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To Know the Place for the First Time

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“Religious beliefs are illusions and insusceptible of proof.”
Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”
C.S. Lewis, *Is Theology Poetry?*

It was late fall in Vienna and already snowing. Tired of pushing my way through the crowds at the Christmas markets, I wandered off. Vienna is a city I've been to a few times but do not know well. One address, however, has been etched in my mind for many years: Berggasse 19. With only a vague recollection that it was northwest of the old town, I made my way in that direction. The snow was growing heavy.

Even on a wintery morning, the Freud Museum was crowded. I did not stay long. For me there was really nothing new to see. I was once enchanted by

Freud and his ideas. Like many young people coming of age in the seventies, I found in Freud a hero. He, along with Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, incited us to challenge the “bourgeois” values of the homes in which we were raised. I read through their works methodically; I incessantly memorized details of their lives. But that was all long ago.

I suppose that for many visitors, the museum was a warm respite on a cold, grey day. It was a warmth I did not feel. I headed out into the snow to walk the streets again.

But it was just too cold outside. I was weary from my wandering. After a beer and a heap of spicy Balkan sausages in a Viennese café, I sought out the solace of my hotel room to think it all through.

Were all those twists and turns of my youthful journey really necessary? Was life less mysterious than I had been led to believe? Was the answer to my questioning always right before my eyes?

I thought of T.S. Eliot and his poem, [“Little Gidding”](#)

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Ironically, after returning home from Vienna I heard about a new film, “Freud’s Last Session.” The film portrays an imagined meeting between Freud and C.S. Lewis and their vastly different views of religion.

For Freud, things are just not what they appear to be on the surface. We must incessantly dig deeper to uncover the true meaning of ourselves and our world. We need to question everything. Nothing is what it seems. God is merely a projection of our deepest fears and anxieties onto a reassuring father figure, a character our fertile imagination has simply conjured up. For Freud, believing in God is like whistling past the graveyard in the dark; it helps keep our darkest fears at bay.

For Lewis, things are as they appear. The world has order because God created the world and gave it order. Things mean what they mean. Seen in

the light of belief, the world does make sense. We should not overthink but lead our lives in faith; we must stop digging and start living.

There was a point in my life when ideas like those of Freud felt important; they seemed to add texture, to lend richness to the world. They promised to give life a meaning more profound than the simple pieties of my parents and the small town in which I was raised. There was a yearning to know more, to know at a deeper level because, in the end, there must be a life beyond the rhythm of work and rest, beyond the reassuringly predictable cycle of the seasons, beyond the small pleasures of friends and family.

For me, that incessant yearning for something beyond the here and now has long since passed. It is good to be back home.

I was hesitant to see the film about Freud and Lewis. I was not sure how it would turn out, who would “win” the debate. And, after seeing the film, I’m still not sure. Maybe we have to wander, we need to explore, we must doubt. It is not clear.

But I do know that, in the end, ideas are just not that important. Living your life in quiet faith is.