About

God. The Holy Ghost. Jesus. Moses. Muhammad. Mary. And Lucifer – Satan! History’s most enduring, and influential story characters. Chris Thomas dares to ask them what you probably can’t, because they’re nowhere to be found; or won’t, because you’re not that brash. The very idea of talking to these characters is ridiculous, as is the belief in something devoid of even a velleity of substance outside imagination. These conversations should make you guffaw, gasp, chortle, wince, and reflect.

Author

Chris Thomas lives with his wife midway between two prominent winelands in South Africa’s Western Cape Province. The couple has two adult daughters. Chris is a graduate from seminary and business school and owns a boutique communications consultancy. Chris has been an active commentator on religion for 15 years. He published a weekly eMagazine, TART Remarks, from 2005 until 2008, and still maintains a blog on the impact of religion on society. It’s Religion, Stupid is the product of consummate reflection and copious reading and intensive discussion since seminary in the late seventies and early eighties.

Chris Thomas is a nom de plume. The pseudonym honours Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) the “road-breaker of the Enlightenment”. His influence is marked in developing an attitude of mind.

Thomasius opposed the outrageous practice of witch burning. He argued eloquently against what he called recorded lunacy, but it was his eventual success in making the belief in witches ridiculous that helped end the evil.
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Jesus and Mo cartoons used by kind permission of the author, Muhammad Jones, drawing his witticism from behind a burka of mystery.
For MCA, for steadfast love and longsuffering
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Introduction

God is history’s most enduring story character. Like Macbeth, And Hamlet. And Sherlock Holmes. Like Cinderella, and the Wizard of Oz. Like Harry Potter and Goldilocks. Characters with lasting presence, imagined as they are.

Story characters can have great influence. I am intrigued by Moses, and Macbeth, and by Boston Legal’s Alan Shore, and The West Wing’s Toby Ziegler, and by Hank Voight of Chicago P.D. But I harbour no illusions that they were, or are, real people. Yet their influence is hardly diminished by their nullity.

As I write American President Donald Trump is still refusing to concede to President-elect Joe Biden. Trump’s supporters continue to back his desperate and baseless legal shenanigans in the impossible pursuit of reversing the election result.

Opinions on the continued support of evangelical and other believers in the face of Trump’s behaviour and attitude abound. I suggest that Trump is as God is and does as God does and that his supporters, numbed by God’s inattention and bombast, accept and appreciate Trump for the very characteristics they have learned to revere, of God.

This idea is discussed in my interview with Satan.

Trump, and the construct of Trump, to my mind, is the result of the
influence of the most well-known story character of all time, and the very real influence of that story character on human lives.

I present what I hope to be amusing interactions with great characters from the myths of religion.

The creation of God has fascinated me from the moment that I realised it was indeed a creation of human reflection.

This God, in the form most theists worship it today, probably originated with Moses. I imagine a conversation between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, where a thwarted fugitive pours out his frustration and swears revenge – and creates a God to aid his efforts.

I have often wondered about what I might say to the main characters in the “Holy Books” if these characters had been real, and available for conversation.

And so, I “interviewed” them!

I remain discumgalligumfricated, greatly astonished but pleased by these interviews.

The idea, long in the making, became focussed at the time of the 2004 Christmas tsunami, when every theologian, and every believer and his dog offered an opinion on what was going on in God’s mind. So, I asked God. The interview with God in this collection developed from that original idea.

I never had any inclination of where the interviews would lead. I never knew what the responses would be, and often questions were the result of an unforeseen reply. It was eerily real.

All of these interviews are special to me; each in its own way.

I love the tension in the God interview.

I had a great time with Lucifer!

Jesus surprised me, but not as much as Mary, who stunned me. And I say again, I had no idea where the interviews would lead, the one with Mary most of all so. I was as stunned as I hope you
will be.

I’ve always wanted to argue, nay fight, with the Holy Ghost. This “thing” is supposed to guide people, yet look at believers: lost beyond imagination, believing diverse and conflicting things on the watch of the spirit supposed to guide and instruct. It’s a nasty piece of work is the Holy Spirit. Of all the characters the most demeaning and damaging. I hope I got the better of the rotter.

Then, Muhammad. I’ve always been uncomfortable with him. I’ll tell you why. His followers dare not say anything even slightly critical of him. Right there, I smell a rat. His name cannot be said without adding, "Peace be upon him"; or "May God honour him and grant him peace"; or "May God grant peace and honour on him and his family". Draw only even a cartoon of him, and someone, somewhere, wants to eliminate you. Why? What makes Muhammad so special? I challenged him.

The conversation between Moses and Jethro, and the interviews all are oddly personal, and reflect probably the closest experience of engaging with “God” I will ever attain.

It was great fun writing these interactions.

I trust that you will find them interesting, revealing, and enjoyable.

Remember, this is all fiction!

I close with an ode to Bertrand Russell, the man who first introduced me to critical thinking. It was in my first year at seminary. It was a lifetime ago. My ode is a pastiche, a rewrite of the experience of the eminent theologian, Dr. Thaddeus, newly arrived at the Pearly Gates: A conversation between the good doctor and the Gatekeeper.
Announcing “It’s Religion, Stupid!”

I expect to publish “It’s Religion, Stupid!” before Easter 2021. The book is the culmination of some thirty years of reflection and notes, one year of writing, and three months of dedicated editing.

Religion is a clear and present danger striking at society’s very cornerstone: accurate and complete information sufficient to make the best possible decisions for survival and the pursuit of happiness.

Modern instantaneous global communication, by fake news, empowers an unscrupulous media, self-serving politicians, and profit driven marketeers to exploit consumers and voters

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1 "It's the economy, stupid!" was the Clinton-Gore campaign slogan in 1992. There was a mild recession because of the transition from a wartime (Cold War) economy to a peacetime economy. The slogan was designed to focus their minds on an obvious fact…

2 By fake news; alternative facts; percepticide; C. elegansing; misrepresentation; catastrophising; misspeaking; agendizing; anonmasstexting; jockeying; cyberlucinations; deepfake; Chewdingers; deadcatting; Woko-Haraming; lies; cancelling; hook & distract; disinformation; bias; Gish galloping; leaks; bullhorning; gaslighting; AI; agitrolling; call-outs; Potemkin fronting; spinning; obloquy; catfishing; forgery; prejudice; interference; doxxing; micro-targeting; fauxraging; chopper talk; smearing; Chewbacca dumps; invisible radiation; propaganda; cybertage; troll farms; fake-news mills; unreality; the weaponization of absurdity; confusion; ratings; manipulation; Death Stars; data pipelines; rank stupidity; balkanization; othering; depraved indifference, and the deafening noise of media traffic… It is the era of the data-industrial complex and information sophistication and data hygiene have become indispensable life skills.
machinated by millennia of religion’s memetic lies. Once they’ve bought gods and demons and life after death, they’ll buy any old thing.

Into this dumbed down market long delivered the likes of Fox and CNN, and Charles Ponzi and Bernie Madoff, and Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, and Big Tobacco and Big Oil and Big Pharma, continue to deliver morphing versions of a narrative resembling reality only inasmuch is required to sustain casual reference to what may appear to be fact.

Fake news originated in the lore on which religion is founded. Religion is demonstrably and doggedly and detrimentally false about our origin, our gender, and our destination, and about the influence of imaginary gods and demons in our lives from cradle to grave. There is little else, if anything, about which one can possibly be misled, and nothing of more importance. Religion has no credibility whatsoever and nothing it teaches can possibly be relied upon. This mendacity permeates everyday living and is entrenched and perpetuated by the continued ready adoption of obscene interpretations of the suspect records of the hallucinations of traumatized Bronze Age shepherds and 6th-century travelling salesmen sheltering against a desert sun in shallow grottos: a fearful basis for ethics, morality, and behavioural motivation.

One simply cannot rely on what is pontificated by people who read what was written by people who heard from people who heard what people heard from people who told what they thought they saw when they were subjected to personal trauma.

The outrageous nonsense making up dogma, and the general acceptance, even tacit, lackadaisical and lethargic go with the flow
identification with the nonsense which is religious doctrine, reduce
people to dumbed down functional idiots at the dangerous
direction of self-serving propagandists tuxed up as politicians and
captains of business and soi disant influenza³.

We have been living, voluntarily, with gross lies for thousands of
years. We even cherish these lies. We are angered when these lies
are challenged; we frown upon those who alert us to these lies,
because we think religion generally good and salutary. But religion
fuels falsity.

A “facts don’t matter; this is a story world” delusion, arrogating
reality, is gaining purchase as believers continue to live by
religion’s lies and fake news, and yet there is feigned surprise,
astonishment and amazement at the purchase and influence of fake
news on public perception and opinion.

Belief is toxic, the more so for
assumed harmlessness.

Reliance upon religious
dictates, and the defence of
religious dictates, and the
promotion of religious
dictates, together, effectively
subject the vast majority to the
manipulation of the few.
Religion is at the bottom of
well-nigh all the problems
people had suffered, and
continue to suffer, by
compromising the ability to
adequately consider data and information.

This alarm is the message of this book, in a nutshell: It’s religion,
stupid!

We must find a new way. It’s Religion, Stupid! indicates that way:

³ Influenzia: Influencers meet influenza. It’s a viral thing.
Disrupting religion in pursuit of evidence-based knowledge, happiness, comfort, intimacy, morality, meaning, awe and wonderment, and the pursuit of evolving understanding.

Conversations with main characters from the Abrahamic religions

In all fairness to the characters subjected to these fanciful interviews, one must acknowledge that they belong to a very specific time and place, courtesy of their creators. It would be unfair, for instance, to expect Muhammad to recognize that sex with a minor is offensive and to realise that taking a child bride is condemnable in the 21st century.

Yet, “being God”, or “being The Prophet”, surely must imply actual and complete and consummate knowledge of each and every and all aspects of life, including developing future societal conviction and weltanschauung yet obscure at any time of cosmic intervention … if “being God” is, in fact, real.

This said, I remind readers that the objective of this book is ridicule, and that the hermeneutical contextual vagaries of imaginary characters do not consume my attention.

Also, it came naturally for these characters, except for Muhammad, for probably obvious reasons, to use Yiddish words and expressions.

Why?

What, am I a cosmic shrink?

Oy.

This is fun stuff.

Enjoy.
Chris Thomas: Thank you, Almighty God, for granting this interview.

God: It’s a pleasure. You’re welcome. And please call me God, for short.

CT: Thank you, God.


God: What do you mean?

CT: What do I mean? Are you serious?

God: What do you mean, “Are you serious?”

I AM. I AM always serious!

(I feel a distinct rumbling under my chair, and I realise that I should proceed with caution.)

CT: But of course you are God. I merely meant that everybody agrees that 2020 was some difficult year…

God: Why?

CT: Are you s… Ah, well, the SARS-CoV-2 Virus. And COVID-19. To mention but the single biggest problem and crisis of the year. It was a bad year! Why, Last Week Tonight host John Oliver blew up 2020 in his season finale¹!

God: Ah, viruses. Neat designs, viruses. Some of Dramacwene’s² best work can be seen in viruses. Why, on Ophungash on the near

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¹ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzlCOg-37hI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzlCOg-37hI)

² Dramacwene is God’s CCO – Chief Creation Officer; the cosmic biological engineer. His formal title is Senior Vice President, Creations. The later interview with Satan throws more light on this character.
side of Guanta Eta, millions of spefs\(^3\) died within a single rotation of the planet – from one, only one of Dramacwene’s viruses.

CT: I… I’m not entirely certain how I should be reacting to that bit, God.

God: Not certain how to react? Have you been briefed at all?

Mike!

(A tall, svelte being rushes closer and whispers in God’s ear. It seems as if the Almighty relaxes. He turns to me again.)

Michael, my Chief of Staff, says you had in fact been screened but that it was decided to allow a more, shall we say, pain in the tuchis trivehal to do this interview. Something about public relations. Yet you should be aware that there is only one preferred response to whatever I say. What am I saying, there is but a single \textit{demanded} response: consummate praise.

The correct response to the virus mention is, “How great thou art, God! How ineffably intelligent! How unspeakably powerful!”

CT: “Trivehal’’?

God: What do you mean?

CT: What is a trivehal?

God: Mike!?

Michael: It is what I believe you call “human”, Mr Thomas. Trivehals are what you call humans – Species Zeta-686 in Dramacwene’s records.

CT: Ah. But… are you not troubled by the suffering of your creation, of trivehals?

God: “Troubled”? Moi? What are you talking about man!? I AM. I AM not troubled by anything. If anything, I AM trouble.

(A guffaw deafens me.)

\(^{3}\) Species Rho-273. From Dramacwene’s records.
CT: Surely some relationship, some… emotional attachment… some… respect for your creation must be… well, must be… in play?

God: I respect Dramacwene’s viruses very much! Why do you think I am publicly praising their effect?

CT: I, I don’t understand…

God: “Don’t understand” what, exactly? You want to know about my respect, respect mind – I AM the only one worthy of respect around this multiverse – and then questions my respect for a virus!?

CT: But surely the life of an intelligent being ranks superior to some celebrated effect of a virus?

God: The difference between the “intelligence” of a spef and a virus is inconsequential by the standard of my omniscience.

CT: And humans, I mean trivehals?

God: You don’t get it, do you? Your species rank lowest of all my created master environment controlling species on all planets in this multiverse.

CT: So, we were lucky – are lucky – that we have not all died from COVID-19?

God: I wouldn’t call it “lucky”. I had very little time of late, what with the same sex fucking outbreak on Aquetinon, to attend to Trivehal.

CT: Trivehal?

God: What do they call that place, Mike? O, yeah, Earth.

CT: If you had more time…

God: If I had more time you’d not be here.

CT: But why?

God: Look you trivehals have been fucking me around since I took that day off after six laborious days to create all the shit you keep
on fucking up. If it was up to me – so help me Myself – you’d have been a forgotten memory long ago.

CT: I don’t know what to say.

God: I get that often.

CT: You will destroy my home and my people as soon as you get a chance?

God: I AM! I don’t get chances! I give chances. I have not given myself a chance to take you lot out.

CT: Please, why!?

God: Jesus.

(A big-eyed being with long flowing hair rushes in and asks nervously, “Yes, Daddy?”)

God: No, not you, son. Sorry. Daddy didn’t call. Daddy was just explaining something. Go play with your clay again. Make a monster. Maybe we can make dinosaurs again? What do you say to that, Jesus? Huge, big dyno’s!

(God laughs raucously. Michael and Jesus smile apprehensively and look at each other in barely shrouded disgust.)

Ah! The poor boy. That Trivehal trip left him shattered. Never been the same since. Something happened in those 64 seconds\(^4\) he spent in that woman’s womb. Bloody Dramacwene! He’s had a few fuckups in his time. Good help is hard to get.

For some reason this son of mine took a liking to the trivehals and kept me from harming them. Fuck knows why. And Fuck is the only one who knows more than me.

(Shattering laughter again.)

\(^4\) The reader is reminded of the the formula that a thousand years are but like a day to God. (2 Peter 3:8, KJV). The 270 day pregnancy is therefore calculated to have lasted 64 seconds.
This son of mine even died for you schmucks! Fuck, when I learned of it, I had to go resurrect the fool.

CT: So… If I may, us trivehals are safe for the moment because of Jesus?

(Jesus rushes in.)

Jesus: Did somebody call?

God: No! Fuck off Jesus! Christ almighty. Go play.

(Jesus scurries off, wailing, “Not that word, daddy, please!”)

He’ll be the end of me yet, that dumb boy. Fuck!

You were saying?

CT: I was asking whether my people and my home avoid your wrath only because of… (whisper) Jesus?

God: Fuck, yes! Look at the poor kid. He’ll come apart if I had to take you lot out. Do I need more aggravation, do you think?

CT: We, the trivehals, are lucky then that we are surviving COVID-19?

God: I guess so. Look, Dramacwene has tested some stuff on Trivehal. What you call Ebola, I think, he has matured into a virus that devastated several species that pissed me off recently. Horrible deaths they suffered. You trivehals have had it great because of… because of you-know-who.

CT: Well, God, people – trivehals – are facing hard times, still. Dire times. There are wars; violence; hunger; droughts, among other challenges. 2016 is known as the year of the earthquake. There were more than 11 000 earthquakes above magnitude 4.0 that year alone. In 2004 nearly 228 000 people died in Sumatra, and in 2010 an estimated 316 000 died in Port-au-Prince.

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5 Yiddish: penis. A dope, a jerk; a clumsy, bumbling fellow. A detestable fellow; a son of a bitch.

6 See the interview with Jesus to learn about his discomfort with the word “Christ”.
Hurricane Dorian, at the time the most intense tropical cyclone on record to strike the Bahamas, killed at least 50 people and left more than 70,000 homeless. In 2016 winter storm Jonas, called The Storm of the Century, left 48 people dead.

As a matter of fact, John Oliver blew up 2016 too in his season finale that year. Then there’s 2020, as I mentioned at the start. COVID-19… wildfires; tropical storms… there’s no end to the misery. The hurricane season – abnormally active. The usual 21 names were exhausted in September already and we began using the Greek alphabet to name new storms.

God: People are so peculiar. Why name disasters?

CT: I suppose we name hurricanes and storms to be able to identify them for research purposes in some effort to understand the phenomena. We study these destructive forces in a desperate bid to improve our chances against the destruction. But naming disasters also helps us to face the terror. When one can identify a threat, and even name it, one somehow feels more able to fight it, to survive it. But, I ask again, God, why? What is the reason for your ravaging behaviour?

God: Reason!? You want to know my reasons!? Who do you think you are, you little worm!? You are nothing but a random moment of my creative power! Who do you think you are, demanding justification from me!?

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7 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HogH1uFjoxc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HogH1uFjoxc)
It’s so unfair. Very unfair. This is so bad for our multiverse⁸.

(Michael leans over God’s shoulder and whispers in His ear again. The Almighty relaxes visibly.)

Let me try again. Michael reminds me of the Trinity’s considerations for granting this interview. Something about a more approachable… approach. A more open position. What is it you wanted to know again?

CT: What is the reason for your actions? Why the hurricanes and the typhoons and the earthquakes?

God: Why do you want to know?

CT: Why!? I want to understand, God.

God: You can’t handle understanding!

(That rumbling again.)

CT: I am not asking for understanding because I consider myself worthy, God. I am so consummately unworthy, God. I am asking in order to subject to your will even better, and to help my fellow brothers and sisters to also better subject.

God: My advisors warned me about this trivehal desire for understanding. Also, that you have this riling mechanism for achieving understanding – interviews. Very irritating. You media people are the enemy of all creation⁹. I am also told that an interviewer should pose one question at a time. You have fired three: hurricanes, typhoons, and earthquakes.

(My thinking at this juncture was mere survival. I had the trenchancy to focus on getting out of the encounter alive.)

CT: I already understand that there is none like you, God. None so wise. None so just. I beg forgiveness for my impulsiveness. I regret my impudence. Allow me to try again to better subject myself to

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⁸ Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Donald Trump.
⁹ Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Donald Trump.
your omnipotence. To more bask in your omniscience. To savour your presence.

(The smile that greets me speaks to ineffable satiation.)

CT: Please, God, share with me, your undeserving subject, worthy only by your creative grace, why humans are subjected to the wrath of destructive storms and earthquakes?

God: It’s sin. It’s sin, is it not, Michael? Is it not sin causing these events this creature describes?

(God looks expectantly at Michael. The angel appears tense and whispers again in God’s ear.)

God: O, yees! Right! Now I remember again. Adam and Eve. I made them last Friday. Or was it last year, Michael? I can never remember, what with a day of mine being as a thousand of your years, Chris – it is Chris, is it not?

CT: Yes, God.

God: Yeah. Time. I said to Paul, a thousand years ago, or last Thursday, I can’t remember just now, that a thousand of his years are like but a few hours to me. Moses wrote a poem about it, did he not, Michael? Moses. What a schmuck. Always stuttering when he’s supposed to say something worth noting. How he ever got those Israelites out of Egypt. And I did all the work, mind. He simply had to take a bow and run out front. Shlemiel10.

But I digress. I told that idio… I told Adam, and Eve, not to eat from my special tree. I had this one tree bearing fruit I was prepared to eat when I visited them. I gave them an entire garden – a big garden. A fantastic garden. A beautiful garden. A terrific garden. An incredible garden. The best garden ever. There had never been a garden that beautiful. There will never be another garden to touch it. I’ve done an incredible job with that garden. A great job. I know more about gardens than… than anyone. I understand gardens. Because I am very intelligent. I have a great

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brain. So, no problem there\textsuperscript{11}. But what do they do? They eat my fruit. My fucking fruit! So, I smote them. Ungrateful prigs. I told them to fuck off out of the garden and that snakes would bite them, and that Eve would shit bricks during childbirth. Fuck, I even gave them sex, the ungrateful tykes. What beats a good fuck? Hey? Come on, tell me – what is better than a screw? Hey? Tell me, huh? But what do they do? They steal my special fruit! They steal my fucking fruit! For fuck’s sake, I even gave Eve big tits so that that dumb fuck Adam could enjoy himself. Thankless rotters\textsuperscript{12}. Jesus! No! Not you! Go play!

(Michael leans over God’s shoulder yet again and whispers intently in His ear.)

There, enough of that. What was it again that you wanted to know, Mr. Thomas? It is Thomas, is it not?

CT: Thank you, Your Omnipotence…

God: God! I told you to call me God. I’m trying to be approachable here!

(I am terrified. God appears to gather himself. He appears to collect his thoughts.)


(God laughs rowdily again.)

CT: Fine, God. Thank you. And please call me Chris, by the way. Pray, if it pleases you, God, please tell me why the vulnerable are so often the ones exposed. Take Hurricane Matthew, for instance, in 2016. More than 1 600 dead, mostly in Haiti…

God (interrupting): Why do you want to know?

\textsuperscript{11} Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Donald Trump.

\textsuperscript{12} Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Joe Pesci.
CT: Is it sin? Is it because Adam and Eve disobeyed you that you visit such horror upon their descendants?

God: That’s no way to speak. That’s no way to speak. Be nice\textsuperscript{13}. But you’re bloody right it is! They disobeyed me! They spat in my face! I’m so pissed at them! Thankless, betraying shlumps\textsuperscript{14}.

CT: Were you never able to forgive them?

God (exploding): I am able to do anything I want! What do you mean, was I never able to forgive them? I chose not to forgive them. And, in any event, I didn’t kill them, did I? I let them live.

CT: But they did die.

God: Yeah. Eventually. But only after suffering much! I mean, imagine raising Cain and Abel! Got them there, didn’t I?

CT: Will people ever be reconciled to you?

God: I guess so. Yes. When I tell my son to go fetch the ones that never question me, they can come live here. As long as they stay out of my way. Come to think of it (and God breaks into a hearty laugh) you are asking many questions, Chris – you don’t stand a change, do you?

CT: I… I…

God (interrupting): Don’t worry! I’ve invited you to ask questions. I am deciding that you can have another chance!

CT: I am overwhelmed, God. How can I ever thank you?

God: You’re forgiven and that’s that. What was the question again?

CT: I… people… Your people, your Creation wish to understand…

\textsuperscript{13} Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Donald Trump.

\textsuperscript{14} Yiddish: a drip, a “drag”, a wet blanket.
God: Understand? You want to understand? What do you want to understand? Why do you want to understand?

CT: God, Matthew and Mark, two of Jesus’s disciples, wrote that even the wind and the seas obey you…

God: Matthew and Mark were naïve and schmaltzy. I told my son to keep them away from quills, but did he listen? You know how kids are. Luke. He had more sense. He speaks of frightening things and of nations suffering. Luke. There’s a writer.

CT: Are you saying that Matthew and Mark got it wrong – that you do not command the winds and the ocean?

God (exploding): I am in absolute control of everything! I make and I break. At will! How can you even think of suggesting that there is anything I do not control!?

(The room shakes under the booming voice. I am absolutely terrified.)

CT: I did not say that…

God: What then did you say!?

CT: I merely asked if Matthew and Mark did not understand…

God: It didn’t sound as if that was what you were asking!

CT: Truly, God, truly and verily, that was what I intended – whether Matthew and Mark misunderstood…

God: They got it right, all right, shleppers\textsuperscript{15} as they were, nonetheless. But I command the forces of nature at my will.

CT: That is exactly my understanding, God. And that is why I ask, why harass people, especially the poor and the suffering? The defenceless?

God: Why do you want to know?

\textsuperscript{15} Yiddish: a “drag”, a drip, a jerk, a maladroit performer.
CT: Because people are dying, God. People are suffering. Back in 2016, off the top of my head, there were eleven typhoons between August and November. Nearly 1 000 people died. The cost was estimated at USD10 billion. The Pacific economies are under severe pressure. On a Sunday in November the Pope prayed for people from Costa Rica and Nicaragua to Italy, suffering from disastrous hurricanes, earthquakes and heavy rains in a single week.

God (interrupting): You are ranting on and on. What was the question again?

CT: Please tell me why people are suffering by natural disasters under your watch!

God: Why not?

CT: Excuse me?

God: All right, you’re excused. Nice meeting you. Please feel free to call again. If you absolutely have to. Let’s go, Michael.

CT: No! God! Please! Please God! Wait! Don’t go. Please God. I want to understand God. Please don’t go…

God: That’s no way to speak. We’ve got enough here for an interview. I’ve given you a lot of my time. (Discombobulated by this sudden departure, I sit in silence for a while. Then Michael appears.)

Michael: God told me to let you have this. It’s his plan.

(He hands me a tome. I open it. The pages are blank.)

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16 Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Donald Trump.
17 Apparently God sometimes thinks he’s Donald Trump.
Chris Thomas: When I met with your Father, I was told how to address them. May I please also ask how you would prefer to be addressed?

(Jesus sweeps a lock of hair from his face and look at me with large brown eyes. When he speaks it is in a whisper.)

Jesus Christ: Gentle Jesus.

CT: Excuse me!?

(I regret the spontaneous outburst immediately, remembering how these words abruptly ended my interview with God. But Jesus remains.)

JC: Gentle Jesus.

CT: … Gentle Jesus?

JC: Yes, Gentle Jesus.

CT: Gentle Jesus, I’d like to talk about your promise to your friends, many years ago, when you left Earth after you had risen from the dead…

JC: What promise?

CT: The promise that you would return to fetch them.

JC: Oooo kaye.

CT: I’d like to know why you did not honour that promise.

JC: I’m waiting for my Daddy to tell me…

CT (interrupting): I am sorry… Gentle Jesus… but I cannot hear you very well. Please speak a bit louder, and directly into the mic.

JC: Sorry. I am waiting for Daddy to tell me to go.

CT: “Daddy”? You’re waiting for God to tell you to go back?

JC: Yes.
CT: Pardon?
JC: Yes!
(The mic squeals loudly.)
Sorry! Sorry!
CT: No harm done, Jesus, no harm done.
JC: You must call me Gentle Jesus.
CT: Pardon?
JC: You must call me Gentle Jesus. Not Jesus. You just said Jesus.
(A short silence.)
CT: I apologise. Gentle Jesus.
JC: It’s Okay. I’m waiting for my Daddy to tell me to go back.
CT: You made that promise to your disciples yourself, Jesus, uh, Gentle Jesus. You promised to fetch them soon to come live with you forever – here in your father’s house. Here, in heaven. Will you confirm that you have made such a promise? That you have given such an undertaking?
JC: Yes.
CT: Pardon?
JC: Yes!
(The mic squeals loudly.)
Sorry! Sorry!
CT: No harm done, Jesus, no harm done. I put it to you, Gentle Jesus… Are you absolutely certain that you prefer to be called Gentle Jesus? Rather than just Jesus? Or Christ? For Christ’s sake?
JC: Yes. Please. “Christ” is the title of that horrible Mel Gibson movie. I couldn’t sleep for weeks after seeing it. The gore! The violence! I had to relive all that pain. And the blood. So messy. Daddy told me to go. I didn’t want to go. But Daddy insisted. I
don’t know why Daddy didn’t go himself. It was his problem. His Creation. His mess. But, no, I had to go. I am so against violence. Gentle Jesus suits me best.

CT: Well, the fact remains that you made a promise to your disciples, a promise which created very specific expectations, and you did not honour that promise.

JC: You mean the promise that…

CT (interrupting): Please speak up! Jesus!

JC: Gentle Jesus.


JC: What was the question, again? Please? I’m sorry, but I startle easily. I’m gentle.

CT: It’s fine. No problem. I was asking about your promise…

JC: The promise to fetch my disciples?

CT: Yes. Indeed. Why did you not honour that promise?

JC: Well, Daddy said to promise them. Daddy said I had to promise them that I would come fetch them. Later.

CT: So, are you saying that you never made that promise of your own accord? That you were ordered to make the promise?

JC: Yes.

CT: But, see, Gentle Jesus… Can’t I please call you Christ, or Jesus? Anything but Gentle Jesus? Christ!

JC: Not that word! I am Gentle Jesus.

(Silence.)

CT: Gentle Jesus…

JC (Interrupting): Are you cross with me now?

CT: What?
JC: Are you cross with me now?
CT: Why? What about?
JC: For insisting to be called Gentle Jesus.
CT: No. No, I’m not cross with you. Christ, how can I be cross with you…
JC (Interrupting): Don’t say Christ. It makes me think of that movie.
(Silence. I’m wondering: Is this Jesus a wimp, or is he perhaps just very, very bright?)
CT: You see, Gentle Jesus, people believe that you, your Father…
JC (Interrupting): Daddy.
CT: What!?
JC: It’s Daddy. You have to call him Daddy.
CT: Fuck.
JC: That’s a bad word.
CT: I do apologise. Gentle Jesus. I do apologise. In the best attempt to gain understanding, I am going to go along. People believe, Gentle Jesus, that you, and your Daddy, and the Holy Ghost…
JC (Interrupting): Mommy.
CT: What!?
JC: Mommy. (The mic squeals.) The Paraclete is like a mommy to me.
CT: You have a “mommy”. Her name is Asherah!
JC: She left. The Paraclete is my Mommy now.
(Silence. I feel certain that Jesus will soon burst out laughing and announce that he’d taken me in. I collect myself, aggravated by the fact that Jesus managed to so upset me.)
CT: Let me pose my question again, Gentle Jesus: People believe that you, and your Daddy, and your Mommy are one; that God is, in fact, one person consisting of three parts.

JC: I never said that.

CT: Granted. I know that. But people believe it, nonetheless.

JC: That may be so, but I never said that.

CT: We digress, but I remind you that you are quoted by your disciple John, in chapter 14 of his book, at verse 16, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever…”

JC: Another Comforter, yes; not the same Comforter! I can’t be held responsible for the beliefs of people! Take that play on words I did with Peter, on the beach, when I said, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church”, or words to that effect.

CT: That is exactly what Matthew wrote you said. And I accept that many people believe many things you never intended them to believe – I hope to speak to the Paraclete – to Mommy – about that.

JC: Careful. Mommy can be sooo rude. But not as rude as Daddy.

CT: You’ve got that right. But I wanted to say that although people believe things that you never intended them to believe, you did make a promise to your disciples that you would be back for them – soon – and they had a reasonable expectation of your soonest return. That is something that the disciples believed, and you, yourself, made them believe that! Did you not?

JC: No.

CT: What?
JC: No! (The mic squeals again.) Sorry. I’m sorry!

CT: Forget the mic. What do you mean? Did you lie to your disciples?

JC: Yes.

CT: What!?

JC: Yes! (The mic squeals.) Sorry. I’m sorry!

CT: But why did you lie to the disciples?

JC: That’s a long story.

CT: I’ve got time.

JC: You see, I travelled with those twelve guys for three years. It was the best time of my life.

(Silence.)

I had been a quiet child. Mommy, my other mother, Mary, was pregnant when she married Joseph.

(Silence.)

Mommy Mary was very young. My Daddy got rid of my other Mommy long ago, after the ancients started to worship her too.

(Silence.)

I was always… different. Joseph told me all about carpentry. I used to looove watching him plane wood, with that strong torso covered in sweat and dust, with the muscles bulging under the effort.

(Long silence.)
CT: Do you mean…
JC: Do I mean what!
(The mic squeals louder than before. Jesus throws back his head and swipes a lock of hair from his face. He stares at me directly.)
CT: Exactly how were you different?
JC: My chromosome pool was not exactly from Mendel’s notes, you know?
(The head is swung backwards again, and Jesus holds a limp wrist to his cheek. Long silence.)
I told Daddy, all those years ago, when he came up with that elaborate plan to fix his fuck-up – you should ask Lucifer…
(Jesus crosses his legs and animatedly waves the index and middle fingers of both hands around to indicate that “Plan” was a word attributable to God.)
… that he shouldn’t interfere with Creation. But nooo…
(Jesus holds up his hands to show the wounds in his palms.)
… He wouldn’t listen. Imagine…
(Jesus crosses his legs over.)
… A young girl of twelve. Twelve! No more than a child! And add no male chromosomes. None. Zilch. Nada. And then my Godenes. The process rearranged my entire Godenome, disintegrated it and reassembled it all awry. Dramacwene really screwed up that time. Sixty-four seconds in eternity, and the female form leaves me cold forever.
(The “ever” is greatly emphasised and accompanied by both hands flung wide of the body. There is a long silence. I am flabbergasted. I wait in anticipation of the conclusion to this revelation.)
CT: Not that it is any of my business, Gentle Jesus, but are you gay?
(Jesus stares at me in that vacant manner used by people that are about to say that something is none of your business.)

JC: So, fucking what?

CT: Like I said. It’s of no consequence whatsoever to me. I couldn’t give a hoot. I’m not homophobic.

JC: Don’t… even… USE that word with me. Talk about homophobic! You should hear Daddy.

CT: I’ve read Leviticus.

JC: Leviticus!?

(Jesus swings his left arm around and plops the hand in his lap.)

Leviticus is noothing!

(Jesus leans forward and slaps me on the knee. Again, the limp wrist.)

About twenty, thirty thousand years ago there lived a cute species on Warsvischolg, in the third quadrant. Daddy’s Chief Creation Officer, Dramacwene, made a calculation mistake in their gene compilation and by the tenth generation the females started dying.

(Jesus smiles archly.)

At the same time the male Warsvi’s grew ever larger genitals.

(Jesus blushes profusely.)

Their sex drive increased with each generation – exponentially. When Daddy visited Warsvischolg a few thousand years later, the male Warsvi’s were so fucking each other that the economy was collapsing.

(Silence.)

CT: And then?

JC: Daddy destroyed the entire planet. I don’t want to talk about it.

(Silence.)
CT: Can we return briefly to the matter of the promise to the disciples? Do you need a few moments to collect yourself?

JC: No. I’m O.K., thanks.

(Jesus pinks away a tear, sniffs, and throws his long, straight hair back over his head.)

CT: Why did you not make good on the promise to the disciples that you would soon fetch them to you?

JC: Daddy controls everything. With an iron fist. I can only but laugh, hey, when people talk of a Trinity. Nowhere in the entire multiverse is there a “Trinity”. Everybody knows that Daddy is the boss, and everybody is scared of him. So, when Daddy told me to make the promise, I made the promise. And God only knows when I’ll return.

CT: Have you ever wanted to return already?

JC: I’ll go back tomorrow. As I said, my travels with those twelve were the best times of my life. But nowadays… Who can walk around the Middle East? We’ll be blown to bits.

But seriously, I have asked Daddy a few times, earlier, to send me back. I watched my friends grow old. I wanted to go back when Paul started writing. What utter nonsense that bloke came up with. God! But Daddy said to leave it be. Daddy wants to see if people can become worthy of living in heaven for eternity.

CT: But wasn’t “The Plan” fixed from the beginning, from the foundation of the world? That you should die…

JC: It’s like keeping poisonous snakes in your child’s bedroom. A plan that kills your own son! And then he even fucked up my chromosomes!

CT: You weren’t always…

JC: Of course not! Gabriel and I used to tour the Cosmos. Ovartis was our favourite. O, the women of Ovartis!
(Jesus spreads the fingers of both hands, and stares at his fingernails. And sighs.)
I broke a nail.
CT: You… You and Gabriel went girl scouting?
JC: And what is wrong with that?
(Jesus looks at me with head tilted, his right wrist at a right angle with fingers spread.)
CT: Nothing! Nothing at all!
JC: Listen, if you think I never had it, you’re mistaken, you hear! Take sweet Mary…
CT: Sweet Mary?
JC: Mary with the very costly oil of spikenard!
(Jesus sings the sentence and his eyes sparkle.)
That girl nearly lined up my chromosomes again!
(Jesus crosses over his legs again and throws his head back.)
If Judas didn’t surprise us in that room, I would have been the fundamentalist poster boy for straightening!
CT: Do tell!
JC: O, a gentleman never does tell, Chris!
(Jesus slaps me on the thigh again. Quite high up on the thigh this time.)
But for you…
CT: Maybe we should return to the second coming. There’s due to be a few surprised faces on Earth, and that’s no maybe.
JC: Just for the record, Judas was very pissed off about that Mary incident. Judas and I were a bit of an item. When he walked in on Mary and me, with those large, soft breasts flapping against my thighs… You know the Gospel writers wrote that Mary had been
anointing my “feet”. That’ll be the day! She had Mister Big in hand, I’ll let you know; nearly jerking the Godenome into shape. I though Judas was going to get a coronary. That’s why he betrayed me in the garden that night.

CT: So, what about the Second Advent then?

JC: Who knows?

(Jesus laughs loudly and slaps me on the knee again. This time his hand lingers a moment too long.)

God only knows… and He’s not telling!

(The hand remains on my knee.)

Listen, tell the church not to go hard on the boys, O.K?
Holy Ghost

Chris Thomas: Thank you for the opportunity to put a few distressing questions on earthly happenings to you… How would you prefer I address you?

Holy Spirit: Welcome to my environment, which is also your environment, Chris. Jesus referred to me as the Comforter, and later English translations of what Jesus said refer to me as Advocate. But the original intention of the Trinity was that I should comfort. So, call me Comforter.

CT: Thank you. Comforter, my world, Earth, is in turmoil. Although there are many diverse causes for these problems, I would like to address the fact that people who claim to be followers of Christ and His gospel, have so many diverse, often extremely diverse, convictions on the message of Christ and how Christ’s message should direct behaviour. And most disturbing is the fact that the diverse denominations, if you will, all claim that their particular and peculiar interpretations of God’s Word – the Bible – are all guided by you, Comforter!

So, I’d like to start with this question: Do you provide the exact same answers to all the questions you receive?

C: Look, it is not that simple. People hear what they want to hear. People listen to specifically identify their predetermined position, the response they had formulated before even asking the question. You, yourself, Chris, has said this. By the way, it is I who provided that insight.
CT: So, you confirm… Thank you, Comforter, for that insight, but I suspect Noam Chomsky said it long before me…


CT: Well, thank you, again. You confirm that your answers are consistent, but that people interpret your answers differently?

C: Yes.

CT: Does this phenomenon disturb you? Are you upset by the implication that your direction completely lacks the intended effect and outcome? Are you concerned about the havoc it causes?

C: Disquiet is not an emotion We encounter. We decide a course; We act; We observe; We evaluate; We react. But, in any event, We know outcomes from the start. To the finest detail.

CT: We? The Trinity?

C: Yes. God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Ghost – me.

CT: God and Jesus take part in the process of inspiration?

C: Process of inspiration?

CT: Inspiration – the term we people use for the insight you provide.

C: O. Yes. God and Jesus take part.

CT: I had an understanding that you are responsible for inspiration exclusively? That inspiring was the expressed reason for your deployment when Jesus departed some 2 000 years ago?

C: I wasn’t “deployed”! Nobody “deploys” me. Or “sends” me. Nobody controls me!

CT: You see, Comforter, this is one of the problems we people experience. Most of our theologians teach that you are, in fact, “another Jesus”, present, albeit invisibly, among people, since the
departure of Jesus, to guide in matters which are difficult to understand.

C: “Another Jesus”!? Where do you get that!? I am my own… my own Godhead. I am an equal member of Team Trinity! How dare you!?

CT: I…

C (interrupting): And what are theo… theo… What?

CT: Theologians. People especially educated and trained to understand the Bible better and to teach people what the Bible really says.

C: And who teaches these theologians to better understand the Bible?

CT: Well… Older people. Elders who have earlier learned to understand the Bible.

C: And who taught these “older people”?

CT: Well, you see, Comforter, that is exactly at the base of the problem. Theologians throughout history have claimed that you, Comforter, had determined their understanding.

C: Well, yes, that is so. I have been doing so for a long time. Since Jesus came back. Actually… I have been doing so from the beginning.

CT: Which brings me back to my original question: Why are there so many divergent articles of faith and so many different religions – even different Christian Religions – and so many denominational differences within these Christian religions, when you have been directing… since the beginning, which is news to me. All of these
religions and denominations claim that you told them that their belief systems were accurate and correct – even exclusively so!

C: But you see, Chris, I do not prescribe. I guide.

CT: You “guide”!?

C: Yeah! That’s what I do, man!

CT: Jesus Christ…

Jesus (rushing into the room): Did someone call?

C: Jesus! By us all, by God, by you yourself, by me, by God, you have incredible ears. Nobody needs you here. Go back to your clay. Go on. Go!

(Jesus turns and leaves dejectedly.)

Completely shot after that Earth Mission. Never wanted the job. Maybe you should talk to him about it. Something must’ve happened in those 60 odd seconds. Dramacwene must have miscalculated. I always thought that human genes were one of Engineering’s biggest fuckups. And then to place Godenes in a froth with human genes… Well, nobody listened, as usual.

CT: O, I did ask Jesus about the Earth Trip. But what do you mean, “Nobody listened”? It goes to the very point of my bewilderment: I just don’t get it, Comforter! And I am really and truly thrown by my failure to understand, because I am talking to the very person tasked with helping me understand, and then you say something about nobody listening to you in any event – did I hear correctly?

C: What don’t you understand?

CT: I don’t understand that I don’t understand, as I am in the very presence of what determines understanding!

C: No, no, no… Let’s take a specific problem of the understanding of one of your… “theologians” and determine the reasons for any misunderstanding.

CT: Excellent! Let’s do just that. And I have just the item!
C: Fire away. Let’s hear it.

CT: It’s around 320CE. The churches of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt are caught in a severe theological storm. It’s about the very nature of God, Comforter…

C (interrupting): I remember.

CT: Arius said that Jesus could not possibly be God, as is God the Father. He trusted to your, uh, “guidance”, Comforter.

C: Yes, and Athanasius said that Jesus, the Redeemer; and God the Father, the Creator, were one.

CT: Exactly! And Athanasius also claimed that you convinced him of his certain view.

C: And you want to know how the discrepancy was possible!

CT: I want to know more than that!

C: More!?

CT: More! Indeed! I want to know how it was possible for Athanasius to prevail at the Council of Nicaea, in 325, only for the Council of Tyre, ten years later, to rule in favour of Arius!? Of course I want to know how Arius and Athanasius got their opposing insights – both claimed you were the inspiration – but more to the point I want to know how a pagan emperor, Constantine, ruled in favour of Athanasius at Nicaea, in 325… And ten years later, in 335, at Tyre, ruled against him! All on your watch, Comforter!

Let me be clear: Arius and Athanasius come to opposite conclusions, under your guidance; Constantine rules in favour of Athanasius – and theologians claim Constantine did so under your guidance; Constantine then reverses his ruling ten years later – again under your guidance!

C: No surprise. As I’ve said, We know outcomes from the start. To the finest detail.
CT: This business had a profound influence on history, Comforter! An indelible influence! The death and destruction caused by this toing and froing is literally incalculable!

C: What do you mean?

CT: Again, you’re supposed to know exactly what I mean! You are supposed to have caused me to say what I just did, and with full understanding of what you caused me to say! You are confirming all my suspicions by your questions, rather than comforting me by your answers!

C: I’m letting you figure this all out for yourself. I’m “guiding”…

CT: O, for crying in a bucket. Yet, let me return to Arius and Athanasius. First you, uh, “guide” Constantine to denounce Arius and to declare the teaching of Athanasius correct – Jesus is God, God is God.

C: Me too!

CT: Yeah. You too.

C: And don’t you forget that.

CT: Ten years later, Constantine changes his mind…

C: Under my guidance.

CT: Under your guidance. Now, at Tyre, in 335, Arius is right, and Athanasius wrong. So… what were you doing, Comforter?

C: I was guiding.

CT: Guiding the whole lot over a cliff, yeah!

C: Yet, here we all are.

CT: Indeed, here we all are, but at what cost, you i… at what cost?

C: What do you mean?

CT: Jeeesus Christ!

Jesus (rushing into the room again): Did someone call?
C: Jesus! You again!
J: Someone said that terrible name.
C: What terrible name?
CT: Why don’t you know what he means, Comforter?
C: I can’t guide Jesus!
CT: He means “Christ”. He doesn’t like the name “Christ”.
C: O, yes, that Mel Gibson movie.
J: It was a terrible movie.
CT: I am sorry I called your name, Gentle Jesus.
J: You can call me anytime, Chris. Just don’t call me Ch… that name.
CT: I apologise, Gentle Jesus.
J: What did you want?
CT: Nothing, really. I was just talking to the Comforter here.
J: O.K. Best leave me out of it, then. Bye, Chris. Call again sometime, hear.
CT: I will, Gentle Jesus.
J: Promise.
CT: I promise, Gentle Jesus.
CT: Goodbye, Gentle Jesus.

(Jesus turns and leaves.)
C: Poor bastard. That Earth Trip really fucked him over.
CT: O, man, that statement alone, coming from you… But let’s get back to the point: at Nicaea, in 325, you guide Constantine to turn out for Athanasius, and against Arius. In fact, Constantine sends Arius into banishment.
C: Yes.
CT: Then, at Tyre, in 335, ten years later, Constantine, no doubt guided by you…
C: Definitely guided by me…
CT: There you have it, Constantine has Arius restored and banishes Athanasius to Gaul! What the fuck?
C: Language, language…
CT: You just used that word just now about Je… about you know who!
C: Yeah, but I’m the Comforter.
CT: You guide me to say “fuck” and then you scold me for saying “fuck”…
C: Ah! You’re getting closer to an understanding.
CT: You know, Comforter, I’m am discomforted. I am fucked.
C: True, that.
CT: Poor Arius, living to enjoy a decision to restore him to church fellowship, dies on the very evening before the ceremony! How cruel is that!?
C: Not my doing. Speak to God.
CT: Jesus Christ!
J (a distant voice): Aaaaarrghh!
C: Careful.
(Long pause.)
CT: Look, I’m here, I might as well try and get to the bottom of what I want to know.
C: Indeed.
CT: I put it to you, Comforter, that the rapid changes under your influence…
C: Guidance.

CT: Under your guidance, that the rapid changes under your guidance cause immeasurable suffering by death and destruction.

C: How so?

CT: What about Bahira, and Muhammad?

C: What about them?

CT: Bahira was an Arian monk, called Sergius, and he met up with Abu Talib’s caravan some three hundred years after this Arius and Athanasius thing, and convinced Abu that his nephew, young Muhammad, was to become a big name prophet.

C: THE Prophet, if you can believe his followers.

CT: Indeed.

C: So, what about it? Nice line I took there, ain’t it?

CT: Nice line? Nice line!? It was Bahira’s Arian influence that drove Muhammad’s line!

C: Ah, I see where you’re going.

CT: You’re the Comforter. I’d be shocked if you didn’t see!

C: Don’t get bitchy now.

CT: For centuries Christians and Muslims have been slaughtering each other. And I think you could have prevented it if you didn’t fuck with Constantine’s mind.

C: Constantine was a politician. He was swayed by the theologians…

CT: Of course! But who “guided” the theologians? And all of a sudden you now know about “theologians”!?

C: Yeah. What can I say?

CT: That means that you foresee the devastating outcomes of misunderstanding revelation?
C: Yes.
CT: But why allow it?
C: Allow what?
CT: Allow the horrors of misunderstanding?
C: Free will.
CT: But this is outrageous, Comforter! It is indeed like leaving loaded guns on the street; like giving a child poisonous snakes to play with.
C: Well, we can’t be prescriptive. Imagine the criticism!
CT: Since when are you concerned with criticism?
C: People have a right to make up their own minds.
CT: This much is now quite evident from what you’ve told me about misunderstanding. I am now wondering if it should not be better, Comforter, that you do not comfort at all! Would it not be better, Comforter, should you not comfort at all?
C: Probably.
CT: Excuse me!?
C: All right, you’re excused. Nice meeting you. Please feel free to call again. If you absolutely have to. I have to fly.
CT: No! Comforter! Please! Please Comforter! Wait! Don’t go. Please Comforter. I want to understand Comforter. Please don’t go…
Chris Thomas: Many thanks for this opportunity! As with my earlier cosmic guests, I am uncertain about how to address you…

Satan: Call me Lucifer. I must admit that the names people call me remain a source of great personal mirth.

CT: Well… Lucifer, speaking of pleasure, I’ve always wondered that people associate both piercing pain and profound pleasure with you. Why, do you think, is this so?

L: Look, I always tell my functionaries that death and pleasure are closely associated. Take that most supreme human pleasure – sex, for example. The body positions and the exclamations are virtually exactly similar to those of people dying. But when something bad happens, it is always me – they curse me. When something good happens, they attribute it to you know who. When it’s match point and that orgasm rolls on like a tsunami, it’s always “God, I’m coming!”; and when you lie there, spent and sweating and wheezing, with the guilt welling up like a blocked drain before you have to get up to go back to the missus, it’s always “the Devil made me do it.” Heaven in the here and now is always me; heaven in the hereafter is always Whatsisname – you know who.

CT: You don’t call God by name?

L: Let me tell you about That One. He’s a shtunk\(^1\)! He gives you instinct, and then forbids you should act on it. You see a sexy woman giving you the eye, and while instinct screams to propagate the species – the only reason for life, mind you – Whatsisname wants you to walk away, and deny how he has made you, or he’ll send you to me. He’s a sadist, man. Honour him!? Call him by his name!? Never! What kind of name is “I am what I Am” in any

\(^1\) Yiddish: a mean or selfish person; a stinker; a nasty person; an unpleasant shlemiel.
event!? “Ehyeh asher ehyeh”!? Oy! I could plotz²! Only that idiot Moses fell for that one – dehydrated and half dead from heat exhaustion, tending sheep for his shyster³ father-in-law. O-O-O-o-y⁴!

You do realise, don’t you Chris, that God, for all practical purposes, was telling Moses to go fuck himself?

CT: Surely that’s a bit of a stretch?

L: No, it isn’t!

CT: God wanted to tell Moses that He was a self-subsistent Being…

L: Get out of here! You’ve had some theological training. You know better! You’re trying to test me, aren’t you?

CT: No…

L: It’s O.K. No worries. You know full well that Hebrew did not have a metaphysical dimension at the time of the story about the burning bush. “Ehyeh asher ehyeh” was an idiom depicting deliberate vagueness. So, when Moses asked who this God was, God replies, “Never you mind who I am; mind your own business!”

God said to Moses, “I shall be what I shall be. I will do exactly as I choose, and I will make no guarantees.”⁵

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² Yiddish: to explode – from laughter; to be aggravated or infuriated – so angry one can plotz.
³ Yiddish: a person (especially a lawyer or politician) who uses unscrupulous or unethical methods.
⁴ Oy is not a word; it is a vocabulary. It is uttered in as many ways as the utterer’s histrionic ability permits. “Oy! I could plotz” represents flabbergastation – “who ever heard such a thing?”

CT: Bit like Donald Trump?
L: To a tee! Trump’s religious following see in him exactly what they had been accustomed to accept of Whatisisname. That Moses introduction is typical Trump: I am what I am and that’s that.
Consider Whatisisname’s attitude to human suffering…
CT: Indeed! Yes! I’ve touched on it during my interview with him. He acknowledged that he doesn’t care.
L: He is completely absent. I saw Trump’s approach to Covid-19, and to the East Coast firestorms, and to the hurricanes… he doesn’t care. And his people continue to love him and worship him and see some incomprehensible “plan” unfolding. Your people, what do you call yourselves – humans; trivehals to management up here, are possessed man!

Trump is the best example of the real God in all creation.
(Lucifer emphasises “real” and flicks his fingers when he says “God”.)

When Whatisisname decided to gather himself a people he did his homework well. He used to be known as El. On earlier occasions he assumed a human form to reach out to Abraham and Jacob. He was one of the three blokes who met with Abraham under the tree on the plains of Mamre\(^6\), when he promised Abraham a huge nation. And when he fought Jacob at the ford of Jabbok, Jacob called the place Peniel – El’s face\(^7\). The first time Abe’s wife laughed at what El had to say. The second time Jacob wrestled with him. So, this time, he took another name and he refused to be seen. Learned his lesson.

CT: The relationship between you and God clearly took a turn for the worst at some stage…
L: You’ve got that right! You can’t trust Whatisisname! He won’t even use his own name! He tells Moses he’s the God of Abraham,

\(^6\) Genesis 18.
\(^7\) Genesis 32.
but then he used to be called El Shaddai. He’s El when he fights Jacob. He’s whatever – in the truest sense of the word – when he speaks to Moses. He suffers from dissociative identity disorder! Consider this “Trinity” nonsense! Three gods; one god. Whatsisname is disturbed, man. Remember, he has to maintain himself against the other lot – “his people” always had a choice between him and the traditional gods of Canaan.

CT: You clearly disapprove of God.

L: Imagine, if you can – and believe me, you cannot – what it must be like to live your life, and we angels live, my mate, we live for fucking ever, imagine living your life forever stroking someone’s ego! For fucking ever polishing someone’s balls! O, Thou’s art sooo wonderful. O, Thou’s art sooo almighty. O, Thou’s art sooo full of grace. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! O, Thou’s art sooo bee-eu-tiful!

I had to compose sheet-music for the heavenly choirs. Believe me, at some point I had five hundred thousand full time composers – five hundred thousand! – to provide all the choirs with music. And do not think for one moment that Ehyeh asher ehyeh tolerates repeat music! No! His Omnipofuck listens to a piece of heavenly music once and that is it. I mean, after Ami Mozart arrived at the Pearlies early December in what was it, 1791, was it not, he was in divine shock for two years at the work I’ve left behind when Whatsisname kicked me in the balls. And can Whatsisname remember!? He fucking never forgets a tune.

This is exactly where the trouble came to a head. Whatsisname had to visit the one-eyed Beta vulgaris rubra giant species on Ewurtfu on the far side of Sirius Beta and he wanted a dramatic entrance. At the same time Jesus, poor child, needed chamber music for a session with a host of newly dead Wackchas from Osibus Zeta, wiped out in a blisterous diamond storm when Whatsisname was chasing skirt and not watching. If I recall correctly, I gave Choir 686, on Whatsisname’s train to Ewurtfu, the same piece of music

9 Armstrong, K. 1999. 34.
used when His Omniposhit hit two communities of Lladi on Lladus Fourteen, in the second quad, with the “Full Terror of my Wrath” 38 234 years earlier. At the time poor Gabriel had to go tell the Lladi that “God” was going to smite them because their priests, during a damaging drought, slaughtered schajack (something like your camel) instead of boschak (something like your goat). The Lladi laughed at Gabriel, convinced that no sentient being could be that petulant… Whatsisname was livid. I had to produce music, and poor Klotz\textsuperscript{10} had to go harvest a comet three lightyears away to obliterate the two communities. God is such a cunt.

But I digress. Whatsisname happened to recognise the music from 38 000 years earlier just as he blinded the poor beet king Drunesch’s single eye with the “Fullness of My Light”. Fuck. Whatsisname lost it, Chris. You know nothing. It was lightning wherever one could see, and the poor beets ran in all directions with that irritating high pitched scream only they can make. And the stench! When the beets scare, they give off the most almighty stench, courtesy of a design flaw by Inutile, a Species Designer working for Chief Creation Officer Dramacwene, who also fucked up your Kangaroo. And the stench pissed Whatsisname off even more, and there and then He decides to hit Dramacwene with “The Full Terror of My…” That’s when I said, “No, fuck, this crap stops now, this moment. It’s my fault. I provided the wrong music, by sheer pressure of production.”

CT: You challenged God!?

L: Fuck, yeah! Things could not have continued in that vein! Whatsisname fucked up everyone and everything that looked at him funny, or that didn’t obey His fucking crazy laws to the fucking letter, and then my overworked choirs and I had to face His fucking tantrums! And the angels tasked with giving essence to His ridiculous life designs forced on poor Dramacwene. Jesus! There’s a law on Vasgock…

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{10} Senior Vice President, Astronomical Bodies and Objects
Jesus (rushing in, wide-eyed and bushy tailed): Yes, brother Lucifer, you called?

L: No, fuck off Jesus. Christ, the man can hear a fucking pin drop on an exploding star. Go back to your clay pit. Go fuck with Dramacwene’s assistants.

CT: Uh, hi, uh… Gentle Jesus.

J: Hi, Chris. Sorry for the interruption.

(Jesus leaves, clearly ashamed.)

L: Jeez, Dramacwene only fucked up that poor lad’s Godenome in those blasted 64 seconds he spent in Mary’s womb. Fuck me! What a lot God’s cartel is. Jeeeesus!

No! I’m NOT calling you, you Chaim Yankel! Go bother Dramacwene!

Where was I? O, yeah, there’s a law on Vasgock forbidding the Vasgocki to piss on the eighth day of their ten-day week. Are you fucking listening, Chris!? They may not piss on the eighth day! They can’t pass water on the eighth day! Are you hearing me!?

CT: Yeah… Incredible.

L: Incredible!? You bet it’s incredible. It’s fucking demented, man! Piss on the eighth day, and you’ll be shitting! The poor Vasgocki drink nothing from noon on the seventh day, for fear of passing water on the eighth! By sunset on day eight they’re as dehydrated as that schmuck Moses was in the desert whenWhatsisname fucked him over with the burning bush.

CT: What’s with everybody here and Moses?

L: Moses is universal history’s most accomplished putz. The man is a stuttering idiot. He can’t put a sentence together without his brother Aron doing it for him, and then it’s nonsensical. But that’s another story. For another day.

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11 Yiddish: a nobody, a “poor Joe”. 
I mean, forty years in the desert? I know you guys didn’t have Google at the time, but forty fucking years to cover, what, four hundred kilometres as the crow flies? That’s ten kilometres per year, for crying in a bucket. Do you know that Google Maps puts it at a six-day walk? It’s supposed to take as long as the Israelis took to roll over the combined armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in 1967! O.K., granted, the Google time estimate is with a rucksack, and without kids and levvstak\textsuperscript{12}. It’s only a couple of hour’s drive in one of your current internal combustion vehicles, for fuck’s sake! And then he comes with this idiotic idea of having wanted the original adults to die off before he reached his destination! What!? You go rescue people and then have them die off before you reach home? Kuni Lemmel\textsuperscript{13}. I remember when the yold\textsuperscript{14} hit that rock for water. I thought Whatisname was going to lose it. Small things like that pisses Whatisname off terribly. Whatisname actually forgot about the trip once he gave Fuckface the commandments. Remember, forty years to Whatisname is but fifty-eight odd minutes\textsuperscript{15}. Less than an hour. When He looked again, the shlemiel was dying and begging to be lifted. Forty years! Jesus!

NO, stay! Not you. I did not call you.

\textsuperscript{12} Yiddish: livestock.
\textsuperscript{13} Yiddish: a simpleton; a Simple Simon.
\textsuperscript{14} Yiddish: a fool.
\textsuperscript{15} The reader is reminded of the the formula that a thousand years are but like a day to God. (2 Peter 3:8, KJV). The 40 year exodus is therefore calculated to have lasted 58 minutes.
Always that fucking stick. Hitting things. Making snakes out of it – he fucking loves that snake routine, hey. Bump into him on the street and he wants to throw the stick at you. Believe it, Michael, that sanctimonious *momzer*\(^{16}\), suggested that one to Whatsisname. But let’s drop the Moses thing. It’s nauseating.

CT: O.K., so what happened with your challenge?

L: Whatsisname called a board meeting. Whatsisname; Jesus; the Paraclete (we used to call him the paraplegic because he never walked, he always drifted); Gabriel (Communication); Dramacwene (Creation and Designs); Klotz (Astronomical Bodies and Objects); Anhiialeight (Obliterations); and me.

And Whatsisname castigated me somewhat awful. For dishing the wrong music once in what, forty thousand years (“For me a thousand years is like a day… yadda, yadda, yadda”). Something awful. And the collateral deaths on Ewurtfu also became my fault. And Drunesch’s blindness. It’s one thing upon another, and suddenly the Trinity just stared at me. And I knew…

CT: The Trinity wanted to execute you?

L: Well, it’s not that easy. Should Whatsisname kill an angel, the Cherub Union would never support him again. There would cause a cosmic coup d’état.

No, Dramacwene proposed the blueprint for your planet, for Ocean – why you’ve called it Earth is lost on me – and called for immediate creation. I was to be allowed the opportunity to bring the new life forms into my fold to buy life, or go down with them if I could only get a minority over Whatsisname. The motion was seconded by Gabriel and it carried. You see, I had a third of the angels behind me. I had been the Celestial Rock Star; I was Mr. Music of the Cosmos. Untouchable, even by Whatsisname. I survived. I was made the offer to appease the angels. And there can be little doubt that music, my forte, rules life on Earth!

\(^{16}\) Yiddish: bastard; used only when there has been a good deal of provocation.
CT: And the rest is history?

L: You’ve got that right! From the moment Adam took that piece of fruit from Eve and feasted his eyes on her curves, I had the odds. I mean, Adam and Eve fucked for a week before they even noticed Whatsisname about. Fuck, that pissed Whatsisname off. You know the story…

CT: And the future? What does the future hold? What will become of you?

L: I don’t know. There’re many stories going about. That retard who thought up Revelations talks of a pool of fire. But I don’t know.Whatsisname has not been to Earth for a long time. I suspect He’s forgotten about Trivehal, uh, Earth. Or maybe He simply doesn’t give a fuck. More likely. Look, when Jesus left there, he told those useless nuchshleppers who followed him around that he would be back for them. But where is Jesus? He’s playing with clay in the den out back. He’s fucked. I mean, how would you feel if your dad gave you over in the hands of savages to be crucified? Poor bastard. He still wakes up screaming nights.

CT: People say that it is you who cause all the suffering on Earth. Is that the case?

L: Look, Chris, why would I want to kill people? The more people, the more I can irk Whatsisname. He makes up a law; I play on Dramacwene’s dynamic and people chose me. Even when people

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17 Yiddish: a nuchshlepper is one who drags along after someone; a toady.
say they choose Whatsisname, I still own their butts! You know that’s true, Chris. I fulfil a must have role: Had I not been around people would have had to take responsibility for their deeds. Now people have the option of “the Devil made me do it”. People can’t live without me, Chris. And as long as I provide the service, I’ll be in business.

CT: Thank you, Lucifer! Thank you very much! Most insightful!
L: You are most welcome, Chris. Don’t be a stranger!
Muhammad

CT: Thank you for this interview… how should I address you?
M: The Prophet will do just fine. Why?
CT: Well, you are called many names: Muhammad; 'abd; bashir; shahid; mubashshir; nathir; mudhakkir; dai; noor; siraj munir; al-muzzamml; al-muddaththir; Ahmad; al-Amin; al-Sadiq; and, of course, The Prophet.

TP: That’s the one – The Prophet.

CT: What’s with Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn ‘ Abd Allāh ibn ‘ Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim?
TP: Full family name. What the Americans would want to see on my passport.
CT: Yes. Tough one, this Christian – Islam thing.

TP: There would be no problem if the Christians would only accept what Gabriel told me in the cave: Islam is the only true religion.

CT: The problem, of course, is that every religion is regarded by their followers as the only true religion.

TP: Every other religion is false. Obviously. Gabriel told me that Allah said so.

CT: If it is acceptable to you, Prophet, I would want to steer clear of the right and wrong of the different religions.

TP: What else is there to talk about? Once you accept that Islam is the only way, all other issues are settled.

CT: Even so, Prophet, there is still, as we speak, no consensus about Islam being the only way – even though, for the moment I am prepared to accept your premise…

TP: It’s not my premise. It’s Allah’s clear statement.

CT: So be it…
TP: You accept it then?
CT: Accept what, exactly?
TP: That Islam is the only way.
CT: It is not important what I think or accept, Prophet…
TP: O, but it is. Islam is the only way.
CT: Can we possibly discuss specific social problems without calling the only way thing at this time?
TP: No.
CT: No?
TP: No.
CT: But…
TP: No buts. Islam is the only way.
CT: I accept that you are convinced that Islam is the only way, Prophet…
TP: It’s not me. It’s Allah. Islam is the only, the unaltered, the original monotheistic faith of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets.
CT: That may well be…
TP: It’s a fact.
CT: Not everybody accepts that it’s a fact.
TP: They’re wrong.
CT: I accept that you may think that they are wrong…
TP: It’s not me. It’s Allah.
CT (pausing): All things being equal…

TP: Islam is the only way.

CT (pausing): Why is it so important to have everybody believe that Islam is the only way?

TP: It’s not about being important. It’s about accepting what is absolutely true.

CT: Is it not possible to talk to each other unless we both agree that Islam is the only way?

TP: No agreement is necessary. Islam is the only way, because Islam is the only way. Allah says so.

CT: You are described as the seal of the prophets, and as the last of the prophets. Is this why you are so certain of what you say?

TP: It’s not me; it’s Allah.

CT: Well, Prophet, I, for one, do not regard Islam as the only way. I don’t even regard Islam as any way.

TP: Then you will be put to the sword.

CT: You condone the killing of people who do not regard Islam as the only true religion?

TP: I was told two things about that by Gabriel: "As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help, and I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore, strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them."
CT: So, either I believe, or die at your hand.
TP: Yes.
CT: Before I decide this grave matter, Prophet, will you allow me some questions about your, uh, encounters, with Gabriel?
TP: Shoot.
CT: That’s a discomforting answer, in the context.
(The Prophet smiles.)
CT: Your father died before your birth and you spent your earliest years in the desert with your foster-mother, Halimah, and her husband. By the way, what’s with deserts and Judaism and Islam?
TP: Not much else around than deserts, are there?
CT: I guess not. So, your mother died when you were six, and you were orphaned. You spent two years with your parental grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, then with your uncle, Abu Talib. Your uncle took you on trading journeys and you learned about commerce and trade…
TP: Why the history lesson?
CT: I want to establish a profile of the boy who met Bahira and the man who heard Gabriel.
TP: So, ask me.
CT: Bahira was a Christian?
TP: Yes. A hermit. Or a monk.
CT: And he spoke to you about a career in… propheteering?
TP: You’re a funny man, Chris. I’ll have you know that I am a descendant of the Prophet Ismail by his second son Kedar. Ismail – son of Abraham. You are in a serious environment and talking about serious things here.
CT: I hope that is not a threat, Prophet?
TP: I’ll extend you every courtesy. But don’t push it.
CT: So, what exactly did Bahira tell you?

TP: Business was not particularly bullish at the time, if I recall correctly. Bahira was a schemer. But what did I know at the time? Bahira means ‘tested by God and approved by God’, so who was I to doubt him?

CT: But Bahira was only an assumed name after he fell out with his Christian peers! He used to be Sergius the Monk. The mere assumed name can never be evidence that God did, in fact, approve of him!

TP: As I said, Bahira was a smooth talker. And he was clear: He saw a cloud shadowing me all the time, miraculously moving to cover me wherever I went. And he told Uncle Abu about visions he had received from God that I would be the last and only true prophet and that my uncle should protect me against the Jews.

CT: Well, I’d like to point out that there is even disagreement about that story: al-Tabari wrote that Bahira told your uncle to protect you from the Byzantines, not the Jews!

TP: al-Tabari wrote many things…

CT: Yes, he did. And his written record differs from the accepted word of mouth version events.

TP: Allah would have taken care of the preservation of the truth.

CT: Whatever blows your hair back, Prophet.

TP: It was Bahira that had access to the original, unadulterated gospels, and the announcement of my coming was found in those gospels!

CT: Those original, unadulterated gospels are, of course, no longer to be consulted.

TP: What are you insinuating?

CT: I’m not insinuating anything. I am stating, loudly and clearly, that Bahira was a con-man and that you bought his fabricated tales because they favoured you.
TP: Fabricated tales? Are you joking? Look at my followers! Billions¹!

CT: Followers is no measure of veracity, Prophet. Hitler had followers; Apartheid had followers. Followers can easily be an indication of gullibility only!

TP: You are being blasphemous!

CT: Blasphemy is a crime with no victim, but the gullible electing to be victimised. But as blasphemy is an insult to some deity, about something held sacred on the declaration of such deity, blasphemy is an imagined insult, even though the gullible may be pained. I have no empathy for victims of blasphemy. I mean, how can you, for instance, be blasphemed if you claim to be the only true prophet of the only true God – nothing could touch you, especially not little old me speaking my mind!

TP: So, what’s your point?

CT: My point is that I suspect that Bahira, pissed at being rejected by his Christian peers, planted some cockamamie idea in your uncle’s receptive mind about you being special, and that everybody wanted to believe this story, and did, and Islam was born.

TP: No, Islam was born when Gabriel…

CT: Yes, I know! But Bahira planted Islam when you were, what, 12 years old! I put it to you that Bahira was your teacher and that this discredited Arian monk introduced you to what is now referred to as “Biblical records”, and that together you had devised your own heresy. What do you say to that?

TP (enraged): How dare you! I even killed Bahira…

(The Prophet literally slaps his hands over his mouth, his eyes wide in horror.)

CT: So, you finally confess, Prophet?

¹ The Prophet often thinks that he is Donald Trump. Much like that other bloke I interviewed – God.
CT: It was after a night of drunken raving, was it not? You woke up and found your own bloodied sword and Bahira’s stabbed body next to you?

TP: No! No! No! It was a Jew who killed Bahira! We were sleeping and a Jew took my sword and killed Bahira and tried to pin it on me!

CT: Not what you just confessed to, Prophet! Not what you just confessed to. But it’s neither here nor there to me. I’m interested in the encounters with Gabriel. Let’s get to those sessions.

TP: What, are you disputing the revelations?

CT: You’re goddamned right, I do!

(The Prophet stares at me in complete disbelief.)

CT: You’re a troubled boy, handed around among family members from even before your own memory, exposed to a swindler, married to the much older widow Khadijah, perturbed by continuous quarrelling among Sabaeanists, Jews, Christians and Arabs worshiping local gods and goddesses, and believing in angels, fairies and demonic jinn. A distressed man seeking solace in solitude, you escape to a cave near the base of Mount Hira for days on end. And then, suddenly, out of nowhere, unexpectedly, Gabriel appears! Gabriel!

TP: And what’s so extraordinary about Gabriel appearing!?

CT: Only that when heavenly beings appear, in the private enclaves of noisy, racing human minds, there is the benefit of earlier records of similar appearances to go by and construct another appearance – Gabriel with Zechariah, Gabriel with Mary, Gabriel with John. Gabriel, no doubt, with Paul…

TP: Gabriel appeared to me and that’s that!

CT: Not so easy as that, Prophet! Not so easily settled!

TP: What are you disputing?
CT: All of it! I am saying that if you did see and hear Gabriel, it happened in your mind; it never actually happened in reality.

TP: You are mad! Consider the billions who follow me\(^2\)!

CT: Absolutely no proof in numbers at all, Prophet! Followers prove nothing but the acceptance of an idea. And, there are more people on Earth not taken by your story than there are following you. The vast majority of those not following you, follow some other prophet or prophets…

TP: But I am the only true prophet…

CT: Say you!

TP: Says Allah, through Gabriel!

CT: Gabriel is a few imaginary pixels in hallucinating minds, Prophet. There is no Gabriel.

TP: How dare you?

CT: How about you being consoled by Khadija and her Christian – Christian, mind – cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, after your distressing visits to the cave. What IS IT with religious revelations and deserts and caves!?

TP: There’s shade in caves.

CT: True, there’s that. Solace from a sun sweating all sense out of impressionable, waxy minds.

TP: You’re now simply being rude!

CT: Rude? I’m not nearly as rude as you are wanting me to accept that ‘Gabriel’ told you what ‘Allah’ wanted people to know. And then there’s the three-year interruption between series of sessions. You were depressed for three years, and then, suddenly, there’s Gabriel again. Nonsense, man!

\(^2\) Uh… The Prophet clearly sometimes thinks he is Donald Trump.
TP: You are an impertinent man, Chris. I won’t stand for it.

CT: We’re here. We’re talking. Leave now and you acknowledge that your story is fake.

TP: Never!

CT: Then let’s continue. Unimaginable atrocities are committed by people convinced that they act in answer to what you said Gabriel said Allah said. Why!?

TP: I can’t possibly be responsible for what people think.

CT: Like hell you can’t! You can’t have vaticinated at will and then deny the direct results and outcomes of your blithering! Muslims kill! Sure, Christians kill too. There are killers everywhere. But your followers kill in the name of this ‘Allah’ which you said ‘Gabriel’ told you to present to your people. You are responsible!

TP: People make up their own minds.

CT: Of course, people make up their own minds, Prophet. And that is exactly why ‘prophets’ and preachers should watch their mouths, because ‘believers’ will not only believe any old nonsense, they’ll specifically believe any particular old nonsense they are convinced to be the furtherance of that self-same old nonsense they are led to accept by the babbling of the prophets. If there be a true prophet, such prophet would be able to foresee the results of his prophecy and will temper, or elaborate, to contain and to guide correctly his followers. I know of no such so-called ‘prophet’ in history. Therefore, I can confidently declare that all prophets, you included, especially you, are fake; are irresponsible self-serving beguiling mountebanks. Whatever ‘prophets’ say can best be ignored. What can possibly be gained by prophesy had probably been said already and by people not claiming divine insight or revelation. You ‘prophets’ make me sick.

TP: So why did you want to talk to me?
CT: First decent remark by you all day. Indeed. Why did I want to talk to you? I’m doing this book, see…

TP: Ah! Another writer! And what is your message?

CT: My message? That people should think for themselves. That people should reject the prophets and their gods. That there are no gods; is no god, and therefore no legitimate revelation by whatever ‘messenger’ imaginable.

TP: You’re not going to be popular!

CT: You’ve got that right!

TP: Anything else?

CT: Yes. There’s something I’m very keen to understand about your personal life.

TP: Shoot.

CT: Don’t SAY that!

TP: Hehehe…

CT: You were married eleven times.

TP: So?

CT: Might have been the done thing then, Prophet, but today it smacks of something rotten. Even so, making room for culture and circumstance, marrying a six-year-old is simply sick.

TP: She lived with her parents after the marriage.

CT: For three more years! Then you, at 53, consummated the marriage. You fucked a 9-year-old girl! You should have been a Roman Catholic priest, a straight one. After Khadija, what, she must have been 68 when she died, you go for little girls. No, man!

TP: You don’t understand.

CT: Damn right, I don’t.

TP: You don’t want to understand.
CT: Right again. What’s to understand? No context or circumstance can possibly make sense out of this preposterous witch’s cauldron of dismal imagination.

TP: We’re not going to see eye to eye, are we Chris?

CT: No, we’re not. Going to see eye to eye.

TP: So, what have we accomplished here today?

CT: Good question, Prophet. Good question. Perhaps we have determined that the prophets should have been more discerning. More charged with responsible reporting. More aware of the dangers of fake news. More mindful of loose cannons making up the prophecies.

TP: You know, maybe you’re right. But I do remain the only true prophet of the only true God. And Islam is the only way. Thanks for stopping by.
Mary

Chris Thomas: I am very glad that you have consented to this interview… And yet again, I find myself embarrassed by not being able to imagine what I should call you, or how I should address you, or what name I should use in speaking to you…

Mary: Call me Blessed Virgin. And you’re welcome.

CT: Blessed Virgin it is then. By choice or decree?

Mary: *Ikh farstey nisht*?

CT: Are you known as “Blessed Virgin” by your choice, or by instruction of God?

Mary: A bit of both, actually. God wants it, and I like it.

CT: Not so humble then, after all?

Mary: *Ken zein*…

CT: You’re quite a woman, M… Blessed Virgin. I can think of no woman with a better story to tell. So, please allow me to take you back to that moment when you realised you were pregnant. How, and when, did you realise that you were pregnant?

Mary: *Ich vais nit*. *Nor Got vaist*. I was washing clothes when I felt sick. One of the women with me told me she got sick like that when she was *trogedik*. And then I remembered the dream about some *sheyn mentsh* in a bright light telling me that I will be *trogedik*.

CT: That was Gabriel? The man in the dream?

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1 Yiddish: I don’t understand.
2 Yiddish: maybe, could be.
3 Yiddish: I don't know.
4 Yiddish: only God knows.
5 Yiddish: pregnant.
6 Yiddish: handsome man.
Mary: So, I was told later, yes.

CT: You didn’t know that it was an angel of God who appeared to you?

Mary: *Oy vay!* At the time I knew nothing. To a hundred and twenty, I was twelve.

CT: Are you happy? Do you think it was all worth it?

Mary: All I ever wanted to be was a baleboote\(^7\). Az a yor ahf mir\(^8\). Then this shlatten shammes\(^9\) comes along and my whole life changes. But it was worth it. I live well. People respect me. The Roman Catholics who come here fall over themselves to meet me.

CT: Do you have a particular sense of greatness, having mothered the Son of God… God himself?

Mary: I could never understand that! An angel tells me I’ll get *trogedik*. I don’t *shupt*\(^10\). I become *trogedik*. I have a *kaddishel*\(^11\). People *ongeshtopt mit gelt*\(^12\) bring expensive gifts. I was *tsemisht*\(^13\).

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\(^7\) Yiddish: a good homemaker, a woman who’s in charge of her home and will make sure you remember it.

\(^8\) Yiddish: I should have such good luck.

\(^9\) Yiddish: busybody, tale bearer; messenger.

\(^10\) Yiddish: fuck.

\(^11\) Yiddish: baby son.

\(^12\) Yiddish: very wealthy; literally, stuffed with money.

\(^13\) Yiddish: confused, befuddled, mixed-up.
CT: I’m beginning to understand, tanteh\textsuperscript{14}… Blessed Virgin.

Mary: \textit{Gott sei dank}\textsuperscript{15}. Tell me too, please!

(There is a long silence. Mary seems to stifle mirth. After a short while she positively trembles with suppressed laughter.)

CT: You’re having me on, aren't you!?

Mary (Collapsing with laughter. She crosses her legs and I notice that they are very shapely and very sexy): \textit{“Tanteh”} did it! I couldn’t keep a straight face after \textit{“tanteh”}! (She roars with laughter.) Your face, Chris! You were really feeling for me! (She collapses again.)

CT: Right. You got me… Blessed Virgin.

Mary (Even louder laughter): Fuck \textit{“Blessed Virgin”}. Call me Mary, for Christ’s sake.

(There’s a load groan from somewhere outside…)

I am so snootful of this \textit{“blessed art thou”}, I can \textit{plotz}!

CT: So, we continue with the Yiddish?

Mary: It’s so expressive! So guttural! I love it!

CT: Indeed, me too. My mother tongue is also guttural. Love it.

Mary: Right, let’s get down to it. What do you want to ask me?

CT: I’m pretty relieved, I’ll have you know. And very surprised.

Mary: Yeah. Because on Earth I’m this younger Mother Theresa with eyes either cast down or lifted in euphoria.

CT: Indeed. You… You don’t appear to be fitting that image.

Mary: Look, I gave these \textit{schmucks} their “Hail Mary, full of grace, Blessed art thou amongst women” and now I just want to be left

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Yiddish: aunt. An international word, but the \textit{tanteh}, in Yiddish, is next of kin, certainly, to a Jewish mother (like which there is no other).
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Yiddish: thank God.
\end{itemize}
alone and now and then moon one of those most odious Roman Catholic priest paedophiles passing on my particular street of gold.

CT: Moon them?

Mary: I often flash the cunts. They usually run for their lives. They prefer younger. And they prefer alternative genitals. Fucking depraved idiots.

CT: Phew.

Mary (Grinning): Surprised, you said?

CT: And then some. There’s a mondegreeen about that prayer. Apparently a four-year-old Roman Catholic child used to pray: “Hail, Mary, full of grace… blessed art thou swimming…”

Mary (Screaming with laughter): Oy vay, are you a welcome guest. Fuck, this place is boring.

CT: Boring, how?

Mary: Boring, how!? Look around you. People are wondering about like zombies, in complete and utter awe of God and my son. It drives me nuts. Everybody shpatziring\(^\text{16}\) about. You should see the fun they have in Lucifer’s place.

CT: I’ve been. I interviewed him.

Mary: Yeah. Did he talk about “Whatsisname”? (She bursts out in laugher again.)

CT: You seem to like your fun…

Mary: At twelve I get pregnant and serve this “salvation story” with my life. Then I die. I come to in this motherfucking hell-hole and face eternity in the presence of eizels\(^\text{17}\) in awe of gozlins\(^\text{18}\). Would not you want some fun?

CT: Are you not upsetting… Whatsisname?

\(^{\text{16}}\) Yiddish: walking without a particular destination.

\(^{\text{17}}\) Yiddish: fools, dopes.

\(^{\text{18}}\) Yiddish: merciless, rapacious unethical swindlers.
Mary (Roaring with laughter again): So, what are they going to do? Send “The Mother of God” to hell!?

CT: I take the point.

Mary: Asherah¹⁹ and I party together regularly.

CT: Asherah!?

Mary: Yeah. Great fun, Asherah. (Screaming laughter again.) What? You are completely flabbergasted, aren’t you, Chris? Remember, Asherah has to put up with Whatisisname fucking everything with receptive genitalia in the multiverse. He has belittled and embarrassed her so often. She just has great times nowadays.

CT: I don’t know what to say.

Mary: Eve sometimes joins in. And Esther and Ruth. Esther and Ruth – now there’s two red hot specimens. Oh, and Mother T joins from time to time.

CT: Mother Theresa!? Are you shitting me!?

Mary: Jesus, man…

(Yeah, Jesus rushes in.)

J: You called mommy?

Mary: Go away, Jesus!

J (Tearful): Hello again, Chris.

CT: Hello, Gentle Jesus. It’s good to see you again.

J: You must please visit again, Chris. It’s lonely up here.

CT: I have no regular access, Gentle Jesus, but I will try.


CT: Goodbye, Gentle Jesus.

¹⁹ The wife of God… it’s a long story. Google it.
(Jesus leaves.)

CT: You guys are very hard on him.

Mary: I know, I know. But, fuck, he’s a tsutcheppenish\textsuperscript{20}. Such a kvetch!\textsuperscript{21}

CT: Aren’t Jewish mammas supposed to dote on their sons?

Mary (Giggling): What, I should be proud he’s not a doctor? Or a lawyer?

CT: He did heal. And he did solve disputes.

Mary: And he shlepped\textsuperscript{22} about Palestine for three years, a grown man! I tried. I got him his first gig, at that wedding where the kushinyerkeh\textsuperscript{23} of a groom didn’t have enough wine. What did he do? He gorges on the attention. And then he tells me off.

CT: You were saying about Mother Theresa?

Mary: O, yes. Remember, she’s now restored to her youth. And boy, was she untouched by human hands when first she was young! She’s making up for lost time, that one! She claims to have done most of the popes. A real shloooche\textsuperscript{24}. I hear say that it’s Augustine at least once a week. That paskudniak\textsuperscript{25}… all holier than thou, but flirting all over town.

CT: Augustine. Yeah. Not too surprised. Look, I wanted to ask you about all those doctrines around Mariology, and the outrageous reports of your images bleeding or appearing on everything from church doors to toast, but I gather that you aren’t interested…

Mary: I’m not even aware of all the shit those stupid Roman Catholics teach about me. Are you aware that only Luke – cute disciple, Luke, a doctor of sorts no less – said anything about me

\textsuperscript{20} Yiddish: someone who becomes a persistent, unshakeable nuisance.
\textsuperscript{21} Yiddish: wet blanket; one who diminishes the pleasures of others.
\textsuperscript{22} Yiddish: to drag one’s heels.
\textsuperscript{23} Yiddish: cheapskate
\textsuperscript{24} Yiddish: slut.
\textsuperscript{25} Yiddish: a nauseating individual; a louse.
and my background, and then only extremely sparsely so? There’s nothing in the Gospel records about me – I was fucked by some ghost; I produced the “Son of Man”; I saw him trick those stewards at the wedding in Canaan – very clever move that was; my move, I’ll have you know; I wept at the cross and at the grave; I prayed with the disciples after the grave was emptied. That’s it! And yet, there’s this enormous history of me being prepared and chosen and what not. They’re possessed, man!

CT: Well, I don’t know what to ask you then.

Mary: How about ask me for a drink? I’ve got Macallan 1926. Only 40 bottles ever produced. I’ve got two. I’ve got 1946 as well! That bloke who bought it at auction never saw Luci nab it and replace it!

CT: I’ll be damned.

Mary: You all are. It’s not Whatsisname that’s gonna get you, Chris; it’s human bloody stupidity! Wake up! I did.

CT: O, wait! There is something else.

Mary: Shoot.

CT: Don’t say that!

Mary (laughing): I heard about your discomfort with Mo.

CT: You talk?

Mary: Weirdness personified, that one. Scares me.

CT: You’ve got that right.
Mary: What do you want to know?
CT: That rumour about the Roman soldier…
Mary: Nah. Good joke though. Podex?
CT: You know that one?
Mary (laughing): I do!
CT: You laugh a lot.
Mary: It’s either that or crying. I prefer laughing. And, indeed, there’s lots to laugh about.

Take the Podex thing. As things stand this entire – what do you guys call it… Gospel – this entire Gospel narrative is ludicrous. Nice story, mind. But laughable. Incredible imagination that spawned this one. But if, in fact, this entire virgin birth thing was just a cock-and-bull story (snickering) to prevent my dad from castrating a Roman and to save face in the neighbourhood, the narrative would be even more ridiculous.

That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

Here (she hands me the ’46). You pour. Your visit justifies it. Hope to see you again. And soon.
A conversation between Moses and Jethro

... and a report on an interesting resulting gathering.

Of all of literature’s characters, Moses must always strongly appeal to the most imaginative minds.

An Egyptian prince, an alleged murderer, a fugitive, a seducer, a conman, a raconteur, an illusionist, a meteorologist, a survivalist, a leader, but, above all, the man that gave us God as we know Him – portable, pocket size, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient.

Moses: The Hebrew Egyptian from Midian. Moses: The creator of God.

I imagine a conversation between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, which led to the exodus from Egypt. For no apparent reason, and despite the anachronism, I imagine that they would use the odd Yiddish expression. Moses, the great leader and lawgiver who brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, constituted them a nation and brought them within reach of the land promised to their forefathers. And Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, also known as Reuel, a Midian priest and man of influence. The name possibly means ‘pre-eminence’.

Moses and Jethro are sitting around a fire in the centre of the Midianite settlement. They have blankets around their shoulders against the desert night and are drinking wine which they take turns to pour from a large earthen jug balanced in the sand and against a small rock. They look pensive.

JETHRO: "Something on your mind, son?"

MOSES: "Is it that obvious?"

JETHRO: "Well, you’re awfully quiet, for one. The wine not good tonight? Is Zipporah acting up again? There’re two new fertility whores at the temple. The jugs on these wenches…"
MOSES: "No, nothing like that. (Long pause.) I’ve been thinking lately."

JETHRO: "Ah, thinking! When a shepherd starts to think, Moses, all manner of muck is possible. What have you been thinking, then?"

MOSES: "This shepherding thing is a bit of a dead end, to be sure, Jethro. I’m bored to death, I am."

JETHRO: "Well, I need a good man to take care of the flock, Moses. Someone I can trust. What, with everything I have to do at the temple, I can hardly be expected to tend the flock myself – and I trust you, son."

MOSES: "I know, I know, Jethro. And I appreciate your confidence. I really do. But I want more. I’d like to be remembered for something. I want my sons to think of me as a man of affairs, not just a shepherd like just about every man around here."

JETHRO: "But you tend the largest flock in all of Midian, Moses! In the entire region, in fact. There’s not a shepherd I know of that does not envy you. You’re Jethro’s man…"

MOSES: "But that’s part of the problem, see! I don’t want to be ‘Jethro’s man’ – I want to be my own man. Eh, maybe that came out all wrong."

JETHRO: "You’ve got that right! I don’t understand. Look, Moses, I have given you refuge when you came running from Egyptian bounty hunters. I’ve never asked questions. For all I know you’re a fraudster. Or a killer. But did I ask difficult questions? Did I pry? Never once! I’ve given you a daughter in marriage. She might not have temple whore looks, but she’s a lay when you don’t feel like the trip up the hill. And she’s the daughter of the priest, for crying out loud. Jethro’s daughter – the daughter of the most important, the most influential man in all of Midian! I’m the man! What I say, goes! And you’re my man."

MOSES: "Don’t think I don’t appreciate your standing in the community, Jethro…"
JETHRO: "Community? Community!? I don’t hold sway over a community, son. I rule a people, I do!"

MOSES (thinking): “I wish I had the chutzpa to confront the arrogant old bastard with the persistent rumours about his personal history. Issues such as his alias, Reuel. Why was he known by this name to the oldest members of the family? Who were the nocturnal visitors that called ever so often? But this is not the time.”

MOSES: "I admire your eminence, Jethro. I am in awe of you… like all your people are. You have accomplished more than any man I’ve ever known. Why, not even Pharaoh demands the devotion that comes so naturally to your people."

JETHRO: "So – we make a great team! I manage the people and you manage the assets. It’s a great deal! Swing by the temple tomorrow and see Neanirosah or Matutolath… Or both! See both. They’ll make you forget you ever had a single thought. Except of course, a very particular kind of thought…"

MOSES: "No, Jethro! I mean, I’ll see the girls. Good tits, you said?"

JETHRO: "Great tits! They bob like coconuts in a rock pool. Firm. Fleshy. Ooo! There. It’s settled then. Go drink generously of the nectar of Neanirosah and Matutolath and you’ll forget all about thinking. Thinking! Ha! A shepherd shouldn’t think."

MOSES: "No, Jethro. Wait! I just can’t face another trip into the fucking desert with those fucking sheep! I can’t…"

(The men drink in silence for a while.)

MOSES: “I want to start a religion."

JETHRO: "You want to what?! Start a religion?! Are you meshugge?!! I have a hard-enough time as it is keeping the multitude focused on one religion and you want to start another?"

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1 Yiddish: Crazy.
Is this how my kindness is repaid?! It’ll be the undoing of me. Years and years of painstaking work gone like a drop in the desert."

MOSES: "No, Jethro. I’ll never do that to you. I want to create a bespoke religion for the Canaanite people of Egypt. Only this time I won’t be so stupid and naïve as to have my ideas stolen and usurped by someone with strong henchmen! Damn that Akhenaton! Damn him!"

JETHRO: "Now there’s a story I’m dying to hear, Moses. So often have I heard you curse Akhenaton. So often have I wondered about your relationship with Pharaoh. So often have I wondered about your past."

MOSES *(Thinking)*: “Not as often as I’ve wondered about your past, old man. One day, one day…”

MOSES: “I’d like to focus on my current concerns, if you don’t mind, Jethro – a religion for the slaves of Goshen. They’re an abandoned lot. Religious orphans. Ready for the plucking. When I think about Akhenaton’s success with his single god sun disk concept… no images allowed. A god with no form or substance. My fucking ideas, all of it. He had the single god idea, I’ll grant him that, but all the detail, all of it, was mine! I made that sun god. I made the fucking thing!”

JETHRO: “That’s a lot of anger you have there, Moses…”

MOSES: “Of course I’m angry! I’m furious. Tempestuous! From the moment Akhenaton mentioned focused control over the masses through a single god, the impressions and the notions just flooded my mind. The opportunities! The power! Man!”

JETHRO: “So you’ve had this religion thing on your mind for some time already?”

MOSES: “As long as I care to remember. Akhenaton mentioned his single god idea during a particularly pleasant evening of feasting, drinking, fucking… O, those Egyptian wenches. Jethro! They do things for you, man.”
JETHRO: “Yeah, yeah! Tell me about this single god thing.”

MOSES: “Akhenaton argued that if one could convince the population that there exists a single supreme deity – and that one is the sole spokesman for that deity…”

JETHRO: *(Jumping up and rubbing his hands together furiously.)* O man! O boy, Moses. What an idea. What an idea! ’El ‘Olam, Moses! Tell me more. *(He sits down again, pours more wine, hands Moses a full cup and shuffles closer to him.)*

MOSES: “The Egyptians have numerous gods. It discombobulates even the most faithful worshippers. The chief god is usually a function of political power. The chief god varies – and Akhenaton no doubt got his single god inspiration from considering the position and influence of the chief god. He was going to call his god Aten, a variation on the sun-god theme. You know: general benevolence, creating and sustaining life, that kind of thing. Run of the mill stuff. The moment I heard this view, I knew exactly how the system should work. I knew exactly what such a supreme god should be like.”

JETHRO: “You did not tell this Akhenaton, did you?!”

MOSES: “I’m afraid I might have dropped a few hints as to my thinking…”

JETHRO: “Dropped a few hints?! What, are you?! A narr²?!”

MOSES: “Well, I was ever so slightly inebriated, and two dancers were shaking their mammarys in my face and it just popped out.”

JETHRO: “I bet it did. I bet it popped out! You need to learn to pacify your putz³. It’s going to be the undoing of you one of these days. What exactly did you tell him?”

MOSES: “I suggested that he reduce Aten to a single symbol, to…”

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² Yiddish: fool.
³ Yiddish: literally, “penis”; a fool, an ass.
JETHRO: “I know ‘to what’! A single symbol is control in the pocket. You *shmuck*[^4]! That’s a brilliant idea! Why did you give it to Akhenaton?”

MOSES: “I was weak, Jethro. Drunk. Lickerish. Wanting to impress Akhenaton.”

JETHRO: “So. What symbol did you propose?”

MOSES: “A solar disk.”

JETHRO: “Brilliant. Aten, the sun-god manifest in a solar disk. Fucking brilliant.”

(*The men drink in silence for a while.*)

JETHRO: “You *nebech*[^5]! It could have been your symbol. Your power!”

MOSES: “I know! I know! Why do you think I want to go back and kill that son of a mongrel dog? He stole my system!”

JETHRO: “That’s a lot of anger you have there, Moses… Maybe you should visit the temple whores more often…”

MOSES: “Fuck the temple whores, Jethro…”

JETHRO: “My thoughts exactly…”

MOSES: “Fuck you, old man! This is my life we’re talking about here. My life! You’re made. A different woman every day of the year, sometimes two…”

JETHRO: “Sometimes more…”

MOSES: “You arrogant, prurient old bastard. All the women you want. The adoration of the people. Riches beyond your needs and even beyond your greed. And me your simple servant. I, Moses, the creator of gods! I tend sheep in a remote, desolate fucking

[^4]: Yiddish: a dope, a jerk, a boob; a clumsy, bumbling fellow; a son of a bitch.
[^5]: Yiddish: an innocuous, ineffectual, weak, helpless or hapless unfortunate; a Sad Sack; a loser.
desert. I’ve had it! I’ve had enough. There should be more to life than tending stupid sheep… Have you ever looked at a fucking sheep, Jethro? I mean, really looked at the thing closely? There’s nothing there. Complete, ultimate, supreme idiocy. Sheep are fucking dumb beyond description. And it’s my life’s calling at present to watch them being dumb and stuffing their faces and being dumb and sleeping and being dumb and standing about and being dumb and shitting in the desert… f… f… fuck!”

JETHRO (Thinking): “O, for the love of ‘Elohim – not another stuttering. Push him ever so slightly and it’s ‘J… J… Je… Je… Jethro’ and ‘F… f… fuck’. Idiot.”

JETHRO: “Allow me a few words, Moses. Listen to me closely.”

(The old priest puts his arm around Moses’s shoulder and speaks in a hushed, comforting tone.)

JETHRO: “Do you think me soft in the head, Moses? Do you think for a moment that I would receive a fugitive from the Egyptian Royal House into my home and into my daughter’s bed without some strategy evolving in my head? Sometimes I think I’ve overestimated you, but then I realise that you are just headstrong, impetuous… and frankly, young for your age. You’re a middle-aged teenager, Moses. But a bright one. A malleable one. One that will reach great heights with the right management. And I, Jethro, if I am nothing else, am a great manager of people, my boy. The very best.”

MOSES (Thinking): “Conniving old bastard. Yet this is a different Jethro. Never during any of our long discussions has the old man exhibited this fraternity. Interesting.”

MOSES: “What are you getting at, Jethro?”

JETHRO: “What I’m getting at is that I, myself, tended sheep for well-nigh twenty years. Twenty years of desert time can break a strong man, Moses. But not me. No, sir. I did not just survive; I came out of the desert a better man. A wiser man. A thinking man…”
MOSES: “I thought you said that a shepherd should not think?!”

JETHRO: “Shepherds, yes! They have no place going about thinking. Shepherds are just cleverer sheep. But not cleverer by much…”

MOSES: “B… b… but…”

JETHRO: “Shut up, Moses! Be quiet! Listen! Do you even realise how much you have learned from tending the flock?”

MOSES: “Wh… wh… what?!”

JETHRO: “Be quiet, l’maan ha’hem! Yes! You’ve learned much from the sheep. When they get used to your presence, when they realise that you are not a threat, when they see you lead them to grazing and to water, when they see you protect them from predators, then they are yours for ever. They look to you for everything they need and want. They trust you implicitly. They come to adore you, in their backward, sheepish way. They simply can’t, won’t exist without you. They pine for you when you are out of sight. They need you completely. They trust you, even though they don’t comprehend the concept or experience the emotion. They just… are yours completely.

“And most people, by far the most people, are just like sheep, Moses. They need someone, they want someone to lead them. To think for them. To protect them. To provide for them. To comfort them. To give them hope of a better tomorrow. And this ‘tomorrow’ thing is big! You can make anyone accept a better tomorrow. A better ‘five years from now’, or a better ‘next year this time’ is a too distant concept for comfort – a better tomorrow is a real here and now benefit. Something that can be felt even in its absence. Something that can be experienced for nearness, for virtual reality, for being so much better, so much more acceptable,

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so much easier to live with than the crappy present, even if that present and the promised ‘morrow are but a sunset apart.

“I sometimes am amazed at myself for my understanding of human behaviour. If I had the spare time, I’d talk to people one by one, or in little groups, and give them advice on how to deal with the everyday problems of life. Help them to understand their fears and their expectations and to understand the reasons why they do what they do – or do not do what they ought to do. I’ve observed so many people, I’ve learned so much about the way people behave by comparing them to their peers that I suspect there might be a business opportunity in sharing my insights with fools who will part with money for my advice! I’ve even come up for a name of this endeavour – Fraudianism! Nice ring, don’t you think? But I digress…

“Can you, Moses, can you command men like you do sheep? I’ve watched you with the sheep. You’re good. A trifle impatient perhaps, but you’re good. You have a natural bent for covert control. I’ve been watching you with the sheep. And it’s a small step, a small but precise step, to guiding people to do what you want them to do without them knowing that they’re doing what you want them to do…”

MOSES: “You’ve been playing me for eighteen years?!”
JETHRO: “What can I say? I’m good. I sometimes…”
MOSES: “Surprise even yourself. I know. I’ve heard.”
JETHRO: “Moses, let’s talk more. Maybe you’re ready for the next big thing. Maybe we can do some magic together. You want to make a new religion for the slave people of Egypt’s Goshen region. I say, why not for the entire world? Why limit ourselves? I’ve never ventured outside of Midian – one loses control when one strays away from the sheep. And elevating promising members from my nearest and dearest concerns me. A little power in the wrong hands…”
MOSES: “What are you saying? You’ll take me on as a partner – sole partner?”

JETHRO: “Partner, shartner… partner is such a definite word. Such a strong word. Limiting even…”

MOSES: “Gey kahn afn yam\(^7\)! Fuck you, Reuel! It’s partner, full partner, or I’m out of here!”

JETHRO: “Ooo! Temper, temper. See – your impetuousness will be the undoing of you. Imagine suggesting to Pharaoh that he go fuck himself… Now that’s a bad idea. An unmanageable idea. A sterile idea. An idea from which nothing good will ever come. A self-destructive idea.”

MOSES: “Hey, that’s a good one – it’s a sterile idea for Pharaoh to go fuck himself.”

(The rapturous laughter of expectancy, of increment intoxication, of mutual suspicion ruptures the nighttime silence. A child’s wailing is heard from a nearby tent, its mother cursing; the father consoling.)

JETHRO: “So, what’s this religion of yours all about?”

MOSES: “For one, my god will knock the socks off Aten!”

JETHRO: “Ooo-kay!”

MOSES: “I had a lot of time to perfect my religion out there in the desert. With the sheep.”

JETHRO: “So you said, yes.”

MOSES: “I was sitting in the desert, sweating, when from the corner of my eye I saw one of your stupid sheep run off. I looked up and directly into the fucking sun. It blinded me. Cursed sun! I knew then that my god would be more powerful even than the sun – and especially superior to Akhenaton’s Aten ape-god.”

JETHRO: “I thought you said Aten was…”

MOSES: “Yeah. Yeah. I mean his stupid god. I created a better one.”

(Jethro pours more wine. The men drink in silence.)

JETHRO: “So tell me! Tell me about this god of yours.”

MOSES: “I got up to retrieve the flock – the entire lot ran after the one that took off – and as I crossed over a small dune I found a patch of rocky ground and a shallow grotto. There was even a small pool of water and some shrubs. The sheep were already drinking, and I sat down in the shade of the cave. Some relief for the first time in days. I must have dozed off, for I remember waking with a start, as if someone was calling my name. Somewhat bewildered, I got up and looked around. And then I saw it!”

JETHRO: “What? What did you see?”

MOSES: “A bush, some 12 to 15 cubits inside the grot, was burning furiously, flames licking the low roof and the dry sticks crackling in the heat. I was mesmerized. I’ve never seen anything like it before. And it just kept on burning. It didn’t burn out though. The flames didn’t get smaller and the heat did not attenuate.”

JETHRO: “What did you do?”

MOSES: “I stood transfixed. Spellbound by the singular sight. And then my curiosity got the better of me. I approached the burning bush, and it was as if the bush burned more intensely as I got closer.”

(Moses stops and drinks slowly from his cup. Jethro watches him intensely. The old man is sitting motionless, gripped by the narrative, his body bent towards Moses, his eyes focused on the younger man’s face.)

“Then a booming voice said, ‘Do not come closer. And take off your shoes. You are now standing on holy ground.’

“I nearly shat myself. I couldn’t see another man anywhere around. But this was a male voice. An authoritative male voice. With an
unequivocal quality about it. So, I took off my shoes, never taking my eyes off that bush. It was still burning, and it appeared to want to burn hotter. I would have taken off my jellaba if The Voice wanted it. I was scared, man!”

(Jethro watches Moses intently. The old man seems to be ensorcelled.)

“So, there I was standing. Barefoot and shivering in the desert. Then The Voice continued: ‘I am the God of your father. The God of Abraham. The God of Isaac. The God of Jacob.’

“At that point I took my eyes off the bush, because the heat was intense. And The Voice said, ‘Why are you looking away?!’

“It sounded annoyed, so I said, ‘I am averting my eyes… God.’

“‘Don’t call me God!’, The Voice boomed. ‘Call me ‘Ehyeh asher ehyeh.’

“Personally, I thought that was a good name. Great even. Politically correct – I AM THAT I AM – who can take exception to such a name? It’s new. It’s original. It says it all. It says nothing. I thought it was a great name and I said so.

“That’s a good name!”

“Of course it is’, boomed The Voice and the ground trembled. The bush was now burning like a furnace. I felt my eyebrows singe and I stood back a step or two.

“Stand still’, boomed The Voice. ‘Be still! I want you to do something for me.’

“Do something for you? Ehyeh asher ehyeh?

“‘Yes. I want you to go back to Egypt and fetch my people!’

“Fetch your people, Ehyeh asher ehyeh? The Egyptians are your people? And you want them out of Egypt? Where must I take them?

“‘Not the Egyptians, you idiot!’, boomed The Voice. ‘Are you meshugge? I want you to fetch the Israelites from Goshen. They
have been subjected to terrible human rights violations by the Egyptians and I won’t have any more of it.’

“Look, Ehyeh asher ehyeh, I said, no disrespect, but the people at Goshen are bloody-minded. They’re a crotchety lot. Cantankerous, even. They don’t take direction well at all. Ask me. I know. I lived among them for decades. They are, in a word, trouble, with a capital T.

“‘I know. I know’, said Ehyeh asher ehyeh, ‘but enough already: Dai\(^8\)! I’ll have you know that I’m also known as Shaddai – The One Who said Enough! They might be crabby, but they’re mine!’”

“‘Well”, said I, “it’s your choice, Ehyeh asher ehyeh, but why do you call them ‘Israelites’? They’re Canaanites!’”

“‘They’re not Canaanites!’, The Voice continued, ‘they’re Israelites. And I am their god. And you’ll do as I tell you, Moses! I want my people out of Goshen, out of Egypt.’

“At that stage it appeared to me as if Ehyeh could be reasoned with. I offered an opinion, and I wasn’t smitten. So, I tried again.

“What exactly do I tell these Israelites to get them to stand up to Pharaoh and follow me… wherever it is you want me to take them?

“‘Assemble their elders’, said The Voice, ‘and tell them that I AM THAT I AM sent you to fetch them to go conquer the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Tell them that I AM THAT I AM promises them a land overflowing with milk and honey!’

“What about Pharaoh and his army?

“‘Don’t you worry about Pharaoh. I’ll smite him.’

“What about money for the journey?

“‘Tell them to ask their Egyptian neighbours for trinkets and food and clothes.’

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\(^8\) Hebrew: enough.
“Why would the Egyptians give the slaves anything?

“‘My people have more than enough shnorrers\(^9\) among them. All of them craftsmen, professional. They won’t ask, they’ll claim. They’re brash, cynical, expert in needling prospective benefactors, and quick in repartee. They’ll get all that is needed, and then some.’

“What if your people don’t believe me?

“‘What’s that you’ve got in your hand?’

“It’s a stick.

“‘Throw it on the ground.’

“I did so, Jethro, and the stick turned into a snake!

\(Jethro\ recoils and whistles.\)

“‘Take it by the tail’, The Voice said, and when I did so the snake became a stick again.”

JETHRO: “Wow!”

MOSES: “Then The Voice said, ‘Put your hand inside your jellaba’, and I did so. When I took my hand out again, Jethro, it was leprous!”

Jethro (cringing): “No!”

MOSES (warming to Jethro’s animated response): “I’m telling you! Then I put my hand back under the cloth and when I took it out again it was healthy!”

JETHRO: “Oooo!”

MOSES: “‘Now go!’, said The Voice and the bush doused out.”

\(Moses\ falls silent and drinks from his cup. Jethro just sits there next to Moses, looking at his son-in-law intently. Moses continues to drink. Then Jethro collapses in a fit of laughter.\)


(There is a long pause. Jethro is in deep reflective thought. Then, eventually, he breaks the silence.)

JETHRO: “So, Moses, how are you going to convince Pharaoh to let the slaves go? Oy! You’ve got no chance, son. Labour reform is no joke. It’s got economic implications, remember. Pharaoh is not going to warm to your liberal labour lamentations. And who can blame him? Good help is hard to find these days.”

MOSES: “I have a cunning plan to outwit Pharaoh…”

JETHRO: “I can hardly wait to hear this plan. But what about the Israelites? Those slaves are a broken people. You’re not going to get them to stand up against Pharaoh. Against a trained army. I hear those iron chariots are awesome bloody things…”

MOSES: “I’ll get the slaves, all right. I’ll convince them of I AM WHAT I AM’s instructions and show them the snake and leper tricks… and voila!”

JETHRO: “That’s another problem: this stick becoming a snake thing. And the leprous hand thing… How are you going to pull that off?”

MOSES: “I’ve spent the better part of my entire life at court, Jethro. Do you really think that I, of all people, did not learn from Pharaoh’s magicians? The tricks are easy! Forget about it!”

JETHRO: “You’re a surprising man, my son.”

MOSES: “Yeah. Right. We have to start the campaign to subdue the Egyptian people by Ab, which is only some ninety days away. That is when the high Nile-inundation occurs and I expect an

¹⁰ Yiddish: I like it!
abnormally high Nile this year. Everything hinges on this occurrence.”

JETHRO: “What if your alluvion does not happen?”

MOSES: “O, it’ll happen. I’ve studied the Egyptian weather patterns for years. I also had access to the meticulous notes Joseph, son of Jacob, kept when he predicted the seven abundant years and the seven years of drought. It’ll happen, alright. The Egyptians are an earthy people. The masses and the House of Pharaoh alike are completely dependent on the fertile lands of the Nile. The Nile and its yield. That is the Egyptian nous.”

JETHRO: “And we are going to put that ‘noose’ around Pharaoh’s neck, aren’t we?”

(The anticipation of success, of bringing off the coup of a lifetime, had the men collapsing with laughter at Jethro’s bon mot.)

MOSES: “My first prediction, the first threat to Pharaoh, will be that the Nile will turn into blood. ‘If you do not let my people go, Pharaoh, the Nile will turn to blood!’”

JETHRO: “That should shake him… But how do you do such a thing, Moses?”

MOSES: “Easily done. A high Nile carries the fine red earth from the basins of the Blue Nile and Atbara. The higher the Nile, the redder the water. I’ve seen this a few times, but indications are that the flood this year will be higher than anything any living Egyptian has ever seen. I’ve done my homework, Jethro – this flood is the big one. The Nile will be red – puniceous! And when this happens, when the red earth contaminates the water, the fish die. The more earth in the water, the bigger the numbers of dead fish. Just imagine the stench of a Nile filled with rotting dead fish!”

JETHRO: “Our very own ‘red herring’!”

MOSES: “Indeed. Not a red herring, though – a puniceous cran: one hundred and forty four bright red herrings!”
Boisterous laughter again. The brotherhood of plotting men was gaining an awful momentum.

JETHRO: “This will be enough for Pharaoh to let you go?”

MOSES: “Pharaoh is a cunning contriver. I expect him to agree to the trek when he sees the effect of my prediction on the people. But the flood will subside. We cannot ready the slaves for a major journey without alerting the authorities, and we will not have enough time to prepare from the time of the flood until the water starts to subside. By that time, with the Nile clearing, Pharaoh will have changed his mind. Of that I’m sure.”

JETHRO: “You really do know these Egyptians rather well, don’t you?”

MOSES: “I’ve devoted my life to the understanding of these conniving and manipulative, but credulous people. I hate their guts. And I’m going to beat them at their very own game… and get myself a nation to lead for good measure.”

JETHRO: “Mind that impetuosity, my boy. Careful! What will you do when Pharaoh reneges?”

MOSES: “Hit him with another prognostication. Frogs! Millions and millions of frogs all over Egypt. Frogs in the houses, in the storerooms, in the temples. Frogs everywhere! You see, Jethro, we must use the Egyptian gullibility and religiosity against them. The two goes hand in hand. My first portent, about the high Nile, suggests that I can manipulate Ha’pi, god of the inundation. This second prediction attacks the status of Heqit, a goddess of fruitfulness, represented by… wait for it – a frog!”

JETHRO: “I love it! Great stuff, Moses!”

MOSES: “After Ha’pi, who is expected to bring regular prosperity, has failed them, on my instruction mind you, Heqit now delivers not fruitfulness, but disease and wasting. When the frogs die, and die they will, because they come ashore from the diseased Nile to seek the shelter of houses and fields only to succumb themselves, when the frogs die, Egypt is in for another big stink.”
JETHRO: “What does Pharaoh do this time?”

MOSES: “I expect him to renege again. When the frogs come ashore, he’ll virtually chase us out of Egypt, but when the amphibians suddenly die, Pharaoh will think the danger gone and will want to retain his cheap labour.”

JETHRO: “You no doubt have a plan to counter Pharaoh dearest?”

MOSES: “I sure do! Mosquitoes!”

JETHRO: “How will you manage that?”

MOSES: “I won’t even lift a finger. Except to Pharaoh, that is!

(Moses makes an elaborate play of shoving his middle finger at an imagined Pharaoh. The two men collapse in laughter yet again.)

“The mosquitoes are simply a natural consequence of the high Nile. It happens every year, but the numbers are small, and the irritation quickly forgotten. But this very high Nile will produce mosquitoes so numerous as to darken the skies. And when the sky darkens, Pharaoh will shit himself. Especially because the people will be terrified – a dark sky means Re cannot reach them.”

JETHRO: “Big shit!”

MOSES: “Big shit. But again, transient shit. The Mosquitoes will abate and Pharaoh will halt our plans again.”

JETHRO: “What is the point, though, if Pharaoh continuous with this to and fro attitude?”

MOSES: “It buys us time to prepare for the trek. And we’re running Pharaoh down gradually. Every time his people sees him succumb, only to renege and then to repeat the agony and the humiliation, his resolve weakens by their growing suspicion. Remember, we are using Egyptian gullibility against Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s own all-powerful weapon is now trained on the old master himself. The soothsaying is simply the vehicle that delivers a people’s evolving mistrust and growing discontent to the very crucible of Egyptian power – the seat of Pharaoh, the very seat of the many gods.”
JETHRO: “Excellent. Excellent. And, of course, the vehicle that delivers us to power, that delivers a people of our own to our embrace and manipulation.”

MOSES: “You don’t mince them, do you, old man. Never enough power and influence for you.”

JETHRO: “Moses, give the people what they crave, and they are yours forever. Who looses? Nobody! They get what they want most of all – freedom from oppression, their own omnipotent god that protects them from all evil and delivers all their enemies into their hand, land and riches from conquering… they’re happy! We’re giving them everything they’ve always wanted and then some. And we… we get the power, the adulation. In return for the odd bit of advice here and some wisdom there and the sporadic dispensation of justice and leadership. People want leadership. Good or bad, right or wrong. It does not really matter. As long as you don’t go too wacky, you can always fixate a people on decisiveness. Remember the bush.”

MOSES: “What bush?”

JETHRO: “The fucking burning bush. The bush you saw at Horeb.”

MOSES: “What about the bush?”

JETHRO: “’El ‘Olam, Moses! The burning bush is a piece of crap. It never happened. You said so yourself. But even I bought it because you were so resolute in relating the story. That’s what I mean. Hit ‘em with big lies. Small lies are for small fry. Get ‘em with the big ones. But be convincing! Strong leaders are decisive.”

MOSES: “I get it. I get it.”

JETHRO: “No. You only think you get it.” (Jethro pauses. When he continues, it is with a somber voice and he speaks in a measured tone.) “People want to be led, Moses.”

MOSES: “I know that!”
JETHRO: “You don’t, Moses! You don’t. Let me explain. Remember that sheep that wandered off in the desert? The one that led you to the grot? Remember how the other sheep simply followed the wandering one? They had no reason, no motivation to follow other than the instinct to go where someone who moves at all, goes. All a flock needs, whether it be ovine or human or whatever, is someone to move in a particular direction, irrespective of the direction. That, Moses, means that a man like you – someone who simply wants to move a people to serve his own vengeful interests – should not lead towards any goal other than manipulating the masses. Your goal should be loosely defined, but your instructions for compliance particularly specific.”

MOSES: “That sounds awfully mendacious, Jethro. Unethical even. Fraudulent.”

JETHRO: “Abraham, Sara, Jacob and Ismail! For the love of YHWH, Moses! Here you are conniving a plan to yentz Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian nation and to deceive, delude and generally cozen all of the Israelites in Goshen, and you are concerned with ethics?! Oy! I could plotz! O-O-O-o-o-oy!”

MOSES: “Well, I…”

JETHRO: “Well, you nothing! Nothing! Be quiet! This is the deal Moses: You are going to revenge yourself on Akhenaton and any number of Egyptians who irked you in the past, who gall you at this time, and who might vex you in the future. In the process you are going to deliver an entire nation from oppression and motivate them to conquer a land overflowing with milk and honey. The fact that there is no I AM THAT I AM is of no consequence whatsoever! You get what you want. The Israelites get what they want. The Egyptians get fucked – there has to be a loser in any scam. It’s unfortunate, but that’s it. I get to dictate behaviour… and perhaps a job for my son, Hobab, who knows the desert like the ossu mokum of a camel.”

MOSES: “Wi… wi… will it work?”
JETHRO: “Of course it will wo… wo… work! If you let me run the tactical implementation. You stick to the yentzing, you seem to have a natural bent for it.”

MOSES: “But you’ve now made me doubt whether the Israelites will buy the I AM thing.”

JETHRO: “Of course they’ll buy it, Moses. Fuck, you just about sold me and I always do the gypping. You very nearly sold me! That bit about misunderstanding God – ‘the Egyptians are your people, God?’ – that’s fucking precious. Don’t loose that! You will most certainly sell them. Everybody wants a big brother, Moses. Everybody needs to believe in a better tomorrow. This I AM THAT I AM thing is a chachma. It’s brilliant. You’ll sell ‘em, son!”

MOSES: “Great. Now for number four: Flies. After the mosquitoes and the stinging and the burning welts and the itching… enter the flies. These babies carry disease. And they set Pharaoh up for my strategic sixth blow, which we will come to in a moment. For the time being though, the skies assume an obnubilated nature again, however temporary. It marks my power over Re in the minds of the green Egyptian hoi polloi.”

JETHRO: “You’re becoming mighty poetic there, Moses! Careful son. I have but a single word for you – impudence. Be careful not to let your guard down.”

MOSES: “Well, when Pharaoh informs me that my people…”

JETHRO: “Our people. ‘Our’, not ‘my’…”

MOSES: “When Pharaoh informs me that ‘our’ people cannot go, I counter with a grievous murrain on his livestock in the fields. Things start to die. Cattle, sheep – all the fucking sheep – and goats. Horses, camels and donkeys. We now hit decisively and hard. Right where it matters most… or so poor Pharaoh thinks.”

JETHRO: “You’ve got more? More than ‘grievous murrain’?”
MOSES: “O yeah! You’ve got that right old man. Wait for number ten.”

JETHRO: “Where are we now anyhow? Seven” Eight?”

MOSES: “Uh-uh. We’re only at number five.”

JETHRO: “Killing of the cattle and the sheep is a solid economic hit. But taking out the horses and the camels is a strategic coup – that reduces Pharaoh’s military capability. No horses, no chariots; no camels, only foot soldiers in the desert – not a grave threat at all!”

MOSES: “Exactly! Although the disease is a natural consequence of the illness carried by the frogs of our second blow, the people will believe that I actually have the power to let these natural disasters occur at my whim! It’s going to happen in any event. I simply use my research to adumbrate the inevitable and sucker Pharaoh, and especially the uneducated masses, into thinking that I am bringing on the disasters.”

JETHRO: “You sound so convincing, Moses. So… authoritative. I hardly recognize you as my head shepherd… as my son.”

MOSES: “I’m not your fucking head shepherd, old man. If you want me to walk away and go do this thing on my own, just continue that ‘head shepherd’ shit and I’ll kick you in the balls and go conquer Pharaoh myself. As for ‘son’, I’m only married to Zipporah to confirm my commitment to you as the leader of the people where I live. Don’t think for a moment…”

JETHRO: “Quiet, Moses! Will you not learn, you stubborn idiot?! Control yourself! Do you not think that Pharaoh will play you like a cheap lyre…”

(Jethro collapses in convulsive laughter.)

“Lyre… you are, in fact, just a liar – you will be lying to Pharaoh and we must protect you from being discovered and from being played for a liar!”
MOSES (Thinking): “Jethro is sharp. The old man is wise and cunning. The plan needs him.”

MOSES: “I apologize Jethro. I’ll try to control my emotions.”

JETHRO: “No, don’t try. Do! Try is not good enough. This is a magnificent strategy we have here. This plan can, and probably will, change the entire course of history. We can not afford to fail. You must steel yourself against Pharaoh’s counter attacks. The man is no fool, Moses. He knows his people better than you do and he has entrenched historic and religious power. He will not keel over and play dead. He will come after you with a vengeance and we have to be prepared. Your only angle, your only trump is your knowledge of historic Egyptian weather patterns and your insight into the results of a deluged Nile. Don’t forget that we’re fighting desperate odds.”

MOSES: “You’re right. Of course you’re right. I won’t fail the plan. I won’t fail you, Jethro.”

JETHRO: “Good. Now get on with it.”

MOSES: “Where was I. Oh, yes – remember that I cannot bring these events to bear. Everything that I have recounted so far is merely the natural result of a flooded Nile. Every event follows naturally on the previous event. I simply announce the events before they occur and in doing so I discombobulate the Egyptians. And remember, even if Pharaoh catches on, he can not interrupt my rhythm. Pharaoh can not start making predictions about gods terrorizing the masses. He is supposed to be able to placate the gods, not infuriate them.”

JETHRO: “I agree.”

MOSES: “In any event, the next plague will deal specifically with Pharaoh’s own magicians and conjurers. By the way, the tenth blow is not natural. We’ll have to plan that very carefully.”

JETHRO: “What is the tenth event?”
MOSES: “We’ll get to it in a while. For the moment, let’s concentrate on number six: Remember the flies? They bring on human boils. Boils with blains…”

JETHRO: “But, Moses! Now that I come to think about it – what about our own people. This suffering on top of their usual hardships will break them, won’t it? How are we going to manage this?”

MOSES: “No problem! Remember, the slaves live in the region of Wadi Tumilat, the part of Goshen that Joseph still negotiated for them. The worst effects of the plagues will not reach them.”

JETHRO: “Oh yes. That’s true. Quite true. What a relief!”

MOSES: “Right. Back to the boils. Now my research has shown that the particular blains associated with the boils caused by the infected haunts of the frogs and cattle affect mostly the hands and feet. That means that Pharaoh’s sorcerers and wizards will be laid low and I will have the entire Egyptian stage to myself! How’s that for advantage?”

JETHRO: “First class! Fantabulous! You’ve done some serious thinking out at Horeb, have you not, Moses my boy?”

MOSES: “Eighteen fucking years of sheep for company will give you some ideas my friend!”

JETHRO: “Don’t I know! What’s next?”

MOSES: “Without fail. Without fail, the month Shebat brings heavy rains and hail to Egypt. Lots of thunder and lightning makes for an excellent show – especially if it had been foretold by the very sage that brought the gods under his control. This storm will wipe out the barley and the flax, but not the wheat and spelt, which would not have yet grown. I’ll announce that I am to spare the wheat and the spelt, as a goodwill measure in return for Pharaoh’s leave to trek. Again, this event will strike in Upper Egypt, away from Goshen nearer the seaboard.”
JETHRO: (Rubbing his hands together with glee.) “It all works out so magnificently, does it not? Resplendently, even.”

MOSES: “Glad you approve, Jethro.”

JETHRO: “What was that? Number six… no, number seven. What follows?”

MOSES: “The high Nile is caused by the heavy precipitation in the lands to the south of Egypt. Round about the month Adar, conditions in these lands are favourable for locusts. Therefore, my next auguring is a plague of locusts, carried into northern Egypt by the ruah-yam, the sea-wind, all along the Nile valley. And I mean locusts! Millions of them, devouring everything in their flight path. These munchers are devastating. And again, Jethro, the skies are darkened…”

JETHRO: “I like, I like…”

MOSES: “Darkness. The Egyptians hate darkness. They fear it. It’s rather funny, really. Grown men whimpering in the dark. Weird. My next item is again a rather usual occurrence, but exacerbated by the unusual flooding. Remember the red earth of the first event? All that masses of earth have by now dried out after the subsiding water, and cover the land in a fine red dust…”

JETHRO: “Wind! A dust storm?!?”

MOSES: “Indeed. A khamsin dust storm. But no ordinary one, believe you me. This will be the mother of all khamsins. All that red dust whirled up by a khamsin wind will make the air thick and dark, even blotting out the sun! It usually lasts for three days, time enough to make final preparations for the trek, while the Egyptians are trapped in their darkness. Remember, Wadi Tumilat will not be greatly affected.”

JETHRO: “Surely Pharaoh will now let us go?!?”

MOSES: “I can’t be sure. I think this will be enough, but I suggest we keep an extra trump. This one will, however, not be a natural consequence of a flooded Nile…”
JETHRO: “What do you have in mind, Moses? You’ve been alluding to this last one, the tenth, is it not, for some time. What will it be?”

MOSES: *(He drinks deep from his cup and wipes his mouth. Stroking his flowing beard, he turns to Jethro with a grave expression and fire in his dark eyes.*) “Murder!”

JETHRO: *(Jolts.*) “Murder?! Who is to be murdered? Who will do the killing?”

MOSES: “Murder, yes! Pharaoh’s son, Thutmosis, is to be killed. I, Moses, will do the killing. Revenge for his betrayal, revenge for the treachery of a friend that was like a brother to me.”

JETHRO *(Thinking)*: “I have never seen Moses in a similar state of mind. This complex man that joined my clan some twenty years ago, this reserved man that married my daughter, this capricious man that would as readily curse a clansman for a triviality as he would interrupt a task to comfort a child, remains a complete enigma to me. How does one respond to such a shocking announcement?”

MOSES: “You seem shocked, Jethro. For twenty years I have carried this animus in my breast. This rancour. This resentment. I cannot remember how many nights I have rolled and tossed in my rage, in maddening fury at Thutmosis, my erstwhile friend. My brother. How I hate him!”

JETHRO *(Thinking)*: “All the answers I had failed to extract from Moses all these years are coming to the fore. At last the innermost being of this bright but impetuous man is to be revealed… and with the revelation his very soul will be delivered into my hands. Complete control of the Egyptian fugitive, after twenty long years. Let him speak. Let him pour it all out.”

MOSES: “I will deliver my last prevision under the dark skies of the khamsin – that Thutmosis shall die by the sword. And I shall personally deliver that death blow under cover of the very darkness
that accommodated my curse. I shall have my vengeance. I shall prevail.”

JETHRO: “You are not particularly fond of this Thutmosis, I perceive…” (Thinking as he chuckles by himself: “This man is so easy to play.)


JETHRO: “An odious fellow, this Thutmosis.”


JETHRO: “An insignificant discomfort compared to the nine blights you are to visit upon him and his house…”

MOSES: “None of which will kill him, though. I might be on my conquering way to Canaan, but Thutmosis might well be Pharaoh soon after and I will never have peace as long as he lives!”

JETHRO: “Thutmosis would not be able to touch you… Thutmosis not able to touch Moses – man, I’m good!”

*Jethro’s rambunctious laughter rips through the sleepy encampment again. A few dogs wake and start barking. A baby’s cries are heard. Yet no one dares challenge the old patriarch for his inconsideration. Moses does not even respond to the interruption. He appears to be utterly and completely focused, as if in the grip of some almighty demon, fixated on a single thought.*

MOSES: “He must die!”

JETHRO (Thinking): “This disquieting obsession could well threaten the entire strategy.”

JETHRO: “Look Moses. You’ll be trekking to Canaan as fast as the women and children can be expected to endure. You’ll be the leader of a strong force – men honed by labour and moved by freedom; men driven by expectation and focused by promise. You’ll be the head of a liberating religion – the sole interpreter of the will of an almighty god – the only god, mind you! You’ll be
untouchable. All-powerful. Your bear down focus on the task at hand is inviolable. Forget this Thutmosis. Tut, Moses – forget Thutmosis!”

(This time the unruly old priest rolls over with laughter. The camp wakes. Animals fret. Infants wail. Irritated voices are heard, but remain subdued. A man rushes over to the fire where Jethro is collapsed in mirth and Moses is staring directly into the flames, oblivious to the commotion.)

Hobab appears.

HOBAB: “Father! Moses! What is going on? Do you not know the hour? The men must be up and at the ready in a few hours and their sleep is continuously interrupted by your cavorting. Please consider the mothers and the children. The people need to rest.”

JETHRO: “Hobab, my son! Do not be concerned. Just a little joke. I’m in prime shape tonight, son! Go back to bed. Fondle that bustluscious Liproapa’s ample mammaries and go back to sleep. I’ll be quiet. Just a little discussion with Moses here. And maybe, just maybe, there’s something really big in it for you too! Go back to bed. I’ll behave.”

(Hobab disappears into the night as the camp settles once more. Jethro draws closer to Moses.)

JETHRO: “Now, Moses. Perhaps it’s time to tell me everything. Everything. A great plan is taking shape here, a plan that will secure your place in history and that will bring wealth to an entire people. But I need to know everything about you and your Egyptian past. Everything! Only then can we cover all bases. Only then can we plan for all eventualities. Let’s be hearing it, son.”

MOSES: “Thutmosis’s grandfather, also called Thutmosis – the Egyptians call their sons by the fathers’ names, or by the grandfathers’ names – one never knows which is which! But old man Thutmosis was known as ‘The Third’ – Thutmosis III. His son, Amenophis, Amenophis II to be precise, has a son named after
the grandfather – a son who will one day become Pharaoh – Thutmosis IV, the main character in this story.

“I was raised in the house of old man Thutmosis, always in the shadow of Amenophis who was groomed to become Pharaoh. He should take the throne shortly, as I hear that the old man is growing frail. Amenophis has a son, the younger Thutmosis, and this brat had been a thorn in my side for as long as I can remember and for as long as I care to forget!

“The little imp used to follow me wherever I went in the palace. Ever since he gained control over his little legs. At first everybody, including me, thought the attention amusing. That Pharaoh’s grandson was doting on me was even regarded as an indication that the gods favoured me, that I was a special emissary allotted to advise the future emperor.

“For this very reason, Amenophis grew increasingly wary of me and even became distant. Not that we were ever close, mind you.”

JETHRO: “Is this the same Amenophis that is about to rise to the throne? The bloke you’ll have to convince to let the slaves trek?!”

MOSES: “The very same. That is why I have designed such an elaborate negotiation plan with so many backup threats – nine in all, and this tenth one – the murder of his first born son!”

JETHRO: “Go ahead.”

MOSES: “In order to improve my standing with Amenophis, I decided to tolerate little Thutmosis. I started to befriend him and to take him on special walks and to care for him when his parents were unavailable – which was often.”

JETHRO: “Good thinking, that.”

MOSES: “I thought so. In any event, the two of us became inseparable. I grew rather fond of the little blighter, and I even considered my attention to him to somehow compensate for the care and protection I received when my prodigy’s aunt gathered me from the river…”
JETHRO: “From the river?”

MOSES: “That’s another story, altogether. Let me tell you about Thutmosis first.

“Pharaoh had a summer palace at Goshen, in the land where the slaves lived, and I visited there as often as I could, taking Thutmosis along most times. I did so partly to escape Amenophis’s quarrelsome presence, but mostly because I just loved the area. It was as if I was naturally drawn to Goshen. A sort of aboriginal home. And I thought at the time that Tutmosis’s presence around me would at least secure my favourable standing with Pharaoh and his household generally.”

JETHRO: “Again, good thinking.”

MOSES: “Yes. With time, however, Amenophis detained his son more and more when I chose to go to Goshen. I did not think much of it at first, considering that a future Pharaoh required specific training and experience and that the youth were being prepared for his future duties. And, in any event, I could not detect any cooling of my relationship with Thutmosis.

“There came a seminal blot on the relationship between me and Amenophis-Thutmosis on the eve of the son’s sixteenth birthday, however.”

JETHRO: “Do tell.”

MOSES: “I was at Goshen, preparing the celebration party for the next day with Pharaoh and his entire Court expected at the summer palace, when the second and third in line for the throne arrived earlier than expected. I was in the embrace of a particularly eesome courtesan, called Odalisque, when Amenophis burst into my chamber unannounced. I had no inclination whatsoever that Amenophis had the hots for Odalisque, but one look at his surprise at our making the beast with two backs told me that he was scorned.”

JETHRO: “Seminal blot, indeed!”
MOSES: “Too true! Amenophis had the decency and royal decorum to withdraw instantly – as did I, mind you – but irreparable harm was done that day. Odalisque really did love me and wanted to be my wife, but the relationship was doomed from that day on.”

JETHRO: “What happened next?”

MOSES: “We had the party the following day. Everybody behaved as if nothing unbecoming had happened. Amenophis and I even spent some time in conversation, for all to see. But his words and his stares were incompatible. Although I was fond of Odalisque, I was never going to sacrifice my future to have her. So I suggested to Amenophis that I escort the court back to the palace at Hakuptah while he lingers in Goshen and gets to know Odalisque better.”

JETHRO: “A suggestion that he no doubt found appealing?”

MOSES: “Quite so. He returned to the court eight days later only. The liaison was, if nothing else, an extended one.”

JETHRO: “Did you ever see Odalisque again?”

MOSES: “Sadly not. Events came to a head rather rapidly after this incident. But I do know that Odalisque remains a favoured wife of Pharaoh to this day. She was a strong woman with pronounced survival skills. She recognised her physical beauty and her sexual prowess to be powerful weapons of distraction and manipulation and that she could employ these weapons to get whatever she wanted. Still, her conquest of Pharaoh was not her first choice of a life at Court. It became a survival issue and she survived all right.”

JETHRO: “By El’ Moses! You still love this woman!”

MOSES: “There’s no denying my love and affection for Odalisque, Jethro. I scoured her, because my own survival as an outsider was at stake. She became the price I was willing to pay to remain a privileged official at Court… But she had her revenge. It was covert revenge, though. She never planned her campaign against me, but she had her revenge all the same.”
Sensing that the denouement of the intrigue that brought Moses to Midian was to be revealed at last, Jethro pours more wine, stokes the fire and moves closer to Moses.)

JETHRO: “No revenge is more rabid that the revenge of a woman scorned…”

MOSES: “You’ve certainly got that right, Jethro. She knew my love for her would somehow trip me up. And I am certain that she did not want me to remain at Court if she was to be with another man, if she had to be with Pharaoh. So she simply allowed matters to develop naturally.”

JETHRO: “And how did things pan out?”

MOSES: “The night after his return to the palace, and after much wine, Amenophis told me the story of his conquest. It was only his version of those seven days at Goshen, to be sure, but it was the story of a conquest no less. He spared me no detail, no maddening moment of his defilement of that temple of beauty and virtue. Yet I realised that listening was part of the price I simply had to pay. His conquest was my conquest, the entrenchment of my right to privilege, payment in full of my right to be counted at Court.

“My being was eviscerated though by his revelation that he allowed his confidant, his advisor, Aknehurop, to have Odalisque. And how he gave instruction for the servant to teach Tutmosis ‘the way of a man with a woman.’ They used my Odalisque to train young Tutmosis, my prodigy, to violate women. Amenophis described in graphic detail how he watched as the teacher and the student maculated my darling. He told me that Odalisque could not join him at Hakuptah upon his return because she needed time to heal. To heal, Jethro! My darling Odalisque needed to heal before she could join my nemeses at Court.

“I could have killed Amenophis. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill Aknehurop. I wanted to kill Tutmosis. I had an consuming urge to butcher Aknehurop. Tutmosis I wanted to suffer, as my Odalisque suffered. Aknehurop had to go quickly; Tutmosis could have followed suit, but I managed to contain my passion. For once.
And only because I knew, I knew for certain, even at that very moment, that I would somehow avenge Odalisque’s humiliation and grief, the direct results of my own hunger for power.”

JETHRO: “Is that what this religion and trek is all about, Moses? Revenge? Will you stake the very lives of an entire people on personal revenge?!”

MOSES: “Yes, I would! What are they to me?! I am one of them, don’t you see?! I, Moses, condemned to a lesser life for being the offspring of Hebrew slaves.”

JETHRO: “What?! You’re not an Egyptian prince?”

MOSES: “See! Consider your reaction, Jethro. All of a sudden I am a non-person, a lesser being, an anathema by my very birth. Well, let me tell you, old man, I never accepted my fate. Never! And I never will. I shall fight to my last breath to be one of the privileged elite. I am Moses! I am strong! I am a royal! I shall never be ordinary! Never!”

JETHRO: “But… but how did you manage to become a member of Pharaoh’s Court?”

MOSES: “By the cunning of my mother and my sister, by some supreme measure of luck, and eventually, mostly by my wits and guile.”

JETHRO: “This is extraordinary, Moses! Unconscionable!”

MOSES: “It is, is it not?! Unconscionable, indeed. Lovely tale, really, my joining the Court of Pharaoh.”

JETHRO: “How…”

MOSES: “Patience, old man. All in good time. For the moment, let me finish my story. You wanted to know everything – you shall hear it all.”

JETHRO: “I can hardly wait. You were telling about Odalisque and Aknehurop…”

MOSES: “Never ever mention their names together! Never!”
JETHRO: “Sorry, Moses. Let go of my arm! You’re hurting me, man!”

MOSES: “I apologise. It’s just that I can hardly contain myself at the deluge of these memories.”

JETHRO: “Take a hold of yourself. And take a drink. And do continue this transfixing tale.”

MOSES: “I was plotting Aknehurop’s death from the very moment that I learned of his violation of Odalisque. Only, I never realised how soon the opportunity would present itself for me to act on my conviction.”

JETHRO: “You actually killed him?!”

MOSES: “Oh yeah! It happened like this: The day after Amenophis told me of the outrage at Goshen I was inspecting one of the smaller brickyards at the edge of the city when I saw Aknehurop in animated conversation with the Egyptian site overseer. I strolled across to the pair and overheard Aknehurop demand the whipping of a slave that seemed to have particularly piqued him. Such was the character of the man that had his vile way with my love. The overseer refused the beating for interrupting his output – following to the letter my specific management regulations for maximum output at any cost. The fact that the overseer was within his rights, and, especially, because he was following my policy in direct opposition to his demands, Aknehurop was furious. He had his dagger drawn and I am certain that he would have slayed the overseer had I not interrupted.

“He turned to me with a sheepish grin and released the overseer. He sheathed the dagger and then, as if something dawned on him, he sneered at me.

“’Come with me, Moses’, he said, ‘let me show you how a real Egyptian solves labour problems.’

“I followed him to where the Hebrew slave of his wrath was toiling in the scorching sun. ‘Hey, Hebrew!’, Aknehurop shouted, ‘come here. Now!’ The man dropped everything and ran up to where we
were standing. He fell on his face before Aknehurop and then looked up to the Egyptian. Without blinking, Aknehurop drew his dagger and slit the slave’s throat. The gurgling sounds of life deserting the slave still haunts me to this day. Then Aknehurop turned to me and sneered, ‘The most honorable death for a Hebrew slave is to die at the hand of an Egyptian.’

“I was later told, by the only eyewitness, that I started on Aknehurop with my bare hands. Apparently caught by absolute surprise, Aknehurop hardly resisted my initial onslaught. By the time he realised that he was viciously attacked, it was already too late. I killed Aknehurop with my bare hands. My kicks dumped him in excruciating pain and I throttled him in the desert sand of Hakuptah.”

JETHRO: “Fwee! What a story! What do you mean, eyewitness? Were you prosecuted?”

MOSES: “No, I was never prosecuted. Because I was never caught. To this day nobody knows that I killed Aknehurop. A Hebrew slave saw me commit the murder and, thinking that I was one of ‘them’, one of the oppressors, threatened to expose me. I could not level with the man for fear of loosing my standing as an Egyptian courtier. But I could also not face Amenophis’ wrath and certain execution for my crime. And I certainly was not going to kill a Hebrew to silence him. So I fled. Eastward. Until I reached a well and met a bevy of women… and the rest you know.”

JETHRO: “You never saw Amenophis or Odalisque or Tutmosis again?”

MOSES: “Never again. I never saw anybody from the Court again. And I’m going back to finish the job. I’m going back to kill Tutmosis.”

It’s 30 days later. In Goshen. A bustling convocation of several grave old men in traditional garb is gathered in the middle of a large room, with a throng around them. Aaron, the brother of Moses, rises and the gathering comes to order. Voices rise from the gathering.
BENJAMIN: “Moses? Wasn’t he at Pharaoh’s court some years ago?”

SAMUEL: “Yes, he disappeared after that other Egyptian was killed on the construction site.”

GAD: “Why did he disappear?”

SAMUEL: “No-one seems to remember exactly, but I recall a rumour that he was friendly with one of Pharaoh’s wives.”

REUBEN (Sniggering): “Ooooh!”

GAD: “What does he want with us?”

SAMUEL: “I don’t know. That’s why we’re here. To hear what he wants.”

BENJAMIN: “Where has he been all these years?”

SAMUEL: “I believe he was in Midian.”

GAD: “What’s in Midian?”


REUBEN: “Quiet! Aaron wants to speak.”

(Aaron clears his throat and surveys the assembly.)

AARON: “Respected and wise men of Israel! There are so many good men gathered here today. Strong men. Wise men. Men with broken hearts. Men with broken spirits, no doubt. But you are all here, all seventy of you, never missing an opportunity to plot for the betterment of the people you represent and love. Please hear what I have to say. My brother, Moses, has returned…”

(Pandemonium erupts. Everyone seems to be speaking at the same time. Voice are raised to be heard above others. Some stronger personalities have their say.)

GAD (Besides himself with rage and astonishment): “Brother! Your bruder? He’s a Hebrew? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph!
At Pharaoh’s court all those years? Oppressing his own people?!
A son of Omrom?”

SAMUEL (His face contorted with anguish, but speaking in a more controlled fashion): “All those years… Do you mean to say that your brother… our brother, a Hebrew, attended Pharaoh’s court while we and our sons and our daughters; our wives; our children slaved in the harshest desert sun? Under the cruelest, most barbarous overseers imaginable? Anbalivabal!”

BENJAMIN (Standing with fists swaying in the air): “I remember now! It was your brother who killed Aknehurop all those years ago, Aaron! Now it all becomes clear! Now all of a sudden I understand why Pharaoh killed us Hebrews in revenge of Aknehurop’s murder. I could never quite understand – now it’s all clear!”

REUBEN: “Do you know how many of our people died under Pharaoh’s revenge? A thousand lives for the life of Aknehurop, is how I remember the Egyptian cries as they slaughtered our sons and our men for Aknehurop’s murder! A thousand innocent lives, Aaron! A thousand! And that was only the number killed directly at Egyptian hands back then. What about the countless deaths from crueler and harder working conditions for months after Aknehurop’s death? Your brother is responsible for thousands of Hebrew lives. Thousands! What I want to know, is where he is right now. What I want to know is why we shouldn’t kill him right now, right here?!”

GATHERING (various voices screaming various statements): “Yeah. Kill him! Kill him right now! Where is Moses? Let me get my hands on him!”

AARON (battling to be heard above the din): “Come, gentlemen, come now. Simmer down! Get a hold of yourselves.”

GAD: “Don’t you ‘simmer down’ us, Aaron! Where does Moses get the chutzpah to set foot among us? How does he muster the insolence, the effrontery, the azes to assume the right to address us, to even talk to us? Fuck him, I say.”
GATHERING: “Yeah. Fuck him! Kill him! Kill him!”

AARON (Shouting above the cacophony. As he speaks the gathering settles down): “Control yourselves! You are the leaders of Israel. Act accordingly. Why indeed is Moses here today? Why indeed? Who will be stupid enough to set foot among men who would want to kill him? Is that not reason enough to at least suppose that such a man, such a foolhardy man, has something of immense importance to share? Something worth risking life and limb for? Will not reasonable men, leaders of a people, grant such a bold man an opportunity to explain himself? Is such a course of action not preferable to mob behaviour, to calls for cold blooded murder?”

(The gathering falls silent at Aaron’s plea. The men still shuffle nervously. The body language remains agitated.)

REUBEN: “You’ve always been a reasonable man, Aaron…”

GAD (Still agitated): “Too bloody reasonable. Too accommodating.”

REUBEN (Laughing amicably): “We’re all friends here. Old friends. We’ve suffered together, we’ve lost loved ones together. We love. We hate. We are a people united in pain and suffering. If Aaron wants us to listen to someone he believes can make a difference to our lives – to the lives of our loved ones – then let us at least listen. I say we give Moses a chance.”

BENJAMIN: “What does he want to say? I’d at least like to know why we should give Moses a chance?”

AARON (Quickly): “He has a plan for freedom…”

REUBEN (Interrupting): “Let Moses rather speak for himself, Aaron. Agree, Benjamin?”

BENJAMIN: “I agree with Reuben! What have we to loose? We have been enslaved here in Egypt for as long as we care to forget. If Moses has a plan to shed the yoke of Pharaoh, I couldn’t care less whether he killed an Egyptian… or even a brother slave. I want
out. For myself, for my family, for my people. I’ll send my son, Gilleom, home to his mother and back. I say we give Moses till my son returns.”

REUBEN: “That sounds fair to me. Gilleom is a quick runner. Your brother doesn’t have much time, Aaron.”

(A young boy jumps to his feet next to Benjamin. The man slaps the boy on the butt and sends him running from the audience. Moses rises at the fringe of the gathering.)

AARON (Speaking in a relieved voice): “My brother, Moses, has returned from Midian after many years of absence. He has returned because he has been called by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to share with you and with all of God’s people the will of the Almighty. Please listen to Moses, venerable men, and hear what God has planned for us.”

(A bustle ensues as Moses walks slowly between the men to the middle of the room. The conversation at the centre continues as he looks around and tries to make eye contact with senior Elders.)

GAD: “Four hundred and thirty years of tsoris, of blood and tears, of torture and slavery, of men dying young and orphans raised to follow in the misery of their dead fathers and now, suddenly, God has a plan?! What do you think, Samuel?”

SAMUEL: “I think you should be ecstatic that God does not strike you down for insolence, Gad. Question God’s timing? The Almighty’s mind? His ways?! Are you meshugge?”

GAD: “I’ve lost two sons already, Samuel! My daughter Rachel has been raped by these Egyptian dogs. I’m fed up with waiting for God!”

MOSES, smiling (THINKING): “The ayes will be with me. The nays will be with me. This strategy will unite even the most dissident factions. What a brilliant plan!”

Moses reaches the centre and surveys the audience. Then he speaks in a grave voice.
MOSES: “I AM WHO I AM has spoken to me. Personally! I AM WHO I AM told me to tell you that you must rise up against your oppressor, that you must take from your neighbours what you may need for the journey to the Promised Land. I AM WHO I AM told me that He will personally take care of Pharaoh – that you need not concern yourself about Pharaoh’s politics. I, Moses, will lead you from this land of the oppressor into the Promised Land…”

(A new commotion stirs up in the audience.)

GAD: “Rise up against Pharaoh? Take from our Egyptian neighbours what we need to move away from this land? Get our masters to help us move away – get them to give us stuff so that we can leave and leave them without slaves? What are you…”

THE AUDIENCE: “… Meshugge?!!”

(The kerfuffle is threatening to become unmanageable again. Aaron is literally jumping about with nervous anticipation.)

MOSES: “P… p… people, p… p… please! Ah… ah… ah… ah…”

GAD: “What?! He can hear the voice of the God of our fathers, but he can not speak to tell the message?”

BENJAMIN: “What is this, Aaron?”

MOSES (taking control of his emotions): “Hear me, o respected and wise men of Israel. Allow me to tell you what God has ordered me to do…”

REUBEN: “Why would the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob speak to you – you who never even did a single labouring thing in your privileged life, you who lived at the court of the very man you now claim to have come to denounce. Why would God speak to you? I don’t believe your story.”

SAMUEL: “Hear, hear! Reuben is right. You have been one of them! You are still one of them! Once a man of privilege, always a man of privilege. I too, do not believe that God would have spoken to you.”
GAD: “I told you this is rubbish. I told you! You, Moses, somehow lost your tenuous grip on Egyptian privilege many years ago when Aknehurop was killed. I remember the man’s death. I remember one thousand of my people killed by Pharaoh in revenge. Now I don’t know whether you killed Aknehurop or not. And I don’t want to know. But I do know that you disappeared at that time. I do know that one thousand of my brothers died horribly as a result of Aknehurop suspicious death. I do know that you will never be reinstated as a Prince of Egypt. And now you are back to represent the other side. Suspicious behaviour, Moses. It smacks of expediency.”

MOSES: “I will take no more time than what you’ve graciously granted me. But please give me an opportunity to speak.”

REUBEN: “He’s right. Let him continue.”

MOSES: “Thank you! Whatever might have happened in my past, does not alter the undeniable fact that the God of our forefathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, spoke to me personally in the Midian desert. That fact remains.”

GAD: “How is that an undeniable fact? How do we know that this god spoke to you?”

BENJAMIN: “Yeah! We have only your word for it!”

MOSES: “Watch!”

(Moses throws his stick on the ground and it turns into a serpent. The gathering gasps and an excited garboil permeates the congregation. Moses picks the snake up by its tail and it becomes a snake again. More gasps rise up from the floor. Then Moses sticks his hand under his cloak and produces a leprous limb to the terrified screams of the men. A moment later he displays a normal, healthy arm for all to see. Relieved heaves are heard. Then a tumultuous babbering follows.)

MOSES (Watching the stirred men with a mixture of pride and revulsion, and allowing them to share their emotions with each other for a few moments): “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
the great I AM is with me, brethren. I, Moses, am His representative. I implore you heed my message and anger I AM not!”

(The gathering is now hanging onto every word Moses speaks.)

GILLEOM (Rushing into the meeting, panting from his run): “I’m back!”

BENJAMIN: “Sit down son. We’re not done here.”

MOSES (derisively): “I have more time?”

REUBEN: “You have all the time you want, Moses. Let’s hear your plan.”

MOSES: “It’s quite simple, really. It’s a rather simple plan. It involves miraculous events, which I AM THAT I AM and I will orchestrate to annoy and harm Pharaoh sufficiently to blackmail him into letting us go. I AM THAT I AM and I have seven such events, so there are seven chances for gaining our freedom. We have even come up with a slogan for the freedom campaign… It’s ‘Let my people go! Let my people go!’”

GATHERING (starting hesitantly and quickening into a tumultuous chant with individuals rising to their feet and punching the air): “Let my people go! Let my people go!”

REUBEN (After some short time, initially straining to be heard above the chanting): “Friends… people… men… please! Please good men, settle down! Be quiet! Please!”

(The gathering reluctantly calms down and the meeting comes to order.)

REUBEN: “Tell us exactly how this plan of yours will work, Moses. Be very specific. Leave out no detail whatsoever.”

MOSES: “Be certain of this absolute truth brethren: It is not my plan. It is the plan of I AM THAT I AM. He is to get all the credit. He is the Doer of the ages. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I am but his servant. I am but the man chosen by I AM
THAT I AM to lead you and your loved ones out of slavery to a land overflowing with milk and honey.”

(The gathering stirs again.)

MOSES: “Aaron and I are going to see Pharaoh tomorrow morning. We are going to demand that our people be allowed to make a three day journey into the desert to worship. That will give us a three day head start. Of course, Pharaoh will deny us. And then I AM THAT I AM will grab Pharaoh’s attention in no uncertain way…”

(The gathering is completely silent, overwhelmed by what they’ve heard.)

SAMUEL: “I humbly retract my earlier criticism of I AM THAT I AM’s time management. What is expected of us?”

REUBEN: “How will we serve this God? This ‘I AM THAT I AM’?”

MOSES: “I will tell you how to serve I AM THAT I AM. He has told me exactly what He wants you to do… and He will continue to instruct me personally and exclusively every step of the way. Simply follow my lead. The Almighty has chosen me as His humble servant. By His power I shall not fail you! Our cause is just. Our freedom is not negotiable. Our way of life will prevail. With God on our side, who can possibly deny us? With God on our side, who can possible deter us. We have a duty, a holy calling to promote the cause of God. We are the chosen ones!”

GATHERING: “We are the chosen ones! Hail be to our God and His prophet Moses! Hail be to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Hail be to I AM THAT I AM! We are the chosen ones!”

(Note: in my mind there are images of death and destruction. The Crusades, the Inquisition, babies baptized and their heads crushed against rocks by the Conquistadors, Srebrenica, 9/11, Bali, Gujarat, Beslan, Hai al-Amaal, Afghanistan, Iraq, London 7/7… and John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ in the background.)
A conversation between Mary and her dad

Dad: "You're what!?"

Mary: "I'm pregnant, daddy!"

Dad: "Pregnant!? You're only 12 for crying in a bucket! Whaddaya mean 'pregnant'!?"

Mom: "Calm down, dear…"

Dad: "Don't you 'calm down dear' me, woman. My 12-year old daughter is in the pudding club, up the creek, pu the elop\(^1\), knocked up, clucky\(^2\), 'in the family way' and infantanticipating, and you want me to 'calm down'?"

Mary: "Daddy…"

Dad: "Don't you 'daddy' me! It's that Roman legionary, isn't it? I knew it! Never trusted him. Never liked him. Told your mother. It's him, isn't it?! It's whatsisname – Podex\(^3\)!!?"

Mary: "No daddy…"

Dad: "There! I told you! Didn't I tell you… what!? 'No daddy'? Whaddaya mean 'No daddy'? It's not that sawdusted Joseph Carpenter wimp, is it?"

Mary: "No daddy."

Dad: "'No daddy'? There's more… more… 'visitors'!?"

Mary: "No daddy."

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\(^1\) Black slang for pregnant.

\(^2\) Australian slang for pregnant.

\(^3\) Latin: asshole.
Dad: "What's with this incessant 'No daddy, no daddy' shit? 'No', it's not Podex; 'no', it's not Woody Woodpecker, 'no' it's not another. What are you telling me – it's a fucking miracle!?

Mary: "Yes daddy."

Dad: "'Yes daddy'. Whaddaya mean 'Yes daddy'?

Mary: "An angel came to me, daddy…"

Dad: "'An angel came to me daddy'? An angel!? What, are you meshugge? And what did this angel do – come 'to you' or come 'in you'?"

Mom: "There, there, dear, is that really necessary?"

Dad: "Quiet woman! I need to hear this. What did the angel do, Mary?"

Mary: "He spoke to me…"

Dad: "'He spoke to me'… He spoke to you!? What, did he have a comely voice? An 'angel'? What am I, a klutz?"

Mary: "No daddy."

Dad: "Enough already with this 'No daddy, no daddy, no daddy' business! What did the angel do?"

Mary: "He told me that I will become pregnant."

Dad: "And a right bloody Maskil was this angel! Of course you'll fall pregnant if you cavort with concupiscent, prurient, lickerish, lubricious soldiers and carpenters – if it's not a spear or a chisel,

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4 Yiddish: crazy.
5 Yiddish: a clod; a clumsy, slow-witted, graceless person; an inept blockhead.
6 Hebrew: those who followed and furthered the Haskalah (the movement of enlightenment, intellectual emancipation…) called themselves "enlightened ones" or Maskilim (singular: Maskil).
it's Bethlehem steel\(^7\), but poke they will poke!"

Mary: "No daddy…"

Dad: "No daddy, no daddy, no daddy'… will you stop already! Who did it!?"

Mary: "The angel said God would make me pregnant…"

(A long… pregnant silence.)

Dad: "YHWH is my aidem\(^8\)! And my ayneke\(^9\) too!? What a chachma\(^10\)! Elohim Gadol\(^11\)"

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\(^7\) Bethlehem steel, US black slang for an erect penis – an obvious anachronism, but I simply could not resist "Bethlehem" steel. Who could've?

\(^8\) Yiddish: son-in-law.

\(^9\) Yiddish: grandchild.

\(^10\) Yiddish: wisdom. Occasionally, chachma is used to describe tricks, subterfuges, clever evasions, unrevealed meanings, or wily, casuistic hocus-pocus.

\(^11\) Hebrew: God is great!
A conversation between Dr Thaddeus and the Gatekeeper

Written in 2006, in humble acknowledgement of Bertrand Russell’s original from Fact and Fiction, 1961. The date, 2006, is important to note, emphasising the technology now already outdated again, as was the original resourcing when first I read Russell’s version. God apparently does not update his apps and software regularly.

The eminent theologian, Dr. Thaddeus, dreamt that he died and pursued his course toward heaven. His studies had prepared him, and he had no difficulty in finding the way. He knocked at the door of heaven and was met with a closer scrutiny than he expected.

"I ask admission," he said, "because I was a good man and devoted my life to the glory of God."

"Man?" said the janitor, "What is that? And how could such a funny creature as you do anything to promote the glory of God?"

Dr. Thaddeus was astonished. "You surely cannot be ignorant of man. You must be aware that man is the supreme work of the Creator."

"As to that," said the janitor, "I am sorry to hurt your feelings, but what you're saying is news to me. I doubt if anybody up here has ever heard of this thing you call 'man.' However, since you seem distressed, you shall have a chance of consulting our Chief Information Officer."

The CIO, a globular being with a thousand eyes and one mouth, bent some of his eyes upon Dr. Thaddeus. "What is this?" he asked the janitor.

"This," replied the janitor, "says that it is a member of a species called 'man,' which lives in a place called 'Earth.' It has some odd notion that the Creator takes a special interest in this place and this species. I thought perhaps you could enlighten it."
"Well," said the CIO kindly to the theologian, "perhaps you can tell me where this place is that you call 'Earth.'"

"Oh," said the theologian, "it's part of the Solar System."

"And what is the Solar System?" asked the CIO.

"Oh," said the theologian, somewhat disconcerted, "my province was Sacred Knowledge, but the question that you are asking belongs to profane knowledge. However, I have learnt enough from my astronomical friends to be able to tell you that the Solar System is part of the Milky Way."

"And what is the Milky Way?" asked the CIO.

"Oh, the Milky Way is one of the Galaxies, of which, I am told, there are billions."

"Well, well," said the CIO, "you could hardly expect me to remember one out of so many. But I do remember to have heard the word 'galaxy' before. In fact, I believe that one of our data managers specializes in galaxies. Let us send for him and see whether he can help."

After no very long time, the data manager made his appearance. In shape, he was a dodecahedron. It was clear that at one time his surface had been bright, but the gloom of the data office had rendered him dim and opaque. The CIO explained to him that Dr. Thaddeus, in endeavoring to account for his origin, had mentioned galaxies, and it was hoped that information could be obtained from the galactic section of the data base.

"Well," said the data manager, "I suppose it might become possible in time, but as there are billions of galaxies, and each has a database to itself, it takes some time to find any particular one. Which is it that this odd salmagundi of molecules desires?"

"It is the one called 'The Milky Way,'" Dr. Thaddeus faltering replied.

"All right," said the data manager, "I will find it if I can."
The manager spoke a series of demands into a small handheld device, rolled three of its eyes at the handheld’s high-pitched beeps and started pacing the room. Some three minutes later the handheld beeped again and identified the galaxy as number QX321762.

This search string," intoned the handheld, "engaged 45% of processing power. This galaxy’s data has never been accessed since Number One accidentally created it during that explicit verbal battle with Lucifer way back in 804.68! Why was this search requested? I am programmed to register an Out of Bounds Report on Gabriel’s Log."

“Override the OOB”, ordered the CIO.

The clerk of QX321762 was sent for and turned out to be an octahedron with an eye in each face and a mouth in one of them. He was surprised and dazed to find himself in such a soothing region, away from the glare of display units.

Pulling himself together, he asked, rather shyly, "What is it you wish to know about my galaxy?"

Dr. Thaddeus spoke up: "What I want is to know about the Solar System, a collection of heavenly bodies revolving about one of the stars in your galaxy. The star about which they revolve is called 'the Sun.'"

"Humph," said the QX321762 clerk, "it was hard enough to hit upon the right galaxy, but to hit upon the right star in the galaxy is far more difficult. I know that there are about four hundred billion stars in the galaxy, but I have no knowledge, myself, that would distinguish one of them from another. I believe, however, that at one time a list of the whole three hundred billion was demanded by the Administration and that it is still stored in the archives. If you think it worthwhile, I will engage special labor from the Other Place to search for this particular star."

It was agreed that, since the question had arisen and since Dr. Thaddeus was evidently suffering some distress, this might be the wisest course.
Several hours later, a very weary and dispirited tetrahedron presented himself before the galactic data manager. "I have," he said, "at last discovered the particular star concerning which inquiries have been made, but I am quite at a loss to imagine why it has aroused any special interest. It closely resembles a great many other stars in the same galaxy. It is of average size and temperature and is surrounded by very much smaller bodies called 'planets.' After minute investigation, I discovered that some, at least, of these planets have parasites, and I think that this thing which has been making inquiries must be one of them."

At this point, Dr. Thaddeus burst out in a passionate and indignant lament: "Why, oh why, did the Creator conceal from us poor inhabitants of Earth that it was not we who prompted Him to create the Heavens? Throughout my long life, I have served Him diligently, believing that He would notice my service and reward me with Eternal Bliss. And now, it seems that He was not even aware that I existed. You tell me that I am an infinitesimal animalcule on a tiny body revolving round an insignificant member of a collection of four hundred billion stars, which is only one of many millions of such collections. I cannot bear it and can no longer adore my Creator."

"Very well," said the janitor, "then you can go to the Other Place."

Here the theologian awoke. "The power of Satan over our sleeping imagination is terrifying," he muttered.
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