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Educational Administration with Conscience: Seeking the "Truth"

Abstract

Educational Administration is a discipline and, such as for all disciplines, one of its purposes is that of approaching the truth. Schooling institutions ideally are all about "the pursuit of truth." But truth is not always recognized as that when found. In this article the authors claim that we know the basic facts about Educational Administration in liberal democratic societies. Truth is in our conscience. The reality is that educational administration is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian religion just as is much of the society. The conscience of educational administrators reflects a Judaeo-Christian belief system. This then would suggest that the educational administrator who practices the principles of this belief system will be congruent with society. However, many in the discipline - both educational practitioners and theorists - appear not to accept this idea.

Acknowledging the arguments against the notion of "absolute truth" and problems in interpreting and promoting religion, the authors develop the stance that the educational administrator whose system of beliefs and values are derived from the Judaeo-Christian faith is the one who will be most effective. He would act with the appropriate mix of conscience, logic, and willpower. The writings of such individuals as Barnard, Neuhaus, W. Walker, and Frye are drawn upon for support. The piece concludes with a statement on the importance of leadership in education and some suggestions for the future development of both

educational administration theory and practice. In the main this article addresses a theme which many scholars would just as soon pretend does not exist. Reality tells us otherwise.

Introduction

Over the years the concepts of administration and leadership have been examined from many points of view. In the beginning the trait approach, which is an attempt to determine forces within the leader himself which contribute to his effectiveness, was popular. Next came the environment approach, an attempt to explain administrative effectiveness by looking at variables and forces within the situation. Then a combination of the trait and environmental approaches appeared; in fact, the literature describes the concept of "emergent leadership" whereby different personalities become in charge in different settings (Gibb, 1970). Other approaches considered the maturity of the leader and the maturity of the group being led (Hersey and Blanchard, 1976). Perrow (1973) comments:

Leadership is highly variable or "contingent" upon a large variety of important variables such as nature of task, size of the group, length of time the group existed, type of personnel within the group and their relationships with each other, and amount of pressure the group is under. (p.13)

These developments in understanding administrative behaviour have accompanied the more broadly-based developments of changing views of organization. Progression was from the Classical (Scientific Management) approach and the reductive Theory X, to the Human Relations approach and the developmental Theory Y, to the Structuralist approach, through to the Phenomenological, Contingency, Marxist, and Critical Theory approaches which have appeared more recently (Campbell, 1977-78; Griffith, 1979; and Thom, 1984b). Belief in the human relations managerial style is now widespread. Of late we have witnessed a move to Theory Z (Ouchi, 1981) and to "beyond a human relations approach" in a form of organization development (Walker, 1981, p.153).

Quite recently several education authors (Enns, 1981; Farquhar, 1981; Hodgkinson, 1983; Sharples, 1984; and Thom, 1984a) have been focusing specifically on the ethical aspects of administration. In effect this represents a renewed focus on leader traits - his values, his beliefs, and his morals. Further, it means a return to an emphasis found in earlier management literature such as by Barnard (1938) and, with respect to educational administration specifically, Althouse (1953), Flower

1958), Broudy (1958), and Miller (1965). This article extends this revived emphasis, presenting the argument that "the truth" concerning effective educational administration in societies such as ours is that the administrator should be a person with conscience, a term to be defined more broadly further in this paper.

Pursuing excellence

Ideally, those who study and practice administration are seeking excellence. Truth leads to the highest forms of excellence. Then, "what is the truth about administration?" Across the approaches to understanding this, one finds two common key facts of administration: (1) a task orientation or "concern for task" and (2) a maintenance orientation or "concern for people". These are elaborated by Bales (1958). So the broad truth is that the excellent administrator has superb task and people abilities. For purposes of this paper we draw the analogy that the specific truth is perceived as an alignment of conscience with reality.

Administrative behaviour is related to the nature of the organization being administered and to the culture or society in question. For example, in a dictatorship the incumbent's communication style would show many differences from the style of a leader in a democratic/participative management context. Further, commitment and confidence are necessary qualities in the excellent administrator, and it is of value to consider these. Commitment and confidence are tied to one's ego and are rooted in the set of values and beliefs which the leader holds.

In this article we are particularly interested in excellence and truth in educational administration and the contribution of values, beliefs, and morals to such. Conscience, then, is the primary focus.

Toward the truth

Our perusal of the literature on administration reveals that no set of profound, necessary conditions for excellence is totally agreed upon. Opinions are inconsistent. In fact, it would appear that the "scientific" model simply has not provided a complete explanation (Greenfield, 1985; Thom, 1984b; and Walker, 1984). Yet, with respect to educational administration, we believe that the "truth" can be determined.

Firstly, one must admit that our mainstream society in North America is a Judaeo-Christian-based society. This is not to deny that many of the values and moral beliefs of other religious groups among the minorities of North America are

consistent with the Judaeo-Christian religion, which we concede has historically been dominant. We celebrate Christmas and Easter, say the Lord's Prayer in many schools, sing God Save the Queen, and follow a calendar which is rooted in the Biblical story. In many areas, the Jewish holidays are observed in the schools as well. In the province of Quebec the public school system is primarily a confessional one formed on the basis of Catholic and Protestant affiliation. Motels across the country provide a Bible in their rooms. Further, the Canadian Charter of rights and freedoms opens with, "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law..." (Ricker, et al., 1982, p.169). These are just a few examples. Neuhaus (1984) comments:

The American experiment, which more than any other has been normative for the world's thinking about democracy, is not only derived from religiously grounded belief, it continues to depend upon such belief. (p.27)

Also, he states that the democratic constitution was made for a moral and a religious people. Admittedly, there are people who say that society has lost its belief in religion, and that evidence of religion in terms of religious holidays is perpetuated out of habit and for commercial value. But surely there is intelligence enough in our highly developed culture that we would move to do away with religious hypocrisy - propose to no longer celebrate Christmas or Easter, and so on - if the majority of society did not give both implicit and explicit approbation of the Judaeo-Christian cultural base. It is clear that the consciences of the mainstream of people in this culture follow Judaeo-Christian ideologies.

The **Ontario Education Act (1983)** cites as a duty of the teacher the following:

(c) to inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth, justice, loyalty, love of country, humanity, benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, purity, temperance and all other virtues. (Sec. 253(1) (i), p.221)

So, as with the general society, much of the education system's basic values rest on the Judaeo-Christian foundation. Of course, historically the first schools were established by Christian missionaries. Educational administrators were once "principal teachers". It follows that the Judaeo-Christian administrator is the one most congruent with the **officially stated** basic ideals of the school system.

The truth is that there are general societal expectations that

the educational administrator be congruent with the above stated morals and ethics in his thinking. This characteristic has been emphasized in a little of the general management literature (e.g., Barnard, 1938) and in practice (e.g., several top government leaders have publicly stated that they maintain active religious affiliation). But, to date, the literature on educational administration has given little attention to the importance of the spiritual or conscience dimensions. One might claim that the human relations approach, Theory Y, and such things as organization development technology and decentralized decision-making are indicators that some individuals are developing along the lines of the Judaeo-Christian concepts. Moreover, the more recent writings on ethics in administration are coming closer to the point.

But critics will say...

There will, we recognize, be many critics of our claim of truth in educational administration. Some people view any religion as an undesirable "crutch" and the "opium of the masses" and interpret much of the Biblical record as far-fetched, ridiculous tales. Some depict religions as the enemy of democratic freedom, as entirely negative influences. Others may verify that they know many very effective educational administrators who are not religious and many religious ones who are ineffective. Many of these individuals believe that the notion of a secular society compels political actors (such as administrators) to be amoral and to practice situation ethics, giving public status to notions of what is morally excellent or morally based only as they reflect the "interest" of those who hold them (Neuhaus, 1984, pp. 31-32). Finally, some will criticize because they have trouble accepting any hint of "absolute truth".

To these types of criticisms we have a response. As adults we acknowledge that there exist many, many different opinions about the meaning of life. Indeed, there are contending truths (or "crutches"), if you will. As individuals and as intellectuals we are interested in the "truth for ourselves". However, each individual must decide from among all the contending truths, which is his personal choice. We maintain that the Judaeo-Christian truth is no more far-fetched or ridiculous than other philosophical approaches - and the major section of people in our society, past and present, have adopted it. Many great minds have accepted its system of beliefs, e.g., Einstein, Schweitzer, Tolstoy, and C.S. Lewis, to name a few. Northrop Frye, world-renowned University of Toronto English Professor, states in **The Great Code**:

I soon realized that a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads; the most

conscientious student will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning. (p.xii)

Frye was late in his career when he wrote this book. His experience time and time again confirmed that the stories from the Bible profoundly affect English literature and our whole society, culture, and imagination. He presents very good arguments to support the Bible's inherent worth and that it did not come into existence through an improbable series of accidents. He goes on to say:

The Bible is clearly a major element in our own imaginative tradition, whatever we may think we believe about it. It insistently raises the question: Why does this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit there inscrutably in the middle of our cultural heritage like the "great Boyg" or sphinx in *Peer Gynt*, frustrating all our efforts to walk around it?...There is no... excuse today for scholars who, in discussing cultural issues originally raised by the Bible and still largely informed by it, proceed as though the Bible did not exist. It seems to me that someone not a specialist in the Biblical field needs to call attention to the Bible's existence and relevance. (p.xix)

There is ample evidence that many objectives of our educational system are rooted in Judaeo-Christian traditions, that it is still informed by it, and is identified with human beings' "capacity for goodness". We agree with Neuhaus that politics is the process of persuading and being persuaded, often engaged in by parties with different beliefs (p.32). To our critics we admit that our pluralistic society encourages those administrators who do not practise religion, those who do not believe in "doing unto others...", who do not follow a religiously derived conscience - we admit that there are many cases of this - but this does not mean that this is best. We know that there is "short-run" and "long-run" success and spiritual answers are generally not seen as "quick-way-to-the-top" answers. However, we contend that the spiritual-approach-with-conscience allows administrators to enjoy their position, leaving them with a sense of integrity and wholeness. People in the end **are** interested in ethics and goodness and justice (as reflected in court cases) and our common life does have a moral and religious character.

The challenge for administrators of our educational institutions is to be committed to the religious and spiritual beliefs upon which our society, families, and schools are based and to enhance one's capacity to resolve conflicts amidst competing belief systems. One does not have to be uncomfortable with the idea of principles, unless they are the hard, rigid principles defined by the pietistic. Persons with conscience support the incarnate and human principles of respect, trust, and integrity.

Escape to freedom

Currently society is witnessing somewhat of a leadership crisis. It is said that more and more people are turning down management positions with the argument that they do not need the kind of stress involved and would like to spend more time with their families. So too in education. Those who take up positions often do not stay long. For example, the average term for a Dean of Education is reported to be just three years. In the Fall 1984 issue of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (C.A.U.T.) **Bulletin** some twenty-five vacant senior positions of administration in education were advertised. These and corresponding examples from the elementary and secondary school panels would suggest that there is a significant turnover in administrative personnel. Technology has set conditions in organizations forcing the executive to respond to a multitude of interest groups. The pace of life perhaps is too fast for the average human being, and thus the stress levels are very high. To succeed, never before has there been such a need for the administrator to give a concise answer to the question, "What do I stand for?"

Psychologists theorize that individuals have a "locus of control" either externally or internally defined (Klassen and Turgeon, 1981). This is a force which determines to a large extent how the person conducts himself and interacts with others, and is a concept closely linked to conscience. In these times administrators are under considerable pressure to act in response to the requests and demands of a variety of politically-based interest and pressure groups (Sackney, 1984). Thus the tendency is toward control of behaviour by a locus externally defined. With many administrators on fixed-term appointments (normally from three to five years) and the procedures for a renewed appointment often involving a vote from most of the interest groups which one has been serving (according to collective agreements) the executive is unable to ignore the pressure.

With respect to education, there is potential harm in administrators continually basing decisions on political and group pressures. Certainly the need is great for administrators "to be in touch" with the demands and support of those whom they serve because, after all is done, if they have not listened well, they have not served well. However, the administrator who draws all of his cues for behaviour from others and lacks a solid value system of his own will be as lost as a ship without compass, chart, and pilot. The administrator needs to decide on the basis of what is **educationally** sound - what is ultimately best for students and teachers as they participate in the teaching/learning process. Decisions are rarely value-free and the decision-maker works from a set of convictions. Expressing no value implies a vacuum. The administrator supports what is "educationally sound" by following conscience and holding to convictions about what is

works from a set of convictions. Expressing no value implies a vacuum. The administrator supports what is "educationally sound" by following conscience and holding to convictions about what is "good", "right", and "moral". Eventually this is a liberating process.

Victor Frankl (1963) submits that the greatest problem in Western culture is the "existential vacuum" or meaninglessness which we experience. Some would have us ignore our history. They suggest that life is so different today that there are no lessons to be learned from the past. Others would have us deny our values. They suggest that old values do not work in a new world; all we are left with is our present experience which is constantly in flux - hardly a solid basis. So we expend much of our energy wondering about premises. We already know the value base. What we need to do is follow our conscience - or an internal locus of control.

No doubt there is much in our culture that would suggest denial that the educational administrator to be highly effective should have religious faith. In fact, almost the complete opposite is implied. We are all familiar with the opinions that "nice guys finish last", "it's not what you know, but who you know", "it's not how good you are, but how long you last", and "those who can, teach; those who can't, administrate." The general message is that "goodness" in persons at the top and in control does not belong. We would argue otherwise. The facts are that administrators who adopt these slogans often fail. They fuel the leadership crisis and limit freedom.

The truth hurts...

Recently, while visiting in the province of Alberta, the first author viewed a sign attached to a large delivery van. It read, "If this Vehicle is not being Driven in a Safe and Courteous Manner, Please Telephone 434-...." And on the Air Canada flight back to Ontario, after lunch was served, a questionnaire was distributed to passengers and it began with, "Your comments and suggestions will help us provide the best possible in-flight meal service."

It is interesting that in society generally we tend to have a consensus of what constitutes "a safe and courteous manner" and "the best possible service" - a view tied to goodness, courtesy, and high value on good human relations. Yet, within the education field many individuals act and speak as if these same views should not apply. In the political arena, many educational administrators experience a loss of integrity if they twist interpretations of these originally noble views. Politics (in the general sense) can make many individuals sacrifice their integrity, not saying what they mean or not meaning what they say. In

striving for power, control, and administrative security individuals may wrongly surrender their will to those they must please, and thus suspend their rationality and objective thinking. The following account, by M.N. Pokrovsky, of Lenin's power over his followers, illustrates the point:

There was above all, his enormous capacity to see to the root of things, a capacity which finally awakened in me a sort of superstitious feeling. I frequently had occasion to differ from him on practical questions but I came off badly every time. When this experience had been repeated about seven times, I ceased to dispute and submitted to Lenin even if logic told me that one should act otherwise. I was henceforth convinced that he understood things better and was master of the power denied to me, of seeing about ten feet down in the earth. (Wolfe, 1960, p.363)

Here is insight into the sources of a leader's use of authority over his followers, if power is used to manipulate.

Why is it that within educational administration and educational organizations frequently there is a lack of trust or "dealing in good faith"? Many individuals have become political without being authentic. Administration without conscience - but usually with ample technique - is what we often witness. This results in individuals scrambling to protect their interests, often at any cost.

Many administrators have the temptation to carry on as if they are oblivious to the need for human decency and dignity. They can be manipulative opportunists, and political grapplers who take advantage of the misfortunes of others. As singer Bob Dylan decries, "When you gonna wake up and strengthen the (good) things that remain?" (1979).

Not much theoretical emphasis is put on virtuous and ethical administration these days. In the literature of educational administration, besides a few pieces concerning ethics mentioned earlier, we see little. In recent years the literature has been monopolized by theory and research on **technique** and "the new theory movement." (cf. Sergiovanni, Greenfield, Hills, Willower, Culbertson, Griffith, Bone, Giles, Bates, Allison and Gronn in references). At the moment the theory authors are repetitive and seemingly confused and appear to be headed into ideas which are increasingly remote from the sum and substance of educational administrative practice. Our opinion is that this is unfortunate and incorrect. Much of the material more properly belongs in neo-sociology and epistemology. It may have application to the theory of organization generally but it is somewhat irrelevant to the discipline of Educational Administration *per se* (see Thom, 1984b). For example, some of Greenfield's more recent work

(1983) proposes "an anarchistic theory of organization" whereby we should follow R.D. Laing's dictum when he says, "I have made an arrangement with my mind: I let it do anything it wants to" (p.299), and live accordingly. The person with conscience can not allow this approach. The model, in our view, suggests an inappropriate lack of discipline (lack of standing for what is correct and good).

Hope for the future

There is hope for educational administration. Neuhaus (1984) claims that North Americans are more religious than they have ever been, at least in outward manifestations. Further, it seems that in our society, amidst all the emphasis on sensationalizing the gruesome and the ugly (especially by the media), there is an "underground" of a multitude of people who volunteer their time and abilities to help the less fortunate. Also, as indicated by government legislation in recent years, never before has our community been so ready and willing to assist the handicapped. So our capacity and sensitivity for goodness and charity is actually quite high.

A most encouraging sign is the publication of the lead article by well-known Emeritus Professor of Educational Administration, William G. Walker, in the Fall 1984 issue of **Educational Administration Quarterly**. The piece is inspirational in "telling it like it is." Walker traces the thirty year history (1954-1984) of the discipline of Educational Administration and is incredibly perceptive and honest about such things as lack of quality in publications, manipulative politics surrounding developments over the years, and misdirection of effort. His choice in choosing "administrative narcissism" as the key theme is significant. The two most salient points made by Walker with respect to our "truth theme" are first, that those in North American educational administration need to look in countries abroad for ideas (to end the "tyranny of isolation" which has been experienced over the years - to discover more of "the truth") and second, rediscover the sources of conscience and ethics of our own culture which have been sadly neglected.

Walker himself "went international" years ago. Following a similar route, by means of a four year experience of theory and practice of educational administration in the Far East with a base in Hong Kong, the first author developed revised definitions of such entities as "conservatism" and "liberalism". He came to realize just how parochial in their thinking about society and schools North Americans can be. A pervasive, unavoidable heightened total awareness is the only way to describe it. Also, there was found in other societies the interplay of mind, body, and spirit in all realms. Granted, not all that emerged from the experience is directly transferable to our society, but much of it

is. Suffice it to say that the international posting makes the "whole truth" more attainable.

Walker's second point is directly supportive of the main idea of our article. Walker speaks for many individuals in our field who have tried over the years to say that the moral fibre of the administrator is very important in the scheme of things. But, some admit to having given up in despair when their ideas were not well-accepted. Others have continued to express themselves but not as strongly and convincingly as Walker has now done. Walker shows exemplary insight and sensitivity when he refers to the teacher as "ambassador of society to the kingdom of the child" (p.16). And in the following:

Contemporary practice in administering a kindergarten or system of kindergartens further exemplified the use of "soft" theory. Froebel, in developing the concept of the Kindergarten, justified his "children's garden" through transcendentalism, the unity of all living things with God. Thus, the flowers, trees, open air, and handling of the symbolic gifts all had mystical significance. Today, in most parts of the world, administrators of Kindergartens are still guided in large part by Froebel's ideas. True, the "gifts" have gone, but the color, the movement, the activity have not. No principal, no teacher, no architect involved in this area of schooling can avoid the stubborn realities of that tradition. Moreover, in the elementary school and to some extent in the secondary school, these ideas linger on. Dewey, whose influence on the education of young children of the world is widely and gratefully acknowledged, did not hesitate to acknowledge his debt to Froebel. (p.16)

How to make it work

How then do we align reality with conscience in Educational Administration? In this article we have attempted to answer this. Excellence entails task and people skills and considerations of context, but, in addition, we believe there must also be Educational Administration based on Judaeo-Christian ethics for true excellence and congruence with society's values. Our very culture, our Constitution, our family bonds, and our institutions are judged by these standards. Virtue, dignity, faith, forgiveness, grace, love, loyalty, support, honesty and fundamental freedoms and justice for all represent our capacity for goodness. And without these moral ideals democracy has no meaning.

Further, what we are saying is that when reality and conscience are aligned, it is actions that make the difference. And the appropriate actions do not come easily. They involve

first a knowledge of the truth, attention to conscience, use of logic, and the bold application of willpower - an important ingredient.

We believe there are danger signals in our educational systems, and that there is a leadership crisis (Kerr, 1984). There are too few "great" administrators and too much administration without "soul". Education is an **extremely** important activity in this society, thus it needs to have **absolutely excellent** individuals in charge of it. Educators need to make every effort to recruit very capable individuals, provide them with superb training, and then give them continuing support for the sake of the students and the next generation. We suggest that administrators with high intelligence **and** who follow their **conscience** perform best.

We know that there will be many critics of these ideas. We have discovered that it takes courage to speak and write about "conscience" and the "spiritual" issues in educational administration circles. It is not popular. Perhaps there is too much affluence, too much comfort in the "guaranteed existence" (Kimbrough & Todd, 1970) which schools have for people to accept religious or spiritually based ideas and suggestions. Perhaps academics have great difficulty accepting any one value system and would rather continue to talk about the quality of life but not try to do much about it.

The fact is that despite our cultural heritage and our written laws and Constitution - all firmly based in Judaeo-Christian values - moral judgement and conscience are given too little attention among educational administration people. Only recently have publications associated with it begun to appear. For the thirty years of the study of Educational Administration as an academic subject the great emphasis has been on the "scientific" approach to understanding. But as Walker says, "surely, the whole organizational animal can be understood only when the 'scientific' and 'unscientific' are taken together" (1984, p.16). Greenfield also recognizes this when he says:

The error most theorists make in thinking about organizations is to conceive them as somehow separate from life, love, self, sex, growth, conflict, accomplishment, decay, death and chance. (1985, p.4)

And later:

Modern organization theory in education and other fields has also ignored literature that deals with administration as an art and as a value-based activity. (p.21)

New literature in this area is a journal, **Ethics in Education**, published by The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,

Toronto, Canada. Also, Goodwin (1981) has a book on Christian leadership in organizations. These indicate the beginning of new directions.

Where is the "truth" to be experienced? Critics may consult current writers such as Frye, Neuhaus, and C.S. Lewis, and others more learned than we, who have grappled with the issue, e.g., Howes (1982), McDowell (1979), Ellul (1972), Barnard (1938), and Relfe (1981).

Educational administration has always been weak on philosophy and the result has been that too often politics overshadows what is educationally sound. There are many means of exploring the ethics/spiritual/conscience theme further. One suggestion is that a major conference on Ethics in Educational Administration could be held (this was tried several years ago in Canada but the enrolment was too low to carry it off). More study of the "locus of control" of effective administrators is in order. Finally, more insight into the proper balance of practising the Protestant work ethic and avoiding stress from over-achievement is required.

In many ways "the red light is on" within educational administration, indicative of a "spiritual sickness" and "weakness of conscience". To begin our "flight to health" the "truth" must be sought. The ambiguity and irrationality which can be found within modern day organizations creates an impression of many irreconcilable truths (Greenfield, 1978). Yet in the end we are practical, rational people who value sincerity and caring, and the dignity of children and the family. Too often we let the idea that we have a secular society lead to the notion that a leader should not have a firm set of religious or spiritual beliefs and values - the foundation of one's conscience.

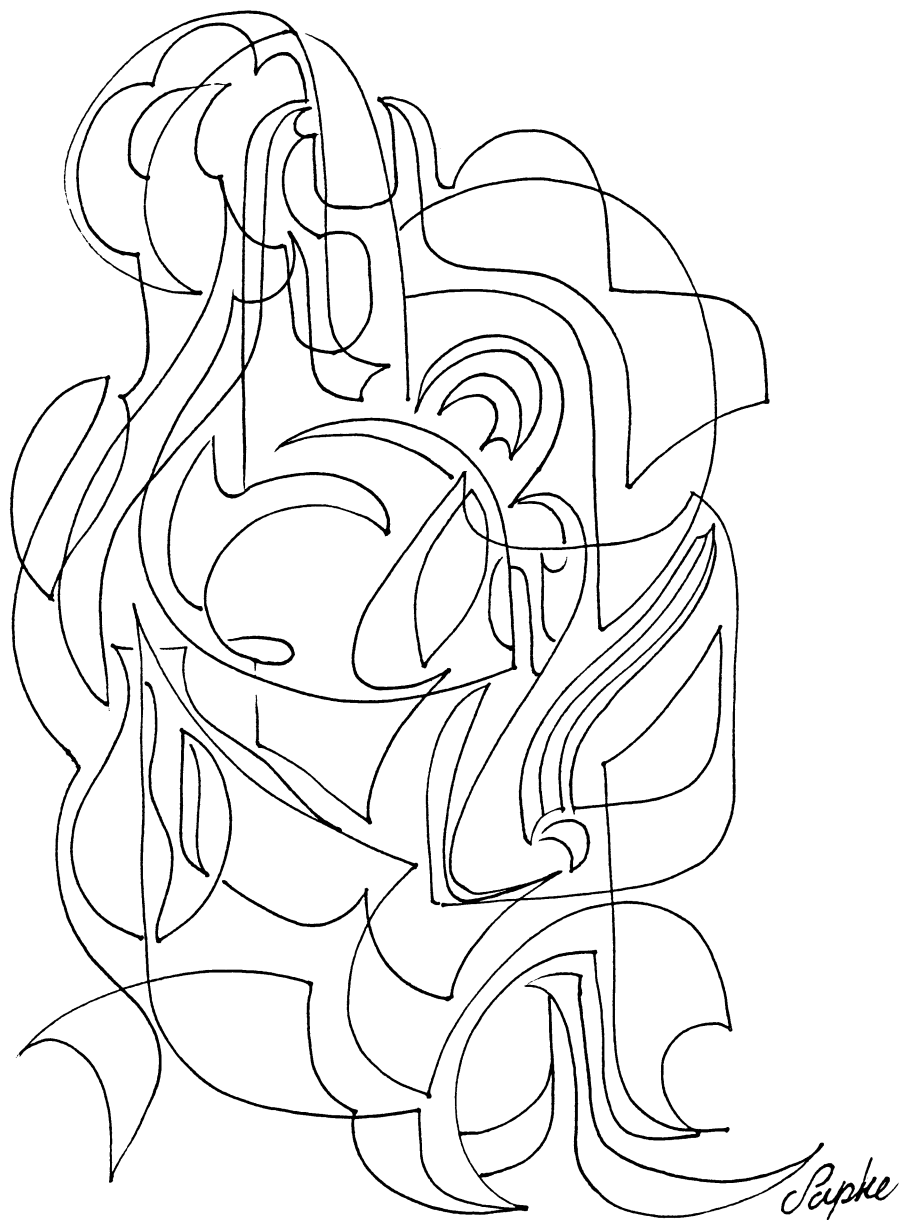
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