living and going on living” (Masson, 1984, p. 269). She was abruptly taken away from him, never to be seen again. Then he clung to his father, admiring the powerful man. He too let him down. He experienced the move to Vienna and his father’s incompetence in supporting the family as a catastrophe. Soon after, when Freud started attending the local public school, his favorite paternal uncle was jailed for ten years for dealing in counterfeit money. He had already associated his mother with death and could not lean on her. Soon, the child Freud was assigned the role of an adult in the family. After he started earning money, he became the support of his parents and sisters. In short, his early attachments were painfully disrupted. There

was no one who could protect him. He had to take care of himself and of others. There was no protective divinity, no kind Providence.

Freud's unmet need for protection and consolation prompted him to reject the God of his father. Yet his actual father could offer him a loving and playful presence, which he needed and cherished. I suggested that he used the memorial representations of the biblical illustrations—transformed into antiquities—to retain the affectionate and playful presence of his father. In an unconscious and roundabout way, Freud had created his ad hoc ancestor temple and cult.

What did I learn from my immersion in Freud's inner life as a child, a son, a collector, and a nonbeliever? First, I confirmed Freud's assertion about a person's memories: "The residual memories—which he himself does not understand—cloak priceless pieces of evidence about the most important features in his mental development" (Freud, 1910, p. 84). Second, I rediscovered the powerful affective impact of representational memories of images and their link to the objects with whom they had been shared. I learned about their potential to become transitional objects—even if images are transformed into three-dimensional objects—whose primary function is to bring about the disguised presence of a beloved and needed object. Freud made his office into a transitional space in which he was never alone. Yet the amateur but sophisticated archaeologist did not have to inform himself as an adult of his emotional need for the company of his father. Freud's emotional use of his antique pieces brought to my mind the elaborate decoration of places of worship in many religions. Do they too establish a connection with internal sustaining—or even frightening—objects as part of their function as religious objects?

Freud placed all his hopes in psychoanalysis. He truly believed that religion as an illusion had no future while science and the voice of the intellect could offer some help to increase "the love of man and the decrease of suffering" (1927, p. 53). He added, "We believe that it is possible for scientific work to gain some knowledge about the reality of the world. . . . If this belief is an illusion, then we are in the same position as you. But science has given us evidence by its numerous and important successes that it is no illusion" (p. 55).

Freud's belief was profound and sincere. It was his belief, to which he committed his life and his indefatigable intellect. The writing of *Why Did Freud Reject God?* convinced me that, whether we are ordinary religious believers or psychoanalysts who believe in psychoanalysis, we organize our lives around profoundly significant beliefs. We do not choose them. They are so dynamically integrated into the fabric of our psychic being that we have to believe. At the end of my research on Freud, I had become very fond of him as a person who struggled with very difficult life circumstances. I felt affectionate compassion for the child he had been and profound respect for the great man he made of himself in his search for meaning and a cause

to commit himself to. He had unveiled to me the genesis of his need to believe in psychoanalysis. He also prompted me to ask a wider question, a general question, not a religious one: What is the psychic function of believing, the action of believing, not just the function of the belief content? That question started me on a new search that resulted in my article “Believing and Personal and Religious Beliefs” (2002a).

My research pointed to the ubiquity of what I decided to call the believing function. It is a necessary and compelling function that organizes our understanding of reality in conjunction with the sense of self and its conflicts and defenses. It is present in the structures of perception and in the unconscious processes of the mind. The believing function organizes personal beliefs based on interpretations of somatic experiences of satisfaction or pain, affective exchanges with others, and societal construction of reality. The beliefs resulting from the interpretation of personal events become part of the sense of self and of the self-structure. The transformation of personal beliefs, as psychoanalysts know so well, “requires a process of self-transformation, of confrontation of conscious and unconscious convictions about oneself, in order to modify the aspects of self-identity that are deeply dependent on particular beliefs” (Rizzuto, 2002a, p. 461). This understanding of the self-organizing function of belief suggests that religious beliefs are a particular aspect of a general function. We select to believe from the religion we have encountered in development the components that have been integrated into our own self. We reject those that are incompatible with what we feel and think we are. Therefore, religion or its absence is not a separate realm of the person but an integral part of a personally organized belief system dynamically organized by the developing self. It is not possible to tease apart religious belief or unbelief from the fabric of the self.

My latest contribution is my chapter “Psychoanalytic Considerations About Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy,” written for Len Sperry and Edward P. Shafranske’s *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy* (2005). In it, I examine the cultural and linguistic evolution from *religion* to *spirituality*. I look at the cultural phenomena that gave an evolving meaning to the term *spirituality*. Many cultural and political events, such as empiricism, modern science, modernism, communism, postmodernism, the atomic bomb, a new ecological awareness, and the “death of God” movement, contributed to questioning of the great metanarratives of the major religions. People were feeling a need for other ways of relating to the sacred.

The replacement of the word *religion* by *spirituality* signals a shift in the psychological attitude to sacred realities. *Religion*, with its etymological root in linking (in Latin *re-ligare*), points to a personal relationship with God or gods. The focus of attention is on the divinity. Religion is god-centered. Spirituality is subject and

experience centered. Spirituality seeks modes of relatedness with sacred realities that suit the individual's and the community's experiences of them [p. 32].

Subjectivism and relativism are modifying dominant religious styles of object relations.

This article presents the latest step of the journey I have taken as a psychoanalyst interested in the developmental and psychodynamic processes that govern the relationship between an individual and his or her dealings with the divinity. I do not yet know where I may go in the future.

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