

# **The Divine Feminine in Hebrew Scripture and Biblical Wisdom Literature**

## FOREWORD

By The Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault, Ph.D.

You are now holding in your hands a small treasure. Prepare to be delighted—and transformed.

When my friend Rami Shapiro asked me to contribute a Foreword to his soon-to-be-published manuscript on the Divine Feminine in Hebrew scriptures, I agreed partly out of skepticism. The Divine Feminine in the Old Testament?? It sounded like an oxymoron. Back in seminary days, I'd been well steeped in the conventional understanding that the cornerstones of patriarchal consciousness in the West were laid down in the Old Testament, making itself known through several spiritual non-negotiables: the utter transcendence of God, the unbridgeable abyss between creator and created, the revulsion of anything remotely resembling "goddess worship." While I often privately suspected this was not the whole picture, as a Christian (and woman), I didn't feel I had much of a platform on which to question another tradition's deepest self-understanding.

But when a rabbi tells me that this is not the whole picture, then I feel a tidal wave of validation, not only for his tradition, but for my own as well. So it is true after all: there has been a feminine presence, a Wisdom presence, lurking all along at the root of our Judaeo-Christian universe! Rami Shapiro not only makes a case for this, but spells it out chapter and verse by assembling the pertinent texts and allowing us to see for ourselves. He deftly sets the stage and lets Wisdom make her own introductions.

Granted, Rami is not exactly your typical rabbi, and I suspect there are those among his colleagues who would be hard put accord him the mantle of spokesperson for the tradition. I chuckled in bittersweet recognition when he shares his story of being upbraided by a professor at rabbinical school who informed him, "The only mother goddess we Jews have is Golda Meir." Among certain sectors of Judaism (and Christianity as well)—the idea of a feminine presence in scripture will remain a hard sell. But Rami speaks from a deeper and more universal tradition, a Wisdom tradition, and within this more spacious context his beautiful words and teachings sparkle like clear water after a long drought.

I love where this book is coming from, but even more I love where it's headed. While acknowledging his early flirtations with a "Hebrew goddess," Rami does not remain at that level, but moves us swiftly to higher ground. Unlike so much naively reactionary feminism, he is very clear of the distinction between "biological facts and theological archetypes" and does not try to make a case for Chochma, Wisdom, as a literal female consort of a male God. Rather, he sees in Wisdom a reflective principle— simultaneously creating and created in a seamless dance of divine becoming. Her proper role is not to be worshipped, but to be actualized in the material of our own lives.

Rami clearly realizes that Chochma (or Sophia in Greek) is about Wisdom and that Wisdom is about transformation: "not only an altered state of mind but an altered trait of behavior," as he so incisively observes. On the strength of this observation he is able to move us beyond the finger pointing to the moon (whether male or female) to the moon itself: the timeless universal teachings and practices that lead to a transformed heart and the permanent establishment within a person of mochin d'gadlut, or spacious mind. In his hands, the Wisdom teachings of the Old Testament take their place within the deeper Wisdom of humanity, adding their individual voices to the universal message since time immemorial: that only through this transformation of the heart can humankind arrive at a stable and enduring peace.

I have long suspected that Jesus, too, emerges from such a greater Wisdom tradition, and Rami's work confirms and extends this insight in several fruitful—and potentially revolutionary—ways. His convincing case that logos ("the Word," which according to the Gospel of John, "became flesh and dwelled among us" in the person of Jesus) is in fact identical to Chochma/Sophia, Holy Wisdom, neatly removes an entire layer of theological superstructure which has been a barrier to understanding for both Christians and Jews. In this same stroke, it also situates Jesus firmly within the Wisdom tradition, as a moshel moshelim (a teacher of Wisdom) rather than the long-expected political Messiah who for two thousand years has been the primary stumbling block to Jewish-Christian reconciliation. "Now a Wisdom Jesus I would have no problem with!" Rami shared with me in conversation. What seeds of healing—for both traditions—may lie hidden in this one, seminal insight!

Finally, I love the way Rami gets there. This little book is vintage Rami Shapiro: masterfully conceived and elegantly executed. With clarity and concision he explains the tradition, assembles the pertinent texts, and presents them in crisp, clean translations with profound spiritual teaching and commentary discreetly disguised as footnotes. If you're like me, you'll find that this little volume very quickly makes itself indispensable. It's destined to become a spiritual classic, a core textbook in the library of worldwide Wisdom. If the Mother has indeed been pursuing Rami Shapiro, as he intimates in his Preface, She definitely picked the right man for the job. We are all the richer for their encounter.

Enjoy!