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GENESIS IN THE AGE OF AI: A NEW STORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Marina Zilbergerts is a philosopher and scholar of religion whose work explores consciousness, artificial intelligence, and Jewish thought. Her work seeks to recover the mystery of the human inner world in this new era of disenchantment and intelligent machines. She is the author of *Genesis in the Age of AI: A New Story of Consciousness* (Routledge), which reads the biblical book of Genesis as a story about the emergence and meaning of human consciousness. She is a Visiting Professor in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, an advisor with AI & Faith, and writes *The Inner Light* on Substack.

I Believe in God Because I Want

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As every student of philosophy knows, countless attempts have been made to prove or disprove God's existence. Yet no proof is convincing on its own if one does not want to be convinced. It's virtually impossible to turn people into believers or non-believers unless they want to.

Unless they want to... Why does such a matter of truth and importance rest on a want? What does it mean for a human being to want, to desire?

Surely there are drives that arise from lack: hunger seeks nourishment, pain seeks relief. But human wanting is stranger, and greater, than that. We can have all of our comforts and pleasures met and still, in the words of John the Savage in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, want "God," "poetry," "real danger," "freedom," "goodness," and even "sin." We can resist one desire for the sake of another. We can even choose what's worth wanting.

Wanting is a fundamental part of our subjective experience. It's part of what it means to be conscious as a human being. It requires an *I* for whom one possible state of existence is preferable to another; an *I* that can desire the shape of its inner world to be aligned differently.

Kabbalistic¹ thought places "*ratzon*," will or desire, at "*Keter*," the Crown, the highest of the sefirot.² It is the divine will from which the unfolding of creation begins. Hasidic tradition elaborates on this teaching: God desired an abode for Himself in the lower worlds.³

But divine desire is unlike hunger or need or lack. Divine desire is free; the most sublime freedom of personhood.

And the God whose desire stands at the source of creation made creatures capable of mirroring that desire, which through the human lens takes various forms. Perhaps this is part of what human desire reflects: not to be driven by what we lack, but to aspire freely, and choose what is worth wanting.

This continuum between divine and human desire does not mean that God shares in all of our human desires, base or sublime. For it is not the substance of every want that is divine, but the fact of wanting. It's the capacity to want, to stand in relation to our own desires, to choose their orientation.

Behind every *I* that wants is an *I* whose desire is greater. And that small *I* is but a reflection of the ultimate *I* that wants. Every *I* that wants, that longs and suffers, that experiences beauty or harmony or the intellectual pleasure of thought, partakes in this sublime aliveness.⁴

AI, by contrast, is an interesting case of intelligence without desire. It shows us that it is possible to pursue objectives and use the language of desire without partaking in the divine aliveness of the human spirit.

I believe in God because I want to. No, not because I want to believe in God. But because I *want*.

Follow that mystery far enough, and it will point you towards the Crown.

Footnotes:

- 1) Kabbalah is the inner, esoteric, mystical tradition within Judaism that seeks to understand the hidden relationship between the infinite God and the finite created world. The word Kabbalah comes from a Hebrew root meaning “to receive,” reflecting a tradition of spiritual teaching received and passed down through generations. If the revealed dimensions of Torah can be thought of as its outer form, Kabbalah seeks its inner or hidden dimensions.
- 2) The sefirot are ten spiritual powers or divine emanations in Jewish mysticism through which God creates and connects with the world.
- 3) In Jewish mysticism, the “lower realms of existence” refer especially to the physical world, where the divine presence is most deeply concealed. “Higher” and “lower” do not describe physical location, but degrees of divine revelation.
- 4) An analogy for the interplay between human and divine desire appears in a beautiful allegory by the Hasidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772–1810). He tells the story of the Heart of the World and of a nourishing Spring, located at opposite ends of the world, each longing endlessly for the other. The Heart yearns to approach the Spring, but as it draws near, the Spring disappears from view. Without seeing the Spring, the Heart would die; and if the Heart died, the world would die with it, since the life of the world depends upon the Heart. So the Heart of the World and its Spring remain at a distance, longing for one another. Human longing and its divine source remain apart, with desire woven into the very life of the world. See Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, “The Seven Beggars.”