

## **Son of God – The Image of God in the Eyes of a Child**

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### **Introduction**

For more than two decades, I have served as a kindergarten teacher at an Israeli state kindergarten and I found it important to integrate Jewish heritage, local culture and Biblical stories into the kindergarten curriculum. Through these stories, I exposed children to the Bible's central character - 'God'. This exposure aroused in the children immense curiosity and preoccupation with God's character, leading me to ask: "How does a preschool child perceive the image of God?" My extensive experience as a kindergarten teacher and the knowledge I had acquired through my Jewish Philosophy studies formed an excellent basis for my doctorate thesis research. Interestingly enough, once I felt competent to commence he appeared, the "teacher", and how amazed I was to realize that my mentor was none other than a 4.5 years old boy named Ram (pseudo name), a secular student at my kindergarten. Ram felt that he and I shared a deep bond of love, confidence and trust and decided to share with me his private secret: he sees the image of God through a light revealed before him during sleep. Ram's visions set me on an inspirational journey of inquiry, discovery and research conducted through an analysis of his drawings, our conversations and his world of divinity, a realm overflowing with symbols and imageries that were surprisingly similar in many respects to the worldview of Jewish Kabbalists. The fact that Ram was a secular child and not a Kabbalist studying at a Talmudic college led to my comprehension that his spiritual world and God consciousness were not constructed within the context of a religious world abundant with rituals and texts, but rather a secular world filled with personal symbols formed and inspired by computer games, TV shows and the various themes that were taught at the kindergarten.

Ram's case revealed to me two distinct influences related to the view of the image of God that were complimentary and intertwined with one another. The first is the emotive influence. Ram's drawings and our shared conversations about God provided for him an emotive address as it enabled him to converse about his spiritual life while affording me access to his deepest emotions and thoughts. In each of his drawings, Ram portrayed a spontaneous discovery of the unconscious, where rest contents unmanifest in the consciousness. His thoughts presented mythical elements and symbols that were intuitive and expressed the inclinations of his psyche, ones that were never taught at home nor at the kindergarten and, moreover, appear to be beyond his personal psyche and the cognitive perception acquired via his environs, i.e. a primordial archetype. Parallel to the personal, inner and intuitive influence, it was possible to observe the cultural-environmental influence, where Ram constructed his God consciousness and spiritual world by means of symbols which he acquired

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

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from the realms of cyber and TV, as well as contents that were taught at the kindergarten.

In accordance with this duality, this article will present a review of research that engages with the theme of children's subjective experience of the image of God alongside studies that deal with the cultural-environmental influence on children's view of God. This will be followed by a demonstration of the significance of integrating children's drawings in our understanding of children's view of God, and concludes with a presentation of Ram's case study through an analysis of his drawings and our conversations on God. The objective is to describe, interpret and identify the manner by which Ram constructs his view of the image of God in light of both cultural-environmental influences and subjective personal-mental influences.

### **The view of the image of God**

Various theoreticians examined the spiritual aspect of children's view of the image of God in early childhood based on Depth Psychology<sup>1</sup> which was developed by C.G. Jung (1958, 1973), and his follower Erich Neumann (1970, pp. 112-113). They view mental development during the commencement of individual life as one that is similar to the development of society, coming into expression as a mythological reality much like the myth of the creation of the world, where the child's image of God develops during the process of separation from his mother. Neumann (2011, p. 11) views this separation process as a mystical encounter that generates change and transformation unto the birth of a third entity, which is expressed by the symbolization of the ego. The ego creates symbols of paradoxical identity, of nonhuman good and bad mythical images such as fearful animals, monsters, faeries, superheroes, and God. Similar to Neumann, Winnicott (1968, p. 80) contends that belief in God originates from the child's process of separation from his mother whereby "human nature reveals itself." In this context, Ogden (1989, p. 1) proposes the concept of the 'analytic third,' which he defines as a third subject created in between the mother and child during the separation process. This is a new, shared unconscious entity which comes to life as a result of imagination, dreams and emotions, and assists the child in regulating his inner world by reducing tension and aggression that rise in his exterior world. Jung (1989, p. 111) claims that this archetype projection is expressed in primordial images that exist in the collective unconscious and that they form the source of childhood fantasies. Hence, the child experiences primordial fantasies that surface from a memory of prehistoric images, which are passed on from one generation to the next genetically, and not from real life, and projects these images unto reality. Jung (in Samuels, 1985, p. 27) views this experience as an inherited archetype that is similar to other human experiences such

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<sup>1</sup> The term Depth Psychology was first coined at the end of the 19th century by one of the first psychoanalysts, the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler. With regards to approaches of psychoanalytical therapy and research that emphasize the significance of the unconscious, Mitchell (2006, p. 213) claims that underneath the surface within the psyche, latent instinctive psychodynamic forces are at work striving to come into expression. These forces exist below the visible level of social interaction and social influence.

as birth, sucking, motherhood, sexuality and death. This is similarly demonstrated in nature in the example of a chick that inherently knows how to follow his mother, build a nest, and fly along with the flock. Thus, in the collective unconscious there are images of the world which drive man forward and provide him the power of continuity. Harding (1999, pp. 194-195) further contends that the child's view of God is not constructed from thoughts and conscious notions but rather from the collective unconscious of the psyche and archetype paradigms that exist in religious myths and stories, folklore and fairy tales, and that these function as patterns for the developing psyche. The influence of culture

As aforesaid, many theoreticians view the child's spiritual belief in God as an organic, innate, personal and inner belief. However, there are also external cultural and social influences that impact the child's view and may, at times, be contrary to the child's inner view. This claim is echoed by Neumann (1970, pp. 209-210) who argues that the creative mystical experience is linked to the child's inner belief and in some instances contradicts the moral ruling of the social conscience, the predominant religion, and the contents of awareness that compose the cultural canon. Similarly, Eaves and Gross (1992, p. 265) claim that human beings come to the world carrying ancient biological luggage that might not be aligned with the current world. This may create a discrepancy between the child's view of God and that of their environs. Winnicott (2014, pp. 77-79) similarly viewed human belief that he claims develops in the heart of the baby as true, inner, personal and private belief, which he termed 'the ability to believe' or 'belief in'. This is raw, naked belief without form or content, an infinite belief that precedes belief in God or any faith. Yet Winnicott (2014, p. 85) stresses that there are distinct polarities in the population who are unaware of a child's capability to create God hence they instill the notion in the child at an early stage consequently preventing the child from developing their own personal authentic belief. Harding (1999, p. 30) adds that a child attains the recognition that there is such a thing as God from birth. Knowledge of God is the basic constructive experience of the child, she claims, but a society that believes in man takes measures to make one forget, ignore or suppress this experience. Harding (1999, p. 27) views child spirituality as an innate universal phenomenon that is imprinted in a child's life and develops organically, where social processes bear influence on a child in their prevention or repudiation of the child's spiritual views.

In light of these assertions, several researchers (Karlsena, Coyleb and William, 2014; Hay and Nye, 2006; Nye, 2009; Reynaert, 2014) inspected the influence of parental and educators' encouragement and development of spirituality on children. These studies suggest that in the presence of an adult which the child trusts and who enables the child's expression of personal spiritual thought, the child's spirituality develops accordingly. However, in the event that the adult ignores the child's spiritual aspects, the child retreats from his views, abstains and does not voice them. De Roos and Miedema's (2001,a) research demonstrates the link between the child's view of the image of God and the educational figures surrounding him, suggesting that

mothers may carry stronger influence on the religious development of their children than their fathers, yet this influence is conditioned by the relationship between the child and his mother. In other research, De Roos and Miedema (2001,b) inspected the relation between the kindergarten teacher and the child. Findings showed that children who come from a secular home and are situated in a kindergarten that teaches religious values are strongly influenced by the view of the image of God in accordance with the child's relationship with the kindergarten teacher. These scholars contend that teachers particularly contribute to the conceptualizations of God as it appears in biblical stories and prayers, whereas parental influence is apparent in the emotive aspects of fostering, love and care in parent-child relations. Wills (2014, p. 190) and Reynaert (2014, p. 180) argue that the more education affords the child critical, independent investigation of personal spirituality that is not oriented by the adult's line of thinking, the more the child is able to bestow meaning to their life and foster self-identity in the world. Moreover, Neumann (2011, pp. 74-77) claims that the more unilateral and severe the religious and cultural demands on the child are, the more inhibitions weigh upon him, increasing tension between the conscious and the unconscious. This tension does not encourage creative achievements nor spiritual development. Like Neumann, Winnicott (2014, p. 79) perceives religion and notions related to the institutionalization of education and morals as emptying man of personal creativity and preventing the developing individual from creating all that is related to concepts of God, benevolence and morals, depleting man from the significant aspect of creativity. Neumann (1970, pp. 363-366) therefore suggests that in order for society to succeed in maintaining a balance between these two polarities and sustain a healthy culture that can enable the ego to exist without being generalized unto the environs, society should sustain a diversity of religion related rituals that are based on myths allowing exposure to symbols that express the spiritual aspect of the human psyche. The child thus learns to integrate them in his subconscious and uses them to interpret emotions and feelings revealed through visions, dreams, fantasies or an inner image expressed in the image of God thereby enabling the child spiritual and individual connection to their inner God.

### **The view of the Image of God Through the use of Drawing**

In order to understand Ram's spiritual world of visions, my research methodology included conversations and drawings reifying his inner world, based on the premise that drawing forms an experience which integrates several sensory organs through which a child formulates their world view, and is perceived by the child as a more expansive and user friendly method than verbal expression with which to create and invent reality. Drawing further affords learning and expression of the child's inner affect world, enabling the observing adult to comprehend the child's personal world view from their fresh and unique perspective (Vimmer, 2011). As Piaget claims (1992, p. 146), upon encountering spiritual imageries we must recall that it is difficult to measure them experimentally as they are internal, hence the need for indirect methods - such as drawing. Jung makes a similar argument (1958, pp. 109-110) contending that the perspective of the image of God constitutes a link to the depths of

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

primordial humanity, expressed in a language of pictures and symbols which is the native language of the human unconscious. When we engage with the image of God, we are dealing with unconscious mental processes composed of collective archetypes,<sup>2</sup> and these unconscious mental expressions are optimally relayed through the figurative language of drawing, expressing the symbols (Jung, 1958, p. 25). In other words, by means of drawing a child is able to create symbols with which to express the image of God. Cassirer (1954, p. 25) defines man as a symbol-creating being, whereby this world of symbols enables him to comprehend, organize, interpret human experience and express their inner world. Similar to Cassirer, Geertz (1990, pp. 93-94) views symbols as being part of the networks of meaning which man creates and constituting the culture in which man lives, i.e. symbols are formed out of social structuralism and provide a basic guideline for the institutionalization of psychological and social processes that design public behavior. Like Geertz, James (1984) contends that the original impetus to create Gods was always psychological and influenced by social structures and conditions; these are not deep structures of the psyche but rather the inclinations and needs of human beings within a society. What Cassirer, Geertz and James describe is essentially a social phenomenon. Contrarily, Jung presents the dynamics of archetype God imageries, where the view of the image of God is an inner process springing from inner mental processes that are influenced by social and mental aspects. Hence, utilization of drawing provides the observer a gateway into the personal and unique world of the child.

This type of unique perspective was exemplified by Dana (4.5 yrs. old) when drawing an image of God after hearing a biblical story I read out to her. I asked Dana while she was drawing:

Me: What are you drawing?

Dana: I'm drawing God.

Me: Do you know that many people say that no one knows what God looks like?

Dana replied with a smile: Now they'll know...

This example illustrates how drawing enables the child to be the 'expert' of their personal art. As Tay-Lim (2013, p.65) conveys in her study, the child can invent their own reality via drawing, i.e. the child does not discover reality but rather creates it through inner understanding. When a child draws, he/she reflects, examines and investigates their deepest thoughts, opinions and perspectives whilst formulating their inner understanding and view of the image of God. This comprehension is made more accurate through discourse conducted between adult and child after the drawing session, as Einarsodottir, Dockett & Perry (2009, p.219) claim, such discourse is highly significant with respect to the meaning children attribute to their drawings. Thus, the process of knowledge structuralization is shared by both adult

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<sup>2</sup> Lach (2017, p. 20) contends that this is based on the premise of the existence of a collective unconscious common to all mankind, which is composed of archetypes and includes all human experiences experienced by humans throughout the ages. These experiences are embedded within.

and child, where both stand as equitable players in the comprehension of the abstract concepts that the child expresses in their drawing.



After Dana completed her drawing, I conversed with her and asked:

Me: Tell me what you drew?

Dana: I drew God, he has hair, hands, he can do anything and be everywhere and guard everybody and all of the children - if there was no God there wouldn't be anyone to watch over us, only Mom and Dad.

It can be observed that along with the human traits Dana attributed to God, she also attributed the supernatural qualities of omnipotence and omniscience, demonstrating a discrepancy between what children tend to think about God and what they draw. This insight is consistent with Heller (1986, p.6) and Hyde's (1990, p.65) research findings which show that children tend to think about God as a superhuman, abstract and omniscient figure and not an amorphic tangible figure. Yet when they draw God, they do not perceive God as a shapeless figure but rather present it in an anthropomorphic, tangible manner. This view of the image of God was demonstrated by many of my kindergarten children, coinciding with Piaget's (1992) contention that children under the age of seven who have not yet attained the concrete operational stage attribute God human characteristics and anthropomorphize God.<sup>3</sup> According to Piaget, this perspective stems from the fact that children attribute the power of omnipotence to their parents and all adults, and at this development stage perceive God as just another human being. Only upon mastering the concrete operational stage are they capable of developing an abstract concept of God. Namely, it is only when children realize that human beings are not omnipotent that they can characterize God as omnipotent. According to this

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<sup>3</sup> Piaget's (1992, p. 146) theory relies on three important concepts related to the mind: Realism – the child thinks that their inner world is apparent to all and is real; Egocentrism – the child believes that everybody else has an inner world similar to theirs; Animism – children think that inanimate objects have thoughts, desires and feelings.

approach, God is perceived by young children very much like a man in the sky, whereas older children view God as a supernatural force that resides in the heavens.

It is possible to see the different children views of the image of God in their drawings. Some children drew God as a human figure that exists outside of planet Earth and affects the world:



Some children drew the image of God as existing on Earth and part of the child's world:



Some children did not draw the image of God but described it as a distant, transcendent and invisible figure that is an integral part of the skies.





Notwithstanding, Ram's case study is unique, mysterious and different because he did not use anthropomorphic descriptions in his visions. Ram's visions and drawings expressed abstract aspects and symbols of his view of the image of God, as specified in the following.

### **Case Study**

On the week I resolved to conduct my doctorate thesis research on preschool children's view of God, I sat in the kindergarten courtyard pondering about my research subject when all of a sudden Ram, a 4.5 years old boy, one of four siblings of a secular-traditional family approached me and whispered in my ear:

Ram: Do you know, Rina, that I see and talk to God every night when I go to sleep? I asked him with great curiosity: How do you see God? Ram replied enthusiastically: I see a light, I open a door and then I see a tube, like a tunnel with light, and then I enter it through a door and when I open the door I am able to see God, and with me in a circle are all of my friends, Superman, Green Hulk and Spiderman. I asked Ram: How do you know that it's God? Ram: I know because he hovered over me and told me that he was God.

This description made me realize that Ram's view of the image of God was utterly different than the rest of his kindergarten mates, yet at that moment I did not grasp the full scope of just how intriguing and unique his perspective truly was.

This discovery set me on a thrilling journey of investigation and research conducted by means of analyzing Ram's drawings, our conversations and his view of God as demonstrated by his visions which conveyed an inner world filled with images and symbols that were surprisingly similar to the spiritual world of Jewish Kabbalists, yet for Ram originated from the world he knew – T.V shows and themes presented within kindergarten and family context. Moreover, Ram's God consciousness progressed from one drawing to the next, unveiling before me his captivating and mysterious inner world.

### **First Drawing**

Upon Ram's personal disclosure of how he sees God through a tunnel of light, I asked him: "Can you draw the God you see?" Ram picked up various colors and markers

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

and began to draw. In this drawing, he drew the imaginary activity he sees in his visions, forming a circle in which appear all of the figures who shared his secret vision. Although his base line was a circle, the figures stood next to each other around the circle, their heads in the circle and their feet directed towards space, conveying the sense that they were hovering and that the circle does not constitute firm ground on which the figures were standing. Clearly, Ram was using figures he was familiar with from his close friends and TV.

When drawing the figures, Ram used an array of colors, where each figure was colored in accordance with the color it was affiliated with (Spiderman – red, Green Hulk – green). The integration of superheroes in Ram's visions supports Barret's (2012, p.207) contention that children's belief in God is a genetic predisposition which helps them to distinguish between natural and supernatural agents in their environs, hence their inclination to believe in supernatural forces such as superheroes, ghosts and angels.

The picture Ram drew was very similar to a scene appearing in the Green Hulk movie which Ram saw, where all of the superheroes stand in a circle and a beam of light streams out from one of the heroes' shields, i.e. Ram absorbed and assimilated spiritual symbols via fictional TV series, and it is from within these fictions where divine magic lies that he constructs his consciousness of the divine. Rosenberg (2013, p. 330) claims that in our current postmodern era, Olam Hasod [World of Secret] is the fiction world which is unbound by the game rules of human logic; in such a world, the boundaries between creator and created are broken, where man not only perceives the infinite spiritual diversity but also constructs and recreates it in reality. Thus, in his drawing Ram becomes a creator of worlds that originate from superheroes he is familiar with. As Amitai ((1979), p.14) contends, the connection between reality and creativity strengthens at the age of 4-5, where the child constructs in their drawing a reality of their own which relates to their experience of the real world. Their approach to reality is egocentric, describing the reality that they are familiar with and through which they formalize their worldview. In order to fortify this reality, Ram used different colors so as to differentiate between human figures and superhero figures. This concurs with Barrett et al. (Barrett, Richert & Driesenga, 2001; Barrett & Richert, 2003; Barrett, Newman & Richert, 2003; Emily, Burdett & Barrett, 2016) who claim that when describing the image of God, children conduct a clear distinction between the figure of God and the figure of man, as they perceive God's figure differently than man's, and do not construe their belief in God in human terms.

At this point, Ram's use of anthropomorphic figures to portray the image of God was compatible with his age and developmental stage (Rimerman, 1975; Amit, (1979); Vimmer, 2011). However, when describing additional visions Ram used abstract symbols, as specified in the following. It is possible that the first representation originated from my request to present God tangibly, in drawing, which may have restricted Ram's creativity in light of Barrett's (1989, p. 612) claim

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

that the adult's request of a child to use drawing in order to describe God is misleading because in doing so we expect the child to present God in concrete concepts.



One week later, I addressed Ram and asked him:

Ram, do you recall telling me how you see God every night? Ram answered with certainty: Yes, every night I see this light and I enter it and sometimes I see God. This time, instead of asking him what God looks like, I asked: Can you draw me what you see when you enter the light?

It seemed that my request filled Ram with great joy. He took a sheet of paper, a basket full of colors and a box of markers, requested to sit alone in the yard and began drawing. First, he drew his bed in the shape of a car with reality matching colors (red and blue). Then he chose a gold colored oil pastel from a variety of colors found in the basket and began to draw ten lines (stairs), and two gold colored squares (rooms). While drawing, he requested:

Can you attach another sheet? Because one sheet is not enough for the ladder I see.

I attached for him another sheet and he continued to draw happily and without pausing two additional floors, where each floor was separated by ten lines, which were stairs, and two additional rooms. While drawing, Ram found it important to inform me that all rooms and stairs were gold in color.



*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

As I watched Ram draw his vision, I noticed that he used a lot of force when coloring with gold, as opposed to the bed which was colored with feeble lines, creating in this manner a very clear distinction between the bed which was in the realm of reality, and the vision of God's manifestation. As will be specified shortly, the drawing on this occasion was an informative drawing through which Ram expressed his emotions, desires and fears that he was incapable of expressing verbally. Ram's view was not characteristic to his age but rather typical of children aged 6-11 who are capable of expressing their affect world abstractly (Amitai, (1979); Vimmer, 2001)

After Ram completed his drawing, he explained to me the meaning of the drawing and I wrote it down, word by word:

Ram: At night when I go to sleep, I enter the spot of light and go up ten gold-colored stairs and arrive at the first room. When you reach the room, you press a button and arrive at another room and another ten stairs. In the first room there is Rocco (a superhero figure from the AVATAR TV series), and in the second room there are Ang and Appa (AVATAR superheroes). In order to cross the next ten stairs I need to press the red button. But only I can pass this stage, anybody else who attempts to pass this stage dies. Then I ascend another ten stairs and God is up there, and when I reach him I attach wings to myself and jump off the roof and fly. Sometimes God descends to me on Friday and Saturday, and on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I ascend to him. Sometimes I go up and he's not there, and I search for him in the four golden rooms and I can't find him.

Following Ram's description, I asked: Why did you choose to draw with the gold color? Ram smiled and answered: Because it's like Jerusalem of Gold, which is holy.

It can be observed that Ram's drawing serves him as a communication channel with which to convey to me his abstract vision, allowing me to be exposed to his inner world, a paradoxical realm of theosophical thought that is difficult to comprehend solely on the human level. Ram drew his journey of discovery of God, a journey lacking figures yet integrating symbols and images he is familiar with from the world of television that describe his experience. At first, Ram's visions and the God consciousness he created were reminiscent in many respects of the language and symbols used by Jewish Kabbalists in various writings, striving to make contact with God through an unmediated experience. For example: Ram's attempt to comprehend the essence of God commences in a spot of light, which is the starting point from which begins a journey to another world that differs from reality. From this spot of light there are ten stairs separating one stage from the other. Ram describes himself going up the stages in order to discover God, but this time God is latent, unseen as are the additional figures that appear in the vision. As Shalom (1980, p. 9) writes on

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

Jewish Kabbalists: "The Kabbalists interpret their experience in language, images and concepts created by their predecessors with which they are familiar, as the light, the voice and even the name of God are none other than symbolic representations of absolute reality which at its core essence always appears as lacking image and form... and it is this absence of image in the mystic's experience which becomes the propelling force that drives him to attempt attaining a new understanding of God."

Ram's use of ten stairs with which to separate one stage from the next and enable ascension and discovery of the abstract latent God is like the manner by which various Kabbalists make use of God's revelation process through the ten 'sephirot' – a process that can be found in multiple Jewish literary sources such as Sefer Yetzira,<sup>4</sup> Sefer Habahir,<sup>5</sup> and Lurian Kabbalah. These sources describe a process of divine sublimation via the 'sephirot' where God's creative force manifests and is revealed. That is, God's oneness is dynamic and flowing and not static and fixed, perceived as a vital God in motion towards creation, where each 'sephira' represents another stage in self-manifestation of the abstract God (Shalom, 1980, p. 39).

The division of God's revelation into four stages and four gold colored rooms filled with light, where the last room is the room where God manifests appears in Sefer Yetzira,<sup>6</sup> where the 'sephirot' are described as stages in the process of the formation of the elements, which are three according to Sepher Yetzira: the higher spirit of living God, air, water and fire. This division, as part of the processes of God's revelation, also appears in Sefer Hazohar, and Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs):

The upper merkava, which is the sod of the four sides, spreads light on three facets... this is the highest Holy King. His rooms are the upper rooms, and the holy rooms of the upper merkavot... The first room is light that shines on the right side, the light that shines from the end of the world to the end of the world, the light that includes all lights. The light of four shades engraved in the four sides of the world, and called Great God. The light that travels at the forefront, the meeting and the first room, and that is the light that is attached to the head of the sod named Yehova. (Sefer Hazohar and Shir Hashirim)

Namely, attaining the formula for the right degree of the created entity's presence and their ability to receive full divine beneficence necessitates their evolution in four dimensions and in four rooms, which are four steps of condensation beginning with infinite light. These mark four states which the created experiences until he is ready to fulfill his purpose.

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<sup>4</sup> Sefer Yetzira, Chapter A, Verse B.

<sup>5</sup> Sefer Habahir, Section 22

<sup>6</sup> Sefer Yetzira, Mantova print version – Chapter A: " One the spirit of the blessed living God... and that is the Holy Spirit: Two air from spirit... Three water from spirit he engraved and stoned chaos into them... Four fire from water he engraved and stoned."

The striking similarity which I noticed between the symbols used by Ram and those used by numerous Kabbalists puzzled me, since Ram was a secular child who had never studied Kabbalist writings but nonetheless was able to construct similar divine consciousness out of his personal spiritual realm. This evoked several cardinal research questions: How does Ram's thought and divine consciousness formalize? Does Ram use symbols which are collective archetypes of God's manifestation in accordance with Jung's (1958) theory, or does he construct his spiritual world from the environs in which he lives and grows? Does Ram truly believe in the existence of a real world and a spiritual world? To what degree does he differentiate between the external world and the inner subjective world, and what are the boundaries he places between his "self" and his objective reality?

My research led me to discover that Ram's consciousness was constructed by means of fictional figures borrowed from the 'real' world of TV, and symbols he was familiar with from his private world, as specified in the following: the figures hiding in the rooms (Ang and Appa) are figures which appear on a TV series he watches called AVATAR. As I personally sat down to watch the series, I discovered that Avatar tells the story of a lost world divided into four kingdoms, Water, Earth, Fire and Air. The Avatar, when capable of mastering all four elements, is able to reach and travel between the worlds, a notion that is strikingly similar to the stairs Ram drew which can be interpreted as stages to be mastered on the way to becoming a full powered Avatar and to attaining God consciousness. Moreover, throughout the journey, Ram, like the Avatar, encounters dangers and foes. Not everybody can pass these phases and 'gates,' and at each stage there is a mission, which at times entails the risk of death. This view provides deeper understanding of Ram's thought process, a mystical one that may lead to fear and danger emanating from proximity to mystical powers and the divine, yet with a goal that carries within it the prospect of immense freedom – an encounter with God. We can observe here an element of dynamics in the discovery of divine powers. In his vision, Ram perceives himself as elevated beyond the 'other', and that only he can pass the various stages and dangers so as to reach God in a measured, safe manner. At the end of the journey, he jumps into the abyss, receives wings and flies. Ram's aspiration is to be like an angel. According to Lederberg (2011, p. 145), this view represents the magus, who has the will and desire to attain the status of angels, to escape humanity and become an angel, thus gain eternal life, to rule and be above the angels. Yet contrary to angels, the magus succeeds to connect between 'above' and 'below', between human and the divine. A similar process appears in the AVATAR series, where the destiny of the leading character, the Avatar - a spirit who comes to the world in human form, jointly with 'good' magi of the four kingdoms - is to maintain peace and harmony between the four kingdoms of water, earth, fire and air while overcoming countless obstacles and life risking dangers on the way to achieve this mission.

Ram's vision portrays a ritual of meetings with God throughout the week: on Friday and Saturday God descends to him, and on other weekdays he ascends to God.

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

Through this ritual, Ram attributes an element of sacredness he is familiar with from his personal world, which is the Jewish Kabbalat Shabbat at the kindergarten and the Kiddush held at his home every Friday evening. Ram perceives Friday and Saturday as holy days and this is paralleled in his visionary ritual where God ascends to him on these sanctified days. Ritual is a repeated principle perceived as cosmic action, a revelation of God. However, there are instances when God hides and Ram cannot find him and is forced to search for him in the rooms. This phenomenon of God hiding is a spiritual mystical phenomenon in a realm that is pre-conceptualized as unknown, latent and mysterious. It is possible to observe that Ram is experiencing a God who manifests in forces in a continuously expanding and extending activity, namely the more latent God is, the more he is manifest. Ram comprehends that there is an 'other' divine force and he moves towards it, towards something that is not him. Simultaneous to Ram's motion towards the 'other' absolute God, there is a birth of the total 'other' in Ram's psyche, where through release of the ego he can connect with God, where space is a space of oppositions. As Gellert (1998, p.130) states, when God plays hide-and-seek, he is playing with himself through us, where the part that seeks its self is the ego, and the part that hides is the "subconscious."

When I asked Ram why he used the color gold, he answered: "Because it's like Jerusalem of Gold." Ram's choice of color originates from archetype cultural influence.<sup>7</sup> The concept 'Jerusalem of Gold,' contends Amirav (2005, p. 87), presents Jerusalem as holy and an embodiment of perfection, a locale that is differentiated and distinct, to which entrance is not free but restricted, where perpetual residence inside this holy place is allowed only to the sacred and divine worth of this space. Thus we see in Ram's vision the place of God's revelation as a divine, sacred space that is physically distinguished from reality and distinctive in time from the environs, to which entrance is conditioned by achievement of missions and permitted solely to the divine and holy.

Me: Why did you choose to use ten stairs? Ram replied: Because stairs are like the Digi Blocks which we learned to use at the kindergarten, where in each pack there are ten, and when you are done with ten you move on to another ten. That is, the division Ram made and the ascent to God align with the decimal division technique we learnt at the kindergarten.

It can be clearly observed how Ram's mystical experience was constructed via the world of symbols he was familiar with, and through the verbal dialogue he and I conducted after the drawing session which enabled him to structuralize the knowledge he saw in his vision, and to conceptualize his thoughts, perceptions, experiences and ideas. Our dialogue process legitimized Ram's visions, empowered

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<sup>7</sup> Vimmer (2011, pp. 52-68) reviews the meaning of different color choices in preschool children drawing in light of Jung, Winnicott and Piaget's theories, contending that the world of colors is part of a universal language. The symbols in drawings, dreams and stories are part of the collective subconscious and carry global cross-cultural collective meaning.

his inner world, and provided confidence in and full acknowledgment of his visions. From that point onwards, Ram viewed me as his confidante, and every time he wished to talk about his drawings or visions he requested me to enter the room, so that nobody else could hear us. When I asked him:

Me: Why don't you want the other children to hear? Ram: Because they'll think that I'm imagining and that all of the things I'm saying are from television, but it's truly happening, it's real, because if I believe in it then it's real!

Ergo, Ram understands that his visions occur while his mind is awake and aware, that the visions are projected outwards by the psyche and are perceived as if they are truly happening "out there." It is apparent that Ram's visions are powerful since they appear to him external and real. Ram is aware of the socialization context he is in and knows that in order to be accepted by society he must take care not to share his visions with everybody, otherwise his friends will not accept him. This echoes Victor Frankl's (1985, p. 64) contention that there are clients who do not share their religious feelings with their therapist since they fear they will be viewed as illusions, nonsense, escapism or a complex. From the first day when Ram drew the vision onwards, he requested each day to continue to draw God, as exemplified in his third drawing.

### **Third Drawing**

The next day, Ram entered the kindergarten, searched for me with his eyes and when he detected me came over, hugged me and asked quietly:

Ram: Rina, can I continue drawing God? Me: Of course. Ram smiled and asked: May I draw when I'm alone in the backyard, because I don't want the other children to disturb me while I draw.

I permitted Ram to sit on the backyard porch and draw. This time, in his third drawing, Ram combined colors of gold with silver, and his drawing continued for several days. Each day, Ram seemed eager to draw his visions, and each day he added more sheets and additional details. It became apparent how Ram was developing his descriptive abilities from one drawing session to the next. Ram's ability to sit down and remain focused on the drawing for a long duration of time and to continue drawing it every day is not typical of his age, as Rimmerman (1975, p. 17) claims that children aged 4-8 are able to concentrate on their drawing for a maximal time period of 10-15 minutes since their ability to focus and persevere at a specific task for a long duration, even if is of extreme interest, is still limited.



After Ram completed his drawing I asked him to tell me what he drew:

Ram: This is my bed. From the bed I see the light, and the light leads me from the bed and then I go up the stairs, there are stages and a red dot, whoever isn't my friend dies, I go up the stairs, continue upwards and then I jump with wings from the roof to God... After the light leads me, I reach four beds which are the *tohu va-vohu* [chaos] of God, and then God decided to construct lines that when you press them it makes a sound, that if you don't wake up in the morning God presses it and wakes us up in the morning. And here there is a set of binoculars through which God can see when it is morning and night time.

It can be observed that the first stage in Ram's third drawing is very similar to the second drawing. This similarity fortifies the fact that Ram sees the same visions repeatedly in his dreams every night. In this drawing too, Ram continues to use the same symbols he used in the second drawing, yet this time expands the language he uses to describe the vision: he describes the light as leading him to God, as though his soul is carried above the light. In this drawing, we find an extension of God's expansion where out of chaos new worlds are constructed. The change commences from the chaos created by Ram; according to Ram, it is "the chaos of God" that resides in the four beds and from this chaos begins a different and new process of additional creation.

Me: Why do you want to draw all of these drawings? Ram answered with a wide grin: Because I love drawing God, it's fun. Me: Why? I asked again. Ram: Because God doesn't want me to draw at night, God asked me to draw at day time, because God explains to me how to draw and it is fun for me, I love it. I asked with astonishment: God explains to you how to draw? Ram answered confidently: Yes, God tells me how to draw, and I draw. In the same breath, he adds: Rina, what I see is truly happening, it is real, like a mirror.

Ram uses here a new concept of the 'mirror', which suggests that he views the upper world as it is reflected in the world below. In her book *Self and Not Self*, Harding (1999, pp. 159-160) refers to this concept claiming that the mirror is the *Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

inner side of our unconscious turned towards the external world, and that the light of awareness cannot reach it. We cannot see through it so that which exists and moves behind the glass wall can be seen solely as it is reflected on the other side of the world. In other words, the content of the collective unconscious dwells and operates deep within us but we only perceive it dimly, as a reflection, and mostly as a distorted camouflage.

It is possible to deduce from Ram's statement that the drawings and symbols expressed in his drawings are not a fruit of his imagination but rather an actual 'being' in the instant, and that all of the information he receives, as he claims, comes directly from God. Ram's self is connected to the existence of his being and he creates the drawings intuitively. Ram operates as a type of 'superhero' moving inside divinity and undergoes a process of familiarization and a 'knowing' of God, a knowledge that penetrates Ram's psyche via the work of art. As Zimmel (2012, p. 135) contends, in this process seeps in an objective appreciation, of self-pleasure springing from passionate creativity, bringing us excitement and bonding through meaning and significance that are thereby formed in one's psyche.

This 'knowledge' of God propels Ram to create an emotive bond of love, and to some extent dependency upon God. As Hugo Bergmann (1970, pp. 69-70) writes, "Man's love of God grows alongside his consciousness... To the extent that man learns to swim in the divine ocean and wander the depths of the abyss in immense waters, so too does he acknowledge the width and depth of divine God, and in the same measure his love for God increases." In this context, Bergmann presents Yehuda Abravanel's philosophy as conveyed in his book *A Debate on God* which deals with love relations that humans experience with God, claiming that such a covenant of love between the world and its creator generates an enormous 'circle of love' that holds all parts of the world in a motion that oscillates from God and towards God. This bond is a bi-directional process from bottom to top, and top to bottom.

Ram's visions can be easily interpreted as products of a fruitful imagination as they do not carry proof of God's existence or operations. Nonetheless, the manner by which his visions impact his inner awareness, behaviorism and mannerism at the kindergarten and at home can be clearly observed, as detailed in the following.

### **Conversations on God**

At the end of the school year and beginning of summer vacation, Ram requested to visit me at my residence with his mother. During their visit, his mother had to leave for a little while to pick up his sister from kindergarten and we were left on our own, sitting in the living room. He looked at me and whispered:

Ram: Do you know, Rina, that I am a special child because I live in three worlds: one world is this world, then there is the second world which is the world of Centopia (an imaginary kingdom appearing in the MIA AND ME TV series; in Jewish mysticism this realm may be viewed as symbolic of the world

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

of angels), and the third world is the world of God. And each time I visit a different world. What I love best is being in Centopia because there are many missions and parties there... When I am five [years old] I will have five worlds.

Ram's utilization of the concept 'worlds' surprised me, yet his answer provided insight that he was, in fact, making a distinction between these worlds, that he comprehends that there is a difference between one world and the other, and that the more he grows so too do his comprehension and awareness grow so that subsequently he will be able to see more worlds. This view can be likened to Jewish mysticism's concept of 'hatzadik' as presented by Shalom (1980, pp.213-214), which is viewed as the source from which all souls originate as well as the origin of life that flows to all the worlds. This life or vital force is the means through which the divine power operates in all that is. During our talk about the worlds, Ram suddenly asked me:

Ram: Rina, may I ascend to God in your house too? I answered with bewilderment: Of course.

Ram requested to go up to my bedroom. He sat on the bed and began to sing the Centopia theme song. Then he shut his eyes, touched his right hand and said to me: "In this hand I have a watch that when I press it I reach God."

In this instance too, Ram uses symbols appearing in the MIA AND ME TV show, like Mia who when wishing to travel to Centopia presses her watch. Similarly, Ram conducts a ritual via the theme song and the watch that propels ascendance to the upper worlds, bringing him closer to God. We find here an integration of mysticism and music: God plays through Ram and this process is a mystical experience that connects the divine image with the human image.

After Ram sang the song he shut his eyes. Several moments later he opened them, and said: That was quick, right? It is because I ascended and saw the Son of God. I exclaimed: The Son of God!? What does he look like? Ram answered with assurance: Exactly like me, he also wears the same clothes as I. What is the Son of God's name?, I asked. Ram replied without hesitation: His name is like mine, Ram. I asked curiously: Do you meet God's Son often? He answered with certainty: Yes, he is with me every time I call him. Once, on Yom Kippur, he replaced me and rode on my bicycle.

Ram perceives the Son of God as the spiritual portrait of himself, his image. Jung (1993) describes a similar phenomenon in his book *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, a figure he named 'Philemon' which appeared in his fantasies and that psychologically represented for him superior insight: "He was a mysterious figure to me. At times he seemed to me quite real, as if he were a living personality. I went walking up and down the garden with him." Jung perceives this figure as a force rising from his subconscious and representing him, the archetype of the unconscious higher self found within each and every one of us, beyond the ego. In this respect, the

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

archetype is very similar to having an additional personality within the psyche, or a part of our personality of which we are unaware. This notion of several personalities existing within the psyche was introduced by one of psychology's pioneers, Sir Francis Galton (1907) who observed on numerous occasions how "the individual divides into two, where one part of the psyche connects with the other part as though he were another person." However, for Jung this pluralism becomes the essence of psychology. He refers to archetype personalities as 'autonomous structures,' implying that they have fixed structure, energy and life of their own, functioning as an agent separate from the ego. This phenomenon similarly exists in mystical Jewish literature, where multiple Kabbalists describe a figure that appeared before them and which was not different from them; they do not describe the figure as divine revelation or an angel that was sent to them but rather their own self-image, which may be viewed as one's 'astral body.' This experience of meeting one's self is considered by later Kabbalists as a remarkable achievement upon entering the world of the sod.<sup>8</sup>

After Ram told me about the Son of God he looked at me and whispered:

Ram: Do you know why it happened so quickly? It is because in your house it's more fun to ascend.

Me: Why is it more fun at my home?

Ram replied without hesitation: Because when I am in the space of someone I love it takes me a minute, and when I am in the space of someone I don't love, or love less, it takes me a lot of time, sometimes an hour.

Me: So where does it take you the longest?

Ram: At my home, because there is no one there whom I love like I love you.

Ram's words deeply moved me as they expressed the bond of love and security that had formed between us, alongside the understanding that Ram's hastened return from God sprung from his wish to hurry back to a place where he felt secure and loved. Nonetheless, they also troubled me since his confession fortified my premonition that his visions were originating from a state of crisis, problematic relations between him and his home, and of parental issues. In other words, the mystical process Ram was experiencing was similar to the mystical processes which various Kabbalists underwent throughout history, i.e. ones originating from crises. As Shalom (1980, p. 36) contends, "Mysticism as a historical phenomenon is a result of crises." Consequentially, I paid a visit to Ram's house to examine whether Ram was experiencing some form of family crisis.

### **Family Crisis**

Following our meeting at my residence, I visited Ram's home and conversed with his parents about him. During our conversation, I discovered that the daily reality Ram

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<sup>8</sup> See: Moshe De Leon, *Mishkan Edut*, pg. 36 verse 62; *Perush Hatorah* by Rabbi Menachem Recanati, pg. 50 verse 61; Shalom (1980) presenting several references to Kabbalists who had visions of their own image, see p. 360 note 7, note 11.

was experiencing abounded with traumatic events. Ram experienced separation anxiety when his parents traveled to the Olympic Games and were absent for a month, leaving their children in the hands of a caretaker incapable of handling the four children. The caretaker quit after a week whereas the children were passed on from one relative to another, experiencing severe insecurity. Since then, Ram has been wetting his bed nearly every night. Moreover, Ram experienced rough daily communication between his parents, and between them and their children: a malfunctioning father presented as helpless and powerless, limited in his decisions, emotionally absent, humiliated and rejected by the mother thereby also by his children, as opposed to a dominant, perfectionist, defensive and over-protective mother. Such communication, contends Victor Smirnoff (1994, p. 58), produces mental trauma. He further argues that dramatic events, such as when the mother demonstrates over-protectiveness over the child, expresses unconscious emotional rejection which she attempts to cover by means of control, or maintains latent sadomasochistic parental relations. All of these injure object relations and produce for the child traumatic baggage that may lead to visions. The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1988, p. 186), also elaborates on the consequences of intensive experiences and relations with parents upon the psyche of a child, arguing that instability and anxiety cause all drives, impulses and stimulations coming from the external world to be viewed by the child as disturbances or 'traumatic' intrusions.

Such experiences may impact the self thereby, although latent at the moment of impression, they hold the potential of becoming a source of severe distortions revealed at a much later date, along with a ceaseless search for the great father figure. Jung (1989, pp. 12-15) further claims that the child's negative or injuring experience of the mother, even if it was not conducted with malicious intent, may arouse distress much like a dark corridor through which negative archaic images of the great mother can seep through and emerge in dreams, visions and primordial archetypes. Simmer (1997, pp. 11-13) argues in this regard that God is the mind product of man under oppression who is unable to actualize his self, where connection with God forms a defense mechanism offering relief from stress that is prevalent in tyrannical states and crisis situations. Thus, although when a person says "I believe in God" it is a statement that cannot be proved and stands in opposition to rationale and existing knowledge, belief in God provides that person meaning and security, and further enables expression of inner feelings such as fear, passion, love, wish for wellbeing and desire for redemption which are not necessarily related to universal archetypes. Similarly, Pritchard (1998, pp.46-48) marks several theories that present magic as developing from emotional stress, hence when a person feels incapable of coping with emotional difficulties they turn to pretense which is aimed at relieving stress, generating catharsis, and providing courage, hope and devoutness that further relieve the accumulated stress.

It may be assumed that the conditions at Ram's home generated within Ram a state of crisis and mental upheaval necessitating the ego to 'step back' from its role as navigator, allowing the subconscious to surface and become the filter or 'the eyes of

*Red Feather Journal Volume 10 issue 1 Fall 2019*

God' through which Ram views the world thereby feeling safe and loved. When the 'still good hand of God' reaches out to us in times of crisis, it can arouse in us joy, security and wonder, a perceived sense of connection to love and our basic intelligence, and in times of struggle or sorrow it can comfort us, reminding us that underneath the stormy waves everything is calm and well – we just need to look inwards, into our selves, and see that God is still there, comforting, guarding and protecting (Gellert 1998, p.130)

### **Summary and Conclusion**

My encounter with Ram led me on an amazing journey, highlighting existing tension between his mythical story and my necessity to rationalize the data, echoing Jung's (1993, p. 350) claim that the tension or flow between two opposing poles, mythos and logos, leads to meaning and awareness, enhancing growth and renewal. Indeed, this tension generated for me personal development, new scopes of investigation, observation and growth, feeling throughout as though I was oscillating between the realms of imagination and reality to the extent of occasional perplexity and confusion, alongside joy and awakening of emotion, curiosity and imagination, lifting me above the boundaries of material life and reality. Moreover, this encounter exposed me to a living, breathing phenomenon that shook my soul. On one hand, as a secular teacher teaching at a secular kindergarten I was exposed to a narrative that ostensibly forms the basis for fictitious essence and behavior, unrealistic fiction that describes the world of religious believers<sup>9</sup> who are seeking, according to Rudolph Otto's (1999) theory, to master the great mystery, merge with it and become as one. On the other hand, the mythical narrative presented by Ram connected me to the values, culture and social unity I was familiar with, as was Ram and his close environs.

It may be assumed that Ram's desire to connect with God and be like God forms a unique, rare case reflecting the religious inclination of his psyche. However, these inclinations are based upon knowledge acquired from his environs. As Rotenberg (1990, pp. 160-163) contends, there are individuals who are inclined to view the world through intuitive, spiritual filters, nonetheless environmental and social processes carry impact upon these inclinations therefore should not be perceived as innate and fixed traits. Ram's case generated for me an innovative insight that there is a possibility that the preschool child has mythical foundations and symbols which are intuitive and an inseparable part of their psyche, an inclination of their personal psyche beyond the cognitive perspective acquired from their environs, i.e. an archetype aspiration. In this respect, Schweid (1996, p. 364) states that although the virtue of creative imagination to become like God exists in every person it is always detected in children, therefore children of innocent hearts are naturally religious. However, as with all organic skills it necessitates fostering and

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<sup>9</sup> There is no significant semantic difference between 'believer' and 'religious,' yet the latter more strongly connotes the search for divinity in the world and aspiration for meaningful life.

disappears as we grow up, where only sole individuals, geniuses of faith, can preserve this virtue in their adulthood on a high creative level and develop it to the degree of highest faith. Similarly, Gellert (1998, p.131) claims that the objective of human life is to become God, which is who we are in essence. The subconscious is a window to the soul and to God, to the magic and mystery found in each and every one of us. Ergo, the desire to become like God is linked to higher faith, which occasionally contradicts the religious approach. Religion may thus be seen as a defense mechanism attempting to cope with man's yearning to connect with the divine by obstructing such bonding by means of placing man within a context of rules and laws, providing a sense of security yet at the same time diverting their deepest desire to become like God.

It is suggested, then, that Ram's mental state combined with his exposure within kindergarten context to various symbols and rituals related to Jewish culture and biblical stories enabled him to discover and reveal the prime figure of God. This can be seen as expressed through three points of view: archetype images that are part of Ram's inner psyche which developed as a consequence of his mental state; personal individual expressions that revealed his inner affect world; and socio-cultural expressions that developed in the reciprocal relations between his individual inner world and the socio-cultural influences he absorbed at the kindergarten and at his home. The address which I, as his kindergarten teacher, provided him (i.e. the exposure of his inner world without receiving judgment or criticism) assisted Ram in the development of his creativity and spirituality. This is echoed in Neumann's (2007, p. 59) claim that "the individual becomes creative solely upon his encounter with the creative void found in the realms of the psyche." Winnicott (2014, p. 78) views the educator's degree of success in instilling the child with ethics and faith as one which depends upon the existence of a developmental state in the child which affords him to accept their personal God, as he knows it to be, and as part of his real life experiences. Winnicott (2014, p. 89) further adds that we must provide children at all development stages, from childhood to adulthood, at kindergarten, school and at home an environment that enables the child to develop their personal ethics, higher self and personal belief in God. By doing so, he claims, we provide the child the opportunity to be creative and grow by means of personal self-expression.

Ram's journey towards God is de facto a return to his deep self-hidden within, an inner journey to his soul. This journey provides the innovative insight that the preschool child's view of God and its analysis and diagnosis by a professional adult or parent can serve as a therapeutic tool, which affords access to the child's inner world and psyche. Such a tool can assist the parent and educator to understand setbacks, anxieties, fears and loves of every child. We all carry the ability to conduct this inner journey, contends Green (2016, p. 147). Green describes it as an inner voice existing from the time of our collective childhood at the Garden of Eden, like an angel who teaches us about the existence of God when we are still inside our mother's womb. As human beings, we undergo a multitude of experiences throughout our lives,

particularly during the transitional period from childhood to adulthood, causing us to multiply and fortify the defense walls surrounding our souls to the degree that we can barely penetrate through. Maybe if we become more attentive to children we may find within them the memory of former generations, an existing evolutionary remnant, and transmute this understanding into a conscious memory.

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