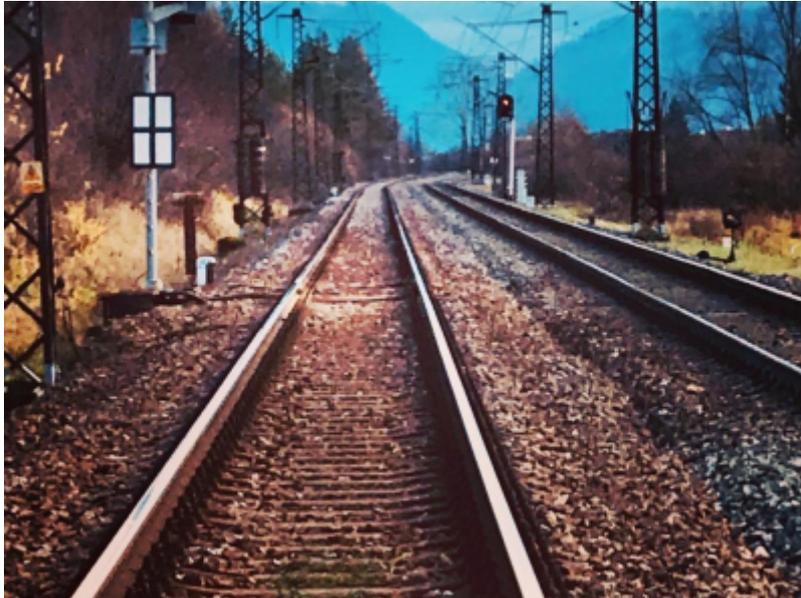


The name of the king is man

Prophecy is history / 27 - The powerful, if they can't stay like everyone else, they will remain inhuman.

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«But how can Josiah ignore Jeremiah and send emissaries to Huldah? The wise men replied: Because women are more compassionate, and so he hoped that what he would say to them would not be too harsh».

Talmud, Megillah 14b

The discovery of a book in the temple becomes the basis of a great religious reform, where we meet the prophetess Huldah who reminds us of the meaning

of women and of prophecy.

A just father and a great miracle are no guarantee that children will continue to write a good and just story. After Hezekiah, a good and faithful king who saved Jerusalem thanks to his faith in God, two evil kings follow one another in Judah, Manasseh and Amon (2 Kings 21), who rebuild the altars to foreign gods, resume and reactivate the ancient Canaanite popular cults that had never really died out among the people. After the beautiful interlude of Hezekiah, idolatry returns, the ancient disease of Israel - and of all men, who are tireless builders of idols whom they can worship: we are consumers of many commodities, but first and above all we are consumers of idols .

In the cycle of alternating between good and evil, after Amon comes Josiah, the new David, a beloved character in the Bible, at least as much as his ancestor Hezekiah: «When he became king, Josiah was eight years old; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem ... He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord» (2 Kings 22: 1-2). Josiah presents himself as a restorer of the temple. The text describes the works with words very similar to those that Chapter 12 had previously used for the restoration of King Joash. Again the silver, collected by the "keepers of the threshold" is melted, turned into coins and given to carpenters and masons. The description of the temple factory closes with the same words used for Joash's restoration: «But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are honest in their dealings» (2 Kings 22,7). Good words about the honesty and loyalty of workers should never be silenced, especially when we encounter them in the Bible; and above all today, when before the jobs we need good words about workers, and that was older than their faith, on which a group of reformers, in a time of religious corruption founded their reform.

It is not uncommon for a prophetic minority that wants a radical reform to base its actions on something more ancient, because it often contains something pure and genuine that over time has become contaminated and has fallen. Sometimes this "something" is a forgotten tradition, some words of the founder erased in time; other times it is a text, a book, a letter, a "gospel" lost

or considered by most apocryphal, while instead it contained an authentic message to the reformers. In the ancient world, including the Bible, what was older was even truer. In that culture there was a conviction that the beginning contained the ideal principle, the real promise before our compromises arrived, the original pact before our infidelities. There was the certainty that to get out of the present crisis the main and perhaps the only resource was a different past, that pristine and still fertile land to generate a future - "in the beginning it was not so". Just like when plunged into a darkened horizon, we feel that in order to give new life to our relationship we must return to the days of first love, to those different words capable of pronouncing an infinite hope. We understand that we must try to review the heart of the other and ours as we have known him or her in that first covenant or alliance, and then make sure that the past resurrects the present that now appears dead. It is not nostalgia, it is in fact the opposite: in the Bible it's called memory. In fact, in these acts one does not look back, but only ahead. Like Moses, who from Mount Nebo did not look towards Egypt but at the Jordan. Sometimes that ancient text is found while working on a "restoration", it emerges as a gift from working on the foundations. At other times the book "creates" itself, born out of listening to people's pain. History can be "produced" today by a greater love, because the book can be generated from the flesh and blood of those who believe that that origin is not lost forever and can really be resurrected. Identities, individual and collective, are always creations of the present, even when they start from the past.

The righteous king Josiah started from the discovery of an ancient book and reformed the cult: he destroyed the pagan altars that populated his region, eliminated the sacred prostitutes from the temple, drove out the Canaanite priests and also destroyed the ancient sacred altar of Bethel (2 Kings 23,4-14). Furthermore, «Josiah he desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire to Molek» (2 Kings 23,10). Every good reform begins by not killing the children anymore, not offering them to the fire anymore to offer them to various Molocs.

Josiah's reform was an essential passage in the history of salvation. Because it marked the passage from the *temple to the book*, which became the centre and "place" of faith. An operation that proved decisive for the period of exile that would soon arrive. Israel managed to survive seventy years without a temple, because Josiah and that school of scribes and priests had moved the axis from the temple to the book. The Torah became the mobile temple, the new Ark of the Covenant that followed the caravan in the world and in time, in the thousand Diasporas and destruction. That destruction by Josiah became a possibility to preserve the faith amidst further devastation and total destruction.

The strength of Josiah's creative destruction is especially striking in these verses: «The king ordered ... to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts ... He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem ... and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts» (2 Kings 23,4-5). Without the courage of destruction, no serious reform can be carried out, because corruption almost always consists in the accumulation - progressive, continuous, unintentional - of things, ideas-ideologies-idols, practices, traditions, which gradually enter into the "temple" of the city and the soul; and so that place in which at the beginning there was "only one voice", that speaking nakedness of infinity where we once had touched the sky, becomes filled with artefacts, to the point of making the sound of that first voice imperceptible and impossible to hear. But the evacuating the premises comes at a very high cost - we and our friends get too attached to these sacred artefacts - and so almost all reforms fail because of the inability to sustain the inevitable pain of destruction. Because a reform is really an operation of emptying in order to return to the bare temple, and then pray and hope that that original voice returns to speak to us. The voice however does not always come back, because the time of the voices is often that of youth; but an empty and silent temple is preferable to a temple filled with fake voices, because as long as the space remains uninhabited we can always hope to hear a different voice within that silence, even if it were the voice of the very last angel.

One of the prophetesses mentioned specifically in the Bible: Huldah, entering this scene is also very important in this fundamental chapter. Josiah is shocked by the words of the rediscovered

book (those that announce the misfortunes of the people due to their unfaithfulness), and he wants proof of the authenticity of that book. In the Bible the "certifiers" of the true word of YHWH were the prophets: «Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum... they spoke with her» (2 Kings 22,14). The prophetess Hulda validates and confirms those words as the words of the Lord, and prophesies that Josiah will be spared from the destruction of Jerusalem. Huldah prophesies with words very similar to those of Jeremiah, who is not named here, although in that period (around 620-622) he was already active in the city.

Why is a prophetess, a woman, consulted and for an opinion of such an extreme importance? A question that many have asked themselves, even in ancient times, making various assumptions as to what the answer might be. We do not really have any further elements or details regarding Huldah from the Bible. From Ezekiel we know of the activity of the prophetesses in Jerusalem, whom he condemned for having «dishonoured the Lord» (Ezekiel 13,19). According to some scholars it is possible that a conflict of sorts between prophets began in that difficult time of the pre-Exile and then of the Exile, and that Huldah was excluded from the official narrative because she was overcome by more powerful and famous prophets. According to a recent and controversial study by Preston Kavanagh (Huldah: The Prophet Who Wrote Hebrew Scripture, 2012), Huldah was instead a fundamental figure in the Bible (she even wrote or influenced a third of the Hebrew Scriptures). The anagram of her name appears 1.773 times in the Bible, since, according to Kavanagh, «biblical writers used the anagram as modern writers use italics to underline a point» (p.12). An extreme thesis, difficult to defend (for example: the biblical names in the Bible that can be formed as an anagram of Huldah are many), which however reminds us of the importance of prophetesses and women in biblical humanism; an importance that was greater than the already remarkable one that the Bible attests to. Because we all know that there is a great affinity between woman and prophecy.

Hulda in Hebrew means weasel (or marten), a name which, according to the Talmud, she deserved for having dared to call the king simply a "man" («Tell the man who sent you to me» 2 Kings 22,15). The prophetesses manage to call the kings by name. Women, more than males, know that the powerful are men, like everyone else. They remind them of it, they remind us of it, starting from the domestic walls. This is an immense gift for the powerful and for everyone. A gift of women, a gift of prophets, the gift of prophecy. Without prophecy leaders make themselves kings always and everywhere. They never experience reciprocity between equals, so they don't know real happiness. They live in sadness in their golden solitude, surrounded by flatterers and admirers. And in the long run, failing to be men like everyone else, they become inhuman. This is also why prophecy is an essential resource of the world and earth.