

SO AND SO: A PHILOSOPHICAL PAS DE DEUX IN THREE ROUNDS

Yavni Bar-Yam

King Solomon, a symbol of worldly as well as holy wisdom, is reputed to have written three books in the Biblical canon, each in a different life stage: *Song of Songs* as a young man, *Proverbs* in middle age and *Ecclesiastes* as an old man. King Solomon's life narrative is told in *Kings 1*. Socrates of Athens, the great Hellenic philosopher, does not have any surviving works of his own, but three contemporaries wrote about him: most famously Plato, in multiple dialogues, but also Xenophon in his memoirs, and Aristophanes, who satirized Socrates in his comedy *The Clouds*.

In this piece, I have imagined that three encounters between these two intellectual giants were driving incidents in the unfolding of each of their lives and the development of their philosophies. I have captured these encounters in a series of three pieces that merge the structure and language of the aforementioned texts of the Bible and of Classical Greece.

In contemporary thought, Rabbi Bradley Artson's brand of process theology, as elucidated in his *God of Becoming and Relationships* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2013) is a close representation of what Socrates and Solomon discover together in my fantasy. Rabbi Artson's name or notion of God as "lure," an impulse that non-coercively guides people in every decision we make, is akin to the "sign," "voice," "divinity," or "oracle" of which Socrates is reported to have spoken in, for example, Plato's *Apology* and Xenophon's *Memoirs*, and which is rendered in this piece as "divinity" and "daimon." The journey this piece finds in the philosophical legends of Socrates and Solomon also resonates with some of the ways Rabbi Artson lays out the reasoning for his theology—routes of logic colliding with paradox in conceptions of the divine, and of personal struggle in coping with the world as it is.

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Part I:
The King and the Cloudgazer
after Song of Songs and Aristophanes' The Clouds

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Dramatis Personæ:

SHE

HE

KING SOLOMON

SOCRATES, in his thinkery

STUDENTS, of Socrates

DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM, the chorus

~•*•~

SHE

Where is my beloved?
I awoke in my bed, sick with love.
I called for him, but he did not come.
I asked for him, but he did not answer.
Where is my beloved, finest of men,
Where does he pasture his sheep,
O you daughters of Jerusalem?

CHORUS

What does he look like;
How is he so fine, as you have told us many times,
O loveliest of maidens,
What does he look like,
That we may help you to search for him?

SHE

My beloved is like a deer,
Like a glorious stag of the mountain,
So does my love bound across hills,
Leap over mountains.

SHE (cont.)

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my love among the other men.

CHORUS

Yes, but how does this help us to find him?
What does he look like, your love?

SHE

His legs are the trunks of cedars.
His arms are the boughs of pomegranate trees.
His face is a gilded shield,
And his arms enwrap me as a banner.
Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my love among the other men.
I delight to sit in his shade.

CHORUS

We must ask a different question.
Where did he go, your love?

SHE

He shepherds the lilies,
So do all the young women love him.
So does my love bound across hills,
Leap over mountains.
He is in a bed of spices,
A mound of myrrh and frankincense.

CHORUS

This is no help, we must ask more directly.
O beautiful of women,
WHO IS YOUR BELOVED?

SHE

This is my lover; this is my friend.
This is my king.

CHORUS

Aha! The king!
We know where he is.
King Solomon, just risen to the throne, rides out in his chariot.
We will take you to your love,
O most beautiful of maidens.
See, where he rides, the king.
His chariot is of the cedar of Lebanon
And the cushions are dyed violet.
He eats the grapes of his vineyard.
He is surrounded by his guard of warriors,
And he is surrounded by our love, we daughters of Jerusalem.

KING SOLOMON

I am bound for Athens, and then for Gibeon,
In Athens to acquire gold and silver, riches from trade,
So I can make a whole house, instead of just this chariot.
And the famed ships of Athens for my fleet,
So that I may defeat my enemies by sea.
And I will make allegiances with that land,
By marrying its princesses.
Foreign concubines keep a man young,
So I will live a long life.
And to help me acquire all those things,
I have heard of a man named Socrates,
Who teaches conniving and deception.
I will ask him to help me get these sundry treasures from the
Athenians.
But what gift shall I give him,
So he will want to help me?

CHORUS

Call King Solomon!

KING SOLOMON

Yes?
O! The daughters of Jerusalem!

CHORUS

Here he is!

SHE

That is not my beloved.
That is not my friend.
That is not my king.

KING SOLOMON

What say you, o you loveliest of the maidens?
That I am not the king?
Do you think Adoniyahu should be king instead?
Because he is my elder? Know you
That the throne was promised me by David, my father.
It was promised to my mother and to me.
Any who doubt me I must have executed.

SHE

No, I seek my beloved,
The most pleasant among all the men.
I awoke in my bed, sick with love,
But I could not find him.
I went out to walk in the city at night,
But he was not where I looked.
I asked the guards on the city wall where he was,
But he was not to be found.

KING SOLOMON

Hmm, this man of yours, who is he?
O you darkest of fruit,
O you loveliest of blossoms in a lovely flower bed.

CHORUS

King Solomon has been known to graze among some lilies himself.

SHE

He is like a lion of the mountains,
His eyes are as doves, and his mouth is as honey.
His face shines as the sun,

SHE (cont.)

And his hair is curled, and black as a raven.

HE

Come on, sheep ...
My beloved is as ...

SHE

The voice of my beloved!
Here he comes!

KING SOLOMON

Why, yes, I see him.
Aha!
I have the perfect plan.
I know who would love to have the loveliest of men.
This Socrates, I have heard,
Has a school for men whose eyes are as doves
And whose mouths are as honey.
I must bring this man to Socrates!
In his thinkery, in Athens.
Then he will help me get the gold, the ships, the concubines.
It is anyway a good idea to have a subject under Socrates' wing;
This boy will prove useful if he learns there.
I understand the manufacturing of quills and down is very
profitable.
And Socrates' arts of talking and persuasion could be useful
In consolidating my kingship and continuing my father's line.
All this will I do and then I will go to Gibeon for sacrifices, as
planned.
Everything works perfectly!

HE

My beloved has teeth like ... like sheep,
Just washed, and not one of them missing or lost.
And her eyes are like ... like sheep.
The white part, that is.
The white parts of her eyes.
Her hair is like ... well, goats

HE (cont.)

When they run down Mount Gilead.
Her arms are to me as ... the fleece of sheep,
Enwrapping me.

KING SOLOMON

He could really use Socrates' help with rhetoric anyway.

HE

Her breasts are as two young ... ewes.
And, sheep, don't tell her I said this, but ...
Her brow is kind of like an open pomegranate.

SHE

My beloved!

HE

O dear!
I did not see you there, my love!

SHE

You are the deer!
I am sick with love.
Come and taste the pomegranate.
I have kept it just for you.

KING SOLOMON

Young man, you are coming with us
On a mission to Athens.
You will be enrolled in the famed thinkery of Socrates.

HE

But I know nothing of thinkering. I'm a shepherd!

KING SOLOMON

Nevertheless, you are coming with me.
Didn't you hear that I am now king?

SHE

I will follow after my love.

CHORUS

We will accompany
And follow King Solomon to Athens, and Socrates.
Do you see how we have to travel by foot,
All the way to Athens, from Jerusalem?
That is because of you, the public.
You fail to amply support comedy.
We could not afford ships nor chariots.
So we must rely on our poor hips to carry lots.
This walk to Athens is the longest;
Indeed you spectators surely wrong us.
And shame on you for giving us not our due.
For on this long road we have nothing better to do,
Than waggle our fingers at you
And sneer at your ignorance.
For who has given you more lovely verse?
And who devised for you a better plot?
And who has been with words more kindly terse?
And who, in parody, more villains caught?
Than we, to whom you show but scorn;
You reward us not for our labors,
You return not our gifts or our favors.
If you appreciated us, you would invest
More money, esteem, and all the rest!
We only plagiarize from the best.
Come now, no one knows better the Muses than we.
No one provides better entertainment for ye.
Would you rather see the work of some tragic poet?
And end the celebration in tears, and covered in blood?
You will not leave our assembly so messy.
Yes, would you rather see some woman go mad, and kill, kill, kill
Her children, her lover, her father, her mother and then
For an encore, herself, or perhaps a lucky spectator, one of you?
Or see us lovely women laugh and dance and flirt, flirt, flirt
With kings, and fools, and all of you?
And walk, walk, walk. Don't forget that, please.

CHORUS (cont.)

Walk, walk, walk, walk, walk.
Well here we are, finally in Athens.
Haww-haww-haww-haww
Exhausted, without even any refreshments to greet us,
Thanks to your frugality.
But here is our King again!

KING SOLOMON

Is this the thinkery of Socrates?

STUDENT

That? That is a door.

KING SOLOMON

Yes, but, well, where are you?

STUDENT

Alas! My poor mind cannot hold up to that level of inquiry,
For if I were to ask my feet where they are, they must respond,
"We are on the floor of the lesson room,"
But if I were to ask my head, it must say,
"Outside, in the air."
You ask questions that are too difficult, cruel stranger.
I am only in my first year of study here.
You must ask my colleague, who is an advanced student.

STUDENT 2

How can I help you?

KING SOLOMON

Is this where Socrates teaches?

STUDENT 2

How can I help you?

KING SOLOMON

Um, by telling me if this is where Socrates teaches.

STUDENT 2

Why should he teach outside, when he has this building for his thinkery?

KING SOLOMON

Who is that descending in a basket?

STUDENT 2

That is a man.

KING SOLOMON

What man?

STUDENT 2

The one descending in a basket.

KING SOLOMON

What is his name?

STUDENT 2

Baskets don't have names besides "basket."

KING SOLOMON

What is the name of the man in the basket?

STUDENT

That is Socrates himself.

KING SOLOMON

Socrates! What are you doing?

SOCRATES

I was observing the clouds,
But I found something much more interesting to observe.

CHORUS

Another man eyeing us?
But no! His gaze is on —

SOCRATES

That fine youth – who is he?

SHE

This is my beloved, and this is my friend.
Like perfumed oil is the pure fame while his name is uttered,
Without flaw is my beloved;
He is perfect and whole.
His face is handsome and red.
His voice is milk,
And his lips are honey.
Better than wine are the kisses of his mouth.

SOCRATES

I have heard definition enough.
Fair youth, do you come to be thinkerized?

HE

No, I'm a shepherd.

SOCRATES

Perfect!
Thinkerers ponder clouds, and are not clouds the same as sheep?

HE

Then I will come here to learn about sheep.

SOCRATES

But it won't be cheap. You, who called me down,
You look rich enough. Who are you?

KING SOLOMON

I am Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

SOCRATES

Indeed?

KING SOLOMON

Well, um, at this point I guess mostly in name.

KING SOLOMON (cont.)

I just started.

SOCRATES

And did you come to enroll yourself as well, in this my thinkery?

KING SOLOMON

No, I just want some advice from you,
Of how and where best to get certain things here in Athens.
As king of Israel, and as I am giving you this fine youth,
I would like to get fine silver and gold
And myrrh, and, well, what grows here?

SOCRATES

Olives?

KING SOLOMON

We already have those.

SOCRATES

People?

KING SOLOMON

Perfect!
I shall wed me to the princesses of this land for allegiance.

SOCRATES

My advice to you, hearken to me:
Do not be concerned with things material.
They are evil.

KING SOLOMON

Why are you taking my golden crown off my head
And putting it in that box over there?

SOCRATES

You're very welcome for that gift.

KING SOLOMON

You didn't give me anything. You took it away from me.

SOCRATES

You slander me with lies, and I'll prove it you.

Is not sadness the lack of happiness and happiness the lack of sadness?

KING SOLOMON

Yes.

SOCRATES

And is not darkness the lack of light and lightness the lack of dark?

KING SOLOMON

Yes.

SOCRATES

And satedness the lack of hunger and hunger the lack of satedness?

KING SOLOMON

Yes.

SOCRATES

Then everything is the lack of something else?

KING SOLOMON

Apparently so, I never thought –

SOCRATES

Obviously not. Don't worry, that's what I'm here for.

So then the lack of a crown is something?

KING SOLOMON

Yes

SOCRATES

And the lack of that something is a crown?

KING SOLOMON

Yes.

SOCRATES

Then I have given you that something, though you hardly deserve it.
Again I say, you're welcome.

KING SOLOMON

Why thank you. How can I repay you?

SOCRATES

By taking my lack of hair.
Never mind, just take my advice.

KING SOLOMON

Gladly. That is why I came.

SOCRATES

Is it not true that the soul is good and the body is bad?
Yes, of course it's true.
So you shouldn't give the body anything it wants:
Not this fine cape with three silver clasps;
Not this belt studded with sapphires.

KING SOLOMON

I think if I take too much more of your advice
I should end up revealing too much of that part of me that you say is
bad.

SOCRATES

As the body tends to these trappings of fools,
The soul tends toward knowledge.
That is the only good pursuit.

KING SOLOMON

Ah.
So knowledge is better than riches?

SOCRATES

Correct.
Don't desire possessions; desire instead
Prudence, wisdom, clarity of thought.

KING SOLOMON

Where are you taking my chariot?
My chariot of the cedar of Lebanon?

SOCRATES

Does this chariot help you get places faster?

KING SOLOMON

Yes, of course.

SOCRATES

Evil.
The longer it takes you to get somewhere,
The more time you have for contemplation along the way.

KING SOLOMON

But how will I ride into battle?

SOCRATES

O, you don't want to do that, do you?

KING SOLOMON

Don't I?

SOCRATES

Better to contemplate.
Look up at the clouds.

KING SOLOMON

I see them, yes.

SOCRATES

No, really look at them. Deeply.
This clasp is harder to undo than I thought it would be.

KING SOLOMON

Mm, yes, I see.
Why do you take my sword?

SOCRATES

Another petty bauble desired by the body, not the soul.

KING SOLOMON

But it's for defending myself.

SOCRATES

Horrors! Why would you want to do that?

KING SOLOMON

So that if someone tries to kill me –
There are many who would try to wrest from me my kingship! –
I can survive.

SOCRATES

Horrors! Extend your life?
Make your soul be longer trapped in that evil body of yours?
You want that?
That is a desire of the body, not the soul.

KING SOLOMON

Ah.
So knowledge is better than long life?

SOCRATES

Correct.
Don't desire life; desire instead
Prudence, wisdom, clarity of thought.

KING SOLOMON

Thank you.
Now, about those Athenian warships...

SOCRATES

Don't be silly.

SOCRATES (cont.)

Worship is better,
To my new vaporous gods of the sky, that is:
To contemplation.

KING SOLOMON

Yes, but,
I still want those ships,
And I still want my chariot back,
So that I may defeat my enemies on land and at sea.

SOCRATES

You want to sail and ride in war against your friends?

KING SOLOMON

No, I say my enemies.

SOCRATES

You would do your enemies a favor, give them a gift?

KING SOLOMON

No, I say I want to go into war against them and take their lives.

SOCRATES

But they are one and the same.
You would give them the gift
Of freeing their souls from their bodies.
What kindness! What generosity!
You cannot kill their souls, of course —
Certainly not with warships and chariots.
Rather, you kill their bodies,
And their souls will be supremely happy.

KING SOLOMON

You are right. I cannot argue with that reasoning.
I do not want to be kinder to my enemies
Than to my own people or my allies.
Where are you leading my manservants and warrior-guards?

SOCRATES

You do not need them, if you don't go to war
And if you don't have anything you need buckled on.
Rather philosophize than go to war to give your enemies a gift.

KING SOLOMON

Ah!
So knowledge is better than the lives of my enemies?

SOCRATES

Correct.
Don't desire others' death; desire instead
Prudence, wisdom, clarity of thought.

KING SOLOMON

Thank you for your advice, Socrates.
I now know that knowledge is better than all things.

SOCRATES

So would you like to enroll in my thinkery?

KING SOLOMON

I don't think I could afford tuition at this point,
With what I have on me.
And anyway, I do need to get to my kingly duties in Israel.
I will tell you, though,
I was going to pray for long life, riches and the lives of my enemies.
But now I know that knowledge is better than all these,
And I will pray for that instead.
Now come, we must go,
I need to make sacrifices in Gibeon.

CHORUS

Here we go.
We hardly got a chance to rest,
And already making the long trek back to Jerusalem.

SHE

But what of my love?

SHE (cont.)

Where is my beloved?

I must wait here for my beloved to return,

That I may rest in his garden, and eat of his fruit.

I warn you, O you daughters of Jerusalem,

If you raise, or if you rouse

Love until it is desirous!

Part II:

The Judge and the Gadfly

after Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Plato's Dialogues

Simmias: Plato, I heard Socrates has returned from his travels overseas.

Plato: Yes, I have heard the same, and am going right now to meet him. Would you like to accompany me?

Simmias: You know that I ever take any opportunity to meet with that great master. But, tell me, for I have never heard, how is it that Socrates went on this journey?

Plato: This will I gladly tell you, for I was with him when he decided to go on this travel. An acquaintance of Socrates' from some previous engagement invited our master to visit him in his home, far away, to the east. The man is king of a foreign land. And I think them a marvelous fortunate state to be ruled by a philosopher-king such as he.

Simmias: Yes? And is he really so thoughtful a man?

Plato: He is no equal to our own Socrates, but I know he is as willing, sometimes, to learn and receive conversation from our philosopher as I am.

Simmias: And I know that you do love him well. Pray tell me what took place.

Plato: I will relate it as I recall it:

We were walking to the marketplace, Socrates and I, as well as two others, Crito and Chaerephon. We were approached by a messenger coming from where we intended. The lovely boy was wearing the most fantastical livery, of oriental cut, with a square tunic hung with tassels of a light blue dye, the likes of which I had not seen. He said he had come expressly searching for one Socrates, whom he said he

believed himself to have found. At which Socrates began to question him, saying:

Socrates: And is a name for an object a description thereof in the absolute, or in the relative sense? That is to say, is a name useful to identify an object alone or only when the object is already known?

Plato: The boy, somewhat bewildered, replied with a description he had been given of Socrates, which made me wonder whether Homer were writing from Hades, so perfect and eloquent was it in the portrait of its subject. The boy proceeded to inform us that his lord, Solomon son of David and mighty king of Israel, would like to receive Socrates as a guest in his royal home in Jerusalem.

Simmias: I have heard of Solomon, son of David. In truth, he is so renowned for his wisdom that his name has even reached my ear.

Plato: Indeed, mine as well. And Socrates said that he knew him, too, because back in the days when Socrates had his thinkery, this man, newly risen to the throne of Israel, came to ask Socrates questions.

Simmias: I am not surprised to hear this.

Plato: So it was settled and Socrates went to visit with this king, accompanied by Crito and Chaerephon. I unfortunately, as you know, have had much business to take care of in Athens, lately, so I could not go with them. They return today, except that Crito was called back to Athens early, and with speed. I had the good fortune of speaking with him. He told me of the meeting between Socrates and King Solomon.

Simmias: Please tell me what they said.

Plato: I will tell you their conversation as was transmitted to me:

Solomon: I invited you to come to visit me, Socrates, because from the gift of God I have become renowned for my knowledge; kings and princes come from all lands to hear from me my wisdom. I wanted to

invite you in particular, as it was you who originally brought me to seek knowledge.

Socrates: I had heard tell of your supreme gift of wisdom and discernment. I am glad I came to visit you; I would like to learn from you.

Solomon: I think that I am the one to learn. You have already taught me much.

Socrates: It is not in my nature to teach, Solomon.

Solomon: But it is in my nature to acquire knowledge, whether or not you are otherwise a teacher.

Socrates: I am not sure I understand what you mean; may I ask you some questions about what you have said?

Solomon: Of course.

Socrates: You said I have taught you even though I am not a teacher. Is that correct?

Solomon: You said you were no teacher, not I.

Socrates: And do you take me for a teacher then?

Solomon: Yes.

Socrates: Let me ask you then, the cobbler, what is his art?

Solomon: Shoemaking.

Socrates: And what is his knowledge?

Solomon: Of how to make shoes, clothes for the feet of others.

Socrates: And the shipbuilder, what is his art?

Solomon: His art is building ships, vessels to carry others on the sea.

Socrates: And his knowledge?

Solomon: His knowledge, one would say, is the knowledge of how to build ships.

Socrates: Then, would you say, that every person with a trade has a corresponding art and corresponding body of knowledge, of which he is master?

Solomon: It would appear.

Socrates: And is the teacher a man with a trade?

Solomon: Surely he is.

Socrates: Then what may be said to be his particular art?

Solomon: By analogy, it should be teaching, imparting knowledge to others.

Socrates: Then, what may be his special knowledge?

Solomon: Of teaching, imparting knowledge.

Socrates: And what knowledge is it that he imparts?

Solomon: What do you mean?

Socrates: I mean, is the knowledge he imparts knowledge that he has, or that he does not have?

Solomon: That he has, of course.

Socrates: And we said that the knowledge he has is that of teaching. So he imparts knowledge of teaching? And one receives from the teacher knowledge of teaching?

Solomon: I suppose it must be so.

Socrates: And let me ask you this, when a cobbler makes shoes, and gives them to someone else, does the other become himself a cobbler?

Solomon: No.

Socrates: Nor does he gain whatever necessary to become a cobbler?

Solomon: No.

Socrates: And similarly with the ship-maker, a receiver of the ship does not become himself a shipbuilder, does he?

Solomon: No.

Socrates: Then the person who is taught by the teacher, does he himself become a teacher, by analogy?

Solomon: No.

Socrates: Then he does not gain the knowledge of teaching?

Solomon: He must not.

Socrates: Why then, this is impossible. Did we not say that must be what one gains from a teacher?

Solomon: Indeed, this is impossible. How can this be? Can teaching really be so futile an occupation for man to be called to under the sun?

Socrates: And do you say that you are a teacher?

Solomon: I am a king. Now to avoid being called a teacher, I will say that the wisdom I give out is in the form of justice.

Socrates: And what form of wisdom is that?

Solomon: Justice is wisdom in a court of law.

Socrates: I asked you not where it is found, but what it is.

Solomon: Justice is wisdom that decides between cases, which is the right and which is the wrong.

Socrates: Right for what and wrong for what?

Solomon: What do you mean? Surely a wise man who fears God may discern between the right and the wrong.

Socrates: Well, does not a cobbler decide between cases of leather, and decide which is right for a sandal and which is wrong? Is that the kind of right and wrong of which you speak?

Solomon: No. I understand your meaning. As the skillful cobbler picks the right tweed for the sole, the wise judge picks the right deed for the soul.

Socrates: So you discern which person and what action is righteous?

Solomon: Exactly. The judgement of the just discriminates between righteous and sinful.

Socrates: I am glad. If you can judge between cases, which is righteous, which is sinful, surely you can tell me in general what is righteousness.

Solomon: The righteous man is like gold, rare and glowing in the light.

Socrates: This does not clarify to my mind what is righteousness.

Solomon: The righteous man walks in the way of God, who is the judge of all.

Socrates: Which comes first, the judgement or the righteousness?

Solomon: What do you mean? Have we not said they are the same?

Socrates: I mean, does a judge finding justice in an act make the act righteous? Or was the act righteous before the judgement?

Solomon: The act was righteous before the judgement.

Socrates: Then the righteousness of the act causes the judge to find it righteous, not the other way around?

Solomon: That is how I see it.

Socrates: And I am sure you see it rightly, as you are the great discerner of Israel. Then answer me this: is a god a judge?

Solomon: God is the ultimate judge from whom all wisdom is derived. For He sees all, and His justice is sharp and accurate.

Socrates: Then, as this god is a judge, he favors those who are already righteous.

Solomon: Exactly so. The good man finds favor in the eyes of the Lord; the bad man God will deny.

Socrates: Then what you said earlier, that the righteous walk in the path of the gods, does not further describe what is righteous. For it is the righteousness that causes the favor of the godly judge. And I am still left asking what is the quality that makes something righteous, to the end that the gods will favor it?

Solomon: You are right. We have not found an answer. Can righteousness not be known? Is pursuit of virtue truly pursuit of wind?

Socrates: Surely, as the wise king, you may find the answer. If a subject came to you and asked: I do not want to incur the wrath and punishments of your justice, how shall I behave? You would answer him: you must behave righteously. Am I correct?

Solomon: Yes. That is what I would say. For the wicked man shall be overtaken by his wickedness, and the sinner shall have his sin redoubled upon him.

Socrates: Suppose he then asked you, how is it to behave righteously? How exactly should I act? How would you answer him?

Solomon: I would respond as follows:

My son, do not fall in with the wicked if they tempt you, and say:

Come join us, and set an ambush to shed innocent blood.

Rather, honor God, and show your devotion to Him.

Do not delay to do service to God or to your fellow.

Do not hasten to wrong him or deny God.

Take my advice; listen to your elders.

Love and enjoy your first wife;

Do not rush to embrace forbidden women.

Be not arrogant, and let not pride mar your face.

Calmness and moderation in drinking and eating will benefit the virtuous.

Socrates: Now suppose the man asks you: Is that all I need to do to be righteous and avoid reproach? Or are there other things a righteous man does?

Solomon: Of course there are other things, too. The wisdom of the righteous is broad, and replete with water is the riverbed of his intelligence.

Socrates: Then you still have not answered the question. You gave examples of what is righteous, not an explanation of what is righteousness, which is what I asked of you. How does a righteous man always act, and what act is always righteous?

Solomon: A righteous man does not sin.

Socrates: Notice that I did not ask you what a righteous man does not do, but what he does. However, I will take your meaning to be that

to be righteous, a man need only avoid sin, and any sin is a negation to righteousness. Is that your meaning?

Solomon: Indeed, Socrates.

Socrates: Now I must ask you, what does it mean to sin? And do not tell me: a sinner does not perform righteous acts. For then we will have progressed not at all.

Solomon: To sin is to transgress against what God has commanded. And so I could have said a righteous man fears and obeys God.

Socrates: Did we not say that the righteous is what the divine favors, not that what the divine favors is the righteous?

Solomon: Yes, but that was only God's capacity as a judge. God is also a lawmaker.

Socrates: To return to the questioning citizen, suppose he now asks you how he is to know what God wants him to do. How would you answer?

Solomon: It is all written down. That is the law of the Pentateuch. The life that follows that law is lengthened. The righteous man lives by Torah.

Socrates: It has everything that is virtue, or is it as you told me before, with many examples of virtue, but there may be other virtuous acts? No new case may arise, unanswered in the written law?

Solomon: I had thought so, surely. But can it really be that there is no progress in time, to bring new problems? Is all constant? No, for new questions come and God answers them.

Socrates: And so any decision in his life, with which the nervous citizen can be faced, the book will tell him which choice is virtuous and which is sinful?

Solomon: Yes.

Socrates: And why do people do evil?

Solomon: A fool does not heed his father's advice; he goes the path of the wicked.

To tell lies, to incite a quarrel, to shed innocent blood.

Socrates: Yes, but do not all people do what they think will bring them advantage?

Solomon: Yes.

Socrates: And does not the god of whom you spoke tell the wicked man that he does evil?

Solomon: Yes, through the law.

Socrates: And will the wicked man be punished for breaking the law?

Solomon: Yes. For whoever sets a trap for the innocent will himself be trapped.

The evil man will be hounded by his sins.

And whoever does wrong will not escape his shame.

The wicked will be filled with wrong.

Socrates: So it benefits man to do right and not to do evil?

Solomon: Yes. The righteous man will prosper in his virtue,

While the sinner's evil will bring him no benefit.

The name of the good will be for glory,

While the name of the sinner will be reviled with spite.

Socrates: Then I don't understand how everything you said may be true all at once. Your statements deny each other.

Solomon: Yes. And I see that all must be absurdity.

Socrates: For why would any man do evil, if it is to his advantage to do the opposite, to do right? Since you said that doing good brings advantage and man does that which brings to him advantage.

Solomon: It is all in vain! Though one seeks understanding, it will elude him.

But I return, and see all the suffering under the sun. And I try to study and learn of the conduct on this Earth. For why should man act against his Lord? And why should he bring suffering and pain and destruction to himself?

And I saw that this is absurdity.

But I saw that it is because they do not know they do evil, that they stray from the path of the righteous.

Socrates: But you told me that what is righteous and what is sinful is clarified in the book of laws.

Solomon: The wicked man does not understand the laws. He is as a wild animal. He rushes to do evil and does not know it will be his downfall.

Socrates: That is why they do evil? Because they lack understanding?

Solomon: Yes. It is the wise who hear the advice of their elders and fear God.

Fools are blind and know not which way is right.

The sinner knows not what will destroy him.

A thoughtful man will learn to walk rightly in the way of the just.

To be a good man is to learn wisdom,

To grasp discernment of judgement,

To fill oneself with knowledge and directness of thought.

Wisdom is as a fair maiden and pure,

Calling out to all the men in the street.

It is good to hear her voice, and to follow her.

She calls out to them, and she says:

O men, I beckon you follow me,

For I walk as a companion to the Lord;

Listen to me, and learn intelligence,

Hearken to me, and learn judgement.

All my words are truth,
All my lessons virtue,
And not one word I speak is crooked or corrupting.
I face away from evil, destructive ways,
And I lead only toward goodness and prudence.
I, Wisdom, will teach you what is right and what is wrong.
My counsel is the counsel of God.
And all who follow me and embrace me know righteousness.
I, Wisdom, am virtue.

Socrates: Ah. This is new. He is righteous who is knowledgeable enough to know what is right. I believe you. Wisdom is virtue. You are indeed a wise man.

Solomon: You say this is new? But it has already been known forever. What you call novel is actually ancient and there is nothing new under the sun.

Socrates: I have another question to put to you: Is the divine lawmaker of whom you spoke good?

Solomon: Of course. He made "good."

Socrates: And is he all parts of good or just some?

Solomon: Do not question God, for he is your Creator.

Socrates: And tell me something else: do good rulers speak well enough to stir a people and convince them?

Solomon: Certainly. The words of the wise move nations. I have given my share of speeches and public prayers.

Socrates: And in so speaking effectively and convincingly a good ruler is able to convey what laws his subjects should obey? And the better a ruler, the clearer he is able to convey those laws?

Solomon: Certainly.

Socrates: And is the god and divine lawmaker of whom you speak a ruler?

Solomon: Yes.

Socrates: Then by your previous statement, he should be a good ruler.

Solomon: Superlatively so.

Socrates: He is the greatest ruler?

Solomon: Of course.

Socrates: Then he should be perfect in his clarity of explaining his laws?

Solomon: Yes. He is.

Socrates: But, then, this contradicts what we agreed on earlier, for why should anyone not understand his laws? And why should any fool be a sinner?

Solomon: No! then we do not know what is justice. We sought understanding of righteousness, and behold! This too is vanity. Knowledge is deceptive, and what one thinks one knows, one actually knows to be false.

Socrates: So must not these gods be multiple, for everything you said to be true? The lawmaker cannot be the same as the judge, and neither may be the same as the ruler. Are there not many divinities, rather than one inconsistent deity?

Solomon: What? I grow tempted to explore that possibility, and to follow all the twisted, incorrigible ways men and women walk under the sun, to find which may be right. For to seek knowledge is to chase wind, and thence is man driven in his pursuit of wisdom, who calls as an attractive, deceiving woman to him in the streets.

Socrates: And how may the gods bring justice to the Earth? For you said that was their portion.

Solomon: God punishes man for his folly, and the sinner will suffer for his sin.

Socrates: So the fate of all the righteous is a happy one, and every sinner has an unhappy life?

Solomon: No! For I have seen a vanity on this earth, that the righteous man is paid back as a sinner, and a sinful man is paid back as one righteous. All this is vanity; there is no sense to life under the sun.

Socrates: I am still not clear. How do the gods bring justice to the earth?

Solomon: They – no – God tells us the laws, how to behave. But no, that was where we began and it is impossible. All is vain!

Socrates: Ah, you say the gods tell us how to behave. How else could it be? You must be right; there is no other way, than that they must tell us in every case what is right. I must start listening for that voice of divinity. For while we are searching for a true understanding of righteousness, we must know how to behave, and knowledge of virtue is still a search, to which none have provided me the answer.

Solomon: And I returned, and saw that for all my wisdom, I know nothing of the ways of God and virtue. And I must go and try all things to see which is the best way for man to act under the sun.

Socrates: Yes, I must myself take my leave of you, for I never like to be too long away from the great polis of Athens, and I intend to wait for that voice there. You have convinced me that I will hear from a divine voice, and I will go seek it. Good bye, King Solomon. Thank you.

Solomon: Fare you well indeed, for all will return to their source. And cycle back again. All is vanity!

Part III:
The Gatherer and the Philosopher
after Ecclesiastes and Xenophon's Memoirs

While Socrates was known to be a man loyal to the polis and a fervent defender of Athens, militarily as well as rhetorically, politically, religiously, morally and any other way that he could, he did have contact with foreigners. One such was the king of the land of Israel, Solomon, son of David, as he was called. I heard of a visit Socrates took to see that king in his land. That encounter has previously been recorded by others and need not be repeated here. Another meeting between the two took place while Socrates was imprisoned, at the end of his life. I was unfortunate enough to be myself abroad at the time, but I was told exactly how it happened from a reliable source. It may well be that this event has been recorded too, but it is an excellent example for how he was an example to all who met him to be godly and pure in all the ways the judges of Athens account him as not being. I hold it so highly in the canon of tales about Socrates that I include it here, in my writing.

When Solomon came to visit, Socrates accepted him graciously in his cell. Solomon had been told of Socrates' trial and sentencing and expressed his sympathy and confusion thus:

You are a man who pursued with zeal to understand the happenings of the soul of man. What is truth? you asked, and what is virtue? And as much as you sought, in your way, you did not find. This is vanity and frustration. And you live in a city with no king to rule over it. All its princes rule together, and all but its slaves are princes. And I know, too, that the heart of a crowd will be moved by any wind, and the larger the number of souls, the weaker the stability. For a tall stack of bricks is easily knocked this way or that, but one brick alone will not lean and cannot fall far from its base. And they took you, a scholar, these multitudinous rulers of the city, and they convicted you of leading the children of the city astray into the pursuit of knowledge, and they have jailed you to kill you. And I know that the pursuit of knowledge is a vanity and a pursuit of wind. He who seeks wisdom will be feared and not respected for his thought and he who seeks to give knowledge will be repaid with spite. And yet you accept your fate patiently and solidly continue in your ways. And you follow them, and make it your choice to die.

How can you know that what you are doing is right? For man knows not what is right and what is wrong. And though you have sought, with wisdom, to find the meaning of virtue and the understanding of righteousness, no answer is to be found. I have tried, with all the wisdom under the sun, and all such pursuits are vanity and frustration of the spirit. So how can you proceed with conviction?

Socrates answered simply, as he answered all who knew him, that his divinity had not allowed him any other course.

Solomon asked with awe: there is a divinity who speaks to you?

It always gives me pleasure to recall the humbleness of Socrates and his personal modesty presents itself whenever those who knew him recount to each other our remembrances of him. In this case, he replied: Of course, King Solomon, and it was you who found for me that divinity, or I should say, taught me to listen to it.

At this Solomon was surprised and said: But you must have proved me wrong. You proved everything I said to be inconsistent. I tried to explain to you what are virtue and justice and righteousness, and you asked me to define them and showed me that I had no understanding of them. Fools are blind, but even the wise cannot see God's righteousness.

Then Socrates: Yes, we cannot fully grasp it, but we must act as is right. And my daimon, my divinity warns me from the wrong things to do. You told me that the gods are the instructors in what is righteous and what is sinful. You were right in that. And the gods talk to me. And I always listen to them, so my life has been pure and unblemished by any sin. So I can die secure in the knowledge that I will be remembered always as having done nothing wrong in my life.

And Solomon grew irritable, and, pacing, continued: And because knowledge of wisdom was beyond me, I turned my attention from study to enjoyment, and I tried all the pleasures of existence. I tempted my body with wine, and tried to find joy therein. I accumulated wealth, the treasures of nations and the property of kings, more than all who were before me under the sun. And I knew that all this, too, was vanity. And so was I drawn to women of foreign lands. I built myself palaces only for my wives and concubines. I accumulated more than all who came before me. And this was a great vanity. For he who has wealth and property, they

will not sate him. And he who has nothing hungers not more than he who has accumulated all that a man could desire. And as the pauper thirsts and starves, so the wealthy one will not be satisfied, though he has much to be coveted. This is a vanity I witnessed under the sun. And when I tried to seek knowledge, I knew that it was a rotten labor for man to be called to under the sun. For though the wise man seeks wisdom, he will not find it. And some other man will come after him and show him to be wrong. And I hated all my labor that I labored under the sun, for it was all in vain, and no one may know its true meaning. And the mind will not be satisfied.

And so I thought to satisfy my body, and I did not deny it of any pleasure nor turn it away from anything it desired, to find what is best for the sons of men to do with the time given them under the sun. For is it not good that man eat and drink and find pleasure in his life under the sun?

Socrates instructed Solomon as I have heard him instruct many. No, no. It is not good to do these things. It is good to be frugal and stoic. It is good to deny oneself the worldly desires of the body. That is what I do. It is good to be temperate and to refuse, rather than be a slave of, the corporeal and carnal appetites.

Solomon asked, annoyed: How do you know? How do you know what is virtue? Man cannot fathom the ways of God.

Socrates calmly answered him: Is it not known that being free is better than being enslaved? And who is more a slave than who is a slave to his own passions?

Solomon responded: And I did follow my passions. But look, here you are, and you are imprisoned to be executed, so how can you say your choice was the best? You, too, as a fool, are enslaved and imprisoned.

Socrates said: I am only enslaved if you consider death to be a bad fate. But fools are those who fear the death of the body. Do you think it is right that I try to avoid my sentencing?

When Solomon indicated the affirmative, Socrates demanded: Show me the man whom death will leave untouched. I cannot avoid that fate. To work to delay death would be infantile and weak and demonstrate an animal's ignorance and lack of perception. It would be foolish to try to prevent death.

Solomon let out an exclamation, and said: You are correct. Life is a futility, for it will ever be overcome by death. The fate of all

is the same. What is the difference between the sage and the fool, between the wealthy man and the poor? All go to the same place, all end in the dirt. All this is vanity and great frustration of the spirit. For what good does it do a man to labor and to accumulate wealth and knowledge and experiences, if it is all for naught and he will end his life with nothing? As the sun returns to the horizon, so will he return to the ground. And all his life is forfeit and pursuit of wind. The heels of his son are to blot him out, once he has ended in dust. There is no gain in all the toil a man toils under the sun! Nothing will benefit him in the end. He will sow, but there is nothing to reap. And so, too, does an animal end in death and void. I see that man is the same as beast, for their fates are the same. And how is it that the wise should die like the fool? What worth, then, is wisdom? I hate the burden of existence, for all the nonsense and futility under the sun.

Socrates reiterated his assurance that as he was in all ways good and pure, and did no wrong in his life, he knew that his person will be remembered always as having been perfect, irreproachable.

Solomon angered and said: You don't know that. Man cannot know what will be, for how it shall be, who will tell him?

Then Socrates: My divinity tells me all I need to know about what will be. The divinity informs me how I must behave.

And Solomon stopped and said: I return, and I remember now that God spoke to me, before I spoke to you. And he made a pact with me, and told me how I must behave. And I was to follow the law! And I did not! I did not follow His word.

And Solomon became greatly ill at heart, and perturbed, and enraged, and fumed thus: I was an idiot, and as a deaf man I heard the word of God, and as an insolent child I responded to it. For I was not satisfied with the knowledge that He gave me. For you showed me that it was vanity. And so I turned to seeking pleasure. And in my seeking of pleasure I turned to the exotic women of alien nations. And I knew all the women of many lands. And knowledge of women is knowledge of evil. And a woman is a trap for the soul. For by them was I led away from God. They led me to build temples to their many pagan gods. And you had told me there must be many. They led me to transgress all moral bounds.

And now I am to be punished, by the great and ultimate Judge. I forgot Him; see how forgetful is man? And so thus I am myself to be forgotten. And all the good of my life and future fortune

of my name is to fall to my father's credit and my son's lot. And all the evil of my life and punishment of my name is to be held away from me and to fall to my sons and to the ensuing generation. And thus will my name, for good and for evil, be stripped away from time and fall to other men who will come after me. And I shall be forgotten.

Like you, whose land is ruled by the mob, I am sentenced by God to be imprisoned in my fate of death and loss of my kingdom. And I see that both our fates are one, for we are both to die and to be forgotten. Our names shall not be remembered as the blessings and the curses of the labors of our lives are passed on to the next generations. And why should those who are to come after us inherit the work of our hands, the glory, the damnation? All is to pass into dust and we two are to be forgotten as have been forgotten those who came before us and those who are to come after us will also be forgotten. And all the good in a man's life is forgotten for the bad. And also the bad shall pass on to his son, and he shall be wholly forgotten. Bitter and painful to me is the nature of existence under the sun.

Exhausted, in his old age, by his words, Solomon quietly and mournfully asked: The end of the matter, after all we heard?

Then both men, I am led to believe, faced their respective fates and uttered the same words in response, Socrates in peace, and Solomon in despair: Fear God; keep His law.

In these two men was all of man.

Yavni Bar-Yam is a writer, puppeteer and teaching artist currently living in Jerusalem. His plays have been produced in New York and Boston, and he has performed devised, collaborative works all around the world. He serves as Artist-in-Residence on the faculty of the Brandeis Collegiate Institute in LA, and served in 2016 as the Timbrel Artist-in-Residence at the National Havurah Committee Summer Institute. He is expecting to receive a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Bar Ilan University in 2018.