Solomon the Soothsayer *

Barbara Hantman

Forget not parents’ parables, for their gentle wisdom is as fine as a crown of onyx and sapphire.

Prey not on the innocent, else a fatal snare sap your own scarlet essence.

Ask not for riches, lest surfeit’s sibilant, seductive cry lead to divinity’s denial.

Plead not for poverty’s asceticism, lest its oppression force temptation to blossom into a shaol of perfidy.

Push not the needy widow and orphan from four corners of un threshed sanctity.

Scorn not the spider, for she can penetrate royal bastions, and greet a prince in his bedchamber.

Imbibe not strong drink in the palace, as it is more important to use that portal for silver-tongued decrees that bolster the destitute.

Preach not lofty social contract and universal ethics unless you are imbued with the fear of the Lord.

Neglect not the valiant woman, for her purple-gold textile is the enduring weave of industry, art, love and life.

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* Inspired by King Solomon’s wisdom as put forth in the Book of Proverbs, and Rabbanit Shani Taragin’s lecture on “Wisdom Literature and the Scheme of Ethical Development” delivered at the Bible and Ethics by Matan Scholars Conference, Lincoln Square Synagogue, NYC, 11/15/09.

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Gloaming of the Gods *

Barbara Hantman

Jezebel, royal Phoenician temptress, used wifely wiles on good King Ahab:
Alas, pillars of Baal blighted desert dune and Galilean green.
“Lamentations” bewails rain battering the just and unjust with equal malice aforethought:
Fate, chance, destiny, happenstance – Yahweh’s amoral rivals – are rendered as
“miqreh.”
Heavenly hosts and ministering angels are a Divine Council of kindly cohorts –
Infiltrated by Satan the antagonist, interloper who rejoices in jostling Job.
For Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, carved mulberry wood “peselim” were mere
dung pellets –
As omnipotent as a scarecrow in a cucumber patch.
Proverbs gives us Lady Wisdom, birthed before primal waters –
Delightfully playful emblem of Father’s love for the inhabited world.
Lady Zion, eternal bride, is a northern mountain city with paradaisical rivers of
palm-lined fecundity --
To be forgotten on pain of spoken and written paralysis.
Finally, Asherah – Lion Lady of the Levant – persisted as clay figurine or carved pole
Complete with flipped hairdo and ample bosom for babe-imbibing sustenance.
Pottery artisans remembered “the Lord and His Asherah” before turning from wheel to
kiln.
Such was polytheism with an unlikely backdrop: the Hebrew Bible!

* This title is a paraphrase of TWILIGHT OF THE GODS, David Penchansky’s
informative book on “polytheism in the Hebrew Bible” (Westminster John Knox Press,
Louisville, Kentucky; 2005).