

HOUSE OF WEeping

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# ANCIENT NEAR EAST MONOGRAPHS

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HOUSE OF WEeping

The Motif of Tears in Akkadian and Hebrew  
Prayers

by  
David A. Bosworth

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for my father

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## Preface

Man begins as a social being; he does not acquire society. This fact, which seems from one point of view a recognized commonplace, has many far-reaching consequences which are not always considered. Moreover, the fact itself has not always been taken as self-evident.

—Anna Louise Strong, *The Psychology of Prayer*

Anna Louise Strong, largely unknown now, was a household name from the 1920s to 1960s, famed for her reporting from the Soviet Union and China and her advocacy for communism. She begins her best-selling autobiography with an episode from her childhood that may shed light on her later work on prayer and commitment to socialism.<sup>1</sup> When she was eleven years old and playing in a garden, she had a sudden realization of herself as separate from the world and everything and everyone in it. Speaking of her childhood self in the third person, she wrote: “She couldn’t get out and nothing could get in through the shell of that hard, round, soul.... For the first time she knew herself as an individual creature, cut off from the world of which she had been a part. She painfully wanted to get back.”<sup>2</sup> As she looked back on this moment, she reflected on her life as a quest to find a way out of human loneliness, a condition that she saw as a consequence of our social nature and the brokenness of our social worlds:

Our individuality is partial and restless; the stream of consciousness that we call “I” is made of shifting elements that flow from our group and back to our group again. Always we seek to be ourselves and the herd together, not One against the herd. And we cannot, for the herd itself is split by struggles, which change in form with the ages: slave against owner, serf against baron, worker against capitalist and the myriad complex conflicts that derive from these.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Louise Strong, *I Change Worlds: The Remaking of an American* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> Strong, *I Change Worlds*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Strong, *I Change Worlds*, 11.

Strong's understanding of our social nature coheres with recent discoveries about the inner voice or stream of consciousness and its social origin and orientation.<sup>4</sup> Even when we may seem to be most withdrawn into our individual selves, we remain deeply connected to others because our inmost selves are social and dialogic. Our emotional lives may also seem private, even intimate, but they also reflect our social nature. We are constantly regulating our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors with other people, and we are never as independent or autonomous as we like to believe. Strong's childhood realization of her individuality came as a devastating blow that left her achingly lonely and set her on a life-long journey to lose herself in a larger cause. Loneliness is as bad for one's health as smoking, and, unlike smoking, loneliness rates are increasing in many countries.<sup>5</sup> The United Kingdom recently appointed a minister of loneliness to address the problem. Our social nature becomes problematic when our social institutions inhibit rather than facilitate connectedness to others. Our need to connect informs our entire lives and whole selves, and it lies at the heart of the present study.

We are constantly regulating our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with other people, even when we do not realize it. In the privacy of our own thoughts, we speak from one aspect of the self to another in a dialogue that has been internalized from the wider world of people around us. Our sense of well-being hinges on the quality of our relationships with other people, and trusted partners help us endure our miseries and celebrate our successes. Like Strong, I am interested in pursuing the study of prayer in light of our social nature. I came to the study of prayer texts through a research project on weeping. Weeping, I learned, is an expression of our need to connect with others, yet many Westerners imagine it is an individual cathartic behavior. As Strong remarks, the observation that humans are by nature social animals is a commonplace, but its far-reaching consequences are not often considered. I hope in the present project to illustrate how profoundly social we are, and how prayer and weeping reveal our social nature. If we were not social, we would neither pray nor weep. The first chapter draws heavily on modern psychological research. The modern discipline of psychology has an individualist bias, yet psychologists who delve deeply into the individual have discovered a community. This first chapter unfolds aspects of human emotion regulation that are important for understanding prayer and weeping. The second chapter applies these insights to an analysis of the motif of weeping in a corpus of

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<sup>4</sup> See pages 15–22.

<sup>5</sup> Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy Smith, and J. Bradley Layton, "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review," *PLOS Medicine* 7 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>; Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy Smith, and Mark Baker, "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10 (2015): 227–37.

Akkadian prayers. I analyze those that involve weeping in some detail and discuss the distribution and function of weeping in the larger corpus of hundreds of prayers. In the third chapter, I provide the same kind of analysis of weeping within the corpus of the Hebrew Psalter. The fourth and final chapter compares the two corpora to one another and to the scientific findings discussed in the first chapter.

As the research presented here shows, we are never truly alone but are constantly regulating our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with our fellow creatures. The present book is the fruit of such social regulation and support. The notes provide only an indication of the many scholars whose work has shaped and informed my own. Although writing a book may seem like a solitary activity, it is a deeply communal task. Every work I have read in pursuit of this project is the fruit of a socially embedded and relationally engaged mind that has connected to my own social world and work and helped shape it into what it is, which is much better than it could have been without such help. For example, at an early stage of the project, I planned to analyze a much smaller corpus of Akkadian material reflected in Benjamin Foster's anthology *Before the Muses*. As I worked through Alan Lenzi's helpful *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, it became clear that I needed to expand the corpus significantly in order to provide meaningful analysis of the several genres of prayer, which are unevenly represented in *Before the Muses*. This decision, largely informed by Lenzi and the other scholars who contributed to his volume, made it possible to uncover the significant correlation between divine wrath and human tears that is common to Akkadian and Hebrew prayers. My initial corpus would have been too small to uncover this and other insights. The work of other scholars, therefore, shaped my thinking and expanded my horizons, enabling me to do more meaningful analysis. Lenzi is high on the list of scholars whose work has shaped my own, and his work on *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns* has facilitated my entry into this area of research and improved my work. He has also been a source of personal encouragement as someone who saw the initial proposal for this project and built up the reputation of the present series with his own valuable contribution. I hope the present work continues that tradition. The peer reviewers for the Ancient Near Eastern Monographs series offered several helpful suggestions, large and small, that have significantly improved the work. Translations from Akkadian, Hebrew, and Greek are my own.

My work integrating science and humanities research received two foundational supports in recent years. First, the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America received a Sciences for Seminaries grant from the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (DoSER) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), funded by the Templeton Foundation. The grant enabled me and several colleagues to incorporate scientific material into seminary courses, which allowed me to further develop my scientific

education and better integrate science into my own thinking, research, and teaching. The grant also allowed me to forge a relationship with Nancy Adleman, a neuroscientist at Catholic University whom I might not otherwise have come to know. She has been enormously helpful in addressing questions that arise for me in my reading. Another outgrowth of the grant is an ongoing commitment at Catholic University to develop relationships among science and humanities faculty and research involving faith and science. Second, from the AAAS, I learned about Sinai and Synapses and became one of the 2015–17 Fellows. The Sinai and Synapses fellowship involves a range of people from diverse professions and expertise who share an interest in science and faith. Arielle Hanien stands out as a Sinai and Synapses fellow who has a strong sense of our social nature and how we coregulate with one another. Geoff Mitelman, who founded and organizes the fellowship at the National Jewish Center for Leadership and Learning, has wide-ranging interests and generously fosters community and encourages the work of the fellows. Several research assistants have assisted with this project. Eric Wagner, CR helped build the corpus of Akkadian texts, especially with tracking down the scattered texts. At an earlier stage, Andrew Litke likewise tracked down many Akkadian prayers and some of the scholarship on these texts. The Catholic University of America's internal grant-in-aid program funded the work of copyediting, page layout, and indexing by Angela Roskop Erisman. I am deeply grateful to both the university and Angela for this help. Important support for this project was close to home. Nothing in my life works without my wife, Britt Silkey, and our son Alex. Becoming a parent has led me to understand and appreciate my own parents more. In the course of this work, my father, Barry Bosworth, received a diagnosis that has made the subject of this project more salient. It is dedicated to him.

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## List of Abbreviations

<i>AbB</i>	<i>Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung</i> . Edited by Fritz R. Kraus. Leiden: Brill, 1964–.
<i>AHw</i>	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . Wolfram von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981.
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
AOTS	Augsburg Old Testament Studies
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archeologist</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>Bijdr</i>	<i>Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie</i>
BMes	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006.
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CHSB	Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
<i>Dš</i>	<i>Dingiršaddaba</i>
<i>Er</i>	A specific <i>eršarunga</i> text
<i>Ešh</i>	A specific manuscript of an <i>eršarunga</i>

<i>ETR</i>	<i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>GAG</i>	<i>Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik</i> . Wolfram von Soden. 2nd ed. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
<i>IBHS</i>	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> . Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988.
IVR <sup>2</sup>	<i>Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia, Vol. IVA Selection from the Miscellaneous Inscriptions from Assyria</i> . 2nd ed. By Henry C. Rawlinson. London, 1893.
<i>JAOs</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013.
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LD	Lectio Divina
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>RevistB</i>	<i>Revista bíblica</i>

RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAACT	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
<i>ScrTh</i>	<i>Scripta Theologica</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
StPohl	Studia Pohl
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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