

1919.HEAVEN, an update

To understand some of the current social malaise, it is helpful to look at some ancient religious concepts from the perspective of today's world. Here are two offerings, both dreams - - - one a short story; the other, a one act, three scene play.

Mr. Tannenbaum's Dream

In Brooklyn, a few days after Moses Tannenbaum had returned from his trip to Israel, he had a wild dream. He dreamed that he was hiking up Mount Sinai alone. The day was hot. The trail was rough and became hard to follow in places. He was wearing a light, white long sleeved shirt and tan pants. He was wearing the hiking shoes his wife had given him for his birthday the previous spring. He was wearing the light, Panama hat he had purchased in Cairo.

He stopped and pondered over the slope he had been hiking. He gazed outward across the desert floor. He began to think how different this was from Brooklyn. Ugly. Lonely. Dry. Then he resumed the thoughts he had had ever since he undertook this his most recent visit to the Middle East: What might it have been like for the ancients to have been here on their way from Egypt thirty-three centuries ago? After so many years in captivity it must have been a real change to suddenly be thrust upon these wide open spaces; to labor, not for a master, but to labor for one's self, one's family, one's friends.

Inevitably, some scenes from the de Mille movie ran through his head. He envisioned throngs of people, living in a large encampment somewhere at the foot of the mountain. Then he heard God speak to him, and he awoke with a jolt.

His eyes focused on the glowing numbers of the alarm clock beside his bed. They glowed a devilish red color as follows: 3:43. He could hear his wife breathing uninhibitedly a short distance away.

He tried capturing the fragments of the dream while they were fresh. Yes, he was sure it was Mount Sinai, just as it had been on his visit two weeks earlier. He could still smell the dust from the trail in his nostrils. But what was that voice? He was alone was he not? What did the voice say? Oh, yes. .. "The time has come."

Tannenbaum's state was one of pleasure mixed with intrigue. He tried getting back to sleep to resume the dream, but was unable to for 15 minutes. He changed his position in the bed. He started reviewing his plans for the next day. After a while, he forgot about the dream and resumed his sleep. When he awoke the following morning, he had no recollection of the dream at all.

The next night, after a few hours asleep, the dream returned. Again he heard a voice say: "The time has come, Moses Tannenbaum, for you to serve as my messenger. When last I spoke to the children of Israel at this same place. I had to use language that could be understood by one and all. The message I gave then has not changed. I still require the fullest devotion of my children. I still forbid using graven images as objects of worship. It is I to whom your worship must be directed, not some object, such as a golden calf."

"But, sir," said Moses, "if your commands are still the same, what is the purpose of your visit this time?"

"I have already said that last time I had to use language that was suited for that time and place. Recent developments, particularly in the last hundred years or so, make it easier for me to state what I want. Contemporary language has words such as photograph that did not exist during my last visit here. The time has come to make use of these modern words to clarify and simplify my commands.

"Confusion exists over graven images for example. The creation of such images is not sinful, nor has it ever been. It is the use of such images as objects of worship that is sinful. Salvador Dali's Last Supper is a beautiful, remarkable work, and can easily be regarded as one of the world's great treasures. It is, never the less, a depiction of an event among mortals. The painting has no power, no connection to my world, and must not be used as an object of worship. As a matter of fact no person from the world of mortals has even the foggiest notion about my world. Michelangelo's depiction of a bearded old man passing the spark of life to Adam, I find amusing, quaint, and presumptuous. And, incidentally, the piece is very well done. But I digress.

"There is one word in your modern lexicon that can be used quite readily as a guide between right and wrong. That word is ego.

"Several of my original commands can be combined into the following single command. 'Live such that your ego is always subdued.' Never let your ego become your master. This one command will make you my servant, and it will prevent you from bringing harm to others. A thief is but an egotist who thinks his claim: to someone else's property is justified. It is his ego that trips him up. The adulterer is a thief that steals innocence. Even my entreaties against covetousness will be observed by keeping your ego subdued. The man who turns

his back to his mother and father in their advanced years, he too is nothing but an egotist. Murder is the worst form of egotism. Self defense does not contain
egotism.

"The incorporation of humility in the observance of the Sabbath is a way of reminding you to keep your ego in check."

Mr. Tannenbaum reflected for a while, assessing what he had been told.

After a few moments, the voice continued, "I know you understand what I have told you. I have chosen you and many others as my messengers, because I knew you would understand, and because I knew that you have the means and the energy to broadcast the information I have given you."

Mr. Tannenbaum began to ask whether there was more, but he turned those thoughts aside knowing there was no more.

In subsequent weeks, he took part in discussions at his synagogue about the role of ego in the commission of evil. He was not surprised how readily his ideas were
accepted as truth.

Pudd'n Head McGuirre's Dream

In Cairo, Illinois, a few days after having made a speech to the Cairo Rotary Club, extolling the virtues of private enterprise, James H. Mcguirre had a wild dream. He was standing on a cloud, watching the proceedings at the gates of heaven. There were numerous desks, totally covered by computers, manned by a staff of men and women in flowing robes. There was a cue in which people were patiently waiting. They were waiting for a review of their deeds at this entry point into eternity. A rostrum stood between the souls waiting in line and the desks.

James knew the routine. He had been in this dream on numerous occasions. He had been given the nickname "Pudd'n Head," as it was his way to dream, to let his mind wander. His father had once remarked: "James, I know you are thoughtful; perhaps too thoughtful. I think you've got your head in the clouds, and can't see your feet in the mud."

He knew the nickname was taken from Mark Twain's book Pudd'n Head Wilson. In high school someone had called him Pudd'n Head and the name had stuck.

Scene 1.

The dream this time was vivid, much more so than on previous occasions. Facial images were clear, voices were clear. Much of the blur of previous dreams was absent. Another element caught Pudd'n Head's attention: A cine camera had been set up facing the rostrum. This he had never seen in previous dreams.

Pudd'n Head saw three people emerging from a cloud. The one in the center was obviously a new arrival of extraordinary importance. The two flanking him were old hands, helpers, who would assist new arrivals. The two helpers introduced the newcomer to two clerks who were standing, in front of a computer, doing some one-handed typing. Others were finishing off their coffee, not paying attention. Another helper emerged from the same cloud walking fast, while hitching his robe. He said, "OK, everybody, we're about to start." The clerks all took seats at their computers. The cine camera operator checked his lens setting, rotated his hat 180 degrees, so the hat-bill would not bump into the camera, peered through the focus piece, and ran the camera a few seconds. The two helpers and their charge continued unaltered, engaged in amiable small talk. The camera man turned his camera on this trio. Pudd'n Head could see the trio clearly now. "By George," he thought, "It's Andrew Carnegie."

Suddenly, with a flash of light and a whooshing sound appeared a bearded man in a flowing white robe, standing at the rostrum, peering intently into a ledger. Pudd'n Head knew instantly this was the keeper of the gates himself, none other than Saint Peter.

SP: [Turning toward the clerks.] Who have we here.

Clerk: We have Andrew Carnegie, sir. If you wish, I can go over his bio with you.

SP: That won't be necessary, Mr. Juarez. I am familiar with this man, and have admired him from afar for many years. Thank you. [Turning toward Carnegie.] So, what do you have to recommend yourself? What deeds? Please note, this question must be asked. We're talking about a formality here.

AC: I made steel, inexpensive steel, to build rail...

SP: I know! [Raising his hand.] Let me...

AC: I also caused libraries to be built, and...

SP: Let me congratulate you, sir. [Shaking Andrew Carnegie's hand.] Your establishment of steel industries enabled the production of large quantities of

inexpensive steel in the United States, and eventually throughout the world. Without your efforts, and the wise harvesting of ideas and resources, humankind would have lived many more decades of sad, dreary existence. Your work set the stage for developments in all areas of human endeavor: medicine, food production, structures, transportation, and energy, just to name a few.

Congratulations Mr. Carnegie, you are most welcome. Allow me to assist you to your limousine. I will personally see that your accommodations are totally to your liking. [Aside, in a loud whisper.] You will love the golf here.

AC: [Aside, in a loud whisper.] How about a view overlooking the 18th hole at Carnoustie?

SP: Done. You must join me some time. At your convenience, of course.

Clerks and helpers: [Subdued laughter.]

Scene 2.

A few nights later.....

Again, the dream was vivid. Two helpers arrive with a new important arrival. It is non other than Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The new arrival is asked to sit in a chair and watch a brief film.

Pudd'n Head is astounded. The film clip is the one made earlier of Andrew Carnegie.

Clerk: I can go over his bio with you.

SP: No need. I have been observing this case a long time.

SP: [Turning toward Roosevelt.] So, what do you have to recommend yourself? What deeds?

FR: I gave hope and comfort to the elderly.

SP: I beg your pardon?

FR: I gave ...

SP: You didn't give a farthing ... excuse me, a dime. As a matter of fact, as a government employee, your contributions to the elderly were zero. As I said, not even a dime.

FR: Well...but...

SP: I asked for deeds. Your deeds. Not someone else's deeds. Now let me clarify: Intentions don't count. A swing at the ball does not equal a hit. Get the idea? I know you claim your intention to help the elderly, but what I see is the forcible taking of resources from one group of people, giving it to another group of people, while gaining a tremendous amount of political power.

FR: It wasn't that way, really. It was my earnest intention to help the elderly.

SP: Please! There's the i-word again. Deeds! Name me deeds!

FR: I gave often, and generously, at my church.

SP: True enough.

FR: I also saved the United States, and maybe even, the World from an unprecedented economic depression.

SP: This is really sad. [With emphasis; frustration and irony bubbling forth.]

FR: Pardon?

SP: You, sir, caused the depression to lengthen and deepen by your megalomaniac manipulations.

FR: Not so! The Wall Street crash set off the depression. I didn't enter office until 30 months after the crash.

Hah!

SP: Dear Franklin, my, my!

You are treading on very thin ice. Deceitful statements are not allowed. Deception at this point means a one-way ticket to Hell. Blindness resulting from egotism is not allowed either. Your one-way ticket will be issued quite quickly. Stupidity is not a factor here, but feigning it is. Don't forget, I will be speaking to Morgenthau in due time. I have impeccable records here. [Motioning toward the clerks.] I see there were eleven [xxy] economic turndowns in the U.S. from 1840 to 1930. Why am I to suppose that the one you inherited was any different?

FR: Well ...

SP: Come on!

FR: It's true enough. That is to say the possibility exists. I have wondered if Henry and I might have exacerbated an otherwise serious, but recurrent, yet tolerable situation.

SP: Deeds?

FR: The usual. Charities, mostly Eleanor's. Church. Kindness to others. Devoted family man.

SP: Good.

We have a place for here, but because your deeds mostly caused harm, your stay is probationary. The damage you wrought is so severe that your sins will carry well beyond three generations. Go in peace. Speak truth. Don't force others to do your will in the name of charity. Here is your ticket to Presumption School.

FR: Presumption School?

SP: Actually it is Anti-Presumption School, that's just a nickname. The full name is Institute for the Correction of Megalomaniac Disorders. Your ticket must be punched one-thousand times before your duty is discharged.

You are dismissed.

Scene 3.

A few nights later, Sam Gibbons, D. Florida, is escorted from the cloud into the presence of Saint Peter.

Clerk: I can go over his bio with you, but I doubt I will need to.

SP: Thanks. You are correct. I have followed this case a long time.

[Turning toward Sam Gibbons.] Mr. Gibbons, I presume?

SG: [Lip quivering.] Yes sir.

SP: Have you seen the film clip of the splendid reception of Mr. Andrew Carnegie?

SG: Yes. I have.

SP: So, what do you have to recommend yourself? What deeds?

SG: I gave medical care to the elderly.

SP: Pardon? My records don't show you as a physician.

SG: Well, you know.

SP: Please explain.

SG: I also gave charity to the poor and downtrodden.

SP: Just a darned minute! Hold on! You did not give to charity to the poor and downtrodden. [Looking vexed. Face pinched; as if avoiding a bad odor.] You invented and nurtured an image in your mind suggesting you were the origin of charity and assistance to others.

I can't take time right now to set you straight on this point. That is a job for others at a future time.

Go on.

SG: I held the line against those Nazis in Europe and in the United States. Where there was charity...

SP: And a bunch of druggies too!

SG: Excuse me?

SP: You took money by force from good, honest, working people and gave it to anybody who might build your political base including drug addicts.

SG: BUT...

SP: Please pay attention!

Can't you see it wasn't your money you were spreading around? These deeds weren't good. They were actually selfish. They were about you and your sleazy

political career, not about assisting others. Your deeds were truly foul and low. You forced other people to pay money to your political base for your own power. All the while you assumed an air of righteousness. "I am doing good," you thought. This was self-deceit, laden with ego. I laugh at your foolishness.

What about all those people from whom you took the money? You don't think they needed it? Deserved it? You don't imagine they might have used it wisely? Don't you see: It's your ego getting in the way of your ability to reason. You think Sam Gibbons can spend Joe Sixpack's money more wisely than can Mr. Sixpack.

[SG gapes in wide-eyed wonder. SP pauses, exhales, and resumes.] The road to Hell is not paved with good intentions. Instead it is paved with selfish intentions, masked as good intentions. Your entry here is unlikely. I have asked Winston to reveal to you the fates of Alfred Kinsey and Margaret Mead. The immediate path in front of you will be arduous beyond comprehension. You will be required to abandon a lifetime of self centeredness. You will have to turn from easy ignorance to hard-won wisdom and knowledge.

Your first step toward admission will be to author a 1200-word essay. Winston will explain.

If the essay is accepted, you must fill out this ten-page application to Anti-Presumption School. Be careful, when you answer the questions and fill in the boxes. Failure to complete Anti-Presumption School earns you an automatic ticket to Hell. If you don't get in, then guess what? To Hell with you.

[Gibbons stands stiff and straight. His nostrils are flared, as if insulted.]

SP: From your demeanor, I don't think you understand the gravity of your situation. You are on the threshold of eternal punishment. Your ego and your ignorance are blocking my attempt at communication. In a phrase: You are a "smart ass."

Only a few people who came through here were given the immediate ticket to the other place. The Roman, Caligula, comes to mind. Joseph Stalin is another. Alfred Kinsey is another - - - though not so obvious as the two aforementioned.

SP: [Continues. Turning to a white-robed, aide at his side. The aide is non other than Winston Churchill] "Mr. Gibbons has not even gotten to the first step. He does not have a clue regarding his own ignorance. Please tell Mr. Gibbons about the process of a similar case, that of Mr. Kinsey.

WC: I am flattered you have chosen me for this task.

SP: It is no accident, Winston. Proceed.

WC: [Winston moves forward and looks Gibbons in his face at a distance of, perhaps, 5 feet.] Tell me sir, have you ever heard the name, "Kinsey?"

SG: You mean the sex guy?

WC: That is he. His full name was Alfred Charles Kinsey. He professed to be a scientist. He authored a two-part, widely read book under the title The Kinsey Reports. His case and your case have nothing in common. He was dispatched to Hell straight from here without any further examination, because his evil was so thorough and complete. Like you he was ignorant and egotistic, but it was the pedophilia, the advocacy of sexual perversions that prevented all considerations that might have saved his soul. I only mention him to underscore the fact that YOU ARE BEING GIVEN A CHANCE.

Another question: Have you ever heard of Margaret Mead?

SG: Yes. Seems to me she was a scientist.

WC: Very good. To be specific she was an anthropologist and spent much time observing primitive humans on islands in the South Pacific.

She was here, at the very spot you are standing upon, a while ago . . . well some fifty years or so. We offered her the same options we are offering you, now and here. She was obstinate. She refused to learn reason and refused to accept facts on their own merits. Her soul could not be extracted from its own false world. We will work with you as long as you show signs of redemption, but, if you don't, as was the case with Ms. Mead, why then it's off to Hell with you.

Poor Margaret, she arrived here with huge pretensions. She thought she was all knowing and all seeing. Now she is on the devil's griddle, being eaten by cockroaches, for all time, still unaware of her own folly. She suffers for eternity. All because she would not use her ability to reason. God gave it to her - - - the ability to reason, that is. She refused it. Her ego made her do it. She said to herself: "God can go stuff it. I know how humans function. God won't tell Margaret Mead how humans function."

Now Mr. Gibbons, please pay close attention. I am going to recap my comments regarding Kinsey and Mead. Then I am going to see if you have been paying attention.

Pay attention now. Kinsey was dispatched to Hell without further consideration. Mead was dispatched to Hell for unrestrained ego. Here is the question: Do you understand that we want to work with you, just as we did with Margaret Mead, but we don't want to fail with you, as we failed with Ms. Mead?

SG: [A blank look on his face. Not answering.]

WC: Well, sir, what is your answer?

SG: What was the question?

WC: [Under his breath.] I knew it. I knew it. I just knew it. These megalomaniacs never listen. [Then loudly, sonorously, as he could do so well, while fixing a penetrating gaze upon Gibbons.] Mr. Gibbons, would you like to go to Hell, straight from this point, and without further examination?

SG: Well . . . no.

WC: Are you willing to work with us on developing your God-given ability to reason?

SG: Yes, but I don't see why.

WC: Do you admit making the following statement in Committee meeting of the House of Representatives, referring to Republicans: "I fought against you Nazi bastards in World War Two." Do you recall making that statement?

SG: Yes, I do.

WC: Do you stand by the statement? If so, what is your reasoning?

SG: Yes, I do, because it's a fact. Republicans are Nazis.

WC: Was General Eisenhower a Nazi?

SG: No. I guess there are some who are not, but for the most part, republicans are Nazis.

WC: You have just demonstrated, in an unequivocal way, an inability to reason. How sad. [Turning to a clerk, keeping notes.] You got this, didn't you?

Clerk: Yes, sir.

WC: [Turning back to Gibbons] The first step in your redemption will be to examine the following proposition: Republicans are Nazis. You will prepare a 1200-word essay defending your point of view, whether in favor of the proposition, or against it. The following materials will be available: Our Library in which you will find many general sources of information, encyclopaedias and history books (many centering on the French Revolution). In your quarters, you will find materials more specific to your needs: The autobiography of Benito Mussolini, the biography of Georges Sorrel, Modern Fascism, by Gene Edward Veith, Jr., The Birth of Fascist Ideology, by Zeev Sternhell, The Liar’s Tale, by Jeremy Campbell, The Law, by Frederick Bastiat. DVD with a copy of Triumph of the Will, by Leni Reifenstahl. If you elect to write this essay without a serious study of the materials, you will certainly fail.

Here is a required ingredient of your essay: A table listing all the Republicans who are either fascists or Nazis. Notes in the table must contain references wherein evidence of Nazism can be reasonably inferred - - - not a compilation of unsupported allegations. Another requirement of the essay: A section devoted to the examination of the letter “z” in the word Nazi. What does it mean? Why did the German fascists, the Nazis, chose to include this descriptor in the name of their political party?

You must work alone. Do not ask for help.

This essay is all important. You will not get another chance. You won’t go a single step further in this program. Are you listening?

SG: Yes.

WC: Once your essay has been deemed acceptable, you will be required to expand your cultural horizons. You are in dire need of schooling. To gain full entry, you must enroll in PA, that is Politicians Anonymous, for 40 course units. You are also required to take 40 units of history and 40 units of United States Constitution.

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When Pudd’n Head awoke the following morning, he had no recollection of Sam Gibbons, or any of the doings at the entry to Heaven. He felt energized and inspired. On previous days, he had been nagged by self doubt about where he stood on the political spectrum. Today this load was gone. He said to himself: “I am a conservative. I will do all I can to support other conservatives and to spread the conservative message.”

