

An Intention for The Naked Path of Prophet Series

This series has interest in the questions of the various scholarly theories about the origins and redactions (assembling + editing) of the Bible...

but this series will not try to solve those riddles.

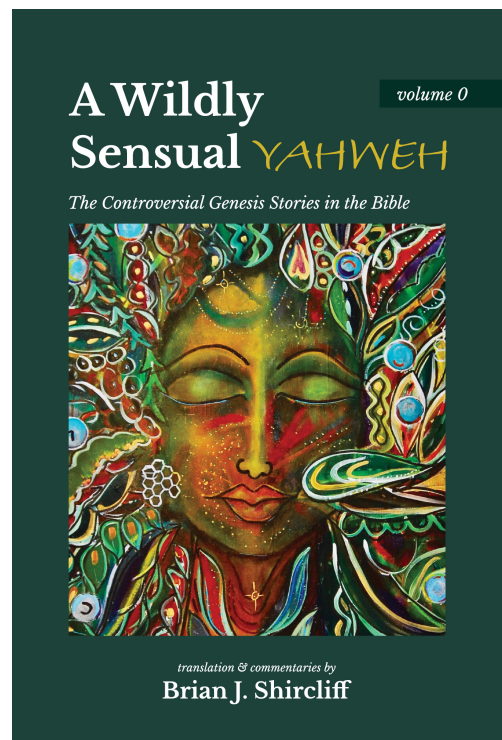
Biblical scholar Thomas Römer's books offer excellent summaries of many of the most current scholarly theories about the origins of the Hebrew scriptures, especially *The Invention of God* and the *L'Ancien Testament*; biblical scholars of the Jesus Seminar have done much to help unravel the Christian traditions' layers to reveal the ecstatic roots of Jesus and the world-resounding message of Paul about this peasant Jesus and what God did for him. Maybe you've checked out *The Gospel of Jesus* by Robert W. Funk, Arthur J. Dewey & the Jesus Seminar or *The Authentic Letters of Paul* by Arthur J. Dewey, Roy W. Hoover, Lane C. McGaughy, & Daryl Schmidt?

Inspired by these and other scholars' excavations of the Bible, this *Naked Path of Prophet* series aims:

first, to reveal more of the cleverness of the Hebrew puns in the biblical texts and then bring forward this cleverly-styled poetry into a clearer English translation

...so that more people can identify such style running through much of the Bible and, if they find such style helpful for our 21st century world, then bring it forward in new ways;

and second, to reveal a significant idea for our time and all time, which continually gets passed over by scholars and by religious leaders and church/synagogue faithful alike, namely, that the Bible being a collection of many differing imaginations and writers could be divided into two competing camps: **the hierarchically-minded** and **the circularly-inspired**



...so that more people can identify which imagination is used within their own family, classroom, workplace, religion, and governments and that, by knowing the differences between circular-imagination and hierarchical-imagination, have the ability to choose which is most life-giving and helpful in any moment.

Hierarchical Imagination

A hierarchy has a human-leader over various strata of minor leaders over various sub-classes of humans. A hierarchy is a system where some humans have more value and more power than others. Often there is even a non-class of humans... untouchables who have no value or enslaved-people of all sorts, sex-slaves of all genders or eunuchs or maid-slaves or wet-nurses, each of whom might be valued/valuable but having very few if any rights to their own human personhood. This is what hierarchies do – they sort and place people based on their value to the system that those with power create and those without power accept until revolution boils over and there is a paradigm shift with some people losing and/or gaining power and privilege within the new hierarchical system...unless an entirely different and more circularly-minded system is chosen.

The hierarchical imagination often uses a podium from which one person addresses the masses who follow. There is little conversation in such a system. The speaker stands over and above the followers who hear and obey. Perhaps the followers take issue with some of the speaker's announcements so the followers find ways to safely communicate their disagreements through channels long after the speech...often passive-aggressively because it's the only safe way to communicate in such a system. The speaker/leader then either takes those communications into account or delivers another speech that clamps down even more on the communicators or changes the system entirely so that the system becomes more circular than before and people have more influence in decision-making. In a hierarchical system, it is impossible to commune with the leader who ranks above all unless there is revolution or unless the top-dog leader changes the rules of the system to make the system more circular. But even then, the people that top-dog leader rules might not want or might not accept a more circularly-inspired system.

The hierarchical imagination plays out in royal-slave systems, in despot-follower systems, in guru-follower systems, in organized religion's leader-follower systems, in celebrity-follower systems...each and all of any era.

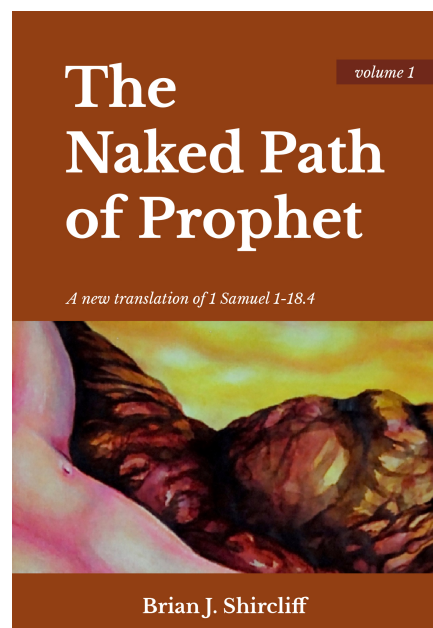
With the hierarchical imagination, people can and often do awful things to each other. The hierarchical system depends on it. And when people know no other option besides the hierarchical system, desperation can settle in quickly...tragic motivation to want to climb a rung higher and then another rung higher...moves that see people in the way or people down below as enemies or problems to solve. With a hierarchical-mindset, it's easy to point out that a person is evil or bad or wrong.

Someone from a circularly-inspired imagination realizes instead that people are not bad or wrong but instead are stuck inside hierarchical-systems, ways of imagining that have limited who they are and all that is.

All too often, hierarchical-imagination limits one's map of the Infinite, what we're all too often tempted to call 'reality.' As we keep growing and have more experiences in life, 'reality' keeps changing doesn't it?

Circularly-Inspired Imagination

A circularly-inspired imagination is much different, of course. With this imagination, each human recognizes the equal-value of all humans and sometimes even of all life, of every living thing. Such a circular imagination perfects itself as an entirely holistic imagination...where participants recognize on their own – often through very different experiences – that there is no separation between creatures...where it is readily recognized that we all exist within a larger and highly interdependent whole, as a Universe, the One-Verse, the Infinite, THE ALL. That is to say, we all exist in 'God.' When we recognize we participate in such a Whole, it's a lot easier to live more harmoniously with every creature.



The circular imagination often invites everyone to sit in a circle, with no one person any higher or more valued than another. A circle breeds a sense of equality, a sense that we're all in this together and that we all will be needed in some diverse and equally-valued way to move forward in our shared life together on the planet. Could there be a leader or moderator or convener of the circle? Of course. But such leaders of a circle try to be very mindful not to interject their opinions or will upon the circle; instead, circularly-inspired leaders ensure that all

ideas are heard, that everyone who desires to speak gets to speak, that those with information share what they know and invite ideas and people to evaluate information openly and wisely and to grow information's usefulness through deliberation and discernment. There is equal access to knowledge and opportunity in a circular system, even if knowledge and opportunity are not 'free,' even if they must be merited through effort and growth.

Circularly-inspired imaginers know well that some experience inspired them to a larger vision of THE ALL. Someone with a circularly-inspired imagination knows that an experience can free anyone stuck in a hierarchical-imagination – an experience as simple as a breath or a gasp from an ecstatic's clever rap or wild story or a deep look into someone's eyes. A circular-imaginer knows too that the awakening that comes from an experience must happen within each person and unfold within each person in that person's own time and in its own original way. It's not possible to make someone know THE ALL. Such an awakening erupts out of nowhere – is ecstatic in that way. Mentoring relationships can help, of course, especially when a mentor invites the mentee to spend some time in some activity, some study, so that some awakening might happen in the mentee's own time. But sensible mentors know that what awakened them might not be the same thing that will awaken their mentees. Indeed, no two experiences are ever the same, right?

Beyond these mentor-mentee relationships, there have been glimpses of the circular imagination being lived out today or in times past, though they all too often either get snuffed out by hierarchs or the hierarchically-minded or devolve to a hierarchical-system because some who once perceived something of THE ALL can no longer stay with that vision and imagination, for whatever reason.

Democracy?

Perhaps you're wondering where democracy rests between these camps?

Democracy – or rule by the people – attempts to break free from the hierarchical imagination with democracy's more circular attempts to allow all voices – at least those of a certain age – to be heard and with every person of age getting an equal vote. But all too often democracy devolves into hierarchy when celebrity-presidents of every party – and even the parties themselves – are followed at every word by their followers, all too often with little discernment as to the value or wisdom of what the leader or party are offering. In smaller groups in a more local place, of course,

more circular-democracies can thrive. In larger groups, it can be quite difficult... unless there is a common appreciation for what ultimately gives life.

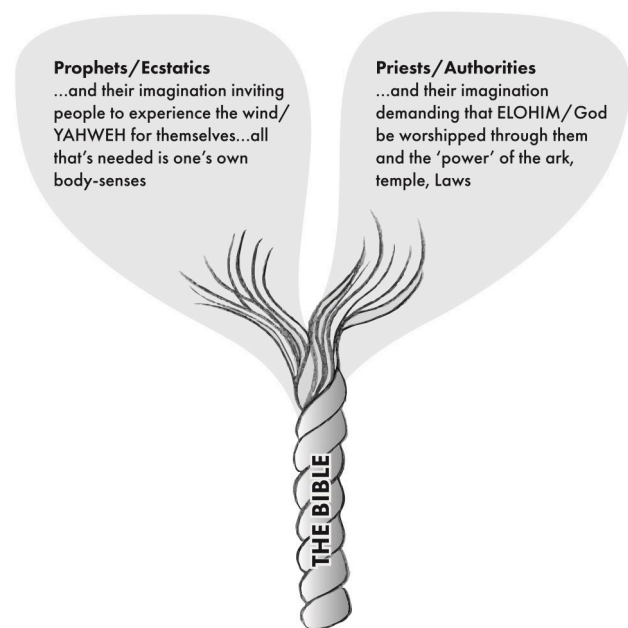
Some roots of circularly-inspired imaginations

So...hopefully you're becoming curious about how a circular imagination actually works or could be helpful in the 21st century, and how it has been lived out in past eras. Well, my friends, that's the very heart of the intention of *The Naked Path of Prophet* series with its devoted interest in YAHWEH's wild and sexy wind. All are called by the wind/breath, we've been reminded by the wise ones through the centuries, few choose themselves or allow themselves to notice the sensations of the wind.

Jesus was interested in the circular imagination...his authentic parables and wisdom sayings and table-fellowship reveal that...but he lost first to the hierarchs of the religion of his region's day and then after his death to those wanting a more hierarchically-minded church.

Paul was interested in the circular imagination...the very rhetoric of his authentic letters to early Jesus-interested communities call for a more circular approach to governance where God rules and all people are valued equally below and because of God who raised up even a peasant (Jesus)...but Paul lost first to Rome and then to Peter's hierarchically-minded camp which projected Rome's sense of order and destruction onto Jesus-interested communities, and still does.

And where and how did Jesus and Paul get interested in a more circular imagination?



The priests/authorities twined the Bible together through the millennia...and while it's a gift to us all that they included the prophets' stories and poems, the way the Bible is assembled today usually has us looking at the Bible through a priestly-lens...the very lens that the prophets through the millennia were trying to up-end.

The priests/authorities edited the prophets' work, as we can see quite clearly in J's stories in Genesis.

The rivalry and family-quarrel between the prophets/ecstatics and the priests/authorities is the entire purpose for the writing of the Bible...each camp trying to sway the other.

Perhaps they were inspired by the wandering ecstasies and their little quips of poetry, clever episodes of story, and exceedingly bizarre actions for, perhaps, nearly 1000 years before Jesus and Paul ever set foot on Earth. Those little ecstatic bits were becoming the Bible, at least the first half of it. It's a circular-style and circularly-minded imagination that seeps out in the poems of the likes of Amos and the three Isaiahs and Jeremiah and more, in the stories of 1 & 2 Samuel and much of 1 & 2 Kings, in large portions of Genesis once called J/Yahwist because of these storytellers' penchant for calling the divine 'YAHWEH.'

Rather interestingly, this circular-style and imagination seems to seep out during the most difficult and oppressive times in history both before Jesus' time, during Jesus' lifetime, and long after.

Perhaps you've caught a wisp of It?

Perhaps you've had an experience of YAHWEH brought on by Its life-giving, inspiring wind?

What's most concerning to me is that many people I know well cannot distinguish a hierarchically-minded imagination from a circularly-minded imagination. Friends who recently left church-communities led by a man who proclaimed his status as a hierarch jumped right into another church-community or even an entirely different religious tradition, both being led by friendlier hierarchs of the same hierarchical system/imagination that still aggravates them, though they're not entirely clear why. The very person upon whom their church was founded – Jesus – was up-ending the hierarchical imagination of his day with his clever parables and wisdom sayings, and with being present and loving with those he is said to share meals/time...women, tax collectors, children, the ill...people who were not regarded as people in Jesus' time. Sadly, so few of my own Christian tradition cannot discern the differences between what Jesus was saying and doing and what Peter or Pilate or the Sanhedrin-leaders were saying and doing. Sadly too, this inability to discern hierarchical-mindedness from circular-mindedness happens in every religious tradition, not just my own Christianity.



I put up with the hierarchical system too...for far, far too long...hoping it would change and thinking my queer outside-on-the-edges life/teaching would change things someday and somehow...until I realized my staying within my low place in the hierarchy (lay religious educator) was still giving power and credence to the hierarchical system. Finally I realized I had to swim away from my position and even my local parish to preserve my own life.

So I have compassion for my church-going and religious friends of all traditions – and yet I hope they/we too swim away from the shipwrecks of all hierarchical imaginations before it's too late to even notice what's in the breeze and always has been – life! Such a realization of the wind of life is precisely what welcomed every awakening that gave birth to a religion in the first place...and all too often just a short time later the circular, spiral-rich experience concretized in messy hierarchies that stifle the original experience that was so rich and life-giving and able to be accessed by anyone living on the planet. Such access to that circular, spiral-rich experience is always available...for anyone who breathes and can sense such breath.

Organized religion of any sort cannot bear the circular imagination that must wait on YAHWEH alone – the very breeze of life – and not anyone directing or liturgizing, not anyone creating formulas or potions or laws or concert-sets to cull their divinities to act.

As we'll soon discover, the ecstatic/prophetic imagination of the Bible's prophets does indeed call on YAHWEH to act...but it's the very experience of sitting, breathing, contemplating, perhaps even spitting just-created-in-the-moment stylish rhymes and rhythms and stories or gasping or laughing with them, and perhaps even as simple as uttering 'YAHWEH' that stirs the breeze to act. When you open your mouth or nostrils, in pours that wildness of YAHWEH. Dare you let YAHWEH have its sexy, ecstasy-inducing way with you?

In a world undergoing such vast changes from day to day, in a world where the old orders no longer satisfy, might we have the courage today to play with such an open, circular style? Might we do so because we've had an ecstatic experience that makes us suspicious of the dangerous hierarchical systems of today and yesteryear? Might we do so because we want to expand such an ecstatic style and discover if it has something new to offer human life on the planet? Or just because it's fun and feels good, in YAHWEH's surprising ways?

No matter –

play.

Play is the very style of YAHWEH as these circular-styled biblical texts mentioned above point out again and again...after all, within a circle, we can be pleasantly surprised together, we can see deeply into each other's eyes, hear more clearly each other's sounds and make meaning from them, taste the possibilities of life's abundance together, smell each other's scents that drift to us in the breeze, touch gently and lovingly the open hands of one another...

circle around! let the breeze blow! play! open yourself to a refreshing surprise!

Brian J. Shircliff
September 2022



The Naked Path of Prophet series, including volume 0 *A Wildly Sensual YAHWEH*, is available through vitalitybuzz.org or ask for them through your favorite online or brick-and-mortar bookseller.