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THE SAYINGS GOSPEL OF ABRAM FROM THE APOCRYPHA, UNCERTAINLY BASED ON FRAGMENTARY, BROKEN, CORRUPT- ED, AND SPURIOUS SOURCES

(1a) Maybe Abram should have reflected a little more on what he was setting out to do.

(1b) Maybe he should have gone no further than that strip mall just outside of Babylon.

(2) It was a factory outlet mall with 7x7 stores and shops.

(3a) They say that Abram was travelling to Canaan to try to settle what would become a persistent issue of land, taking along his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, together with other relatives, camp followers, sheep, goats, she-asses, camels, tents, and assorted gear.

(3b) They say that Abram was anointed to overturn the tyranny of Earthly kings, their Earthly empires, and their bloody sacrifices to astrological gods.

(4) Sarai and Abram practised open marriage with the Pharaoh, Abimelech, and Hagar well into advanced age.

(5) Sarai and Abram kept a fierce fire at their campsites. They held to the singular image of the lineage as if graven on stone.

(6) All the great kingdoms and empires were made of stone, regulated and oriented by multiple stars, but Abram's kingdom could be fashioned into a singular rule beyond, invisibly seeded anywhere for any purpose and grown into uncounted cycles of birth and death.

(7) Wherever they stopped, Abram and his clansmen raised up columns of fire and smoke.

(8) Abram was tall and of great dignity. He wore a long beard and wrapped himself in thick woollen robes.

(9) Except for those of other human beings, Abram never heard voices. Page-turners with calloused fingers heard these voices, through the weariness of long study and poor diet, and assigned a few to Abram.

(10) Innumerable voices sound in this world. It can be said that choosing one is error.

(11) Around the clan's fires there could be only one voice, which was not a voice but a drumming.

(12) No matter the elevation of the law or covenant, the first slaughters leave an indelible taste on the tongue—a rusty taste of blood.

(13a) Maybe it would have been better to go down into Babylon and open a shop. Babylon could never have enough shops.

(13b) Maybe it would have been better to withdraw to the noble desert and avoid all further prophets, oracles, scriptures, commitments, and jihads.

(14) Maybe he should have gone back east with that Indian he met in the food court, who rattled on interminably about his rose-apple Earth.

(15) The Indian was a major league *sramana* with all the special signs and powers. He saw as well as Abram that Canaan would always be resettled by other empires or grow to empire, no matter the modest plot purchased for Sarai from the Hittites or all the clearing slaughters, purifying exiles, and repeated returns to the original promise or premise.

(16) The Indian suggested that he turn back with him to the East. Abram could have provided some closure for the free-flowing *sutras* of his people and put leather boots on naked feet and kepis over headdresses so that later authorities would take them with more weight. He could have also helped with much-needed editing, with time-keeping, and perhaps even with the breeding of cattle and goats.

(17) Thank G-d Abram never turned back east, Sarai said as she directed the raising of the tent in the parking lot. He would have died.

(18) The Indian was hairless and dressed in only a *dhoti*, though the desert wind chafed his skin. He was a little frail from excessive fasting, so he ordered a burger and fries.

(19) It was a standard Babylonian food court of the time, with all the franchises under imperial supervision.

(20) Like Abram, the Indian would conjure up countless offspring, like particles of dust on the ground, grains of sand along the river Ganges or Jordan, or stars in the heavens. Yet while Abram's offspring would arise in the usual way, the Indian would sprinkle his semen on lotus petals, and his myriad

seed would be taken up and taken to term by *gopis* and water sprites.

(21) Abram ordered the Halal chicken and rice.

(22) It might have been better to live out a normal life span, die en route, and let his countless offspring settle where they would.

(23) Travel is broadening.

(24) Abram knew Sacred History and the Manifested Will. He knew history as nightmare and before it happened. He knew the one story, repeatedly.

(25) Abram's one will and one story would become so powerful in the end that centuries, empires and oceans would disappear down its pores.

(26) Skylights were everywhere in the mall, bleaching the food court in white light.

(27) There was a constant murmur of commerce or prayer.

(28) It might have been better to let the drum beat in his head go unheeded, its pulse slowly spending itself in the sands.

(29) The Indian's will was also great but multiple and slipped easily inside the pores of his rose-apple Earth.

(30) The freely conceiving Hagar knew Abram and the Indian. She knew what Abram felt and what he liked. This was spoken in the Zohar, which because it was perfect could never be written.

(31a) No one encountered Hagar without desire. It was her green almond eyes. No, it was her cheekbones, which resembled those of an Apache queen. No, it was her thick black hair, which was as heavy as drapes. No, it was her weighty breasts and tiny waist. No, it was the way she swam across the river.

(31b) Hagar was at another level and founded a different line—not the spurious line that people talk about but rather one that somehow undercut or enclosed the rest.

(32) Hagar's cloak is great and obscure, riven through with stars, transparent and opaque. She has just the one cloak and endless closet space.

(33) Let the Divine Will tell its one story where it will and will what it will in some empty place. Let It stay in the lunatic desert or on some lunatic island, where the damage might be contained. Or, if the Divine Will must have a whole cosmos, let it have no more than one.

(34) Many eternities have slipped the Divine Will, thank G-d, for it would be terrible to have every thing and every notion stretched on the same rack, withered like Yeshua's fig tree.

(35a) Abram foresaw that caravans of fussy and ham-handed priests, judg-

es, kings, desert traders, and legal scholars would stretch him on a rack into Abraham. They would make his imposing frame the one imposing story and capitalize his will.

(35b) He saw all this and yet.

(36) The Indian's will was submerged or perhaps undetectable, and he preferred negative assertions. All he would affirm was that his will was not not-will, which was not much help, though he did teach Abram an easier way of breathing.

(37a) Neither Abram nor the Indian were writers. Whether in the desert, caves, forests, or cafés, they spoke. But they were always happy to announce their plans and stories to anyone who would listen and hopefully write them down, in stone or on a napkin.

(37b) Scripture is deception.

(38) The Indian didn't know the local politics. He was from the forest tradition and habituated to luxuriant growth and multiple perspectives. In the desert he was only a tourist, unfamiliar with its stark views. It was easy for him to take another course. Abram had to live there.

(39) Every oasis was the same, like a well-managed franchise. Or thirst and hunger made every oasis appear the same.

(40) Is this enemy or friend? Is this poison or food? It was called natural reason. Rebranded in Athens, it was later returned with a flourish to the desert.

(41) The Divine Will is natural but sour, unthinkable, and unsayable, like the taste of a lemon.

(42a) In the desert reason is the all-purpose glue or solvent.

(42b) The Divine Will has only one eye, like a Cyclops, and doesn't need reason. It plays at reason.

(43a) Scripture has only one eye, which is turned in on itself. It doesn't need to see. It plays at seeing. In scripture Abram is sealed, like a mosquito in amber.

(43b) The buzz of the mosquito was there with its annoyance, mystically, in the beginning, before the word, and well before the invention of trees.

(44) If Hagar's eyes had not been that deeply green—if he had not always had that consolation, in flesh or in memory—he could not have risen from or gone to his bed with joy.

(45a) They say that Abram would not have travelled on to Canaan but for the downturn in the Mesopotamian economy.

(45b) They say that Abram would not have travelled on to Canaan but for a fallow period in the progression of Babylonian pop. The pride of musician-ship was dead. The beat was monotonous, and all melody was gone.

(46) On the outskirts of empire barbarians peered over the crests of mountains, from the masts of wooden ships on the horizon, and from atop desert dunes like cartoon characters drawn around the edges of a page. They would rape and pillage, but very soon they would be hungover and bored. They had instinct but no will. Abram would lend out his own at a discount.

(47) It made Abram's square shoulders sag to realize that his will would be stretched that far and that going on to Canaan would make Canaan the world and his will the Will of everyone.

(48) Canaan is *dukkha*, *samsara*, *avidya*, the Indian was sorry to say, wobbling his head from side to side.

(49a) They crowded into empire nearly unconscious, almost inanimate, deformed, raising kingdoms in name only, chasing their own tails, with severed heads tied to their belts.

(49b) Their superfluous slaughters and empires under Abram's brand would proceed with greater care, decorum, focus, efficiency, and authority. They would carry Yeshua, who was in Abram's line, on their shields.

(49c) Following the trade winds, the unviewable Prophet on his anonymous horse would reshape the moon with a curved sword.

(50) The Indian said that Yeshua would take graduate studies in the east and that the Prophet would draw water from a prefabricated forest of canyons and caves. But each could have learned everything he knew from the Ancients, Egyptians, Pharisees, Zealots, Romans, Greeks, Persians, or even that common old yenta Yeshua met one day in the market.

(51a) Yeshua and the Prophet were as ungraspable as Hagar and thus generated a lot of scripture.

(51b) Scripture is jihad, and jihad is the tale of the Tar-Baby and the Br'er Rabbit.

(51c) Scripture is for children, who should never be allowed to read it.

(52) When children learn to read scripture, they are no longer children and have lost the only way to the Kingdom. Every struggle in the desert or in desert caves only brings more.

(53) All the fatal grace of Abram is advertised every day on every marquee in every town of this rose-apple Earth. All the saving grace of Abram arises from the Abram no one knows and who seldom speaks.

(54a) The true biography of Abram was virtually written in six volumes on a sunny plaza in Babylon by a daydreaming Levite in happy exile under empire, who dozed soon after to yet more delicious dreams and who woke with nearly all memory of his great work gone.

(54b) He was awakened by a cry in the street.

(55) The Levite is said to have dreamt that it was a cold marriage with Sarai, that Ishmael was always Abram's favourite, but that a complication in the will led to a written separation.

(56) Abram would lend support to Ishmael for some time after through a third party and meet for coffee every crescent moon at a café called The Village Well. He never liked Isaac much because he was so compliant with will, history, and every word that began with "mono" or "meta"—words that to Abram were nothing but inescapable burdens. He wanted to vomit every time he heard a phrase like "Sacred History," "Divine Will," or "Unfolding of Spirit." One night, he went after Isaac with a kitchen knife.

(57a) It may be that Abram experienced too much and lived too long. It was just one thing after another, trouble compounding trouble, or so the Levite is said to have dreamt.

(57b) But there was Hagar with her striking green eyes. She was one of the mothers of all that can be said.

(57c) The bangles on Hagar's wrists and ankles sounded in warning as she carried water in full buckets across the square.

(58) They would carry stars, crosses, moons, and other devices on their shields as if each told a different story, and they would use what they called Abram's will to wrestle history to particular ends. History would grow to be a lion, camel, bear, or eagle, and it would stalk, labour, lumber, or soar in one mighty shape, which was always the shape of Abram.

(59) Uncounted beings would form the shape of Abram, and over and over they would call him up from whatever grave or cave they found him in, grumbling, as old men do, and model him in marble or straw.

(60) Men and women would be formed into flaming torches and burnt to cinders like Medicine King, the Bodhisattva, but in Abram's name, their God being great. They would belt children with bombs and push them onto school buses on sunny mornings in Abram's name.

(61) Red-haired, left-handed Ishmael would ride a coracle through the Pillars of Hercules to the new world, where he would become a headman in an Amazonian village, but he would never marry and would found no line of

descent. Nearly all the stories told about him are false. In smoky moonlight, he would keep his watch, wondering what had happened.

(62) Ishmael's will was too simple for Will, and his power was too rudimentary. In the eyes of Abram's followers and descendants, Ishmael was a dope.

(63) However disguised by the great deeds of its kings, queens, emperors, patrons, courtesans, traders, commissars, bankers, presbyters, popes, imams, senators, philosophers, and logicians, power walks with leaden boots and gives off the piss-soaked reek of beer halls.

(64) Abram's mighty will would prove easily transferable, with or without the paperwork, and would licence all things. Reason, natural and unnatural, would fall on her back and take on all who would pay. Reason would turn out to be a whore with a heart of iron, who would syllogize Abram's will into regiments of armoured vehicles, rockets, canons, drones, and cluster bombs.

(65a) Abram was still uncut when Hagar gently washed him and knew him on a fleece in a hidden wood on the cliff side.

(65b) Because it was morning the lark sang.

(66) Except for her piercing eyes and spare jewellery, Hagar was fashioned like the goddess figures on Indian temples with weighty breasts, world-bearing hips, fine dancing feet, rounded thighs and arms, and a planetary forehead. Her cheeks were high, her ears were spiked, her green eyes were shaped like almonds, and her skin was smooth and darkly gold.

(67a) They say that Abram believed Hagar directed it all through the occult agency of her green eyes and imposing form.

(67b) They say that Hagar would have been happier if it had been done in some other way or even if something else altogether had been done.

(67c) They say that Hagar had darker and higher concerns and was loath to interfere.

(67d) They say a lot of things.

(68) They say that Abram always had the contested iconography of Hagar in his heart, which was his closest approach to wisdom. The Indian, enjoying his Diet Pepsi, sat up even straighter at the table.

(69) Hagar will mean nothing to Abram, Sarai said, laying a salmon on a grill set up in the parking lot. She refused to eat at the food court. Abram's mighty, world-transforming story was divine and could in no way be rooted in merely green eyes, however stunning.

(70a) Whether on animal skins on a hillside, in a tent, or at the well in the next village, only Hagar listened to Abram's laments.

(70b) They would violently denounce his law and story but then recreate its particulars in drag, clause by clause.

(70c) They would never break the foundational arc, no matter how numerous the negations, subversions, and reversals, but only make way for yet another reprise.

(70d) They would repeatedly make a show of their weariness, pretending to let go of what they would secretly preserve and slightly revise, laying the stones for the paving of yet more plazas of empire.

(70e) Abram's laments were multiple but really only one.

(71) Abram would travel on to Canaan to lose himself in Abraham, capitalize his will, and assert the Celestial King, as he was instructed to do. The Indian wobbled his head from side to side, as Indians do, for reasons sometimes obscure.

(72) Sitting at the table in the food court with the Indian, looking down into his empty plate, Abram sagged once more under the Will he was about to embody.

(73) You can only expect so much from a king, however highly placed, the Indian said, meaning to console.

(74) Abram called Sarai on his cell. She gathered together their family, friends, camp followers, herds, stocks, tents, and gear, and prepared to go on. There was thunder in a clear sky. They kept the sun to the south as they entered the descending road to Canaan.

(75) There was a moment when he might have renounced his founding thought and its attendant will, power, voice, and story, as the Indian suggested, but the desert imposed and the moment passed. Later he sacrificed himself along with Isaac on the altar of Israel with a double-bladed sword.

(76a) His descendants say that renunciation would have left a terrible gap in the desert, which thirsts after the capital of what he would renounce.

(76b) They say that if Abram had refused his calling in the absence of Hagar, he could not have risen in the morning, thrown open the flap of his tent, and strode out on the sands even as a simple Bedouin. He would not have stirred at all, they say. He would have lingered there on his unchanged bedding, inert and golem-like, or fallen to drink like his nephew Lot.

(76c) They say that echoing deserts and remote forests would always crawl with monsters who cannot distinguish thought from act or even one thought

from the next. And these monsters would slink into every city if they could, spreading infection, garbling the one voice.

(77) Your monsters are *dukkha*, the Indian murmured. Your monsters are fractured projections of your thought and nothing to fear.

(78) In India even the monsters had decipherable expressions, reassuring *mudras*, as they rolled your coins into empty bowls and tore into the offered flesh.

(79) Ask the freely conceiving Hagar, the Indian said. She is *Binah*, mother of all that can be said. To her right is her partner *Hokmah*, the singular point. Beyond that, there's nothing much we can speak about.

(80) Hagar is *jñana*, the Indian said. She is *sanyasa*, he said, which is the same. Her temple is in the Western Paradise on the Isle of the Blest.

(81a) It happened that Abram pulled up behind Hagar in the drive-thru at a Mickey Dee's somewhere in Canaan. She was in a Dodge Caravan, and Abram was in an ancient Volvo. Having picked up their orders, they pulled out of line to the back of the parking lot.

(81b) The parking lot bordered a drainage ditch and a cornfield battered down by a recent rain.

(82) In the following sunlight raindrops stood out in globules on the pale stalks.

(83) The specialized reek of deep-frying dissolved in the air and became ever more remote as they talked.

(84) Leaning on her red Dodge Caravan, her hands in flowing gestures annotating her words, Hagar still looked fine, though she had grown a little thicker about the waist.

(85) Abram received through the curtains of her generous lips every word shaped in delight. A theatre of chariots, wheels within wheels, rose from her speech, rolled free of the parking lot, the field, and the whole sublunary world, and cycled through the full complement of forms, beyond the card-sharking demiurge, the shattered vessels, and into quintessence.

(86) She told him everything he could know.

(87) Soon after, Abram died.