

Mysticism in Hebrew Scriptures

Sr. Barbara Paleczny

MYSTICISM IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

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Leviticus, Chapters 17-26

In the holiness code of priestly law,
the decisive element
in the concept of holiness
is belonging to God.



One who belongs to God
must assume
the nature of the holy God:
"You shall be holy, for I,
Yahweh your God, am holy"
Leviticus 19:2



The priests are holy
because
they stand
in relationship to God.

Numbers 16:5



"Who is able to stand
before the Lord,
this holy God?"

1 Samuel 6:20



In the priestly side of holiness,
ancient cultic hymns
praise the divine redeemer
who manifests his holiness
in great deeds.

Exodus 15:11



First ISAIAH:
MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE
WITHIN THE CONTEXT
OF HIS CRITIQUE
OF FRAUDULENT SOCIETY



ISAIAH 6:2-9, 10:17

Isaiah presents
God's holiness
as a consuming fire
to anything sinful.



JUSTICE AND INTEGRITY

justice (*mishpat*)

and integrity (*tsedaqah*)



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CONTEXT

Presupposing the normative reality of the torah (5:24, 14:24-27),
Isaiah proclaims
in the face of systemic perversion
that God's truth
will not be mocked (37:17-20).



Isaiah 3:15

Yahweh in fact is ally of the dispossessed,
"What do you mean that you crush my people and grind the faces of the poor?"
demands Yahweh of the rulers.



ISAIAH 5:1-7

SONG OF LOVE FOR A FRIEND'S VINEYARD



Image of a destroyed vineyard:
a people have become corrupt in terms of justice.

Isaiah 5:7

The full yield of sour grapes
images real vineyards:
taken over by large landowners
who, full of greed,
leave the poor empty.



ISAIAH 5:4

Yahweh cries out in agony,
"What more could I have done
for my vineyard
that I have not done?"
and then lays open the vineyard,
revealing its inner chaos
and emptiness.



Destruction comes
from within

to a society
so deeply organized
against its own good
and God's sovereignty.



ISAIAH 5:7

Yahweh expected justice (*mishpat*),
but found bloodshed (*mishpah*),
integrity (*tsedaqah*),
but found only a cry of distress
(*tsa`aqah*).



Irony emphasizes the judgment:

- Rich landowners who add "house to house" will see them empty. (Isaiah 5:8)
- Carousers will die of hunger and thirst and even become death's dinner.



Isaiah 5:8

"Woe to those
who add house to house
and join field to field
until everywhere belongs to them
and they are
the sole inhabitants
of the land."



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Isaiah 5:16-17
"Yahweh Sabaoth
will increase his glory by his
justice (*mishpat*),
the holy God
will display his holiness
by his integrity
(or righteousness *tsedaqah*)."



Isaiah 5:19-20

Perversion of ethical
standards:
turning darkness into light
and light into darkness.



Isaiah 5:23

"Woe to those who for a
bribe acquit the guilty
and cheat the good person of
justice "*tsedakah*".



Isaiah 5:30
By their sinful crushing of the
poor, they blot out the light.

"Only look at the country:
darkness and distress,
the light flickers out
in shadows."



ALTHOUGH LEGAL,
THEIR ACTIONS
ARE UNJUST
AND, THEREFORE, IMMORAL.



Awesome drama and
unambiguous message
of ISAIAH 5:8-30:

clear connection
that God's holiness is manifest
in justice, economic justice,
even here in what is probably
an early text of Isaiah.



ISAIAH'S MYSTICAL
EXPERIENCE

ISAIAH 6: 1-8



THE *CENTRAL* MESSAGE OF
ISAIAH CHAPTERS 1-11

is that God reveals himself
and his holiness
through integrity and justice
...
economic justice



EXILE IN BABYLON

SECOND ISAIAH
BOOK OF CONSOLATION
...



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ISAIAH 43

Fear not . . .
I have called you by name.
You are mine. . . .



Isaiah 43:2

When you walk through fire,
you shall not be burned.



Isaiah 43:4

You are precious in my eyes and
honored
because I love you.



POURING OUT LAMENT
PROVIDES ROOM FOR HOPE
AND FOR
DEEP MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE



KNOW GOD AND
REMEMBER GOD'S DESIRE
= contemplative or mystical
experience

ISAIAH II
(Chapters 40-55)
BOOK OF CONSOLATION



Profoundly affected
by Hosea's identification
of the incomprehensible power of love
which marks Yahweh as the all-holy,
Deutero-Isaiah = a link
between
the priestly and prophetic
tradition.



Deutero-Isaiah emphasizes
God's dynamic holiness
in intervening
to save the captives
while marvelling
at the majesty
of God's holiness itself.



PROPHETIC IMAGINATION
WITH HOPE FOR ALL PEOPLES

ISAIAH III



ISAIAH 32:16-17 Contrasting
the desert emptiness of oppression:

"In the wilderness,
justice will come to live,
and integrity in the fertile land;
integrity will bring peace (*shalom*),
justice give lasting security."



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- After vulnerability of exile, embrace the pain and pour out lament;
- In exposing the false response, long-denied memories yield new life.



Trito-Isaiah (Ch. 56 - 66)
=
freedom, energy and courage
to envision
an alternatively arranged world.



ISAIAH 66:12-13

As nurslings, you shall be carried
in her arms, and fondled in her lap;
As a mother comforts her son, so will
I comfort you.



I AM ABOUT TO CREATE
NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH.
THE THINGS OF THE PAST
SHALL NOT BE REMEMBERED.

I WILL REJOICE . . . AND EXULT
IN MY PEOPLE.
NO LONGER SHALL THE SOUND
OF WEEPING BE HEARD . . .
ISAIAH 65:17



PSALMS:

REAL LIFE.
CONNECTED, RELATING
WITH GOD, OTHERS,
NATURE, SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC JUSTICE.



PAIN, SORROW, DESPAIR,
JOY, DELIGHT AND HOPE
RELATING WITH GOD



LIFE IMMersed IN GOD,
-- NOT PIOUS PLATITUDES --

OPENS US UP
TO MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

ALL LIFE IN GOD



FOR WHOM AND WHEN
IS GOD DISTANT OR
UNAPPROACHABLE?

WHEN IS GOD INTIMATE?
FOR WHOM?



MEANING FOR JEWS . . .

MARY, JOSEPH
JESUS



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MEANING FOR US . . .

GRATEFUL TO GOD,
GRATEFUL
TO JEWISH PEOPLE,
OPEN . . .



ALONG WITH
THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES,
THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES
ARE A GUIDING LIGHT
AND TOUCHSTONE
FOR WHAT IS
AUTHENTIC MYSTICISM
IN LATER AGES



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Delores Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll , N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1993. Chapter 1, pp. 15 – 33.
- An outstanding article from the past: Walter Brueggemann, "Unity and Dynamic in The Isaiah Tradition." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. 29 (1984).



Beyond the theme:
I invite you to come
to our convent home. . .



NEXT ART EXHIBIT
of my paintings, prints
and those of Sister Ann Semel:
3415 W. Woodlawn
435-3234
Fri. Nov 2: 7 - 9 pm
Sat & Sun, Nov. 3, 4:
11 am - 4 pm



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RETREAT for WOMEN

To learn and discern
about religious life
(18 - 45 years of age)
Sunday, Oct. 14,
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



REQUISITES:
cheerful personality;
ability to risk; sense of adventure;
love for God and others.

*. . . Single, including widows, single
mothers with grown children,
or those with an annulment
of marriage vows. . .*

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