

Freud at the Double Gate: “My Son, the Myops” as a Dream of Messianic Liberation

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The Dream

Another time I had a dream that a man I knew on the staff of the University said to me: ‘My son, the Myops.’ Then followed a dialogue made up of short remarks and rejoinders. After this, however, there was yet a third piece of dream in which I myself and my sons figured.

On account of some happenings or other in the city of Rome it is necessary for the children to flee, and this they do. The scene is then laid before a gate, a two-winged gate in antique style (the Porta Romana in Siena, as I know while I am still dreaming). I am sitting on the edge of a well, and am very sad; I almost weep. A feminine person—nurse, nun—brings out the two boys and hands them over to their father, who is not myself. The elder of the two is distinctly my eldest son, and I do not see the face of the other; the woman who brings the boy asks him for a parting kiss. She is distinguished by a red nose. The boy denies her the kiss, but says to her, extending his hand to her in parting, ‘Auf Geseres’ and to both of us (or to one of us) ‘Auf Ungeseres.’ I have the idea that the latter indicates an advantage.

—Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (1913), combining the introductory fragment with the later main dream scene.

Abstract

Sigmund Freud’s dream conventionally known as “My Son, the Myops,” recorded in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, has long been recognized as containing an important Jewish dimension. Freud himself connects the dream with Theodor Herzl’s *Das neue Ghetto*, the “Jewish question,” anxiety over the future of his children, their lack of a fatherland, and his wish that they might someday move freely across national boundaries. Peter Loewenberg later identified a hidden Zionist theme within the dream.

This essay proposes a broader psychobiographical interpretation. “My Son, the Myops” may represent Freud’s own passage through a double religious threshold. At the Porta Romana—a double gateway leading symbolically toward Rome—Freud confronts two systems of religious authority that had shaped him: Christianity, emotionally impressed upon him during childhood through his Catholic nursemaid, and Judaism, embodied in the paternal tradition of Moses and the Law.

Freud’s psychological task is therefore analogous to that of a warrior preparing for battle who must first conquer the enemy within himself. Before he can imagine liberating others, he must free himself from both religious systems that continue to exert authority over him. The dream’s children, nurse or nun, unidentified father, refused kiss, *Geseres*, invented *Ungeseres*, Passover associations, and Freud’s identification with Hannibal can consequently be read as elements of a concealed drama of liberation.

In this reading, psychoanalysis becomes more than a scientific project. It becomes the instrument by which Freud imagines freeing humanity from religious authority and, ultimately, freeing “the children” from the inherited cycle of religious division, persecution, and antisemitism.

Introduction: The Dream of the Children

The fragment that gives the dream its familiar title initially seems obscure. Professor M. says, “My son, the Myops.” Freud explains, however, that Professor M. and his son act as screens for Freud and Freud’s own eldest son.

Freud later provides the dream’s more extensive scene. Something has happened in Rome, and the children must be brought to safety. Freud finds himself before an ancient double gateway, the Porta Romana of Siena. He sits beside a fountain, “greatly depressed” and almost in tears.

A woman whom Freud describes ambiguously as an attendant, nurse, or nun brings out two boys and delivers them to their father, who is explicitly not Freud. The elder boy is recognizably Freud’s eldest son. Freud cannot see the face of the second child.

The woman asks the elder child for a farewell kiss. He refuses. Instead, he extends his hand and says, “Auf Geseres.” He subsequently says, “Auf Ungeseres,” a word apparently created by Freud within the dream. Freud has the feeling that *Ungeseres* represents something preferable to *Geseres*.

Freud then tells us with unusual directness what lies behind the dream. His thoughts concern *Das neue Ghetto*, the Jewish question, anxiety about the future of the children, the inability to provide them with a homeland, and the hope that they might eventually possess the rights of citizens and move freely across frontiers.

The foundation of the dream is therefore unusually clear. Whatever additional meanings it may contain, Freud himself establishes its emotional field:

children, Judaism, antisemitism, exile, Rome, citizenship, and liberation.

The argument advanced here is that these elements form part of a much larger psychological drama. Freud is not simply worrying about his own children. He is imagining a means by which future generations—the children of Israel—might escape the historical cycle of religious difference and antisemitic persecution.

The dream may therefore express a concealed messianic ambition: not a religious messianism, but a secular one.

Freud would save the children by destroying the conditions that perpetuated their suffering.

The Warrior Who Must First Conquer Himself

Freud’s identification with Hannibal provides an essential context for understanding the dream.

Freud wrote that Hannibal had been one of his great childhood heroes. The identification intensified when Freud encountered antisemitism. Hannibal, a Semitic military leader who challenged Rome, came to symbolize persistence, defiance, and resistance to the power represented by Catholic Rome.

Freud also connected his own repeated inability to reach Rome with deeply cherished ambitions. Rome was therefore more than a geographical destination. It represented an objective that Freud psychologically longed to conquer.

This makes the setting of “My Son, the Myops” particularly suggestive.

Something dangerous has occurred in Rome.

The children must escape.

Freud has not yet entered the city.

He stands instead at the **Porta Romana**, an ancient double gateway leading toward it.

The scene resembles that of a warrior positioned before the entrance to a battlefield.

Yet Freud’s true adversary cannot simply be Rome or the Catholic Church. Before he can challenge religious authority externally, he must confront the religious structures within himself.

His battle is therefore double.

He must free himself from the Christianity emotionally implanted during his earliest childhood.

He must also free himself from the Jewish Law inherited through his family and paternal tradition.

This provides a possible psychological meaning for the dream’s striking architectural feature: the **double gate**.

It is unnecessary to claim that Freud consciously designed one door to represent Christianity and the other Judaism. Dreams rarely operate with such literal precision. Rather, the double gateway may act as a condensation of Freud’s double religious inheritance.

Before the warrior can pass through the gates and undertake his mission, he must overcome both forms of sacred authority within himself.

Before Freud can become the liberator, Freud must first become free.

The First Door: The Catholic Mother

Freud was raised within a Jewish family, but his earliest childhood also contained a powerful Catholic influence through his nursemaid.

He later remembered her as an intelligent older woman who spoke to him about God and Hell and took him to church. The religious impression was apparently strong enough that the young Freud returned home repeating Christian ideas to his family.

This history gives special significance to the woman who appears in “My Son, the Myops.”

Freud describes her ambiguously as something like a nurse, attendant, or nun.

It would be too strong to claim that the woman simply *is* Freud’s childhood nursemaid. Freud himself connects her with other contemporary figures. But Freud’s own theory of dreams permits a single dream figure to condense several people and emotional relationships.

The nurse/nun may therefore contain, among other associations, the Catholic woman who first introduced the child Freud to God, Hell, church, and Christian salvation.

The structure of the dream is striking.

The religious woman brings the children to **a father who is not Freud.**

This unidentified father may contain another symbolic meaning: the heavenly Father.

The sequence then becomes almost liturgical:

the religious woman leads the children to the Father.

But the eldest son refuses the ritual.

The woman asks for a kiss.

The child will not give it.

The Refused Kiss: Freud’s Difficulty Saying Goodbye to Christianity

A farewell kiss communicates two things simultaneously.

It expresses affection.

It also completes a separation.

The child’s refusal can therefore be interpreted in two opposite but psychologically compatible ways.

He rejects the woman.

But he also fails to complete the goodbye.

This ambivalence fits Freud's childhood relationship with Christianity remarkably well.

Christianity was not merely an intellectual doctrine that the adult Freud encountered and rejected. Its images had entered his emotional life through an important maternal figure during his earliest childhood.

God and Hell were connected not simply with belief but with attachment.

To free himself completely from Christianity, Freud therefore had to separate psychologically from something that he had once loved.

The dream transfers that conflict onto the son.

The child will not kiss the nun.

Instead, he extends his hand and says:

“Auf Geseres.”

Ordinarily a farewell might involve *Auf Wiedersehen*—until we meet again.

Freud specifically draws attention to the strange substitution.

Geseres, as Freud explains it, evokes ordained suffering, calamity, imposed misfortune, lamentation, or wailing.

The child therefore does not offer the woman the conventional language of reunion.

He gives her the language of suffering.

The gesture can be read simultaneously as separation and judgment.

The hand remains extended—the relationship has not entirely disappeared—but the kiss has been withheld.

The emotional bond has been transformed into confrontation.

Freud cannot simply say goodbye to Christianity.

He must pass judgment upon it.

From Geseres to Ungeseres: Ending Ordained Suffering

The dream then takes an even more remarkable linguistic turn.

After *Geseres* comes Freud's invented word:

Ungeseres.

The German prefix *un-* negates what follows it.

Freud says that within the dream he somehow understands *Ungeseres* to represent something preferable to *Geseres*.

At the simplest level, therefore, the opposition becomes:

Geseres — ordained suffering, calamity, affliction.

Ungeseres — the negation or overcoming of that suffering.

Freud's subsequent associations lead from these words to food, then to leavened and unleavened bread, from unleavened bread to Passover, and finally to the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt.

This sequence may be central to the dream.

Jewish suffering leads to Passover.

Passover leads to Exodus.

Exodus means that the children leave bondage.

If Freud is simultaneously worrying about the future of "the children," antisemitism, exile, citizenship, and the absence of a secure homeland, then *Ungeseres* may represent something much larger than a linguistic joke.

It may symbolize the condition Freud hopes to create:

a world after Geseres.

A world after historically ordained Jewish suffering.

A world in which the children no longer inherit the persecution of their ancestors.

In this sense, *Ungeseres* becomes Freud's imagined secular Promised Land.

The Second Door: Moses and the Law

But Christianity cannot be Freud's only adversary if his ultimate objective is the abolition of religious division itself.

He must also confront Judaism.

Christianity rests historically upon Judaism. Christianity inherits the Hebrew God, the Hebrew patriarchs, the Mosaic tradition, and the concept of divine Law. If Freud believes that religion itself contributes to the divisions producing antisemitism, then eliminating Christianity while preserving its religious foundation would not complete his task.

The second battle is therefore against **Moses and the Law**.

This creates an extraordinary paradox.

Freud must destroy Moses.

Yet Freud must also become Moses.

Moses liberates the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage and gives them the Law.

Freud's imagined mission would reverse the second part of that achievement.

He would liberate the modern children of Israel from bondage again—but this time part of the bondage is the continuing authority of religious Law itself.

Psychoanalysis consequently becomes a new instrument of Exodus.

If religion can be explained psychologically, its authority changes fundamentally.

If God can be understood as an enlargement of childhood paternal authority, God no longer needs to be regarded as an external supernatural reality.

If religious commandments can be explained through human psychology, then Law can be analyzed rather than simply obeyed.

Freud would therefore attack religion not merely by declaring that religion is false but by explaining **why human beings create religion**.

That is a far more radical assault.

Destroying the supernatural foundation of Jewish Law would simultaneously undermine the Christian system constructed upon it.

The desired endpoint would not be the triumph of Judaism over Christianity or Christianity over Judaism.

It would be a society in which neither category possessed the supernatural authority necessary to divide human beings.

The imagined result would be a secular brotherhood in which the children could cross borders without being defined and persecuted by inherited religious identity.

Hannibal and Moses: Warrior and Liberator

Two heroic figures now stand behind Freud.

Hannibal gives Freud the model of the warrior against Rome.

Moses gives Freud the model of the liberator of the children.

Freud psychologically combines them.

From Hannibal comes defiance, perseverance, aggression, and the determination to challenge Rome.

From Moses comes Exodus, leadership, the salvation of an oppressed people, and the creation of a new social order.

But Freud cannot merely imitate either man.

Hannibal never conquered Rome.

Moses gave Israel precisely the Law from which Freud believes modern civilization must eventually free itself.

Freud's imagined task therefore requires him to surpass both.

He must succeed where Hannibal failed.

He must overturn what Moses established.

That is what distinguishes this ambition from ordinary professional ambition.

Freud certainly wished to become an important scientist.

But scientific recognition alone cannot fully explain the dream's emotional landscape of children, exile, Jewish suffering, Rome, Exodus, and redemption.

The scientific ambition may instead have been the **vehicle**.

The deeper destination was liberation.

“By the Waters of Babylon”: Freud's Grief for the Children

The emotional center of the dream is not triumph.

Freud sits beside the water “greatly depressed” and almost in tears.

His own association leads to Psalm 137:

By the waters of Babylon, the exiled Israelites sit and weep.

The importance of this association should not be underestimated.

Before Freud imagines liberation, he identifies himself with a displaced people.

The children are endangered.

Rome is threatening.

A Jewish colleague has suffered professional discrimination.

Freud has recently encountered a drama concerned with contemporary antisemitism.

He worries that he cannot provide his children with a homeland.

The fantasy of liberation therefore grows directly out of grief.

Freud is not initially the victorious warrior.

He is the mourner by the waters.

Only after confronting the suffering does the possibility of Exodus emerge.

The warrior begins by weeping.

The Faceless Child and Julius

The second child presents one of the most intriguing but necessarily speculative possibilities in the dream.

Freud says that he cannot see the boy’s face.

He does not identify this child as his deceased younger brother Julius, and therefore any such identification must remain a hypothesis.

Nevertheless, the possibility deserves consideration.

Freud’s younger brother Julius died in infancy when Freud himself was still extremely young. Freud later acknowledged intense childhood jealousy toward younger siblings, and psychoanalytic biographers have long considered the possibility that the death of Julius became connected with unconscious guilt over hostile wishes.

Within such a psychobiographical framework, the dream's invisible child may contain an association with the brother Freud could not save and may once have wished would disappear.

The symbolism would then become especially powerful.

The visible boy is Freud's living son.

The invisible boy is the dead child.

The living child can be recognized.

The dead brother has no face.

Why can Freud not look at him?

Perhaps because seeing Julius would require confronting the primitive fantasy:

I wanted you gone.

The ambition to "save the children" would then contain several layers simultaneously.

Freud seeks to protect his actual sons.

He seeks symbolically to protect the children of Israel.

And at the deepest level, he may be attempting to save through substitute children the one child he could never save.

One dead Julius is answered by an imagined future in which innumerable children are liberated.

Such an interpretation must remain conjectural, but it offers a psychologically coherent connection between personal guilt and universal ambition.

The Red Nose: An Open Symbol

The woman's conspicuously red nose remains difficult to interpret securely.

Its prominence suggests that it carried some associative significance for Freud.

One might consider associations with blood, sacrifice, Christian imagery, or the corporeal symbolism surrounding Christ. It might even be tempting to connect redness with the blood through which Christian redemption is traditionally imagined.

But there is not enough evidence to make this identification confidently.

The symbol should therefore remain open.

The larger argument does not require it.

Indeed, acknowledging uncertainty strengthens the interpretation by distinguishing between evidence-supported associations and more speculative possibilities.

Psychoanalysis as Freud's Weapon

The argument now returns to the central question:

What kind of ambition was Freud pursuing?

Freud unquestionably wished to make important scientific discoveries.

He wanted recognition.

He wanted psychoanalysis to survive him.

But “My Son, the Myops” suggests the possibility that scientific achievement was serving something psychologically larger.

Psychoanalysis gave Freud a weapon capable of challenging religion at its foundation.

Traditional religious criticism argues against particular beliefs.

Psychoanalysis does something more threatening.

It proposes an explanation for why human beings need gods in the first place.

If the heavenly Father originates psychologically in the earthly father, then theology becomes psychology.

If religious guilt derives from childhood conflict, then sin becomes analyzable.

If divine Law is rooted in human psychological history, then revelation loses its privileged position.

Psychoanalysis could therefore do what military attack against Rome never could.

It could undermine religious authority from within.

And because Christianity rests historically upon Judaism, an attack upon the foundations of one becomes an attack upon both.

Freud's final enemy is consequently not Catholicism alone.

It is not Judaism alone.

It is the human psychological structure that transforms the father into God and human law into divine Law.

That structure exists within Freud himself.

This is why the warrior must first fight himself.

The Double Gate Reconsidered

The Porta Romana can now be understood as the dream's organizing symbol.

Freud sits before a **double threshold**.

One gate leads through Christianity.

The other leads through Judaism.

Behind the first stands the beloved Catholic nursemaid, the church, Hell, salvation, and the heavenly Father.

Behind the second stand Jakob Freud, Moses, divine Law, Jewish chosenness, and the paternal tradition.

Freud cannot simply reject one and embrace the other.

He must pass beyond both.

Only then can he attempt to construct another world.

This is what distinguishes his imagined solution from political Zionism.

The Zionist answer to antisemitism is territorial:

Give the Jewish people a homeland.

Freud's imagined answer is psychological and civilizational:

Create a world in which religious distinctions no longer possess the power to separate human beings into mutually hostile groups.

In that world, the children will need no special refuge because they will be free to move across frontiers.

That is *Ungeseres*.

Not another exile.

Not another ghetto.

Not merely another homeland.

The abolition of the conditions producing the suffering itself.

A Secular Messianic Ambition

The term **messianic** requires clarification.

The argument is not that Freud secretly believed himself to be a supernatural messiah.

The proposed messianism is psychological and secular.

It concerns the magnitude and structure of the ambition.

A messianic figure rescues a people from suffering and inaugurates a transformed world.

Freud's imagined project contains precisely those elements.

There is a suffering people.

There are endangered children.

There is exile.

There is an oppressive old order.

There is a liberator.

There is a new teaching.

And there is the promise of a radically different future.

Freud replaces revelation with psychoanalysis.

The analyst replaces the priest.

Psychological insight replaces religious confession.

Reason replaces divine command.

The secular society replaces sacred tribal division.

And the children are released from *Geseres* into *Ungeseres*.

In this sense Freud's ambition may be understood not primarily as the desire to become a great scientist, but as the desire to become a new kind of liberator.

Science supplies the method.

Psychoanalysis supplies the weapon.

The children supply the purpose.

Conclusion: Freud's Exodus Dream

"My Son, the Myops" may therefore be read as Freud's **Exodus dream**.

The children are endangered and must be brought out.

Freud sits before a double gate and weeps.

The Catholic mother appears.

Behind her stands a father who is not Freud.

The son refuses her kiss.

Instead of *Auf Wiedersehen*, he says *Auf Geseres*.

Then comes Freud's extraordinary invention:

Ungeseres.

The cancellation of ordained suffering.

Freud's own associations lead from that word toward Passover, Exodus, and the children of Israel.

Behind the dream stands Hannibal, the Semitic warrior against Rome.

Behind Freud stands Moses, the liberator of Israel.

Freud must become both while ultimately transcending both.

He must be Hannibal enough to challenge Rome, yet achieve what Hannibal could not.

He must be Moses enough to lead the children from bondage, yet confront the religious Law Moses represents.

But before either task can be completed, Freud must pass through the double threshold within himself.

He must separate from the Catholic woman who introduced him to God and Hell.

He must confront Moses, the father, and the Jewish Law.

He must expose religion itself as a human psychological creation.

Only then can the children be free.

The dream thus suggests a distinction between two ambitions that may have coexisted within Freud.

His **scientific ambition** concerned the discovery and establishment of psychoanalysis.

His deeper **messianic ambition** concerned what psychoanalysis might accomplish for civilization.

Science was the vehicle.

Liberation was the destination.

Freud therefore stands at the Porta Romana not merely as a scientist approaching a discovery, but symbolically as a warrior preparing for a campaign.

Before him are Rome, religion, history, and antisemitism.

Behind him are the children.

Between them stands the double gate.

And the first person Freud must liberate is himself.