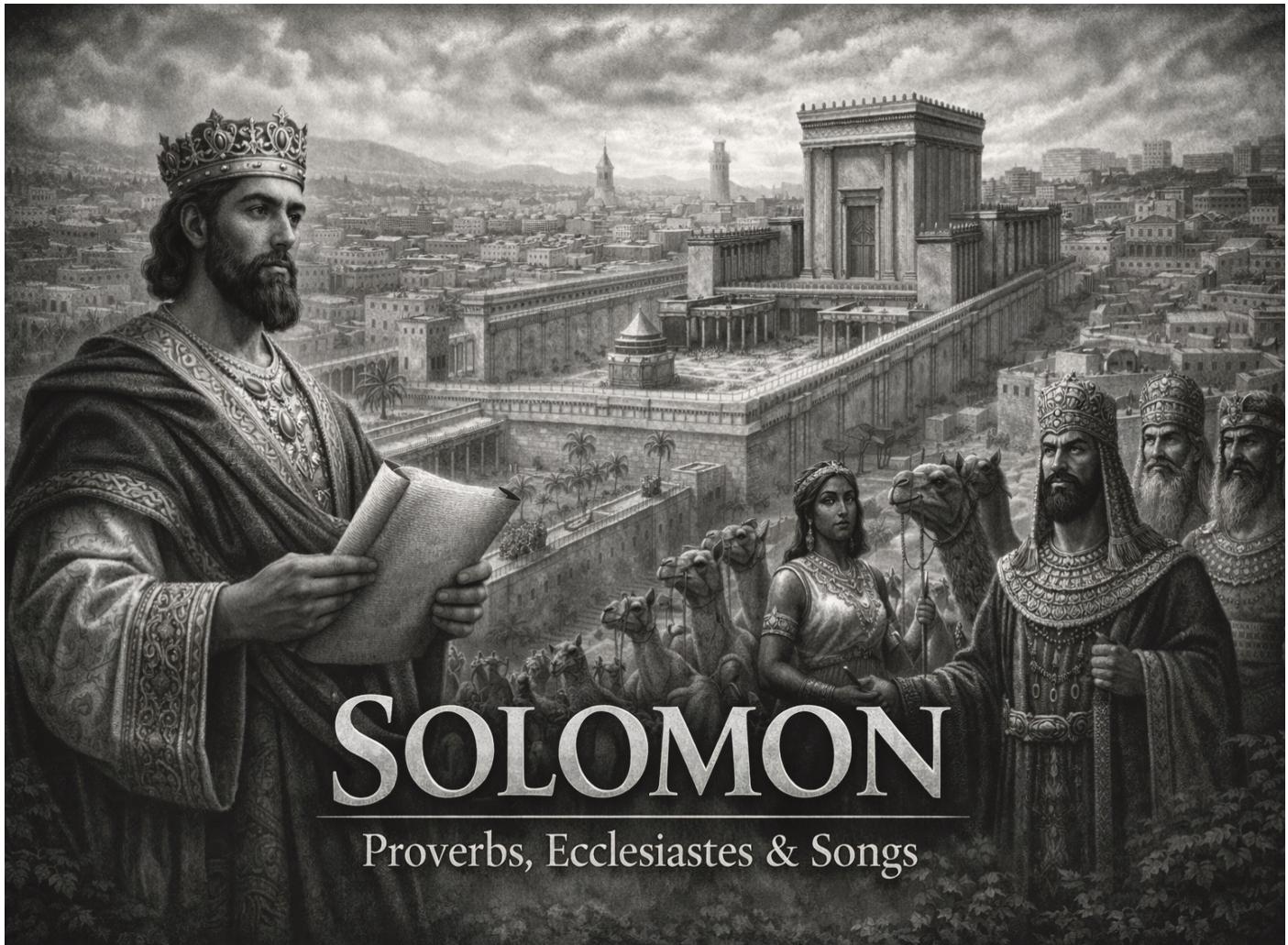


SOLOMON

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes & Songs



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The Wisdom of Alahim Through King Solomon

These are the wise sayings of Solomon, David's son, Israel's King - Written down so we'll know how to live well and right, to understand what life means and where it's going. It's a behavioural manual for living, for learning what's right and just and fair; To teach the inexperienced the ropes and give our young people a grasp on reality. There's something here also for seasoned men and women, still much for the experienced to learn - Fresh wisdom to dig-up and think upon, the rhymes and reasons of wise men and women....

1 KINGS 4:29-34

"Alahim gave Solomon wisdom - the deepest of understanding and the largest of hearts. There was nothing beyond him, nothing he couldn't handle. Solomon's wisdom outclassed all the boasted wisdom of wise men of the East, outshone the famous wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone ... He became famous among all the surrounding nations. He created 3,000 proverbs; his songs added up to 1,005. He knew all about plants, from the huge cedar that grows in Lebanon to the tiny hyssop that grows in the cracks of a wall. He understood everything about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Sent by kings from all over the earth who had heard of his reputation, people came from far and near to listen to the wisdom of Solomon".

ECCLESIASTES 12:9-10

"The Final Word: Besides being wise himself, the Quester (Solomon) also taught others knowledge. He weighed, examined, and arranged many proverbs. The Quester did his best to find the right words and write the plain truth".

EZEKIEL 16:44-45

"Everyone who likes to use proverbs will use this one: "Like mother, like daughter." You're the daughter of your mother, who couldn't stand her husband and children. And you're a true sister of your sisters, who couldn't stand their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite".

2 PETER 2:20-22

"If they've escaped from the slum of sin by experiencing our Master and Deliverer, Yahusha Messiah, and then slid back into that same old life again, they're worse than if they had never left. Better not to have started out on the straight road to Alahim than to start out and then turn back, spitting on the experience and the righteous command. They prove the point of the proverbs, "A dog goes back to its own vomit" and "A washed pig heads straight back to the mud."

PROVERBS 1

A Manual for Living

1-6 These are the wise sayings of Solomon, David's son, Israel's king—Written down so we'll know how to live well and right, to understand what life means and where it's going; A manual for living, for learning what's right and just and fair; To teach the inexperienced the ropes and give our young people a grasp on reality. There's something here also for seasoned men and women, still a thing or two for the experienced to learn—Fresh wisdom to probe and penetrate, the rhymes and reasons of wise men and women.

Start with Alahim

7 Start with Alahim—the first step in learning is bowing down to Alahim; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning.

8-19 Pay close attention, friend, to what your father tells you; never forget what you learned at your mother's knee. Wear their counsel like a winning crown, like rings on your fingers. Dear friend, if bad companions tempt you, don't go along with them. If they say—"Let's go out and raise some hell. Let's beat up some old man, mug some old woman. Let's pick them clean and get them ready for their funerals. We'll load up on top-quality loot. We'll haul it home by the truckload. Join us for the time of your life! With us, it's share and share alike!"—Oh, friend, don't give them a second look; don't listen to them for a minute. They're racing to a very bad end, hurrying to ruin everything they lay hands on. Nobody robs a bank with everyone watching, Yet that's what these people are doing—they're doing themselves in. When you grab all you can get, that's what happens: the more you get, the less you are.

Lady Wisdom

20-21 Lady Wisdom goes out in the street and shouts. At the town center she makes her speech. In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand. At the busiest corner she calls out:

22-24 "Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance? Cynics! How long will you feed your cynicism? Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn? About face! I can revise your life. Look, I'm ready to pour out my spirit on you; I'm ready to tell you all I know. As it is, I've called, but you've

turned a deaf ear; I've reached out to you, but you've ignored me.

25-28 "Since you laugh at my counsel and make a joke of my advice, How can I take you seriously? I'll turn the tables and joke about your troubles! What if the roof falls in, and your whole life goes to pieces? What if catastrophe strikes and there's nothing to show for your life but rubble and ashes? You'll need me then. You'll call for me, but don't expect an answer. No matter how hard you look, you won't find me.

29-33 "Because you hated Knowledge and had nothing to do with the Fear-of-Alahim, Because you wouldn't take my advice and brushed aside all my offers to train you, Well, you've made your bed—now lie in it; you wanted your own way—now, how do you like it? Don't you see what happens, you simpletons, you dumb-asses? Carelessness kills; complacency is murder. First pay attention to me, and then relax. Now you can take it easy—you're in good hands."

2

Make Insight Your Priority

1-5 Good friend, take to heart what I'm telling you; collect my counsels and guard them with your life. Tune your ears to the world of Wisdom; set your heart on a life of Understanding. That's right—if you make Insight your priority, and won't take no for an answer, Searching for it like a prospector panning for gold, like an adventurer on a treasure hunt, Believe me, before you know it Fear-of-Alahim will be yours; you'll have come upon the Knowledge of Alahim.

6-8 And here's why: Alahim gives out Wisdom free, is plainspoken in Knowledge and Understanding. He's a rich mine of Common Sense for those who live well, a personal bodyguard to the candid and sincere. He keeps his eye on all who live honestly, and pays special attention to his loyally committed ones.

9-15 So now you can pick out what's true and fair, find all the good trails! Lady Wisdom will be your close friend, and Brother Knowledge your pleasant companion. Good Sense will scout ahead for danger, Insight will keep an eye out for you.

They'll keep you from making wrong turns, or following the bad directions Of those who are lost themselves and can't tell a trail from a tumbleweed, These losers who make a game of evil and throw parties to celebrate perversity, Traveling paths that go nowhere, wandering in a maze of detours and dead ends.

16-19 Wise friends will rescue you from the Temptress—that smooth-talking Seductress Who's faithless to the husband she married years ago, never gave a second thought to her promises before Alahim. Her whole way of life is doomed; every step she takes brings her closer to destruction. No one who joins her company ever comes back, ever sets foot on the path to real living.

20-22 So—join the company of good men and women, keep your feet on the tried-and-true paths. It's the men who walk straight who will settle this land, the women with integrity who will last here. The corrupt will lose their lives; the dishonest will be gone for good.

3

Don't Assume You Know It All

1-2 Good friend, don't forget all I've taught you; take to heart my commands. They'll help you live a long, long time, a long life lived full and well.

3-4 Don't lose your grip on Love and Loyalty. Tie them around your neck; carve their initials on your heart. Earn a reputation for living well in Alahim's eyes and the eyes of the people.

5-12 Trust Alahim from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for Alahim's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to Alahim! Run from evil! Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life! Honor Alahim with everything you own; give him the first and the best. Your barns will burst, your wine vats will brim over.

But don't, dear friend, resent Alahim's discipline; don't sulk under his loving correction. It's the child he loves that Alahim corrects; a father's delight is behind all this.

The Very Tree of Life

13-18 You're blessed when you meet Lady Wisdom, when you make friends with Madame Insight. She's worth far more than money in the bank; her friendship is better than a big salary. Her value exceeds all the trappings of wealth; nothing you could wish for holds a candle to her. With one hand she gives long life, with the other she confers recognition. Her manner is beautiful, her life wonderfully complete. She's the very Tree of Life to those who embrace her. Hold her tight—and be blessed!

19-20 With Lady Wisdom, Alahim formed Earth; with Madame Insight, he raised Heaven. They knew when to signal rivers and springs to the surface, and dew to descend from the night skies.

Never Walk Away

21-26 Dear friend, guard Clear Thinking and Common Sense with your life; don't for a minute lose sight of them. They'll keep your being alive and well, they'll keep you fit and attractive. You'll travel safely, you'll neither tire nor trip. You'll take afternoon naps without a worry, you'll enjoy a good night's sleep. No need to panic over alarms or surprises, or predictions that doomsday's just around the corner, Because Alahim will be right there with you; he'll keep you safe and sound.

27-29 Never walk away from someone who deserves help; your hand is Alahim's hand for that person. Don't tell your neighbor "Maybe some other time" or "Try me tomorrow" when the money's right there in your pocket. Don't figure ways of taking advantage of your neighbor when he's sitting there trusting and unsuspecting.

30-32 Don't walk around with a chip on your shoulder, always spoiling for a fight. Don't try to be like those who shoulder their way through life. Why be a bully? "Why not?" you say. Because Alahim can't stand twisted beings. It's the straightforward who get his respect.

33-35 Alahim's curse blights the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He gives proud skeptics a cold shoulder, but if you're down on your luck, he's right there to help. Wise living gets rewarded with honor; stupid living gets the booby prize.

4

Your Life Is at Stake

1-2 Listen, friends, to some fatherly advice; sit up and take notice so you'll know how to live. I'm giving you good counsel; don't let it go in one ear and out the other.

3-9 When I was a boy at my father's knee, the pride and joy of my mother, He would sit me down and drill me: "Take this to heart. Do what I tell you—live! Sell everything and buy Wisdom! Forage for Understanding! Don't forget one word! Don't deviate an inch! Never walk away from Wisdom—she guards your life; love her—she keeps her eye on you. Above all and before all, do this: GET WISDOM! Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding! Throw your arms around her—believe me, you won't regret it; never let her go—she'll make your life glorious. She'll decorate your life with favour, she'll festoon your days with beauty."

10-15 Dear friend, take my advice; it will add years to your life. I'm writing out clear directions to Wisdom Way, I'm drawing a map to Righteous Road. I don't want you ending up in blind alleys, or wasting time making wrong turns. Hold tight to good advice; don't relax your grip. Guard it well—your life is at stake! Don't take Wicked Bypass; don't so much as set foot on that road. Stay clear of it; give it a wide berth. Make a detour and be on your way.

16-17 Evil people are restless unless they're making trouble; They can't get a good night's sleep unless they've made life miserable for somebody. Perversity is their food and drink, violence their drug of choice.

18-19 The ways of right-living people glow with light; the longer they live, the brighter they shine. But the road of wrongdoing gets darker and darker—travelers can't see a thing; they fall flat on their faces.

Learn It by Heart

20-22 Dear friend, listen well to my words; tune your ears to my voice. Keep my message in plain view at all times. Concentrate! Learn it by heart! Those who discover these words live, really live; body and being, they're bursting with health.

23-27 Keep vigilant watch over your heart; that's where life starts. Don't talk out of both sides of your mouth; avoid careless banter, white lies, and gossip. Keep your eyes straight ahead; ignore all sideshow distractions. Watch your step, and the road will stretch out smooth before you. Look neither right nor left; leave evil in the dust.

5

Nothing but Sin and Bones

1-2 Dear friend, pay close attention to this, my wisdom; listen very closely to the way I see it. Then you'll acquire a taste for good sense; what I tell you will keep you out of trouble.

3-6 The lips of a seductive woman are oh so sweet, her soft words are oh so smooth. But it won't be long before she's gravel in your mouth, a pain in your gut, a wound in your heart. She's dancing down the perfumed path to Death; she's headed straight for Destruction and taking you with her. She hasn't a clue about Real Life, about who she is or where she's going.

7-14 So, my friend, listen closely; don't treat my words casually. Keep your distance from such a woman; absolutely stay out of her neighborhood. You don't want to squander your wonderful life, to waste your precious life among the hardhearted. Why should you allow strangers to take advantage of you? Why be exploited by those who care nothing for you? You don't want to end your life full of regrets, nothing but sin and bones, Saying, "Oh, why didn't I do what they told me? Why did I reject a disciplined life? Why didn't I listen to my mentors, or take my teachers seriously? My life is ruined! I haven't one blessed thing to show for my life!"

Never Take Love for Granted

15-16 Do you know the saying, "Drink from your own rain barrel, draw water from your own spring-fed well"? It's true. Otherwise, you may one day come home and find your barrel empty and your well polluted.

17-20 Your spring water is for you and you only, not to be passed around among strangers. Bless your fresh-flowing fountain! Enjoy the wife you married as a young man! Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose— don't ever quit taking delight in her body.

Never take her love for granted! Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with a prostitute? for a fleeting moment of pleasure with a promiscuous stranger?

21-23 Mark well that Alahim doesn't miss a move you make; he's aware of every step you take. The shadow of your sin will overtake you; you'll find yourself stumbling all over yourself in the dark. Death is the reward of an undisciplined life; your foolish decisions trap you in a dead end.

6

Like a Deer from the Hunter

1-5 Dear friend, if you've gone into hock with your neighbor or locked yourself into a deal with a stranger, If you've impulsively promised the shirt off your back and now find yourself shivering out in the cold, Friend, don't waste a minute, get yourself out of that mess. You're in that man's clutches! Go, put on a long face; act desperate. Don't put off until tomorrow what should be done today!—there's no time to lose. Run like a deer from the hunter, fly like a bird from the trapper!

A Lesson from the Ant

6-11 You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two. Nobody has to tell it what to do. All summer it stores up food; at harvest it stockpiles supplies.

So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed? Sleeping, sleeping, sleeping: a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty as your permanent houseguest!

Always Cooking Up Something Nasty

12-15 Swindlers and scoundrels talk out of both sides of their mouths. They wink at each other, they shuffle their feet, they cross their fingers behind their backs. Their perverse minds are always cooking up something nasty, always stirring up trouble. Catastrophe is just around the corner for them, a total wreck, their lives ruined beyond repair.

Seven Things Alahim Hates

16-19 Here are six things Alahim hates, and one more that he loathes with a passion:

- eyes that are arrogant,
- a tongue that lies,
- hands that murder the innocent,
- a heart that hatches evil plots,
- feet that race down a wicked track,
- a mouth that lies under oath,
- a troublemaker in the family.

Warning on Adultery

20-23 Good friend, follow your father's good advice; don't wander off from your mother's teachings. Wrap yourself in them from head to foot; wear them like a scarf around your neck. Wherever you walk, they'll guide you; whenever you rest, they'll guard you; when you wake up, they'll tell you what's next. For sound advice is a beacon, good teaching is a light, moral discipline is a life path.

24-35 They'll protect you from promiscuous women, from the seductive talk of some temptress. Don't lustfully fantasize on her beauty, nor be taken in by her bedroom eyes. You can buy an hour with a prostitute for a loaf of bread, but a promiscuous woman may well eat you alive. Can you build a fire in your lap and not burn your pants? Can you walk barefoot on hot coals and not get blisters? It's the same when you have sex with your neighbor's wife: Touch her and you'll pay for it. No excuses. Hunger is no excuse for a thief to steal; When he's caught he has to pay it back, even if he has to sell his whole house. Adultery is a brainless act, being-destroying, self-destructive; Expect a bloody nose, a black eye, and a reputation ruined for good. For jealousy detonates rage in a cheated husband; wild for revenge, he won't make allowances. Nothing you say or pay will make it all right; neither bribes nor reason will satisfy him.

7

Dressed to Seduce

1-5 Dear friend, do what I tell you; treasure my careful instructions. Do what I say and you'll live well. My teaching is as precious as your eyesight—guard it! Write it out on the back of your hands; etch it on the chambers of your heart. Talk to Wisdom as to a sister.

Treat Insight as your companion. They'll be with you to fend off the Temptress -that smooth-talking, honey-tongued Seductress.

6-12 As I stood at the window of my house looking out through the shutters, Watching the mindless crowd stroll by, I spotted a young man without any sense. Arriving at the corner of the street where she lived, then turning up the path to her house. It was dusk, the evening coming on, the darkness thickening into night. Just then, a woman met him—she'd been lying in wait for him, dressed to seduce him. Loud, slutty and brash she was, restless and roaming, never at home, Walking the streets, loitering in the mall, hanging out at every corner in town.

13-20 She threw her arms around him and kissed him, boldly took his arm and said, "I've got all the makings for a feast—today I made my offerings, my vows are all paid, So now I've come to find you, hoping to catch sight of your face—and here you are! I've spread fresh, clean sheets on my bed, colorful imported linens. My bed is aromatic with spices and exotic fragrances. Come, let's make love all night, spend the night in ecstatic passion! My husband's not home; he's away on business, and he won't be back for a month."

21-23 Soon she has him eating out of her hand, bewitched by her honeyed speech. Before you know it, he's trotting behind her, like a calf led to the butcher shop, Like a stag lured into ambush and then shot with an arrow. Like a bird flying into a net not knowing that its flying life is over. 24-27 So, friends, listen to me, take these words of mine most seriously. Don't fool around with a woman like that; don't even stroll through her neighborhood. Countless victims come under her spell; she's the death of many a poor man. She runs a halfway house to destruction, fits you out with a shroud and a coffin.

8

Lady Wisdom Calls Out

1-11 Do you hear Lady Wisdom calling? Can you hear Madame Insight raising her voice? She's taken her stand at First and Main, at the busiest intersection. Right in the city square where the traffic is thickest, she shouts, "You—I'm talking to all of you, everyone out here on the streets! Listen, you idiots—learn good sense!"

You blockheads—shape up! Don't miss a word of this—I'm telling you how to live well, I'm telling you how to live at your best. My mouth chews and savors and relishes truth—I can't stand the taste of evil! You'll only hear true and right words from my mouth; not one syllable will be twisted or skewed. You'll recognize this as true—you with open minds; truth-ready minds will see it at once. Prefer my life-disciplines over chasing after money, and Alahim-knowledge over a lucrative career. For Wisdom is better than all the trappings of wealth; nothing you could wish for holds a candle to her.

12-21 "I am Lady Wisdom, and I live next to Sanity; Knowledge and Discretion live just down the street. The Fear-of-Alahim means hating Evil, whose ways I hate with a passion—pride and arrogance and crooked talk. Good counsel and common sense are my characteristics; I am both Insight and the Virtue to live it out. With my help, leaders rule, and lawmakers legislate fairly; With my help, governors govern, along with all in legitimate authority. I love those who love me; those who look for me find me. Wealth and Esteem accompany me—also substantial Honor and a Good Name. My benefits are worth more than a big salary, even a very big salary; the returns on me exceed any imaginable bonus. You can find me on Righteous Road—that's where I walk—at the intersection of Justice Avenue, Handing out life to those who love me, filling their arms with life—armloads of life!

22-31 "Alahim sovereignly made me—the first, the basic—before he did anything else. I was brought into being a long time ago, well before Earth got its start. I arrived on the scene before Ocean, yes, even before Springs and Rivers and Lakes. Before Mountains were sculpted and Hills took shape, I was already there, newborn; Long before Alahim stretched out Earth's Horizons, and tended to the minute details of Soil and Weather, And set Sky firmly in place, I was there. When he mapped and gave borders to wild Ocean, built the vast vault of Heaven, and installed the fountains that fed Ocean, When he drew a boundary for Sea, posted a sign that said no trespassing, And then staked out Earth's Foundations, I was right there with him, making sure everything fit.

Day after day I was there, with my joyful applause, always enjoying his company, Delighted with the world of things and creatures, happily celebrating the human family.

32-36 "So, my dear friends, listen carefully; those who embrace these my ways are most blessed. Mark a life of discipline and live wisely; don't squander your precious life. Blessed the man, blessed the woman, who listens to me, awake and ready for me each morning, alert and responsive as I start my day's work. When you find me, you find life, real life, to say nothing of Alahim's good pleasure. But if you wrong me, you damage your very being; when you reject me, you're flirting with death."

9

Lady Wisdom Gives a Dinner Party

1-6 Lady Wisdom has built and furnished her home; it's supported by seven hewn timbers. The banquet meal is ready to be served: lamb roasted, wine poured out, table set with silver and flowers. Having dismissed her serving maids, Lady Wisdom goes to town, stands in a prominent place, and invites everyone within sound of her voice: "Are you confused about life, don't know what's going on? Come with me, oh come, have dinner with me! I've prepared a wonderful spread—fresh-baked bread, roast lamb, carefully selected wines. Leave your impoverished confusion and live! Walk up the street to a life with meaning."

7-12 If you reason with an arrogant cynic, you'll get slapped in the face; confront bad behavior and get a kick in the shins. So don't waste your time on a scoffer; all you'll get for your pains is abuse. But if you correct those who care about life, that's different—they'll love you for it! Deliver your breath for the wise—they'll be wiser for it; tell good people what you know—they'll profit from it. Skilled living gets its start in the Fear-of-Alahim, insight into life from knowing a Set-apart Alahim. It's through me, Lady Wisdom, that your life deepens, and the years of your life ripen. Live wisely and wisdom will permeate your life; mock life and life will mock you.

Madame Prostitute Calls Out, Too

13-18 Then there's this other woman, Madame Prostitute—a whore-bag, brazen, empty-headed, frivolous. She sits on the front porch of her house on Main Street, And as people walk by minding their own business, calls out, "Are you confused about life, don't know what's going on? Come inside with me, I'll show you a good time! No one will ever know—I'll give you the time of your life." But they don't know about all the skeletons in her closet, that all her guests end up in destruction.

10

An Honest Life Is Immortal

- 1 Wise son, glad father; stupid son, sad mother.
- 2 Ill-gotten gain gets you nowhere; an honest life is immortal.
- 3 Alahim won't starve an honest being, but he frustrates the appetites of the wicked.
- 4 Sloth makes you poor; diligence brings wealth.
- 5 Make hay while the sun shines—that's smart; go fishing during harvest—that's stupid.
- 6 Blessings accrue on a good and honest life, but the mouth of the wicked is a dark cave of abuse.
- 7 A good and honest life is a blessed memorial; a wicked life leaves a rotten stench.
- 8 A wise heart takes orders; an empty head will come unglued.
- 9 Honesty lives confident and carefree, but Shifty is sure to be exposed.
- 10 An evasive eye is a sign of trouble ahead, but an open, face-to-face meeting results in peace.
- 11 The mouth of a good person is a deep, life-giving well, but the mouth of the wicked is a dark cave of abuse.
- 12 Hatred starts fights, but love pulls a quilt over the bickering.
- 13 You'll find wisdom on the lips of a person of insight, but the shortsighted needs a slap in the face.
- 14 The wise accumulate knowledge—a true treasure; know-it-alls talk too much—a sheer waste.

The Road to Life Is a Disciplined Life

- 15 The wealth of the rich is their security; the poverty of the indigent is their ruin.

16 The wage of a good person is exuberant life; an evil person ends up with nothing but sin.

17 The road to life is a disciplined life; ignore correction and you're lost for good.

18 Liars secretly hoard hatred; fools openly spread slander.

19 The more talk, the less truth; the wise measure their words.

20 The speech of a good person is worth waiting for; the blabber of the wicked is worthless.

21 The talk of a good person is rich fare for many, but chatterboxes die of an empty heart.

Fear-of-Alahim Expands Your Life

22 Alahim's blessing makes life rich; nothing we do can improve on Alahim.

23 An empty-head thinks mischief is fun, but a mindful person relishes wisdom.

24 The nightmares of the wicked come true; what the good people desire, they get.

25 When the storm is over, there's nothing left of the wicked; good people, firm on their rock foundation, aren't even fazed.

26 A lazy employee will give you nothing but trouble; it's vinegar in the mouth, smoke in the eyes.

27 The Fear-of-Alahim expands your life; a wicked life is a puny life.

28 The aspirations of good people end in celebration; the ambitions of bad people crash.

29 Alahim is solid backing to a well-lived life, but he calls into question a shabby performance.

30 Good people last—they can't be moved; the wicked are here today, gone tomorrow.

31 A good person's mouth is a clear fountain of wisdom; a foul mouth is a stagnant swamp.

32 The speech of a good person clears the air; the words of the wicked pollute it.

11

Without Good Direction, People Lose Their Way

1 Alahim hates cheating in the marketplace; he loves it when business is aboveboard.

2 The stuck-up fall flat on their faces, but down-to-earth people stand firm.

3 The integrity of the honest keeps them on

track; the deviousness of crooks brings them to ruin.

4 A thick bankroll is no help when life falls apart, but a principled life can stand up to the worst.

5 Moral character makes for smooth traveling; an evil life is a hard life.

6 Good character is the best insurance; crooks get trapped in their sinful lust.

7 When the wicked die, that's it—the story's over, end of hope.

8 A good person is delivered from much trouble; a bad person runs straight into it.

9 The loose tongue of the Alahimless spreads destruction; the common sense of the Alahimly preserves them.

10 When it goes well for good people, the whole town cheers; when it goes badly for bad people, the town celebrates.

11 When right-living people bless the city, it flourishes; evil talk turns it into a ghost town in no time.

12 Mean-spirited slander is heartless; quiet discretion accompanies good sense.

13 A gadabout gossip can't be trusted with a secret, but someone of integrity won't violate a confidence.

14 Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances.

15 Whoever makes deals with strangers is sure to get burned; if you keep a cool head, you'll avoid rash bargains.

16 A woman of gentle favour gets respect, but men of rough violence grab for loot.

An Alahim-Shaped Life

17 When you're kind to others, you help yourself; when you're cruel to others, you hurt yourself.

18 Bad work gets paid with a bad check; good work gets solid pay.

19 Take your stand with Alahim's loyal community and live, or chase after phantoms of evil and die.

20 Alahim can't stand deceivers, but oh how he relishes integrity.

21 Count on this: The wicked won't get off scot-free, and Alahim's loyal people will triumph.

22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful face on an empty head.

23 The desires of good people lead straight to the best, but wicked ambition ends in angry frustration.

24 The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller.

25 The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.

26 Curses on those who drive a hard bargain! Blessings on all who play fair and square!

27 The one who seeks good finds delight; the student of evil becomes evil.

28 A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump; a Alahim-shaped life is a flourishing tree.

29 Exploit or abuse your family, and end up with a fistful of air; common sense tells you it's a stupid way to live.

30 A good life is a fruit-bearing tree; a violent life destroys beings.

31 If good people barely make it, what's in store for the bad!

12

If You Love Learning

1 If you love learning, you love the discipline that goes with it— how shortsighted to refuse correction!

2 A good person basks in the delight of Alahim, and he wants nothing to do with devious schemers.

3 You can't find firm footing in a swamp, but life rooted in Alahim stands firm.

4 A hearty wife invigorates her husband, but a frigid woman is cancer in the bones.

5 The thinking of principled people makes for justice; the plots of degenerates corrupt.

6 The words of the wicked kill; the speech of the upright delivers.

7 Wicked people fall to pieces—there's nothing to them; the homes of good people hold together.

8 A person who talks sense is honored; airheads are held in contempt.

9 Better to be ordinary and work for a living than act important and starve in the process.

10 Good people are good to their animals; the "good-hearted" bad people kick and abuse them.

11 The one who stays on the job has food on the table; the witless chase whims and fancies.

12 What the wicked construct finally falls into ruin, while the roots of the righteous give life, and more life.

Wise People Take Advice

13 The gossip of bad people gets them in trouble, the conversation of good people keeps them out of it.

14 Well-spoken words bring satisfaction; well-done work has its own reward.

15 Fools are headstrong and do what they like; wise people take advice.

16 Fools have short fuses and explode all too quickly; the prudent quietly shrug off insults.

17 Truthful witness by a good person clears the air, but liars lay down a smoke screen of deceit.

18 Rash language cuts and maims, but there is healing in the words of the wise.

19 Truth lasts; lies are here today, gone tomorrow.

20 Evil scheming distorts the schemer; peace-planning brings joy to the planner.

21 No evil can overwhelm a good person, but the wicked have their hands full of it.

22 Alahim can't stomach liars; he loves the company of those who keep their word.

23 Prudent people don't flaunt their knowledge; talkative fools broadcast their silliness.

24 The diligent find freedom in their work; the lazy are oppressed by work.

25 Worry weighs us down; a cheerful word picks us up.

26 A good person survives misfortune, but a wicked life invites disaster.

27 A lazy life is an empty life, but "early to rise" gets the job done.

28 Good men and women travel right into life; sin's detours take you straight to destruction.

13

Walk with the Wise

1 Intelligent children listen to their parents; foolish children do their own thing.

2 The good acquire a taste for helpful conversation; bullies push and shove their way through life.

3 Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything.

4 Indolence wants it all and gets nothing; the energetic have something to show for their lives.

5 A good person hates false talk;
a bad person wallows in gibberish.

6 A Alahim-loyal life keeps you on track;
sin dumps the wicked in the ditch.

7 A pretentious, showy life is an empty life;
a plain and simple life is a full life.

8 The rich can be sued for everything they
have, but the poor are free of such threats.

9 The lives of good people are brightly lit
streets; the lives of the wicked are dark alleys.

10 Arrogant know-it-alls stir up discord, but
wise men and women listen to each other's
counsel.

11 Easy come, easy go,
but steady diligence pays off.

12 Unrelenting disappointment leaves you
heartsick, but a sudden good break can turn
life around.

13 Ignore the Word and suffer;
honor Alahim's commands and grow rich.

14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,
so, no more drinking from death-tainted
wells!

15 Sound thinking makes for gracious living,
but liars walk a rough road.

16 A commonsense person lives good sense;
fools litter the country with silliness.

17 Irresponsible talk makes a real mess of
things, but a reliable reporter is a healing
presence.

18 Refuse discipline and end up homeless;
embrace correction and live an honored life.

19 Beings who follow their hearts thrive;
fools bent on evil despise matters of being.

20 Become wise by walking with the wise;
hang out with fools and watch your life fall
to pieces.

21 Disaster entraps sinners,
but Alahim-loyal people get a good life.

22 A good life gets passed on to the
grandchildren; ill-gotten wealth ends up with
good people.

23 Banks foreclose on the farms of the poor,
or else the poor lose their shirts to crooked
lawyers.

24 A refusal to correct is a refusal to love;
love your children by disciplining them.

25 An appetite for good brings much
satisfaction, but the belly of the wicked
always wants more.

14

A Way That Leads to Destruction

1 Lady Wisdom builds a lovely home; Sir Fool
comes along and tears it down brick by brick.

2 An honest life shows respect for Alahim;
a degenerate life is a slap in his face.

3 Frivolous talk provokes a derisive smile;
wise speech evokes nothing but respect.

4 No cattle, no crops; a good harvest requires
a strong ox for the plow.

5 A true witness never lies;
a false witness makes a business of it.

6 Cynics look high and low for wisdom—and
never find it; the open-minded find it right
on their doorstep!

7 Escape quickly from the company of fools;
they're a waste of your time, a waste of your
words.

8 The wisdom of the wise keeps life on track;
the foolishness of fools lands them in the
ditch.

9 The stupid ridicule right and wrong,
but a moral life is a favored life.

10 The person who shuns the bitter moments
of friends will be an outsider at their c
elebrations.

11 Lives of careless wrongdoing are run-
down shacks; set-apart living builds soaring
cathedrals.

12-13 There's a way of life that looks harmless
enough; look again—it leads straight to
destruction. Sure, those people appear to be
having a good time, but all that laughter will end
in heartbreak.

Sift and Weigh Every Word

14 A mean person gets paid back in meanness,
a gracious person in favour.

15 The gullible believe anything they're told;
the prudent sift and weigh every word.

16 The wise watch their steps and avoid evil;
fools are headstrong and reckless.

17 The hotheaded do things they'll later regret;
the coldhearted get the cold shoulder.

18 Foolish dreamers live in a world of illusion;
wise realists plant their feet on the ground.

19 Eventually, evil will pay tribute to good;
the wicked will respect Alahim-loyal people.

20 An unlucky loser is shunned by all,
but everyone loves a winner.

21 It's criminal to ignore a neighbor in need, but compassion for the poor—what a blessing!

22 Isn't it obvious that conspirators lose out, while the thoughtful win love and trust?

23 Hard work always pays off; mere talk puts no bread on the table.

24 The wise accumulate wisdom; fools get stupider by the day.

25 Beings are delivered by truthful witness and betrayed by the spread of lies.

26 The Fear-of-Alahim builds up confidence, and makes a world safe for your children.

27 The Fear-of-Alahim is a spring of living water so you won't go off drinking from poisoned wells.

28 The mark of a good leader is loyal followers; leadership is nothing without a following.

29 Slowness to anger makes for deep understanding; a quick-tempered person stocks up on stupidity.

30 A sound mind makes for a robust body, but runaway emotions corrode the bones.

31 You insult your Maker when you exploit the powerless; when you're kind to the poor, you honor Alahim.

32 The evil of bad people leaves them out in the cold; the integrity of good people creates a safe place for living.

33 Lady Wisdom is at home in an understanding heart—fools never even get to say hello.

34 Alahim-devotion makes a country strong; Alahim-avoidance leaves people weak.

35 Diligent work gets a warm commendation; shiftless work earns an angry rebuke.

15

Alahim Doesn't Miss a Thing

1 A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire.

2 Knowledge flows like spring water from the wise; fools are leaky faucets, dripping nonsense.

3 Alahim doesn't miss a thing—he's alert to good and evil alike.

4 Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim.

5 Moral dropouts won't listen to their elders; welcoming correction is a mark of good sense.

6 The lives of Alahim-loyal people flourish;

a misspent life is soon bankrupt.

7 Perceptive words spread knowledge; fools are hollow—there's nothing to them.

8 Alahim can't stand pious poses, but he delights in genuine prayers.

9 A life frittered away disgusts Alahim; he loves those who run straight for the finish line.

10 It's a school of hard knocks for those who leave Alahim's path, a dead-end street for those who hate Alahim's rules.

11 Even destruction holds no secrets from Alahim—do you think he can't read human hearts?

Life Ascends to the Heights

12 Know-it-alls don't like being told what to do; they avoid the company of wise men and women.

13 A cheerful heart brings a smile to your face; a sad heart makes it hard to get through the day.

14 An intelligent person is always eager to take in more truth; fools feed on fast-food fads and fancies.

15 A miserable heart means a miserable life; a cheerful heart fills the day with song.

16 A simple life in the Fear-of-Alahim is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches.

17 Better a bread crust shared in love than a slab of prime rib served in hate.

18 Hot tempers start fights; a calm, cool spirit keeps the peace.

19 The path of lazy people is overgrown with briars; the diligent walk down a smooth road.

20 Intelligent children make their parents proud; lazy students embarrass their parents.

21 The empty-headed treat life as a plaything; the perceptive grasp its meaning and make a go of it.

22 Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel and watch them succeed.

23 Congenial conversation—what a pleasure! The right word at the right time—beautiful!

24 Life ascends to the heights for the thoughtful—it's a clean about-face from descent into destruction.

25 Alahim smashes the pretensions of the arrogant; he stands with those who have no standing.

26 Alahim can't stand evil scheming, but he

puts words of favour and beauty on display.

27 A greedy and grasping person destroys community; those who refuse to exploit live and let live.

28 Prayerful answers come from Alahim-loyal people; the wicked are sewers of abuse.

29 Alahim keeps his distance from the wicked; he closely attends to the prayers of Alahim-loyal people.

30 A twinkle in the eye means joy in the heart, and good news makes you feel fit as a fiddle.

31 Listen to good advice if you want to live well, an honored guest among wise men and women.

32 An undisciplined, self-willed life is puny; an obedient, Alahim-willed life is spacious.

33 Fear-of-Alahim is a school in skilled living—first you learn humility, then you experience esteem.

16

Everything with a Place and a Purpose

1 Mortals make elaborate plans, but Alahim has the last word.

2 Humans are satisfied with whatever looks good; Alahim probes for what is good.

3 Put Alahim in charge of your work, then what you've planned will take place.

4 Alahim made everything with a place and purpose; even the wicked are included—but for judgment.

5 Alahim can't stomach arrogance or pretense; believe me, he'll put those braggarts in their place.

6 Guilt is banished through love and truth; Fear-of-Alahim deflects evil.

7 When Alahim approves of your life, even your enemies will end up shaking your hand.

8 Far better to be right and poor than to be wrong and rich.

9 We plan the way we want to live, but only Alahim makes us able to live it.

It Pays to Take Life Seriously

10 A good leader motivates, doesn't mislead, doesn't exploit.

11 Alahim cares about honesty in the workplace; your business is his business.

12 Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds; sound leadership has a moral foundation.

13 Good leaders cultivate honest speech; they love advisors who tell them the truth.

14 An intemperate leader wreaks havoc in lives; you're smart to stay clear of someone like that.

15 Good-tempered leaders invigorate lives; they're like spring rain and sunshine.

16 Get wisdom—it's worth more than money; choose insight over income every time.

17 The road of right living bypasses evil; watch your step and deliver your life.

18 First pride, then the crash—the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.

19 It's better to live humbly among the poor than to live it up among the rich and famous.

20 It pays to take life seriously; things work out when you trust in Alahim.

21 A wise person gets known for insight; gracious words add to one's reputation.

22 True intelligence is a spring of fresh water, while fools sweat it out the hard way.

23 They make a lot of sense, these wise folks; whenever they speak, their reputation increases.

24 Gracious speech is like clover honey—good taste to the being, quick energy for the body.

25 There's a way that looks harmless enough; look again—it leads straight to destruction.

26 Appetite is an incentive to work; hunger makes you work all the harder.

27 Mean people spread mean gossip; their words smart and burn.

28 Troublemakers start fights; gossips break up friendships.

29 Calloused climbers betray their very own friends; they'd stab their own grandmothers in the back.

30 A shifty eye betrays an evil intention; a clenched jaw signals trouble ahead.

31 Gray hair is a mark of distinction, the award for a Alahim-loyal life.

32 Moderation is better than muscle, self-control better than political power.

33 Make your motions and cast your votes, but Alahim has the final say.

17

A Whack on the Head of a Fool

1 A meal of bread and water in contented peace is better than a banquet spiced with quarrels.

2 A wise servant takes charge of an unruly child and is honored as one of the family.

3 As silver in a crucible and gold in a pan, so our lives are refined by Alahim.

4 Evil people relish malicious conversation; the ears of liars itch for dirty gossip.

5 Whoever mocks poor people insults their Creator; gloating over misfortune is a punishable crime.

6 Old people are distinguished by grand children; children take pride in their parents.

7 We don't expect eloquence from fools, nor do we expect lies from our leaders.

8 Receiving a gift is like getting a rare gemstone; any way you look at it, you see beauty refracted.

9 Overlook an offense and bond a friendship; fasten on to a slight and—good-bye, friend!

10 A quiet rebuke to a person of good sense does more than a whack on the head of a fool.

11 Criminals out looking for nothing but trouble won't have to wait long—they'll meet it coming and going!

12 Better to meet a grizzly robbed of her cubs than a fool destructionbent on folly.

13 Those who return evil for good will meet their own evil returning.

14 The start of a quarrel is like a leak in a dam, so stop it before it bursts.

15 Whitewashing bad people and throwing mud on good people are equally abhorrent to Alahim.

16 What's this? Fools out shopping for wisdom! They wouldn't recognize it if they saw it!

One Who Knows Much Says Little

17 Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble.

18 It's stupid to try to get something for nothing, or run up huge bills you can never pay.

19 The person who courts sin marries trouble; build a wall, invite a burglar.

20 A bad motive can't achieve a good end; double-talk brings you double trouble.

21 Having a fool for a child is misery; it's no fun being the parent of a dolt.

22 A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired.

23 The wicked take bribes under the table; they show nothing but contempt for justice.

24 The perceptive find wisdom in their own front yard; fools look for it everywhere but right here.

25 A surly, stupid child is sheer pain to a father, a bitter pill for a mother to swallow.

26 It's wrong to penalize good behavior, or make good citizens pay for the crimes of others.

27 The one who knows much says little; an understanding person remains calm.

28 Even dunces who keep quiet are thought to be wise; as long as they keep their mouths shut, they're smart.

18

Our Words Can Give Life or Death

1 Loners who care only for themselves spit on the common good.

2 Fools care nothing for thoughtful discourse; all they do is run off at the mouth.

3 When wickedness arrives, shame's not far behind; contempt for life is contemptible.

4 Many words rush along like rivers in flood, but deep wisdom flows up from artesian springs.

5 It's not right to go easy on the guilty, or come down hard on the innocent.

6 The words of a fool start fights; do him a favor and gag him.

7 Fools are undone by their big mouths; their beings are crushed by their words.

8 Listening to gossip is like eating cheap candy; do you really want junk like that in your belly?

9 Slack habits and sloppy work are as bad as vandalism.

10 Alahim's name is a place of protection—good people can run there and be safe.

11 The rich think their wealth protects them; they imagine themselves safe behind it.

12 Pride first, then the crash, but humility is precursor to honor.

13 Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.

14 A healthy spirit conquers adversity, but what can you do when the spirit is crushed?

15 Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights.

16 A gift gets attention; it buys the attention of eminent people.

17 The first speech in a court case is always convincing—until the cross-examination starts!

18 You may have to draw straws when faced with a tough decision.

19 Do a favor and win a friend forever; nothing can untie that bond.

20 Words satisfy the mind as much as fruit does the stomach; good talk is as gratifying as a good harvest.

21 Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose.

22 Find a good spouse, you find a good life—and even more: the favor of Alahim!

23 The poor speak in soft supplications; the rich bark out answers.

24 Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.

19

If You Quit Listening

1 Better to be poor and honest than a rich person no one can trust.

2 Ignorant zeal is worthless; haste makes waste.

3 People ruin their lives by their own stupidity, so why does Alahim always get blamed?

4 Wealth attracts friends as honey draws flies, but poor people are avoided like a plague.

5 Perjury won't go unpunished. Would you let a liar go free?

6 Lots of people flock around a generous person; everyone's a friend to the philanthropist.

7 When you're down on your luck, even your family avoids you—yes, even your best friends wish you'd get lost. If they see you coming, they look the other way—out of sight, out of mind.

8 Grow a wise heart—you'll do yourself a favor; keep a clear head—you'll find a good life.

9 The person who tells lies gets caught; the person who spreads rumors is ruined.

10 Blockheads shouldn't live on easy street any more than workers should give orders to their boss.

11 Smart people know how to hold their tongue; their grandeur is to forgive and forget.

12 Mean-tempered leaders are like mad dogs; the good-natured are like fresh morning dew.

13 A parent is worn to a frazzle by an

irresponsible child; a nagging spouse is a leaky dripping tap.

14 House and land are handed down from parents, but a congenial spouse comes straight from Alahim.

15 Life collapses on loafers; lazybones go hungry.

16 Keep the rules and keep your life; careless living kills.

17 Mercy to the needy is a loan to Alahim, and Alahim pays back those loans in full.

18 Discipline your children while you still have the chance; indulging them destroys them.

19 Let angry people endure the backlash of their own anger; if you try to make it better, you'll only make it worse.

20 Take good counsel and accept correction—that's the way to live wisely and well.

21 We humans keep brainstorming options and plans, but Alahim's purpose prevails.

22 It's only human to want to make a buck, but it's better to be poor than a liar.

23 Fear-of-Alahim is life itself, a full life, and serene—no nasty surprises.

24 Some people dig a fork into the pie but are too lazy to raise it to their mouth.

25 Punish the insolent—make an example of them. Who knows? Somebody might learn a good lesson.

26 Kids who lash out against their parents are an embarrassment and disfavour.

27 If you quit listening, dear child, and strike off on your own, you'll soon be out of your depth.

28 An unprincipled witness desecrates justice; the mouths of the wicked spew malice.

29 The irreverent have to learn reverence the hard way; only a slap in the face brings fools to attention.

20

Deep Water in the Heart

1 Wine makes you mean, beer makes you quarrelsome—a staggering drunk is not much fun.

2 Quick-tempered leaders are like mad dogs—cross them and they bite your head off.

3 It's a mark of good character to avert quarrels, but fools love to pick fights.

4 A farmer too lazy to plant in the spring has nothing to harvest in the fall.

5 Knowing what is right is like deep water in the heart; a wise person draws from the well within.

6 Lots of people claim to be loyal and loving, but where on earth can you find one?

7 Alahim-loyal people, living honest lives, make it much easier for their children.

8-9 Leaders who know their business and care keep a sharp eye out for the shoddy and cheap, For who among us can be trusted to be always diligent and honest?

10 Switching price tags and padding the expense account are two things Alahim hates.

11 Young people eventually reveal by their actions if their motives are on the up and up.

Drinking from the Chalice of Knowledge

12 Ears that hear and eyes that see—we get our basic equipment from Alahim!

13 Don't be too fond of sleep; you'll end up in the poorhouse. Wake up and get up; then there'll be food on the table.

14 The shopper says, "That's junk—I'll take it off your hands," then goes off boasting of the bargain.

15 Drinking from the beautiful chalice of knowledge is better than adorning oneself with gold and rare gems.

16 Hold tight to collateral on any loan to a stranger; beware of accepting what a transient has pawned.

17 Stolen bread tastes sweet, but soon your mouth is full of gravel.

18 Form your purpose by asking for counsel, then carry it out using all the help you can get.

19 Gossips can't keep secrets, so never confide in blabbermouths.

20 Anyone who curses father and mother extinguishes light and exists benighted.

The Very Steps We Take

21 A bonanza at the beginning is no guarantee of blessing at the end.

22 Don't ever say, "I'll get you for that!" Wait for Alahim; he'll settle the score.

23 Alahim hates cheating in the marketplace; rigged scales are an outrage.

24 The very steps we take come from Alahim; otherwise how would we know where we're going?

25 An impulsive vow is a trap; later you'll wish you could get out of it.

26 After careful scrutiny, a wise leader makes a clean sweep of rebels and dolts.

27 Alahim is in charge of human life, watching and examining us inside and out.

28 Love and truth form a good leader; sound leadership is founded on loving integrity.

29 Youth may be admired for vigor, but gray hair gives prestige to old age.

30 A good thrashing purges evil; punishment goes deep within us.

21

Alahim Examines Our Motives

1 Good leadership is a channel of water controlled by Alahim; he directs it to whatever ends he chooses.

2 We justify our actions by appearances; Alahim examines our motives.

3 Clean living before Alahim and justice with our neighbors mean far more to Alahim than religious performance.

4 Arrogance and pride—distinguishing marks in the wicked—are just plain sin.

5 Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind.

6 Make it to the top by lying and cheating; get paid with smoke and a promotion—to death!

7 The wicked get buried alive by their loot because they refuse to use it to help others.

8 Mixed motives twist life into tangles; pure motives take you straight down the road.

Do Your Best, Prepare for the Worst

9 Better to live alone in a tumbledown shack than share a mansion with a nagging spouse.

10 Wicked beings love to make trouble; they feel nothing for friends and neighbors.

11 Simpletons only learn the hard way, but the wise learn by listening.

12 A Alahim-loyal person will see right through the wicked and undo the evil they've planned.

13 If you stop your ears to the cries of the poor, your cries will go unheard, unanswered.

14 A quietly given gift soothes an irritable person; a heartfelt present cools a hot temper.

15 Good people celebrate when justice triumphs, but for the workers of evil it's a bad day.

16 Whoever wanders off the straight and narrow ends up in a congregation of ghosts.

17 You're addicted to thrills? What an empty life! The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied.

18 What a bad person plots against the good, boomerangs; the plotter gets it in the end.

19 Better to live in a tent in the wild than with a cross and petulant spouse.

20 Valuables are safe in a wise person's home; fools put it all out for yard sales.

21 Whoever goes hunting for what is right and kind finds life itself—glorious life!

22 One sage entered a whole city of armed soldiers—their trusted defenses fell to pieces!

23 Watch your words and hold your tongue; you'll deliver yourself a lot of grief.

24 You know their names—Brash, Impudent, Blasphemer—intemperate hotheads, everyone.

25 Lazy people finally die of hunger because they won't get up and go to work.

26 Sinners are always wanting what they don't have; the Alahim-loyal are always giving what they do have.

27 Religious performance by the wicked stinks; it's even worse when they use it to get ahead.

28 A lying witness is unconvincing; a person who speaks truth is respected.

29 Unscrupulous people fake it a lot; honest people are sure of their steps.

30 Nothing clever, nothing conceived, nothing contrived, can get the better of Alahim.

31 Do your best, prepare for the worst—then trust Alahim to bring victory.

22

The Cure Comes Through Discipline

1 A sterling reputation is better than striking it rich; a gracious spirit is better than money in the bank.

2 The rich and the poor shake hands as equals—Alahim made them both!

3 A prudent person sees trouble coming and ducks; a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered.

4 The payoff for meekness and Fear-of-Alahim is plenty and honor and a satisfying life.

5 The perverse travel a dangerous road,

potholed and mud-slick; if you know what's good for you, stay clear of it.

6 Point your kids in the right direction—when they're old they won't be lost.

7 The poor are always ruled over by the rich, so don't borrow and put yourself under their power.

8 Whoever sows sin reaps weeds, and bullying anger sputters into nothing.

9 Generous hands are blessed hands because they give bread to the poor.

10 Kick out the troublemakers and things will quiet down; you need a break from bickering and griping!

11 Alahim loves the pure-hearted and well-spoken; good leaders also delight in their friendship.

12 Alahim guards knowledge with a passion, but he'll have nothing to do with deception.

13 The loafer says, "There's a lion on the loose! If I go out I'll be eaten alive!"

14 The mouth of a prostitute is a bottomless pit; you'll fall in that pit if you're on the outs with Alahim.

15 Young people are prone to foolishness and fads; the cure comes through tough-minded discipline.

16 Exploit the poor or glad-hand the rich—whichever, you'll end up the poorer for it.

Don't Move Back the Boundary Lines

17-21 Listen carefully to my wisdom; take to heart what I can teach you. You'll treasure its sweetness deep within; you'll give it bold expression in your speech. To make sure your foundation is trust in Alahim, I'm laying it all out right now just for you. I'm giving you thirty sterling principles—tested guidelines to live by. Believe me—these are truths that work, and will keep you accountable to those who sent you.

22-23 Don't walk on the poor just because they're poor, and don't use your position to crush the weak, Because Alahim will come to their defense; the life you took, he'll take from you and give back to them.

24-25 Don't hang out with angry people; don't keep company with hotheads. Bad temper is contagious—don't get infected.

26-27 Don't gamble on the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, pawning your house against

a lucky chance. The time will come when you have to pay up; you'll be left with nothing but the shirt on your back.

28 Don't stealthily move back the boundary lines staked out long ago by your ancestors.

29 Observe people who are good at their work—skilled workers are always in demand and admired; they don't take a backseat to anyone.

23

Restrain Yourself

1-3 When you go out to dinner with an influential person, mind your manners: Don't gobble your food, don't talk with your mouth full. And don't stuff yourself; bridle your appetite.

4-5 Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich; restrain yourself! Riches disappear in the blink of an eye; wealth sprouts wings and flies off into the wild blue yonder.

6-8 Don't accept a meal from a tightwad; don't expect anything special. He'll be as stingy with you as he is with himself; he'll say, "Eat! Drink!" but won't mean a word of it. His miserly serving will turn your stomach when you realize the meal's a sham.

9 Don't bother talking sense to fools; they'll only poke fun at your words.

10-11 Don't stealthily move back the boundary lines or cheat orphans out of their property, For they have a powerful Advocate who will go to bat for them.

12 Give yourselves to disciplined instruction; open your ears to tested knowledge.

13-14 Don't be afraid to correct your young ones; the rod of discipline won't kill them. A good beating, in fact, might deliver them from something worse than death.

15-16 Dear child, if you become wise, I'll be one happy parent. My heart will dance and sing to the tuneful truth you'll speak.

17-18 Don't for a minute envy careless rebels; soak yourself in the Fear-of-Alahim—

That's where your future lies. Then you won't be left with an armload of nothing.

19-21 Oh listen, dear child—become wise; point your life in the right direction. Don't drink too much wine and get drunk; don't eat too much food and get fat.

Drunks and gluttons will end up on skid row, in a stupor and dressed in rags.

Buy Wisdom, Education, Insight

22-25 Listen with respect to the father who raised you, and when your mother grows old, don't neglect her. Buy truth—don't sell it for love or money; buy wisdom, buy education, buy insight. Parents rejoice when their children turn out well; wise children become proud parents. So make your father happy! Make your mother proud!

26 Dear child, I want your full attention; please do what I show you.

27-35 A prostitute is a bottomless pit; a loose woman can get you in deep trouble fast. She'll take you for all you've got; she's worse than a pack of thieves. Who are the people who are always crying the blues? Who do you know who reeks of self-pity? Who keeps getting beaten up for no reason at all? Whose eyes are bleary and bloodshot? It's those who spend the night with a bottle, for whom drinking is serious business. Don't judge wine by its label, or its bouquet, or its full-bodied flavor. Judge it rather by the hangover it leaves you with—the splitting headache, the queasy stomach. Do you really prefer seeing double, with your speech all slurred, Reeling and seasick, drunk as a sailor? "They hit me," you'll say, "but it didn't hurt; they beat on me, but I didn't feel a thing. When I'm sober enough to manage it, bring me another drink!"

24

Intelligence Outranks Muscle

1-2 Don't envy bad people; don't even want to be around them. All they think about is causing a disturbance; all they talk about is making trouble.

3-4 It takes wisdom to build a house, and understanding to set it on a firm foundation; It

takes knowledge to furnish its rooms with fine furniture and beautiful draperies.

5-6 It's better to be wise than strong; intelligence outranks muscle any day. Strategic planning is the key to warfare; to win, you need a lot of good counsel.

7 Wise conversation is way over the head of fools; in a serious discussion they haven't a clue.

8-9 The person who's always cooking up some evil soon gets a reputation as prince of rogues. Fools incubate sin; cynics desecrate beauty.

Rescue the Perishing

10 If you fall to pieces in a crisis, there wasn't much to you in the first place.

11-12 Rescue the perishing; don't hesitate to step in and help. If you say, "Hey, that's none of my business," will that get you off the hook? Someone is watching you closely, you know—Someone not impressed with weak excuses.

13-14 Eat honey, dear child—it's good for you—and delicacies that melt in your mouth. Likewise knowledge, and wisdom for your being—Get that and your future's secured, your hope is on solid rock.

15-16 Don't interfere with good people's lives; don't try to get the best of them. No matter how many times you trip them up, Alahim-loyal people don't stay down long; Soon they're up on their feet, while the wicked end up flat on their faces.

17-18 Don't laugh when your enemy falls; don't gloat over his collapse. Alahim might see, and become very provoked, and then take pity on his plight.

19-20 Don't bother your head with braggarts or wish you could succeed like the wicked. Those people have no future at all; they're headed down a dead-end street.

21-22 Fear Alahim, dear child—respect your leaders; don't be defiant or mutinous. Without warning your life can turn upside down, and who knows how or when it might happen?

An Honest Answer

23 It's wrong, very wrong, to go along with injustice.

24-25 Whoever whitewashes the wicked gets a black mark in the history books, But whoever exposes the wicked will be thanked and rewarded.

26 An honest answer is like a warm hug.

27 First plant your fields; then build your barn.

28-29 Don't talk about your neighbors behind their backs—no slander or gossip, please. Don't say to anyone, "I'll get back at you for what you did to me. I'll make you pay for what you did!"

30-34 One day I walked by the field of an old lazybones, and then passed the vineyard of a slob; They were overgrown with weeds, thick with thistles, all the fences broken down. I took a long look and pondered what I saw; the fields preached me a sermon and I listened: "A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, with poverty as your permanent houseguest!"

25

The Right Word at the Right Time

1 There are also these proverbs of Solomon, collected by scribes of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

2 Alahim delights in concealing things; scientists delight in discovering things.

3 Like the horizons for breadth and the ocean for depth, the understanding of a good leader is broad and deep.

4-5 Remove impurities from the silver and the silversmith can craft a fine chalice; Remove the wicked from leadership and authority will be credible and Alahim-honoring.

6-7 Don't work yourself into the spotlight; don't push your way into the place of prominence. It's better to be promoted to a place of honor than face humiliation by being demoted.

8-12 Don't jump to conclusions—

there may be a perfectly good explanation for what you just saw. In the heat of an argument, don't betray confidences; Word is sure to get around, and no one will trust you. The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry, And a wise friend's timely reprimand is like a gold ring slipped on your finger.

13-15 Reliable friends who do what they say are like cool drinks in sweltering heat—refreshing! Like billowing clouds that bring no rain is the person who talks big but never produces. Patient persistence pierces through indifference; gentle speech breaks down rigid defenses.

A Person Without Self-Control

16-19 When you're given a box of candy, don't gulp it all down, eat too much chocolate and you'll make yourself sick; And when you find a friend, don't outwear your welcome; show up at all hours and he'll soon get fed up. Anyone who tells lies against the neighbors in court or on the street is a loose cannon. Trusting a double-crosser when you're in trouble is like biting down on an abscessed tooth.

20 Singing light songs to the heavyhearted is like pouring salt in their wounds.

21-22 If you see your enemy hungry, go buy him lunch; if he's thirsty, bring him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness, and Alahim will look after you.

23 A north wind brings stormy weather, and a gossipy tongue stormy looks.

24 Better to live alone in a tumbledown shack than share a mansion with a nagging spouse.

25 Like a cool drink of water when you're worn out and weary is a letter from a long-lost friend.

26 A good person who gives in to a bad person is a muddied spring, a polluted well.

27 It's not smart to stuff yourself with sweets, nor is esteem piled on esteem good for you.

28 A person without self-control is like a house with its doors and windows knocked out.

26

Fools Recycle Stupidity

1 We no more give honors to fools than pray for snow in summer or rain during harvest.

2 You have as little to fear from an undeserved curse as from the dart of a wren or the swoop of a swallow.

- 3 A whip for the racehorse, a tiller for the sailboat—and a stick for the back of fools!
- 4 Don't respond to the stupidity of a fool; you'll only look foolish yourself.
- 5 Answer a fool in simple terms so he doesn't get a swelled head.
- 6 You're only asking for trouble when you send a message by a fool.
- 7 A proverb quoted by fools is limp as a wet noodle.
- 8 Putting a fool in a place of honor is like setting a mud brick on a marble column.
- 9 To ask a moron to quote a proverb is like putting a scalpel in the hands of a drunk.
- 10 Hire a fool or a drunk and you shoot yourself in the foot.
- 11 As a dog eats its own vomit, so fools recycle silliness.
- 12 See that man who thinks he's so smart? You can expect far more from a fool than from him.
- 13 Loafers say, "It's dangerous out there! Tigers are prowling the streets!" and then pull the covers back over their heads.
- 14 Just as a door turns on its hinges, so a lazybones turns back over in bed.
- 15 A shiftless sluggard puts his fork in the pie, but is too lazy to lift it to his mouth.

Like Glaze on Cracked Pottery

- 16 Dreamers fantasize their self-importance; they think they are smarter than a whole college faculty.
- 17 You grab a mad dog by the ears when you butt into a quarrel that's none of your business.
- 18-20 People who shrug off deliberate deceptions, saying, "I didn't mean it, I was only joking," Are worse than careless campers who walk away from smoldering campfires. When you run out of wood, the fire goes out; when the gossip ends, the quarrel dies down.
- 21 A quarrelsome person in a dispute is like petrol thrown on a fire.
- 22 Listening to gossip is like eating cheap candy; do you want junk like that in your belly?
- 23 Smooth talk from an evil heart is like glaze on cracked pottery.

24-28 Your enemy shakes hands and greets you like an old friend, all the while plotting against you. When he speaks warmly to you, don't believe him for a minute; he's just waiting for the chance to rip you off. No matter how shrewdly he conceals his malice, eventually his evil will be exposed in public. Malice backfires; spite boomerangs. Liars hate their victims; flatterers sabotage trust.

27

You Don't Know Tomorrow

- 1 Don't brashly announce what you're going to do tomorrow; you don't know the first thing mabout tomorrow.
- 2 Don't call attention to yourself; let others do that for you.
- 3 Carrying a log across your shoulders while you're hefting a boulder with your arms Is nothing compared to the burden of putting up with a fool.
- 4 We're blasted by anger and swamped by rage, but who can survive jealousy?
- 5 A spoken reprimand is better than approval that's never expressed.
- 6 The wounds from a lover are worth it; kisses from an enemy do you in.
- 7 When you've stuffed yourself, you refuse dessert; when you're starved, you could eat a horse.
- 8 People who won't settle down, wandering here and there, are like restless birds, flitting to and fro.
- 9 Just as lotions and fragrance give sensual delight, a sweet friendship refreshes the being.
- 10 Don't leave your friends or your parents' friends and run home to your family when things get rough; Better a nearby friend than a distant family.
- 11 Become wise, dear child, and make me happy; then nothing the world throws my way will upset me.
- 12 A prudent person sees trouble coming and ducks; a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered.
- 13 Hold tight to collateral on any loan to a stranger; be wary of accepting what a transient has pawned.
- 14 If you wake your friend in the early morning by shouting "Rise and shine!" It will sound to him more like a curse than a blessing.

15-16 A nagging spouse is like the drip, drip, drip of a leaky tap; You can't turn it off, and you can't get away from it.

Your Face Mirrors Your Heart

- 17 You use steel to sharpen steel, and one friend sharpens another.
- 18 If you care for your orchard, you'll enjoy its fruit; if you honor your boss, you'll be honored.
- 19 Just as water mirrors your face, so your face mirrors your heart.
- 20 Destruction has a voracious appetite, and lust just never quits.
- 21 The purity of silver and gold is tested by putting them in the fire; The purity of human hearts is tested by giving them a little fame.
- 22 Pound on a fool all you like— you can't pound out foolishness.
- 23-27 Know your sheep by name; carefully attend to your flocks; (Don't take them for granted; possessions don't last forever, you know.) And then, when the crops are in and the harvest is stored in the barns, You can knit sweaters from lambs' wool, and sell your goats for a profit; There will be plenty of milk and meat to last your family through the winter.

28

If You Abandon Alahim's Law

- 1 The wicked are edgy with guilt, ready to run off even when no one's after them; Honest people are relaxed and confident, bold as lions.
- 2 When the country is in chaos, everybody has a plan to fix it— But it takes a leader of real understanding to straighten things out.
- 3 The wicked who oppress the poor are like a hailstorm that beats down the harvest.
- 4 If you desert Alahim's law, you're free to embrace depravity; if you love Alahim's law, you fight for it tooth and nail.
- 5 Justice makes no sense to the evilminded; those who seek Alahim know it completely.
- 6 It's better to be poor and direct than rich and crooked.
- 7 Practice Alahim's law—get a reputation for wisdom; hang out with a loose crowd— embarrass your family.
- 8 Get as rich as you want through cheating and extortion,

29

If People Can't See What Alahim Is Doing

- 1 For people who hate discipline and only get more stubborn, There'll come a day when life tumbles in and they break, but by then it'll be too late to help them.
- 2 When good people run things, everyone is glad, but when the ruler is bad, everyone groans.
- 3 If you love wisdom, you'll delight your parents, but you'll destroy their trust if you run with prostitutes.
- 4 A leader of good judgment gives stability; an exploiting leader leaves a trail of waste.
- 5 A flattering neighbor is up to no good; he's probably planning to take advantage of you.
- 6 Evil people fall into their own traps; good people run the other way, glad to escape.
- 7 The good-hearted understand what it's like to be poor; the hardhearted haven't the faintest idea.
- 8 A gang of cynics can upset a whole city; a group of sages can calm everyone down.
- 9 A sage trying to work things out with a fool gets only scorn and sarcasm for his trouble.
- 10 Murderers hate honest people; moral folks encourage them.
- 11 A fool lets it all hang out; a sage quietly mulls it over.
- 12 When a leader listens to malicious gossip, all the workers get infected with evil.
- 13 The poor and their abusers have at least something in common: they can both see—their sight, Alahim's gift!
- 14 Leadership gains authority and respect when the voiceless poor are treated fairly.
- 15 Wise discipline imparts wisdom; spoiled adolescents embarrass their parents.
- 16 When degenerates take charge, crime runs wild, but the righteous will eventually observe their collapse.
- 17 Discipline your children; you'll be glad you did—they'll turn out delightful to live with.
- 18 If people can't see what Alahim is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.
- 19 It takes more than talk to keep workers in line; mere words go in one ear and out the other.

20 Observe the people who always talk before they think—
even simpletons are better off than they are.

21 If you let people treat you like a doormat,
you'll be quite forgotten in the end.

22 Angry people stir up a lot of discord;
the intemperate stir up trouble.

23 Pride lands you flat on your face;
humility prepares you for honors.

24 Befriend an outlaw
and become an enemy to yourself.
When the victims cry out,
you'll be included in their curses
if you're a coward to their cause in court.

25 The fear of human opinion disables;
trusting in Alahim protects you from that.

26 Everyone tries to get help from the leader,
but only Alahim will give us justice.

27 Good people can't stand the sight of
deliberate evil; the wicked can't stand the
sight of well-chosen goodness.

30

The Words of Agur Ben Yakeh Alahim? Who Needs Him?

1-2 The skeptic swore, "There is no Alahim!
No Alahim!—I can do anything I want! I'm
more animal than human; so-called human
intelligence escapes me.

3-4 "I flunked 'wisdom.' I see no evidence of a
set-apart Alahim.

Has anyone ever seen Anyone climb into Heaven
and take charge? grab the winds and control
them? gather the rains in his bucket? stake out
the ends of the earth? Just tell me his name, tell
me the names of his sons. Come on now—tell
me!"

5-6 The believer replied, "Every promise of
Alahim proves true; he protects everyone who
runs to him for help. So don't second-guess him;
he might take you to task and show up your lies."

7-9 And then he prayed, "Alahim, I'm asking for
two things before I die; don't refuse me—
Banish lies from my lips and liars from my
presence. Give me enough food to live on,
neither too much nor too little. If I'm too full,
I might get independent, saying, 'Alahim?
Who needs him?' If I'm poor, I might steal and
dishonor the name of my Alahim."

10 Don't blow the whistle on your fellow
workers behind their backs; They'll accuse
you of being underhanded, and then you'll
be the guilty one!

11 Don't curse your father or fail to bless your
mother.

12 Don't imagine yourself to be quite
presentable when you haven't had a bath in
weeks.

13 Don't be stuck-up and think you're better
than everyone else.

14 Don't be greedy, merciless and cruel as
wolves, Tearing into the poor and feasting
on them, shredding the needy to pieces only
to discard them.

15-16 A freeloader has twin daughters named
"Gimme" and "Gimme more."

Four Insatiables

Three things are never satisfied, no, there are
four that never say, "That's enough, thank you!"

- destruction,
- a barren womb,
- a parched land,
- a forest fire.

17 An eye that disdains a father
and despises a mother— that eye will be
plucked out by wild vultures and consumed by
young eagles.

Four Mysteries

18-19 Three things amaze me, no, four things I'll
never understand—

- how an eagle flies so high in the sky,
- how a snake glides over a rock,
- how a ship navigates the ocean,
- why adolescents act the way they do.

20 Here's how a prostitute operates: she has sex
with her client, Takes a bath, then asks, "Who's
next?"

Four Intolerables

21-23 Three things are too much for even
the earth to bear, yes, four things shake its
foundations—

- when the janitor becomes the boss,
- when a fool gets rich,
- when a prostitute is voted "woman of the year,"
- when a "girlfriend" replaces a faithful wife.

Four Small Wonders

24-28 There are four small creatures, wisest of the wise they are—

- **Ants**—frail as they are, get plenty of food in for the winter;
- **Marmots**—vulnerable as they are, manage to arrange for rock-solid homes;
- **Locusts**—leaderless insects, yet they strip the field like an army regiment;
- **Lizards**—easy enough to catch, but they sneak past vigilant palace guards.

Four Dignitaries

29-31 There are three solemn dignitaries, four that are impressive in their bearing—

- a lion, king of the beasts, deferring to none;
- a rooster, proud and strutting;
- a billy goat;
- a head of state in stately procession.

32-33 If you're dumb enough to call attention to yourself by offending people and making rude gestures, Don't be surprised if someone bloodies up your nose when they belt you one! Churned milk turns into butter; riled emotions turn into fist fights.

Never spiteful, she treats him generously all her life long.

She shops around for the best yarns and cottons, and enjoys knitting and sewing.

She's like a trading ship that sails to faraway places and brings back exotic surprises.

She's up before dawn, preparing breakfast for her family and organizing her day.

She looks over a field and buys it, then, with money she's put aside, plants a garden.

First thing in the morning, she dresses for work, rolls up her sleeves, eager to get started.

She senses the worth of her work, is in no hurry to call it quits for the day.

She's skilled in the crafts of home and hearth, diligent in homemaking.

She's quick to assist anyone in need, reaches out to help the poor.

She doesn't worry about her family when it snows; their winter clothes are all mended and ready to wear.

She makes her own clothing, and dresses in colorful linens and silks.

Her husband is greatly respected when he deliberates with the city fathers.

She designs gowns and sells them, brings the sweaters she knits to the dress shops.

Her clothes are well-made and elegant, and she always faces tomorrow with a smile.

When she speaks she has something worthwhile to say, and she always says it kindly.

She keeps an eye on everyone in her household, and keeps them all busy and productive.

Her children respect and bless her; her husband joins in with words of praise:

"Many women have done wonderful things, but you've outclassed them all!"

Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-Alahim.

Give her everything she deserves! Adorn her life with praises!

31

Speak Out for Justice

1-3 The words of King Lemuel, the strong advice his mother gave him: "Oh, son of mine, what can you be thinking of! Child whom I bore! The son I dedicated to Alahim! Don't dilute your strength on fortune-hunting women, promiscuous women who shipwreck leaders.

4-7 "Leaders can't afford to make fools of themselves, gulping wine and swilling beer, Lest, hung over, they don't know right from wrong, and the people who depend on them are hurt. Use wine and beer only as sedatives, to kill the pain and dull the ache Of the terminally ill, for whom life is a living death.

8-9 "Speak up for the people who have no voice, for the rights of all the misfits. Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!"

Praise to a Virtuous Wife

10-31 A good, virtuous woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds. Her husband trusts her without reserve, and never has reason to regret it.

ECCLESIASTES 1

THE QUESTER (Solomon)

1 These are the words of the Quester, David's son and king in Jerusalem:

2-11 Smoke, nothing but smoke. [That's what the Quester says.] There's nothing to anything—it's all smoke. What's there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives, but nothing changes—it's business as usual for old planet earth. The sun comes up and the sun goes down, then does it again, and again—the same old round. The wind blows south, the wind blows north. Around and around and around it blows, blowing this way, then that—the whirling, erratic wind. All the rivers flow into the sea, but the sea never fills up. The rivers keep flowing to the same old place, and then start all over and do it again. Everything's boring, utterly boring—no one can find any meaning in it. Boring to the eye, boring to the ear. What was will be again, what happened will happen again. There's nothing new on this earth. Year after year it's the same old thing. Does someone call out, "Hey, this is new"? Don't get excited—it's the same old story. Nobody remembers what happened yesterday. And the things that will happen tomorrow? Nobody'll remember them either. Don't count on being remembered. There's nothing new under the sun!

12-18 Call me "the Quester." I've been king over Israel in Jerusalem. I looked most carefully into everything, searched out all that is done on this earth. And let me tell you, there's not much to write home about. Alahim hasn't made it easy for us. I've seen it all and it's nothing but smoke—smoke, and spitting into the wind. Life's a corkscrew that can't be straightened. A minus that won't add up. I said to myself, "I know more and I'm wiser than anyone before me in Jerusalem. I've stockpiled wisdom and knowledge." What I've finally concluded is that so-called wisdom and knowledge are mindless and witless—nothing but spitting into the wind. Much learning earns you much trouble. The more you know, the more you hurt.

2

1-3 I said to myself, "Let's go for it—experiment with pleasure, have a good time!" But there was nothing to it, nothing but smoke. What do I think of the fun-filled life? Insane! Inane! My verdict on the pursuit of happiness? Who needs it? With the help of a bottle of wine and all the wisdom I could muster, I tried my level best to penetrate the absurdity of life. I wanted to get a handle on anything useful we mortals might do during the years we spend on this earth.

I Never Said No to Myself

4-8 Oh, I did great things: built houses, planted vineyards, designed gardens and parks and planted a variety of fruit trees in them, made pools of water to irrigate the groves of trees. I bought slaves, male and female, who had children, giving me even more slaves; then I acquired large herds and flocks, larger than any before me in Jerusalem. I piled up silver and gold, loot from kings and kingdoms. I gathered a chorus of singers to entertain me with song, and—most exquisite of all pleasures—voluptuous maidens for my bed.

9-10 Oh, how I prospered! I left all my predecessors in Jerusalem far behind, left them behind in the dust. What's more, I kept a clear head through it all. Everything I wanted I took—I never said no to myself. I gave in to every impulse, held back nothing. I sucked the marrow of pleasure out of every task—my reward to myself for a hard day's work!

I Hate Life!

11 Then I took a good look at everything I'd done, looked at all the sweat and hard work. But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing.

12-14 And then I took a hard look at what's smart and what's stupid. What's left to do after you've been king? That's a hard act to follow. You just do what you can, and that's it. But I did see that it's better to be smart than stupid, just as light is better than darkness. Even so, though the smart ones see where they're going and the stupid ones grope in the dark, they're all the same in the end. One fate for all—and that's it.

15-16 When I realized that my fate's the same as the fool's, I had to ask myself, "So why bother being wise?" It's all smoke, nothing but smoke. The smart and the stupid both disappear out of sight. In a day or two they're both forgotten. Yes, both the smart and the stupid die, and that's it.

17 I hate life. As far as I can see, what happens on earth is a bad business. It's smoke—and spitting into the wind.

18-19 And I hated everything I'd accomplished and accumulated on this earth. I can't take it with me—no, I have to leave it to whoever comes after me. Whether they're worthy or worthless—and who's to tell?—they'll take over the earthly results of my intense thinking and hard work. Smoke.

20-23 That's when I called it quits, gave up on anything that could be hoped for on this earth. What's the point of working your fingers to the bone if you hand over what you worked for to someone who never lifted a finger for it? Smoke, that's what it is. A bad business from start to finish. So what do you get from a life of hard labor? Pain and grief from dawn to dusk. Never a decent night's rest. Nothing but smoke.

24-26 The best you can do with your life is have a good time and get by the best you can. The way I see it, that's it—divine fate. Whether we feast or fast, it's up to Alahim. Alahim may give wisdom and knowledge and joy to his favorites, but sinners are assigned a life of hard labor, and end up turning their wages over to Alahim's favorites. Nothing but smoke—and spitting into the wind.

3

There's a Right Time for Everything

3 There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

2-8 A right time for birth and another for death, A right time to plant and another to reap, A right time to kill and another to heal, A right time to destroy and another to construct, A right time to cry and another to laugh, A right time to lament and another to cheer, A right time to make love also to abstain, A right time to embrace and another to part, A right time to search and another to count your losses,

A right time to hold on and another to let go, A right time to rip out and another to mend, A right time to shut up and a time to speak out, A right time to love and another to hate, A right time to wage war and another to make peace.

9-13 But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does? I've had a good look at what Alahim has given us to do—busywork, mostly. True, Alahim made everything beautiful in itself and in its time—but he's left us in the dark, so we can never know what Alahim is up to, whether he's coming or going. I've decided that there's nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That's it—eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It's Alahim's gift.

14 I've also concluded that whatever Alahim does, that's the way it's going to be, always. No addition, no subtraction. Alahim's done it and that's it. That's so we'll quit asking questions and simply worship in set-apart fear.

15 Whatever was, is. Whatever will be, is. That's how it always is with Alahim.

Alahim's Testing Us!

16-18 I took another good look at what's going on: The very place of judgment—corrupt! The place of righteousness—corrupt! I said to myself, "Alahim will judge righteous and wicked." There's a right time for every thing, every deed—and there's no getting around it. I said to myself regarding the human race, "Alahim's testing the lot of us, showing us up as nothing but animals."

19-22 Humans and animals come to the same end—humans die, animals die. We all breathe the same air. So there's really no advantage in being human. None. Everything's smoke. We all end up in the same place—we all came from dust, we all end up as dust. Nobody knows for sure that the human spirit rises to heaven or that the animal spirit sinks into the earth. So I made up my mind that there's nothing better for us men and women than to have a good time in whatever we do—that's our lot. Who knows if there's anything else to life?

4

Slow Suicide!

1-3 Next I turned my attention to all the outrageous violence that takes place on this planet—the tears of the victims, no one to comfort them; the iron grip of oppressors, no one to rescue the victims from them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead instead of the living who are still alive. But luckier than the dead or the living is the person who has never even been, who has never seen the bad business that takes place on this earth.

4 -6 Then I observed all the work and ambition motivated by envy. What a waste! Smoke. And spitting into the wind. The fool sits back and takes it easy, His sloth is slow suicide. One handful of peaceful repose Is better than two fistfuls of worried work— More spitting into the wind.

Why Am I Working Like a Dog?

7-8 I turned my head and saw yet another wisp of smoke on its way to nothingness: a solitary person, completely alone—no children, no family, no friends—yet working obsessively late into the night, compulsively greedy for more and more, never bothering to ask, "Why am I working like a dog, never having any fun? And who cares?" More smoke. A bad business.

9-10 It's better to have a partner than go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps, But if there's no one to help, tough!

11-12 Two in a bed warm each other. Alone, you shiver all night. By yourself you're unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Can you round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn't easily snapped.

13-16 A poor child with some wisdom is better off than an old but foolish king who doesn't know which end is up. I saw a youth just like this start with nothing and go from rags to riches, and I saw everyone rally to the rule of this young successor to the king. Even so, the excitement died quickly, the throngs of people soon lost interest. Can't you see it's only smoke? And spitting into the wind?

5

Alahim's in Charge, Not You!

1-2 Watch your step when you enter Alahim's house. Enter to learn. That's far better than mindlessly offering a sacrifice, Doing more harm than good. Don't shoot off your mouth, or speak before you think. Don't be too quick to tell Alahim what you think he wants to hear. Alahim's in charge, not you—the less you speak, the better.

3-7 Overwork makes for restless sleep. Overtalk shows you up as a fool. When you tell Alahim you'll do something, do it—now. Alahim takes no pleasure in foolish drivel. Vow it, then do it. Far better not to vow in the first place than to vow and not pay up. Don't let your mouth make a total sinner of you. When called to account, you won't get by with "Sorry, I didn't mean it." Why risk provoking Alahim to angry retaliation? But against all illusion and fantasy and empty talk There's always this rock foundation: Fear Alahim!

A Salary of Smoke!

8-9 Don't be too upset when you see the poor kicked around, and justice and right violated all over the place. Exploitation filters down from one petty official to another. There's no end to it, and nothing can be done about it. But the good earth doesn't cheat anyone—even a bad king is honestly served by a field.

10-12 The one who loves money is never satisfied with money, Nor the one who loves wealth with big profits. More smoke. The more loot you get, the more looters show up. And what fun is that—to be robbed in broad daylight? Hard and honest work earns a good night's sleep, Whether supper is beans or steak. But a rich man's belly gives him insomnia.

13-17 Here's a piece of bad luck I've seen happen: A man hoards far more wealth than is good for him And then loses it all in a bad business deal. He fathered a child but hasn't a cent left to give him. He arrived naked from the womb of his mother; He'll leave in the same condition—with nothing. This is bad luck, for sure—naked he came, naked he went. So what was the point of working for a salary of smoke? All for a miserable life spent in the dark?

Make the Most of What Alahim Gives!

18-20 After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as Alahim gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what Alahim gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's Alahim's gift! Alahim deals out joy in the present, the now. It's useless to brood over how long we might live.

6

Things Are Bad!

1-2 I looked long and hard at what goes on around here, and let me tell you, things are bad. And people feel it. There are people, for instance, on whom Alahim showers everything—money, property, reputation—all they ever wanted or dreamed of. And then Alahim doesn't let them enjoy it. Some stranger comes along and has all the fun. It's more of what I'm calling smoke. A bad business.

3-5 Say a couple have scores of children and live a long, long life but never enjoy themselves—even though they end up with a big funeral! I'd say that a stillborn baby gets the better deal. It gets its start in a mist and ends up in the dark—unnamed. It sees nothing and knows nothing, but is better off by far than anyone living.

6-7 Even if someone lived a thousand years—make it two thousand!—but didn't enjoy anything, what's the point? Doesn't everyone end up in the same place? We work to feed our appetites; Meanwhile our beings go hungry.

8-10 So what advantage has a sage over a fool, or over some poor wretch who barely gets by? Just grab whatever you can while you can; don't assume something better might turn up by and by. All it amounts to anyway is smoke. And spitting into the wind. Whatever happens, happens. Its destiny is fixed. You can't argue with fate.

11-12 The more words that are spoken, the more smoke there is in the air. And who is any better off? And who knows what's best for us as we live out our meager smoke-and-shadow lives? And who can tell any of us the next chapter of our lives?

7

Don't Take Anything for Granted!

1-6 A good reputation is better than a fat bank account. Your death date tells more than your birth date. You learn more at a funeral than at a feast— After all, that's where we'll end up. We might discover something from it. Crying is better than laughing. It blotsches the face but it scours the heart. Sages invest themselves in hurt and grieving. Fools waste their lives in fun and games. You'll get more from the rebuke of a sage Than from the song and dance of fools. The giggles of fools are like the crackling of twigs under the cooking pot. And like smoke.

7-10 Brutality stupefies even the wise And destroys the strongest heart. Endings are better than beginnings. Sticking to it is better than standing out. Don't be quick to fly off the handle. Anger boomerangs. You can spot a fool by the lumps on his head. Don't always be asking, "Where are the good old days?" Wise folks don't ask questions like that.

11-12 Wisdom is better when it's paired with money, Especially if you get both while you're still living. Double protection: wisdom and wealth! Plus this bonus: Wisdom energizes its owner.

13-14 Take a good look at Alahim's work. Who could simplify and reduce Creation's curves and angles To a plain straight line? On a good day, enjoy yourself; On a bad day, examine your conscience. Alahim arranges for both kinds of days So that we won't take anything for granted.

Stay in Touch with Both Sides!

15-17 I've seen it all in my brief and pointless life—here a good person cut down in the middle of doing good, there a bad person living a long life of sheer evil. So don't knock yourself out being good, and don't go overboard being wise. Believe me, you won't get anything out of it. But don't press your luck by being bad, either. And don't be reckless. Why die needlessly?

18 It's best to stay in touch with both sides of an issue. A person who fears Alahim deals responsibly with all of reality, not just a piece of it.

19-20 Wisdom puts more strength in one wise person Than ten strong men give to a city. There's not one totally good person on earth, Not one who is truly pure and sinless.

21-22 Don't eavesdrop on the conversation of others. What if the gossip's about you and you'd rather not hear it? You've done that a few times, haven't you—said things Behind someone's back you wouldn't say to his face?

How to Interpret the Meaning of Life?

23-25 I tested everything in my search for wisdom. I set out to be wise, but it was beyond me, far beyond me, and deep—oh so deep! Does anyone ever find it? I concentrated with all my might, studying and exploring and seeking wisdom—the meaning of life. I also wanted to identify evil and stupidity, foolishness and craziness.

26-29 One discovery: A woman can be a bitter pill to swallow, full of seductive scheming and grasping. The lucky escape her; the undiscerning get caught. At least this is my experience—what I, the Quester, have pieced together as I've tried to make sense of life. But the wisdom I've looked for I haven't found. I didn't find one man or woman in a thousand worth my while. Yet I did spot one ray of light in this murk: Alahim made men and women true and upright; we're the ones who've made a mess of things.

8

1 There's nothing better than being wise, Knowing how to interpret the meaning of life. Wisdom puts light in the eyes, And gives gentleness to words and manners.

No One Can Control the Wind!

2-7 Do what your king commands; you gave a sacred oath of obedience. Don't worryingly second-guess your orders or try to back out when the task is unpleasant. You're serving his pleasure, not yours. The king has the last word. Who dares say to him, "What are you doing?" Carrying out orders won't hurt you a bit; the wise person obeys promptly and accurately. Yes, there's a right time and way for everything, even though, unfortunately, we miss it for the most part. It's true that no one knows what's going to happen, or when. Who's around to tell us?

8-9 No one can control the wind or lock it in a box. No one has any say-so regarding the day of death. No one can stop a battle in its tracks. No one who does evil can be delivered by evil. All this I observed as I tried my best to understand all that's going on in this world. As long as men and women have the power to hurt each other, this is the way it is.

One Fate for Everybody!

10-11 One time I saw wicked men given a solemn burial in set-apart ground. When the people returned to the city, they delivered flowery eulogies—and in the very place where wicked acts were done by those very men! More smoke. Indeed. Because the sentence against evil deeds is so long in coming, people in general think they can get by with murder.

12-13 Even though a person sins and gets by with it hundreds of times throughout a long life, I'm still convinced that the good life is reserved for the person who fears Alahim, who lives reverently in his presence, and that the evil person will not experience a "good" life. No matter how many days he lives, they'll all be as flat and colorless as a shadow—because he doesn't fear Alahim.

14-15 Here's something that happens all the time and makes no sense at all: Good people get what's coming to the wicked, and bad people get what's coming to the good. I tell you, this makes no sense. It's smoke. So, I'm all for just going ahead and having a good time—the best possible. The only earthly good men and women can look forward to is to eat and drink well and have a good time—compensation for the struggle for survival these few years Alahim gives us on earth.

16-17 When I determined to load up on wisdom and examine everything taking place on earth, I realized that if you keep your eyes open day and night without even blinking, you'll still never figure out the meaning of what Alahim is doing on this earth. Search as hard as you like, you're not going to make sense of it. No matter how smart you are, you won't get to the bottom of it.

9

1-3 Well, I took all this in and thought it through, inside and out. Here's what I understood: The good, the wise, and all that they do are in Alahim's hands—but, day by day, whether it's love or hate they're dealing with, they don't know.

Anything's possible. It's one fate for everybody—righteous and wicked, good people, bad people, the nice and the nasty, worshipers and non-worshipers, committed and uncommitted. I find this outrageous—the worst thing about living on this earth—that everyone's lumped together in one fate. Is it any wonder that so many people are obsessed with evil? Is it any wonder that people go crazy right and left? Life leads to death. That's it.

Seize Life!

4-6 Still, anyone selected out for life has hope, for, as they say, "A living dog is better than a dead lion." The living at least know something, even if it's only that they're going to die. But the dead know nothing and get nothing. They're a minus that no one remembers. Their loves, their hates, yes, even their dreams, are long gone. There's not a trace of them left in the affairs of this earth.

7-10 Seize life! Eat bread with gusto, Drink wine with a robust heart. Oh yes—Alahim takes pleasure in your pleasure! Dress festively every morning. Don't skimp on colors and scarves. Relish life with the spouse you love. Each and every day of your precarious life. Each day is Alahim's gift. It's all you get in exchange For the hard work of staying alive. Make the most of each one! Whatever turns up, grab it and do it. And heartily! This is your last and only chance at it, For there's neither work to do nor thoughts to think In the company of the dead, where you're most certainly headed.

11-12 I took another walk around the neighborhood and realized that on this earth as it is—

The race is not always to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor satisfaction to the wise,
Nor riches to the smart,
Nor favour to the learned.
Sooner or later bad luck hits us all.

No one can predict misfortune.

Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds in a trap,
So men and women are caught
By accidents evil and sudden.

Wisdom Is Better than Muscle

13-16 One day as I was observing how wisdom fares on this earth, I saw something that made me sit up and take notice. There was a small town with only a few people in it. A strong king came and mounted an attack, building trenches and attack posts around it. There was a poor but wise man in that town whose wisdom delivered the town, but he was promptly forgotten. (He was only a poor man, after all.) All the same, I still say that wisdom is better than muscle, even though the wise poor man was treated with contempt and soon forgotten.

17-18 The quiet words of the wise are more effective Than the ranting of a king of fools. Wisdom is better than warheads, But one hothead can ruin the good earth.

10

1-4 Dead flies in perfume make it stink, And a little foolishness decomposes much wisdom. Wise thinking leads to right living; Stupid thinking leads to wrong living. Fools on the road have no sense of direction. The way they walk tells the story: "There goes the fool again!" If a ruler loses his temper against you, don't panic; A calm disposition quiets intemperate rage.

5-7 Here's a piece of bad business I've seen on this earth, An error that can be blamed on whoever is in charge: Immaturity is given a place of prominence, While maturity is made to take a backseat. I've seen unproven upstarts riding in style, While experienced veterans are put out to pasture.

8-11 Caution: The trap you set might catch you. Warning: Your accomplice in crime might double-cross you. Safety first: Quarrying stones is dangerous. Be alert: Felling trees is hazardous.

10 Remember: The duller the ax the harder the work; Use your head: The more brains, the less muscle. If the snake bites before it's been charmed, What's the point in then sending for the charmer?

12-13 The words of a wise person are gracious.
The talk of a fool self-destructs—
He starts out talking nonsense And ends up
spouting insanity and evil.

14-15 Fools talk way too much, Chattering stuff
they know nothing about. A decent day's work
so fatigues fools That they can't find their way
back to town.

16-20 Unlucky the land whose king is a young
pup, And whose princes party all night. Lucky
the land whose king is mature, Where the princes
behave themselves And don't drink themselves
silly. A shiftless man lives in a tumbledown
shack; A lazy woman ends up with a leaky roof.
Laughter and bread go together, And wine
gives sparkle to life— But it's money that makes
the world go around. Don't bad-mouth your
leaders, not even under your breath, And don't
abuse your betters, even in the privacy of your
home. Loose talk has a way of getting picked up
and spread around. Little birds drop the crumbs
of your gossip far and wide.

11

1-6 Be generous: Invest in acts of charity. Charity
yields high returns. Don't hoard your goods;
spread them around. Be a blessing to others.
This could be your last night. When the clouds
are full of water, it rains. When the wind blows
down a tree, it lies where it falls. Don't sit there
watching the wind. Do your own work. Don't
stare at the clouds. Get on with your life.

Just as you'll never understand the mystery
of life forming in a pregnant woman, So you'll
never understand the mystery at work in all that
Alahim does. Go to work in the morning and
stick to it until evening without watching the
clock. You never know from moment to moment
how your work will turn out in the end.

Before the Years Take Their Toll!

7-10 Oh, how sweet the light of day, And how
wonderful to live in the sunshine! Even if you live
a long time, don't take a single day for granted.
Take delight in each light-filled hour,
Remembering that there will also be many dark
days And that most of what comes your way is
smoke. You who are young, make the most of
your youth. Relish your youthful vigor. Follow
the impulses of your heart. If something looks
good to you, pursue it.

But know also that not just anything goes; You
have to answer to Alahim for every last bit of
it. Live footloose and fancy-free—You won't
be young forever. Youth lasts about as long as
smoke.

12

1-2 Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're
still young, Before the years take their toll and
your vigor wanes, Before your vision dims and
the world blurs And the winter years keep you
close to the fire.

3-8 In old age, your body no longer serves you
so well. Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints
stiffen. The shades are pulled down on the
world. You can't come and go at will. Things
grind to a halt. The hum of the household fades
away. You are wakened now by bird-song. Hikes
to the mountains are a thing of the past. Even
a stroll down the road has its terrors. Your hair
turns apple-blossom white, Adorning a fragile
and impotent matchstick body. Yes, you're well
on your way to eternal rest, While your friends
make plans for your funeral. Life, lovely while it
lasts, is soon over. Life as we know it, precious
and beautiful, ends. The body is put back in the
same ground it came from. The spirit returns
to Alahim, who first breathed it. It's all smoke,
nothing but smoke.

The Quester says that everything's smoke.

The Final Word!

9-11 Besides being wise himself, the Quester
also taught others knowledge. He weighed,
examined, and arranged many proverbs. The
Quester did his best to find the right words
and write the plain truth. The words of the wise
prod us to live well. They're like nails hammered
home, holding life together. They are given by
Alahim, the one Shepherd.

12-13 But regarding anything beyond this, dear
friend, go easy. There's no end to the publishing
of books, and constant study wears you out so
you're no good for anything else. The last and
final word is this:

Fear Alahim...Do what he tells you!

14 And that's it. Eventually Alahim will bring
everything that we do out into the open and
judge it according to its hidden intent, whether
it's good or evil.

SONG OF SOLOMON

1

1 The Song—best of all songs—
Solomon's song!

The Woman

2-3 Kiss me—full on the mouth! Yes! For your love is better than wine, headier than your aromatic oils. The syllables of your name murmur like a meadow brook. No wonder everyone loves to say your name!

4 Take me away with you! Let's run off together! An elopement with my King-Lover! We'll celebrate, we'll sing, we'll make great music. Yes! For your love is better than vintage wine. Everyone loves you—of course! And why not?

5-6 I am weathered but still elegant, oh, dear sisters in Jerusalem, Weather-darkened like Kedar desert tents, time-softened like Solomon's Temple hangings. Don't look down on me because I'm dark, darkened by the sun's harsh rays. My brothers ridiculed me and sent me to work in the fields. They made me care for the face of the earth, but I had no time to care for my own face.

7 Tell me where you're working —I love you so much— Tell me where you're tending your flocks, where you let them rest at noontime. Why should I be the one left out, outside the orbit of your tender care?

The Man

8 If you can't find me, loveliest of all women, it's all right. Stay with your flocks. Lead your lambs to good pasture. Stay with your shepherd neighbors.

9-11 You remind me of Pharaoh's well-groomed and satiny mares. Pendant earrings line the elegance of your cheeks; strands of jewels illumine the curve of your throat. I'm making jewelry for you, gold and silver jewelry that will mark and accent your beauty.

The Woman

12-14 When my King-Lover lay down beside me, my fragrance filled the room.

His head resting between my breasts— the head of my lover was a sachet of sweet myrrh. My beloved is a bouquet of wildflowers picked just for me from the fields of En Gedi.

The Man

15 Oh, my dear friend! You're so beautiful! And your eyes so beautiful—like doves!

The Woman

16-17 And you, my dear lover—you're so handsome! And the bed we share is like a forest glen. We enjoy a canopy of cedars enclosed by cypresses, fragrant and green.

2

1 I'm just a wildflower picked from the plains of Sharon, a lotus blossom from the valley pools.

The Man

2 A lotus blossoming in a swamp of weeds—that's my dear friend among the girls in the village.

The Woman

3-4 As an apricot tree stands out in the forest, my lover stands above the young men in town. All I want is to sit in his shade, to taste and savor his delicious love. He took me home with him for a festive meal, but his eyes feasted on me!

5-6 Oh! Give me something refreshing to eat—and quickly! Apricots, raisins—anything. I'm about to faint with love! His left hand cradles my head, and his right arm encircles my waist!

7 Oh, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem, by the gazelles, yes, by all the wild deer: Don't excite love, don't stir it up, until the time is ripe—and you're ready.

8-10 Look! Listen! There's my lover! Do you see him coming? Vaulting the mountains, leaping the hills. My lover is like a gazelle, favourful; like a young stag, virile. Look at him there, on tiptoe at the gate, all ears, all eyes—ready! My lover has arrived and he's speaking to me!

The Man

10-14 Get up, my dear friend, fair and beautiful lover—come to me! Look around you: Winter is over; the winter rains are over, gone! Spring flowers are in blossom all over.

The whole world's a choir—and singing! Spring warblers are filling the forest with sweet strains. Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed, and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms. Oh, get up, dear friend, my fair and beautiful lover—come to me! Come, my shy and modest dove—leave your seclusion, come out in the open. Let me see your face, let me hear your voice. For your voice is soothing and your face is ravishing.

The Woman

15 Then you must protect me from the foxes, foxes on the prowl, Foxes who would like nothing better than to get into our flowering garden.

16-17 My lover is mine, and I am his. Nightly he strolls in our garden, Delighting in the flowers until dawn breathes its light and night slips away. Turn to me, dear lover. Come like a gazelle. Leap like a wild stag on delectable mountains!

3

1-4 Restless in bed and sleepless through the night, I longed for my lover. I wanted him desperately. His absence was painful. So I got up, went out and roved the city, hunting through streets and down alleys. I wanted my lover in the worst way!

I looked high and low, and didn't find him. And then the night watchmen found me as they patrolled the darkened city. "Have you seen my dear lost love?" I asked. No sooner had I left them than I found him, found my dear lost love. I threw my arms around him and held him tight, wouldn't let him go until I had him home again, safe at home beside the fire.

5-11 Oh, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem, by the gazelles, yes, by all the wild deer: Don't excite love, don't stir it up, until the time is ripe—and you're ready. What's this I see, approaching from the desert, raising clouds of dust, Filling the air with sweet smells and pungent aromatics? Look! It's Solomon's carriage, carried and guarded by sixty soldiers, sixty of Israel's finest, All of them armed to the teeth, trained for battle, ready for anything, anytime. King Solomon once had a carriage built from fine-grained Lebanon cedar. He had it framed with silver and roofed with gold. The cushions were covered with a purple fabric, the interior lined with tooled leather. Come and look, sisters in Jerusalem.

Oh, sisters of Zion, don't miss this! My King-Lover, dressed and garlanded for his wedding, his heart full, bursting with joy!

4

The Man

1-5 You're so beautiful, my darling, so beautiful, and your dove eyes are veiled By your hair as it flows and shimmers, like a flock of goats in the distance streaming down a hillside in the sunshine. Your smile is generous and full—expressive and strong and clean. Your lips are jewel red, your mouth elegant and inviting, your veiled cheeks soft and radiant. The smooth, lithe lines of your neck command notice—all heads turn in awe and admiration! Your breasts are like fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing among the first spring flowers.

6-7 The sweet, fragrant curves of your body, the soft, spiced contours of your flesh Invite me, and I come. I stay until dawn breathes its light and night slips away. You're beautiful from head to toe, my dear love, beautiful beyond compare, absolutely flawless.

8-15 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride. Leave Lebanon behind, and come. Leave your high mountain hideaway. Abandon your wilderness seclusion, Where you keep company with lions and panthers guard your safety. You've captured my heart, dear friend. You looked at me, and I fell in love. One look my way and I was hopelessly in love! How beautiful your love, dear, dear friend—far more pleasing than a fine, rare wine, your fragrance more exotic than select spices. The kisses of your lips are honey, my love, every syllable you speak a delicacy to savor. Your clothes smell like the wild outdoors, the fresh scent of high mountains. Dear lover and friend, you're a secret garden, a private and pure fountain. Body and being, you are paradise, a whole orchard of succulent fruits—Ripe apricots and peaches, oranges and pears; Nut trees and cinnamon, and all scented woods; Mint and lavender, and all herbs aromatic; A garden fountain, sparkling and splashing, fed by spring waters from the Lebanon mountains.

The Woman

16 Wake up, North Wind, get moving, South Wind! Breathe on my garden, fill the air with spice fragrance. Oh, let my lover enter his garden! Yes, let him eat the fine, ripe fruits.

5

The Man

1 I went to my garden, dear friend, best lover! breathed the sweet fragrance. I ate the fruit and honey, I drank the nectar and wine. Celebrate with me, friends! Raise your glasses—
“To life! To love!”

The Woman

2 I was sound asleep, but in my dreams I was wide awake. Oh, listen! It's the sound of my lover knocking, calling!

The Man

“Let me in, dear companion, dearest friend, my dove, consummate lover! I'm soaked with the dampness of the night, drenched with dew, shivering and cold.”

The Woman

3-8 “But I'm in my nightgown—do you expect me to get dressed? I'm bathed and in bed—do you want me to get dirty?” But my lover wouldn't take no for an answer, and the longer he knocked, the more excited I became.

I got up to open the door to my lover, sweetly ready to receive him, Desiring and expectant as I turned the door handle. But when I opened the door he was gone. My loved one had tired of waiting and left. And I died inside—oh, I felt so bad! I ran out looking for him But he was nowhere to be found. I called into the darkness—but no answer. The night watchmen found me as they patrolled the streets of the city. They slapped and beat and bruised me, ripping off my clothes, These watchmen, who were supposed to be guarding the city. I beg you, sisters in Jerusalem—if you find my lover, Please tell him I want him, that I'm heartsick with love for him.

The Chorus

9 What's so great about your lover, fair lady? What's so special about him that you beg for our help?

The Woman

10-16 My dear lover glows with health— red-blooded, radiant! He's one in a million. There's no one quite like him! My golden one, pure and untarnished, with raven black curls tumbling across his shoulders. His eyes are like doves, soft and bright, but deep-set, brimming with meaning, like wells of water. His face is rugged, his beard smells like sage, His voice, his words, warm and reassuring. Fine muscles ripple beneath his skin, quiet and beautiful. His torso is the work of a sculptor, hard and smooth as ivory. He stands tall, like a cedar, strong and deep-rooted, A rugged mountain of a man, aromatic with wood and stone.

His words are kisses, his kisses words. Everything about him delights me, thrills me through and through! That's my lover, that's my man, dear Jerusalem sisters.

6

The Chorus

1 So where has this love of yours gone, fair one? Where on earth can he be? Can we help you look for him?

The Woman

2-3 Never mind. My lover is already on his way to his garden, to browse among the flowers, touching the colors and forms. I am my lover's and my lover is mine. He caresses the sweet-smelling flowers.

The Man

4-7 Dear, dear friend and lover, you're as beautiful as Tirzah, city of delights, Lovely as Jerusalem, city of dreams, the ravishing visions of my ecstasy. Your beauty is too much for me—I'm in over my head. I'm not used to this! I can't take it in. Your hair flows and shimmers like a flock of goats in the distance streaming down a hillside in the sunshine. Your smile is generous and full—expressive and strong and clean. Your veiled cheeks are soft and radiant.

8-10 There's no one like her on earth, never has been, never will be. She's a woman beyond compare. My dove is perfection, Pure and innocent as the day she was born, and cradled in joy by her mother. Everyone who came by to see her exclaimed and admired her—All the fathers and mothers, the neighbors and friends,

blessed and praised her: "Has anyone ever seen anything like this— dawn-fresh, moon-lovely, sun-radiant, ravishing as the night sky with its galaxies of stars?"

11-12 One day I went strolling through the orchard, looking for signs of spring, Looking for buds about to burst into flower, anticipating readiness, ripeness. Before I knew it my heart was raptured, carried away by lofty thoughts!

13 Dance, dance, dear Shulammite, Angel-Princess! Dance, and we'll feast our eyes on your favour! Everyone wants to see the Shulammite dance her victory dances of love and peace.

7

1-9 Shapely and favourful your sandaled feet, and queenly your movement—
Your limbs are lithe and elegant,
the work of a master artist.
Your body is a chalice,
wine-filled.
Your skin is silken and tawny
like a field of wheat touched by the breeze.
Your breasts are like fawns,
twins of a gazelle.
Your neck is carved ivory, curved and slender.
Your eyes are wells of light, deep with mystery.
Quintessentially feminine!
Your profile turns all heads,
commanding attention.

The feelings I get when I see the high mountain ranges —stirrings of desire, longings for the heights— Remind me of you, and I'm spoiled for anyone else!

Your beauty, within and without, is absolute,
dear lover, close companion.
You are tall and supple, like the palm tree,
and your full breasts are like sweet clusters
of dates. I say, "I'm going to climb that palm
tree! I'm going to caress its fruit!"
Oh yes! Your breasts
will be clusters of sweet fruit to me,
Your breath clean and cool like fresh mint,
your tongue and lips like the best wine.

The Woman

9-12 Yes, and yours are, too—my love's kisses
flow from his lips to mine. I am my lover's.

I'm all he wants. I'm all the world to him! Come, dear lover— let's tramp through the countryside. Let's sleep at some wayside inn, then rise early and listen to bird-song. Let's look for wildflowers in bloom, blackberry bushes blossoming white, Fruit trees adorned with cascading flowers. And there I'll give myself to you, my love to your love!

13 Love-apples drench us with fragrance,
fertility surrounds, suffuses us, Fruits fresh
and preserved that I've kept and delivered
just for you, my love.

8

1-2 I wish you'd been my twin brother, sharing
with me the breasts of my mother, Playing
outside in the street, kissing in plain view of
everyone, and no one thinking anything of it. I'd
take you by the hand and bring you home where
I was raised by my mother. You'd drink my wine
and kiss my cheeks.

3-4 Imagine! His left hand cradling my head, his
right arm around my waist! Oh, let me warn you,
sisters in Jerusalem: Don't excite love, don't stir
it up, until the time is ripe—and you're ready.

The Chorus

5 Who is this I see coming up from the country,
arm in arm with her lover?

The Man

I found you under the apricot tree, and woke you
up to love. Your mother went into labor under
that tree, and under that very tree she bore you.

The Woman

6-8 Hang my locket around your neck, wear
my ring on your finger. Love is invincible facing
danger and death. Passion laughs at the terrors of
destruction. The fire of love stops at nothing—it
sweeps everything before it. Flood waters can't
drown love, torrents of rain can't put it out. Love
can't be bought, love can't be sold— it's not to
be found in the marketplace.

My brothers used to worry about me:

8-9 "Our little sister has no breasts. What shall
we do with our little sister when men come
asking for her? She's a virgin and vulnerable, and
we'll protect her. If they think she's a wall, we'll
top it with barbed wire. If they think she's a door,
we'll barricade it."

10 Dear brothers, I'm a walled-in virgin still, but my breasts are full—And when my lover sees me, he knows he'll soon be satisfied.

The Man

11-13 King Solomon may have vast vineyards in lush, fertile country, Where he hires others to work the ground. People pay anything to get in on that bounty. But my vineyard is all mine, and I'm keeping it to myself. You can have your vast vineyards, Solomon, you and your greedy guests! Oh, lady of the gardens, my friends are with me listening. Let me hear your voice!

The Woman

14 Run to me, dear lover. Come like a gazelle. Leap like a wild stag on the spice mountains.

SOLOMON'S END

At the beginning of his reign, Solomon loved Yahuah and asked for wisdom above riches, power or long life. But toward the end of his life, his heart slowly turned. Scripture records that he loved many foreign women — seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines — and they “turned away his heart.” What began as political alliances became spiritual compromise. In his later years, Solomon built high places for the gods of his wives—Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and others — and he did not remain spiritually loyal in his worship of Yahuah, as his father David had been. So the wisest man on earth allowed affection, desires of the flesh, and diplomacy to erode his righteous devotion. His downfall was not ignorance, but divided love and a mixed swell of worship behaviour! Yahuah was a jealous Alahim and will not be mocked!

Because of this idolatry, Yahuah declared that the kingdom would be torn from his house. Though judgment was delayed (for David’s sake), the consequences unfolded immediately after Solomon’s death. His son Rehoboam ruled harshly, the northern tribes rebelled under Jeroboam, and the united kingdom split into Israel/Ephraim (north) and Judah (south). What followed were generations of instability, false worship, and eventually national captivity — Israel carried away by Assyria, and Judah later exiled to Babylon. Solomon’s compromise planted seeds of division that fractured an entire nation. His life stands as both a monument of wisdom and a warning: brilliance without wholehearted devotion and behavioural obedience, leads to decline, and private idolatry eventually produces public collapse.

