

Chapter Five- PERSONALISATION AND CREATIVE WRITING

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Introducing the Idea of Personalization

Personalizing Midrash - Martin Buber

Buber speaks of "the man of today"¹ who cannot make contact with the Bible:

He must read the Jewish Bible as though it were something entirely unfamiliar, as though it had not been set before him ready-made, as -though he has not been confronted all his life with such concepts and such statements that cited the Bible as their authority.

He must face the Book with a new attitude as something new.

He must yield to it, withhold nothing of his being, and let whatever will occur between himself and it.... He holds himself open.

He does not believe anything a priori; he does not disbelieve anything a priori.

He reads aloud the words written in the book in front of him; he hears the word he utters and it reaches him. Nothing is prejudged.....

In the previous chapter we looked at the use of literary tools to examine the text of the Tanakh. In the main we focused on two kinds of literary analysis, structuralist, in which the detailed make up and structure of the text is analyzed, and reader-response in which the understanding of the text is seen as a collaborative exercise between author and reader with the reader's suppositions playing a large part in the reading. However we mentioned a third category, personalization, and it to this that we now turn.

We defined **personalization** as an approach in which the central question relates to the way that **the reader finds ways in which the text speaks existentially to him or her**. The emphasis is on the search for personal meaning based on the world and the world-view of the reader. Such an approach tends to leave behind any ideas about author intention and focuses on reader response in the sense of each reader seeking out and finding their own personal meaning in the text, regardless of what the author intended. This approach encourages multiple points of vision regarding the text, and is capable of taking small details in the text and blowing them up into central themes.

We mentioned the obvious similarity between such an approach and the type of reader-response approach that we outlined there. However, we emphasized that this approach actually goes much further and can thus be seen as a separate approach. In a sense it is the radical end of the scale of reader-response. In the more moderate forms of reader-response, the literary enterprise is seen as a partnership between author and reader in which the two have significant roles in evaluating the text and drawing conclusions regarding for example, the roles and actions of the characters. The author is not seen as autonomous: rather he or she is seen as having put forth a scenario to which the reader is expected to respond. However, the author is still seen as being the significant or at least a very significant and central part in the enterprise.

This tends to change when we turn to the more radical forms of personalization. To a large extent the text becomes a jumping off point for the concerns of the reader. The

¹ Martin Buber, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies* (Schocken, 1926, 1968), 1-13.

weight of the partnership changes. **Now it is the reader who is dominant: the concerns of the author are largely left behind as irrelevant and it is the reader's concerns that take over.** In approaches of personalization, the text becomes an arena in which to a large extent the reader can express his or her concerns. It is the reader's world that is central now. Texts are reread and rewritten through the eyes of the reader, using the values and agenda of the reader in order to retell the story, to reevaluate and to change those elements in the story with which the reader has problems, or to amplify those parts of the text which are of most interest to the reader rather than to the writer. Thus elements which might have been of minor concern to the author of the text but which are seen by the reader as central and needing more expression can be expanded and moved to a more central role in a rewritten narrative. Inner voices (which the style of the Tanakh tends to ignore almost completely) can be brought to the fore by readers accustomed to seeing and hearing those voices express themselves. Thus a text can be worked over in a very extreme and radical way, altered almost out of all recognition in a very plastic and fluid way. In these techniques of personalization, the reader's voice comes over loud and clear. It is the dominant voice and it expresses an authentic response by the reader to the scenario kicked off by the author.

Personalization by its very nature will tend to be influenced by prevailing fashions or ideological trends. Since the text is a jumping off point or perhaps a framework for the expression of personal opinions and world-views, it stands to reason that trends and directions that come to the fore in society as a whole will, through their influence on the public as a whole, reflect itself in the things that are written by members of that public. Since many people are fascinated by the Tanakh, we would be surprised if the new voices and concerns were not to surface here as well. One obvious example of this in recent years has been the influence of feminism and feminist critiques of the Tanakh in Biblical studies as a whole and in the trend toward personalization in particular. Much creative writing - or rewriting of the text of the Tanakh has developed over the last decades. Feminist, or women's midrash has become a major literary enterprise, especially given the accepted opinion in women's circles that women have got a raw deal in the biblical text as a whole. The opinion that the Tanakh largely expresses a male viewpoint in many of its stories, has brought about a counter-trend which seeks to subvert the dominant ethos of the Tanakh in this sense by creatively rewriting the stories from women's points of view. Many minor female characters have been brought out of the shadows and have been given a voice of their own, independent of the male characters whose dependents they often are in the text. In techniques of personal creative writing, Lot's wife can reclaim her name and Dena her dignity.

Later in the book we will deal with the use of literature in Tanakhic study and we will see there some examples of how different authors have played with the text in the way that we are discussing here. The difference between what we are talking about here and what we will talk about there is in the educational application of the technique of creative writing. In the later chapter we will examine the responses of the students to the creative writing of authors who have used the techniques of personalization in their understanding of the text and have written their own versions of the Biblical text. Here, in this chapter, we are examining techniques through which the students express themselves in writing, through which, in other words, they themselves are responding in personal terms to the Biblical text.

The Pros and Cons of the Personalization Approach in Teaching

Approaches like this almost by definition are controversial among teachers. There are those who condemn it as irresponsible and even immoral interference with a sacred text. There are those who see it as irrelevant. What is important, according to these approaches is to study the text itself and learn the special lessons that God or the accepted and legitimate interpreters of God's text intend us to learn. The student is seen primarily as a receptacle of received and transmitted wisdom, rather than as a creative person. Some of these concerns might well be true for many who do not approach the text from quite such a strict theological position. It is certainly possible to see a teacher who will be prepared to accept the idea of literary interpretation as valid when performed seriously and thoughtfully by a Thomas Mann, a Bialik or a Meir Shalev but who will balk at encouraging his or her own students to "play" with the text. This is a real concern and a valid one. We might see creative responses to a text as legitimate and positive but fear for the lack of control that comes with letting the students loose on a Biblical text. We might be concerned that the tone of the students' responses will be less than respectful, will perhaps involve too much humor and irreverence. We might be giving license to students to mock the text that we consider either sacred in the traditional sense or in the sense that we see great literature - Shakespeare, Tolstoy - as sacred.

What is certain is that we indeed give up a great deal of our control over the parameters of free expression when we employ techniques of creative writing with our students and personalize the texts. We know what goes into the exercise but we are helpless to predict the results. There is potential for anarchy in any classroom and any teaching situation. We all try to control that potential and to allow expression within our classrooms to the extent that we deem appropriate. There is great uncertainty in the use of these creative techniques and we might feel that it threatens our control.

However, the potential to be harvested by the use of such techniques is clear. Techniques of personalization are both engaging and empowering from the point of view of the students. They allow students to enter the text and indeed the world of the Tanakh in a way that many other methods simply do not permit. If you are a character, or a participant in a Biblical scene, you get both to explore the scene in new and unexpected ways and you often get to care much more strongly about what happens in the text. The difference between first person participation and third person observation of a Biblical text is marked. Since one of the concerns of all teachers must be to get the students to care about the text and, in the narrative sections of the Tanakh, to engage closely with the text, the potential of such techniques to do this must be clear.

In response to the last argument brought up against the use of such techniques - the argument about levity and disrespect - it could be argued that students who are really going to exploit the text in "irresponsible" and "negative" ways, will be unlikely to be engaged by more orthodox methods of pedagogy. Their negativity might well be expressed more in terms of silent alienation than by active "disruption", but their

involvement will not be greater. On the other hand there are other students who might well be more engaged and brought to greater appreciation of the biblical text precisely by the use of these techniques. If that is so, the risk of loss of control over the minority might be a small price to pay for engagement of the majority. Ultimately, of course, it is up to each teacher to make their own account of the pros and cons of using these techniques. We believe that personalization is an important approach for teachers who feel comfortable with its techniques and that the teacher who can use the techniques comfortably is in a good position, with more ways to evoke response in students. In addition, it should be noted that humor in and of itself, is not to be thought of as a bad thing. The Tanakh is, of course, not averse to using humor and satire on occasion. In addition, to use humor even in the exploration of a serious text, is not necessarily to mock the text. As a vital and central human emotion, it is important to be able to bring humor into the teaching and the learning situation. To use it is not necessarily to abuse it.

In this chapter we will bring a number of techniques in which we have related to different texts. The techniques are obviously usable in many different contexts although it should be noted that some techniques are better suited for different texts. Some texts are more psychologically loaded, making them more suitable for techniques that allow those sides to be expressed. Some techniques might be more suitable for multi character texts, others for more intimate texts.

#1 - Hearing Inner Voices: Esther and Mordechai

As mentioned earlier, one of the features of the Biblical style is its reticence to examine the inner voices and feelings of the characters. It is this feature that has allowed so much midrashic interpretation through the centuries, and it is this feature too that allows us to use our own techniques to explore this inner world. The example we bring is drawn from a curriculum on Purim and Megillat Esther. It is well known that there is no direct mention of religious faith in the Megillah although many believe that there is a great deal happening on the subject underneath the surface of the text. One of the subjects that we wanted to examine was the issue of faith in the lives of the characters of the Megillah and through them in the lives of the students. As part of that examination, we developed the following exercise. It focused on chapter four of the Megillah, in which Mordechai tries by way of a messenger to persuade Esther to try and intervene with the king to change the decree regarding the destruction of the Jews. In the course of the chapter each character makes two statements. We take those statements as the basis for the following exercise.

EXERCISE: Esther and Mordechai: Talking From Faith?

...ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת...

Posing The Problem

Let us examine the question of how the central characters of Esther and Mordechai understand the world. On an individual human level, do they accept the idea that the Megillah seems to be suggesting, of a divine guide underneath the surface of life in Shushan - and by extension, of life in the world?

One of the important aspects of any study of Jewish figures from the past is to examine the relevance of these figures as potential models for Jewish attitudes and behavior today. It is doubtful to what extent a person of perfect faith like Abraham can provide an accessible model for young people (or perhaps, for anyone) today. The age of prophecy, of direct communication with God, has passed. Faith for us today is more difficult because it is more indirect. Despite the claim of many thinkers and philosophers over the centuries, most people are not completely persuaded by the suggested "proofs" of God's existence. Religious belief in today's world is more likely to be based on the so called "**leap**" of faith, a conscious decision that a person makes to accept the partial, circumstantial evidence that exists and to interpret it in a way that can underpin religious belief. From this point of view, it may be that the figures of Mordechai and Esther represent a more accessible model of belief in the midst of uncertainty, which can be very relevant to students examining their own issues of faith.

Writing Two Monologues

- Ask the students to (re)-read chapter 4 of the Megillah. Divide the class into two groups. Ask all the students in one group, working individually, to take the two speeches of Mordechai (Esther 4: 7-8, 13-14) and to write a monologue of all the thoughts that are going through his mind while he says these things. They should look very carefully at the text and try and think of

as many things as possible that he might be thinking while saying these words. At the same time, the other half of the class should do the same thing for the two speeches of Esther (verses 11, 16). What is going through Esther's mind as she says these things?

- Pair the students up so that we have one representing Esther's state of mind and one representing Mordechai's. Let them read the text and hear each other's inner voice. Thus two things are going on at the same time, the overt dialogue, as reported in the text, and the inner dialogue, interpreted by the two students. They can ask each other questions to try and clarify and deepen their understanding of the two characters, but must at this stage stick to asking questions of the other regarding their partner's two speeches. It should be noted that the exercise can be done in the first person, with both students playing the parts of Esther and Mordechai, or in the third person where they talk *about* their character.
- After this, each student is asked to react to the situation in the following way. Let the student representing Mordechai write down and then report his reactions to Esther's speech of verse 11. Let the student representing Esther do the same for Mordechai's speech of verses 13-14. They should relate how they feel about the other at that precise moment. How does Mordechai feel about Esther's concern for court protocol and for her own safety? How does Esther feel about the demand that is being made of her, and about the fact that her life is on the line? The students should now discuss the whole exchange between the two characters so that they feel that they have a good understanding of the state of mind of both characters.

This is a simple exercise which allows us to examine the religious faith (or lack of it) in these two important Biblical characters and by extension to begin, in a non-threatening way, to examine the ideas of the students. It is a prelude to an attempt to write a statement of faith for the characters in question which in turn serves as a basis for examining the student's own religious world view. The use of a creative writing technique in this context is aimed at allowing the students to get inside the characters and to induce a certain amount of reflective thinking on the part of the students regarding their own issues of faith.

#2 - Hearing Your Own Inner Voice: Bibliodrama

We now go over to another technique, much more intimate as far as the participants themselves are concerned, and one that should be used both sparingly and after preparation, by an educator who feels competent in the skill and confident in her or his interactive skills and emotional sensitivity. We refer to a technique called bibliodrama, a term coined by the American scholar and educator Peter Pitzele, for a specific dramatic technique of exploring the Biblical text as a form of modern midrash. Strictly speaking this is creative drama rather than creative writing but we feel that it belongs here because in a sense it represents creative writing in its most immediate and spontaneous form. We bring here an abridged form of an introduction that Pitzele has written explaining parts of his technique. Here are details of three possible educational/dramatic strategies that the educator can use.

Bibliodrama: The Tools

The essence of bibliodrama is the act of voicing and playing a biblical character. One can do this singly or in a group with others. No props or devices are needed to accomplish this. When the warm-up is sound, the invitation made safe and appealing, the scene and characters clearly defined, then the act of voicing and playing is as easy as a somersault. However, for the would-be director there are a number of tools that can support and extend this bibliodramatic move.

The Empty Chair Strategy

Chairs can be a useful prop and can be used in many ways. For example, you can place an empty chair in the center of the room and tell the players that this chair represents God, and that they are to stand as near or as far from that chair as they feel represents their closeness or distance from God. Characters may then be questioned about their feelings, relationship, history with God). Once these tableaux are created, the facilitator's task is to interview the participants in role and to help them tell the group a little about themselves. Often other characters will take part in asking characters questions.

Often it will be helpful to ask people once they have chosen the character and become it, to locate that character in time and space. "You tell me you are Miriam? So at what point in your story are you coming before us?" Sometimes the participant may answer immediately and with certainty. "I am Miriam; I have just seen my brother's wife Zipporah." Other times when the character draws a blank you may need to present some of the options: "Are you Miriam as a young girl, as the leader crossing the Red Sea, as the dancer, as the prophetess, as the woman who challenges her brother, as the stricken Miriam, as Miriam dying?"

The empty chair serves both to concretize a dimension of the character and provide a staging point for its expression. Using the chair also clearly demarcates the playing space from the group space, the stage from the audience. To reach the chair one moves from audience to participant, from self to role; and then returning to one's seat, one steps out of the role and back into the place of observation.

Empty chairs may be used to sculpt a scene before one actually has people play the parts. You may place chairs side by side, or three chairs together with one off alone - you and the group may play with the relationships between the characters. Once the chairs are arranged, their positions - opposition, alliance, isolation - help the players warm up to the parts. The chairs give some form and control to the interpretive direction of a scene. The chairs support the players and move them in a certain direction. Rearrange the chairs, and new bibliodramatic interpretations present themselves.

The Echoing Strategy

Echoing is part of the art of listening. The technique can help you to help your players enter more fully into their parts. Let's say we have been reading the story of the birth and adoption of Moses. Using a variety of indirect methods, we may be looking at the social condition of slavery, thinking about repressive regimes, discussing the role women play in the opening chapters of the book, noticing literary motifs, studying the Hebrew, talking about our own experiences of feeling trapped, threatened, exiled. All these are part of the repertoire of methods of Bible study. But then, as the director, I might invite the group to zoom in on Moses' sister, Miriam. We might wonder what it was like for her to see a baby brother born in the time of the edict. Such speculation is still indirect (we are talking about her), until a moment comes when I say, "I wonder what Miriam would say to us if she could tell us about this time in her life." I say this in almost a musing manner, and I let the silence hang a bit, see whether a head comes up or whether anyone takes the cue. Then making my question fully direct: "Would anyone like to speak for a moment as Miriam? Tell us, Miriam, what is this time like for you?" Here in slight shifts I move from the indirect (I wonder what Miriam would say...) to the direct (Tell us, Miriam, what this time is like for you).

Worst case (I have never seen it happen, but it is our fear): no one speaks.

Then you as the director might wish to offer your own speculation as Miriam. You might begin saying, "Well, I think Miriam might say the following if she were here to tell us her story:

"This is a cruel time for me. I am caught between impossible choices. On the one hand, I cherish this little baby. On the other hand, his every cry threatens my life and those of my brother and mother and father."

Then you might say, "I wonder if there is another Miriam here who might have something else, or something different, to tell us?" You hope that your words have primed the pump. But let's say that, again, no one picks up on it. The silence that greets you may be the silence of resistance, but it also may be a silence which is suddenly filling with the enormity of that family's life. With no one else willing to play at that moment, you let go of the game, perhaps with some words like "Well, it was just a thought to talk to Miriam, to imagine her words; it's a kind of midrash. Maybe we will try it again some time." And you go on with the study session. You have planted a seed.

More likely, someone does respond to your invitation, or does offer a variant Miriam to the one you proposed. "I think Miriam would be scared," someone offers.

Hearing this, you notice that the phrasing is still indirect (Miriam would be afraid instead of I, as Miriam, am afraid). Your task here is to shift it into direct speech: "So, you are Miriam, and you are scared," you say gently, moving the participant into the role.

"Well, yes," perhaps with a slight shrug or a nervous laugh. Where is this going? This is different.

"And why are you scared?" you ask, persisting, but in a tone that is caring rather than confrontational. Students, adults perhaps more than young people, are so used to thinking there is a right answer, that even in a method so evidently open and imaginative as this one, students may still feel cornered by any interrogation. You take the role of the concerned friend rather than probing director.

"Well, she's scared be...."

"I'm scared because..." insisting gently that the role be played

"All right, I'm scared because this little baby could get us all in trouble. In big trouble."

"Yes," I say, and echoing "My parents broke the law, and we are living in whispers. Is that right?" referring back to the participant.

"Yes, I mean, what if he were discovered? What if it were found out that we were hiding him?"

"What could happen?"

"We could get into big trouble."

"Ah. Like...?"

"I don't know. I don't want to think about it. All I know is that we have to be very secret, very quiet. Like you said "whispers.""

"It's hard," I say...

The Talking Object Strategy

You might ask people to choose inanimate objects from the Biblical story and to become those objects. After they choose an object, you might ask: "Do any of you wish to tell us anything about yourself?" Here is an example of what I heard a woman say in an adult Torah group:

"I am the reed ark that carried Moses down the Nile." "Tell me more about yourself."

"Well, what do you want to know?" "Who made you?"

"I don't know" (This response is not at all unusual and represents an important and challenging moment for the facilitator. The participant is, for a moment, caught in a

dilemma. It is not yet clear whether she can give full rein to her imagination, making up a story out of whole cloth, or whether she has to adhere to the information - or lack thereof - in the Bible. The task of the facilitator at this point is to encourage imagination to invent the story).

"Well, someone must have made you, and though your story is not told in the Bible, perhaps you can let us in on some of your secrets." Or, "I know we do not know in a factual way anything about you, but in this exercise you are free to make up a story. I'll ask you a few questions, and you can just see what answers come to mind"

The important thing here is, in the spirit of play and invention, to encourage the role-player to let her imagination respond.

"OK. Moses' father made it"

"Made me," I say, gently correcting the speaker back into role.

"OK. Made me."

"Did he talk to you while he was making you?" "Not actually aloud"

"But you could read his thoughts?" "Not his thoughts, his feelings."

"Ah hah And what were those feelings?" "He was sad, and he was angry."

"I see. And did you know what you were being made for?"

"Yes."

"And that was?"

"To carry the little infant down the Nile." "How did you feel about this assignment?" "It was a huge responsibility. I wanted Moses' father to be very careful. To weave me well and to caulk me well. I did not want to leak, or tilt over."

"And did he build you well?" "Yes, very well."

"Yes. I want you to know what it felt like to carry him down the river. It was like being his mother."

In the closure to the class where the woman played the reed ark, she expressed her surprise at how vivid the scene had become for her. *"I really see Moses' father bending over in candlelight and weaving the basket. It was amazing, and as the basket I had feelings, too. It was harder to say Goodbye to the baby than I said."*

And another group member, speaking to her, said, "I never thought about the ark before as a kind of second mother, a womb. I mean I guess it's obvious, but it made me realize how many times Moses was mothered and passed on. The little ark is like a metaphor for how transient his childhood must have felt for him."

Though these comments have a degree of adult sophistication, this exercise lends itself well to young kids, to families, and particularly intergenerational groups. Kids may not have the same ability to comment on the objects as adults, but they are far less inhibited in representing them in the first place. I'll never forget the kid who, playing Joseph's coat, said, "It was scary when the brothers tore me into pieces and splashed blood on me. They were so mad. Like wolves."

A rabbi once said of this work that it created "a level playing field." What he meant was that this method does not privilege knowledge or book-learning. As a result it is possible for men and women, boys and girls, of all ages and familiarities with the Bible to enter into a midrashic community together in which what is valued is imagination, empathy, and certain expressive abilities.

We see here that the technique is one which is excellent for plumbing the emotional depths of a story and examining the human drama and tensions underneath the text. It derives its power partly from the situation of the text but much more so from the range of associations that the students bring to the drama from their own world and their own experiences. Since many of us have experienced in our own lives, at least at certain moments, the kind of familial anguish that lies beneath the surface of many of the stories in Beraishit especially, it can provide a very powerful way of both exploring the text and engaging the individual participants with the text.

Bibliodrama is indeed a powerful tool and the question arises where to use it. From one point of view it is possible to use the technique at almost any point in a Biblical narrative. But it is important to use such a powerful and personal tool sparingly and to choose the right moment to do so. The best and most suitable points to use the technique, it might be suggested, are those moments in the Biblical text where there is some form of dramatic interaction with emotional or psychological tensions and issues that pay examination. Almost any story has its high emotional points, and it is possible to go through the narrative stories of the Torah one after another and to choose those points of emotional resonance where the technique would best be employed.

We might suggest for example, the following potential moments in stories of Beraishit.

Ch. 13: 8-9. (The tension between Avram and Lot).

Ch. 16: 4-5. (The tension between Sarai and Hagar).

Ch. 18: 10-15. (Sara's laughter and her denial).

Ch. 22: 7-9. (Isaac and Avraham's interaction at the time of the Akedah).

Let us take one such example and explore it. We ourselves recommended its use in a curriculum which placed the Cain and Abel story at its centre and we chose verse eight of the story (*Gen. 4*) both because of its ambiguity and its emotional power. The ambiguity of a text is always an advantage in this form of exercise since it allows participants to find their own ways inside a text rather than sticking more closely to a text. The advantage of ambiguity might be compared

to a group of actors who are working with a skeleton script rather than a detailed word by word script. They have more chance to bring themselves into the scene, using their own personal insights and experience, and influencing the development of the scene in a way that would be more difficult if all the details had been written in. However, it should be noted that even without ambiguity, many pieces are still ripe for bibliodramatic development, simply by virtue of the fact that the inner voices of the Biblical characters are lacking. Bibliodrama aims to supply those inner voices. .

The ambiguity of the verse has been noted by commentators and masters of midrash down the ages.

And Cain said to Abel his brother: and it came to pass when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

The omission of the words that Cain used has been an invitation for creative midrash and has given rise to whole host of different versions of the conversation. The truth is that the original text was far more prosaic than some of the creative ideas that the different midrashim have suggested: both the Samaritan text and the Septuagint add the phrase "Let us go outside" as the text of Cain's missing words. But the ambiguity of the Masoretic text of the Torah gives fertile scope for exploration. But the other reason for selecting this piece is its sheer emotional power. This brings up both sibling rivalry and family violence or general violence in the strongest terms. These are subjects that many of the participants will recognize from their own personal experience, something that will potentially make for a rich dramatic confrontation with the text.

Pitzele himself reports on his use of the Cain and Abel story as a basis for bibliodrama.

In the midrashic enactments I have guided, the build-up to the encounter of the brothers begins as Cain and Abel are moved in their manhood to bring offerings to the Lord. Cain, "in the course of time" comes first.

Who will be Cain? I ask. And almost always there is a long pause, for we have heard the story, and it takes a certain courage and energy for a person to dive deep enough to find and feel that part of himself. I wait. After a while, several members of the group stand up - not all men - and step forward, often with a shrug or a sigh, an anxious glance. And who will be Abel? Again a pause; again there are volunteers. I need someone, too, to play God.

Why, I ask Cain when we have cleared a space in the center for our drama, why do you make an offering? Where does this idea come from?

The first Cain speaks. "So often I heard my parents speak of the garden. I could feel their longing. When it came time for me to contribute to the family, I became a tiller of the soil: I have tried to make a garden for them. It took time, but now I have plants and trees that yield good things to eat, and fruit. Yes, even fruit."

"In my heart," says another Cain, "I compete with God. This garden is my way to make a substitute paradise for my parents. I shall show God that we can bring forth abundance even out of the ground He cursed."

"I bring my offering to show God what I have done. I myself. It is a display of my power to understand the processes of nature, how to sow and plant and harvest."

"No, no, this is not true at all. This offering is not egotism; It is made in a gesture of peace and reconciliation. My father has not spoken to the Lord since he left Eden, but he has told me stories, and I hope that by my offering God will return to communicate with my parents!"

And there is Abel, listening, eyeing his older brother from a distance.

Why, I ask, are you here?

"I too, must make some showing before the Lord. But what do I have? Nothing I have made with my hands, only what the Lord has given into my keeping. But among what I have I shall select the best."

And another Abel speaks: "There is a part of me that does not want to be left out of this. I am often alone on the hills with the flocks while Cain is close to home. Often I feel left out. But not now. What if the Lord appears and I am not there to see Him? Cain will get some reward, and I shall get nothing."

A third Abel speaks: "Out there alone on the hills I feel close to God. Especially at night under the stars. I hear things in the wind and see things glint and dart in the heavens, and my soul has been drawn out of me into that warm darkness. Many times I have felt a rapture. But never until I saw my brother bring his offering did I think to give something back to the infinite Mystery from which all life comes."

Silence. - The brothers, stand, at first attempting to ignore one another. We wait to see what will happen.

Spontaneously Cain turns. "Copycat," he says. "take your bleating sheep off somewhere else. This is my spot; it was my idea:"

"I can stand wherever I please. It's a free country." "Not here!"

"What a sorry-looking bunch of vegetables. That's sheep food."

"You let your sheep wander one more time into my garden, and I'll kill them."

"What do you know about butchering, garden man? I slaughter the sheep for our feasts, not you:'

"What else do you do with your sheep, boy, out there all by yourself?"

On the other side of this last insult are oaths, menace, and the threat of a premature enactment of what the myth delays until God has stepped in to tilt the balance. I hold the brothers apart and motion to the actor playing God. He enters and puts an arm around Abel and slowly draws him aside, and then both turn their backs on Cain. Abel, looking somewhat apprehensively over his shoulder, laughs. Nothing is said. 'The silence weighs on us as Cain, seeing God and Abel move aside, watches them for a moment, then looks down. His eyes are hooded, and he seems to be looking deep inside himself.

*Turning to the group-as-audience I ask, "What do you imagine is going on inside Cain?"
"I hear the silent roar of his anger."
"I see him trying to figure out what he did wrong!"
"He's examining his whole life, searching for an answer."
"I feel him hating God."
"I see the wheels of revenge beginning to turn."
"He wants to punish God."
- "He feels he has lost his brother. He is alone."
And the text tells us that "Cain's countenance fell, and he was enraged."*

Peter Pitzele, *Our Fathers'*

Wells

Certainly a strong and powerful tool, and one that needs to be used carefully and sensitively, we believe that bibliodrama as a technique is an enrichment to any educator's arsenal of techniques.

#3 – Alternative Biblical Versions: Many Davids

Let us now move on to a different technique which aims at providing new way of engaging participants with stories, familiar or unfamiliar. The specific aim of this technique is to get students to look at the text very carefully and to concentrate on one part of the story - a phrase or a verse - while being aware of the whole story.

We suggest that the best way to use this technique is together with the study of some classic creative literary texts on subject of the story. Let us describe the technique in relation to a particular story before we talk about it in more general terms.

We will take as our example the David stories. The first steps as described below are general steps aimed at familiarizing the students with the idea of the different ways in which writers have seen and rewritten the David stories over time. They are not part of the specific creative technique itself although it is felt that using them as an introduction helps focus the technique and enhances the results. If the technique has been used before, they can be dispensed with unless they serve your aims as an educator.

EXERCISE: Rewriting David

- The participants should start by writing down briefly their own descriptions of David as they see him. These should be shared with the group.
- We would then continue by comparing aspects of the two biographies of David in Shmuel and Divrei HaYamim. This idea has been mentioned with examples in the chapter on using historical approaches and therefore there is no reason to bring examples here. Suffice it to say that we would bring a small example or two from the two stories to show what the authors of Divrei HaYamim did to the text according to their own aims and needs.
- Following this we would then look at one of the stories such as the David and Bat Sheva story (2 Shmuel 11) and see how the Rabbis have rewritten the story in various ways through the midrash, using especially those midrashim that appear in Tractate Sanhedrin.
- The next step would be to look at a number of modern literary treatments of David. These can either be connected to specific stories (either one already mentioned or a new one) or be general pictures of David. We mention some of the ones that Steve has found particularly useful and powerful. Yaakov Fichman wrote some very strong epic treatments of David in Hebrew verse (which have not been published in translation) which show an intimate picture of David especially at times of personal crisis and Bialik wrote some great folk stories based on David (and Solomon) translated as "And it Came to Pass". Some of these are more or less loosely adapted from midrashic or folk sources while others came from Bialik's own imagination. Uri Zevi Greenberg wrote some extraordinarily dramatic nationalist poetry which held up David as a symbol of strong national leadership and Jewish pride and rule. Moshe Shamir wrote an excellent version of the Uriah and BatSheva story published in English variously

as "The Hittite Must Die" and "Uriah the Hittite". This is fascinating since it purports to show David through Uriah's eyes both at a time when he idolized (and idealized) David and at a later time when he saw him as a corrupt and power hungry monarch. These kinds of stories exist for many of the Biblical figures and the idea here is to show what great writers have done with the Biblical text and how they have extended and interpreted it once again according to their own perspectives and their own needs.

- Finally, we would look for a text, either in prose or poetry, that takes a very close look at a very small part of the story. For David, two good "literary" readings appear in Adin Steinsaltz's "Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book" and Maurice Samuel's "Certain People of the Book" both give good examples of this. The best example that Steve has found for David is a wonderful story by Michael Greenberg which appeared in the English language magazine Shdemot many years ago on the subject of Avishag. It takes the very brief mention of Avishag at the beginning of Sefer Melachim and expands it imaginatively into a full blown scenario, which in no way goes against the text but simply adds, filling in the gaps in the text. The reason that it is so good and suitable to the present purpose is that the students can read everything about Avishag in the Biblical text in a few moments and thus immediately grasp what the author has done and assess his success in doing it. Any other text can serve but an extreme "blowing up" of a limited text is ideal.

All of these are preliminary steps. Now we come to the technique itself.

- Take a story (in this case one of the David stories) that you have not yet looked at with the participants. Read it through from beginning to end with the group, providing any necessary context without going into any detail. Make sure that all the students understand the entire piece.
- Now divide it up into small segments according to the number of participants in the group. Each segment should be self contained, in that it provides a whole scene or part of a scene. For example, a speech of a particular character should not be divided in the middle. Some segments might consist of several verses while others might consist of a mere three or four words.
- Here is an example of a division. If we take for example the story of David and Avigayil which appears in 1 Shmuel ch. 25, we can suggest a division of the first verses as follows: the translation is according to the Koren "Jerusalem Bible".
 1. "And David" (second part of first verse) - end of verse 1.
 2. Verse 2.
 3. Verse 3.
 4. Verse 4.
 5. Verses 5-8.
 6. Verse 9.
 7. Verses 10 - 11.
 8. First part of verse 12 to "went back".
 9. Second part of verse 12 from "and came" to "sayings".
 10. First part of verse 13 to "Let every man gird his sword".

The division will change according to the number of participants. To create more parts for example, verse two could be subdivided, with the last phrase "he was shearing his sheep in the Carmel" being separate. Similarly to create less parts verse 4 could be added to verses 5 to 8 and all of verse 13 could be one part.

- **Each person now takes his or her part and has about 20 minutes to half an hour to write their part in full according to their own imagination.** They can stay near the text or go far from it. They can tell it in the first or third person or even in the second person if, for example, it involves a dialogue. They can be any of the characters in the scene or a fly on the wall (literally!). The only rule is that they have to stay within their piece and must start at the beginning and finish at the end in order that the next person will be able to write his or her piece in the secure knowledge of where the previous piece "landed".
- After this the group comes back together and one after the other, in order, the participants read through their own version of the story. The variety of styles will be revealing: prose, poetry, drama, humor, pathos - all will tumble into the text.
- Finally, there should be a discussion about what has been learned on a variety or deeper levels. What has been learned about the story under discussion? How would the same story have been written from the point of view of one of the other characters? Was the story critical of its main character or not? How would the story look if it described the incident from the other point of view? What has been learned about the ideas of the Biblical authors and the way that they wrote their stories down from their own points of view?

This is a good technique to get to understand the ideas of literary authorship and style. It is fun, enjoyable and creative and can be used very seriously to facilitate understanding of the way that texts can be written from different points of view. It is an excellent tool for instance to introduce students into critical or non-critical texts. In addition it brings them closer to the text and gets them more interested in the "small print" of the stories. If well done, there are almost always students who come out of this exercise, stating that the Biblical text will never look the same again.

#4 - Concluding Exercise: Rewriting The Text

Rewriting the Ending of Job and Rewriting The Megillah!

Our last example in this chapter involves another kind of rewriting, a rewriting that comes to close a process of learning by evaluating the text as a whole. Very often, having examined a Biblical book or part of a book as a unit, a creative writing exercise of one kind or other can serve as a good form of processing of the kind that is so necessary in concluding a learning unit. We will give two different examples of this technique, each of which has different specific goals but each of which is an attempt to help the students process the larger picture of what they have learned. The first is drawn from the difficult book of Job, the second from the book of Esther. Each come at the end of the learning process for the specific book.

Rewriting The Ending Of Job

How do we explain the strange ending of the book (Job ch. 42 vv7-17)? Job is the ultimate happy end story. It can be argued that the end of the book is totally at variance with the tone of the rest of the book. It is as if a film made by Ingmar Bergman has had its last five minutes directed by the last of the Hollywood hacks! Just at the time that Job no longer needs a happy end for himself in emotional and psychological terms since God's revelation has given him a multi-dimensional picture of God's universe in which reward for virtue is no longer necessary, he gets what he no longer needs.

If we (like Job) have internalized the message that we are not to ask questions about issues such as reward and punishment of God and that God "works in inscrutable ways", how are we to explain the ending? Just as Eliphaz, Bildad and Tzofar have been rebuked by God for "not speaking rightly of God" i.e. upholding a wrong conception of God as a God who necessarily rewards virtue and punishes evil, the ending suggests the very opposite! Does the ending not undermine the message that we received in only the last chapters by suggesting that in the end, the righteous *will* get their reward?

Many people have found the ending problematic and out of line with the rest of the story. There are many scholars, in particular, who believe that the ending was tacked on by a different hand, by someone who felt that he or his audience would feel cheated if Job did not have such an ending. On the other hand, the ending has been enthusiastically received by countless others who see poetic justice in Job's newfound wealth and restored family. How are we to read the ending, as a just reward for hardship and, as such, a fitting conclusion to the story or as an unsuitable and somewhat jarring contradiction to the inner truth of the story's central message? The Christian theologian Arthur Peake, gave an interesting and approving reading of the end of the story.

It is not that Job needed his restoration in order to regain his confidence in God. Had he been doomed to end his days in pain, he could walk through the valley with the memory of the vision of God. But then the reader would have been very unfavorably impressed by God's treatment of him. Now [the reader] feels that God has made amends to [Job] for the pain that God has made him endure... We must remember that

the compensation given to Job is to clear God's character, not in any way to reaffirm the old theory that the righteous must be fortunate.

FINAL EXERCISE: Ending Job

The students should read Job chapter 42: 7-17 and the following questions should be raised with them.

1. In your opinion does the end of the story, in which Job is finally rewarded for his virtue, suit the rest of the story or does it, in any way, undermine it?
2. Why do you think that some critics have seen it as being a later addition? If it is an addition, what might the person who added it on, have been trying to say by his action?
 - They should look at the following analysis by Arthur Peake. Why does he believe that the ending is put into the story (whether or not it was original is irrelevant for him)? What message does he believe the author is trying to put over here?

It is not that Job needed his restoration in order to regain his confidence in God. Had he been doomed to end his days in pain, he could walk through the valley with the memory of the vision of God. But then the reader would have been very unfavorably impressed by God's treatment of him. Now [the reader] feels that God has made amends to [Job] for the pain that God has made him endure... We must remember that the compensation given to Job is to clear God's character, not in any way to reaffirm the old theory that the righteous must be fortunate.

- The students should be asked to write an alternative ending to the story in which there is no happy end. They should start from verse 7 "After the Lord had said these things to Job..."
- The students should discuss which version they think is most fitting, that of the author of the Book of Job or the ones that they have written? Why?

FINAL EXERCISE: Rewriting The Megillah!

- We suggest a final exercise, which is aimed at bringing things together. The students, (in pairs?), are asked to write their own shortened version of the same story. They should understand that different generations have written their own version of the Megillah, in traditional, theologically motivated texts, or in modern secular poetry and prose. In a sense we can say that each generation has rewritten the Megillah according to its own understandings, insights and sensitivities. This process of midrash is one of the things that most mark the Jewish attitude towards texts. It has been seen as a legitimate activity within the Jewish world for thousands of years. We are now asking the students to take part in this timeless Jewish activity.

- They should use some of the following questions as their guidelines. If there are students who wish to use non-literary techniques such as art or music, they should be encouraged to do so.
1. What changes would you put in to your Megillah in the light of all the things that have been discussed?
 2. Would you change the picture of the different characters?
 3. Would you bring the element of faith more to the fore?
 4. Would you change the ending of the story?
 5. Would you show Esther's intermarriage in a different way or, for example, do what some of the sages did, portraying her as a victim of royal force, when they rewrote their version of the story in their commentaries or midrashim?
 6. Would you do what later generations do and put into Esther's mouth, all sorts of prayers to God which are singularly absent from the Megillah itself? (They can be found in the Additions to the Book of Esther, which are in the Apocrypha, the collection of Jewish texts from the late second Temple period).
 7. What exactly is your Megillah? How would you make this text yours?

#5 A Voyage of Discovery for Each of the Characters in the David-Batsheva Story by Haya Ben Natan

*from HaMikra V'Ani - The Tanakh and Me:
Alternative Methods for Teaching Tanakh*

Haya Ben Natan was for decades a most creative teacher of Tanakh pedagogy at the Seminar HaKibbutzim Teachers college in Tel Aviv. She availed herself of many psychodramatic tools used in family therapy to explore the relationships in Biblical narrative. She built group work inquiry into the story and its interpersonal meanings. However she also found surprising ways to lead the students to a very close analysis of the structure and terminology of the Biblical text.

Her basic pedagogical approach consists of three steps:

- **Identifying central concepts underlying the story**
- **Offering techniques for a close textual analysis in the light of that concept**
- **Proposing creative group activities translating our concepts and text analysis into a active personal knowledge about our characters and perhaps our lives.**

I Samuel 11 - Concepts, Texts and Group Activities

Three main concepts are suggested as tools to explore the Biblical story of David and Batsheva.

- 1. The Anatomy of a Crime**
- 2. Hiddenness and Dramatic Tension**
- 3. Point of View - "What you see from her you can see from there"**

CONCEPT: The Anatomy of a Crime - Unpremeditated

Legally David's crimes are premeditated but psychologically and dramatically David's actions are not portrayed as premeditated in the sense that he always knew what he wanted and how to get it and what he was getting into. First he is struck by beauty and opportunity and temptation combine to an act with full knowledge of the fact of adultery but no sense for the consequences, for the complications. Then the cover-up escalates without premeditation into murder. Finally God intervenes which is nothing David could have imagined when he began the adultery or carried out the cover-up.

The narrative structure of II Sam. 11 can be summarized by the words of wisdom in Proverbs 30: 18-20

**"Three things are beyond me, four I cannot fathom.
How an eagle makes it way over the sky;
How a snake makes it way over a rock;
How ship makes its way through the high seas;
How a man has his way with a maiden?"**

**Such is the way of the adulteress:
She eats, she wipes her mouth,
And she says: "I have done no wrong!"**

The dramatic literary structure of II Sam 11 as an Anatomy of a Crime may be outlined:

:

- the **background - the opportunity** - staying at home in Jerusalem and sleeping late (II Sam 11:1-2),
- the **development - the temptation** - seeing a beautiful woman bathing (II Sam 11:2)
- the **act** of the main character- the **crime** - taking her and sleeping with her (II Sam 11: 3-4)
- the **complication** from the secondary character- **unforeseen consequences of the sin** - pregnancy (II Sam 11:5)
- the **reactions** of the main character - **three cover-up attempts** - the first two fail and lead to escalation of efforts (II Sam 11:6 and 8, 10, and 14-15) - from adultery, to deceit and manipulation, to murder
- the **resolution** - Uriah eliminated and Bathsheba married and the child becomes "legal" (II Sam 11:25-27)
- **unraveled** - the third attempt which seemed to have succeeded has failed because God sees through the cover-up and judges it otherwise than the adulterer. (II Sam 11:27b)

The plot line may be compared to the Proverbs 30: 18-20

- the **development - the temptation** - seeing a beautiful woman bathing (II Sam 11:2)

"How a man has his way with a maiden?" – Here is the male perspective of David spying Batsheva and deciding how to "have his way with her."

- the **act** of the main character- the **crime** taking her and sleeping with her (II Sam 11: 3-4). Here again it is David who is the adulterer but he can be compared to the way of the adulteress (Batsheva is not described as a seductress by II Sam 11). In the imagery of Proverbs **sexual consumption is compared to eating**. Both are driven by instinctual needs to consume. Later in II Sam 11: 25 David compares the sword to an instrument that "eats / *tokhal hakherev*".

Such is the way of the adulteress: She eats...

- the **complication** from the secondary character- **unforeseen consequences of the sin** – pregnancy (II Sam 11:5). However eating often involves **getting oneself dirty**, just as having intercourse involves becoming impure and needing purification (recall Batsheva's bathing - sanctifying herself from impurity - II Sam 11:4). Hence the need to clean up the consequences of satisfying one's physical desires.
- the **reactions** of the main character - **three coverup attempts**

she wipes her mouth...

Proverbs 30:29-32 goes on to describe the arrogance of the king which is also the arrogance of the adulterer and schemer, David:

**There are three that are stately of stride, four that carry themselves well
....a king whom no one dares to rise against him.
If you have acted scandalously with arrogance,
if you have schemed to do evil, clap your hand over your mouth.**

- the **resolution** - Uriah eliminated and David blames the nature of war - it is the way of the sword to eat victims - no person is to blame - not Yoav and not David (II Sam 11:25)

And she says: "I have done no wrong!"

Beyond the resolution is Divine justice which is not initially in the purview of the sinner.

CONCEPT: Hiddenness and Dramatic Tension

The dramatic dynamic of II Sam. 11 is driven by the coverup by David but also by all that is hidden from David and from the reader. David and the reader have no idea that Batsheva will get pregnant, though the bathing as purification after menstruation is hint we understand after the fact. The reader has no notion of what Batsheva thinks or feels. Is she a seductress plotting her husband's death? David has no expectation that a fellow soldier would prefer to sleep outside rather than sleep with his wife in his own bed, because David's values and psyche do not work that way. Does Uriah ever find out what happened? Does he ever peek at the letter he is carrying? Neither David nor the reader knows that God will intervene for the narrator does not judge David's acts directly but builds the narrative around whether his coverup will work or not. Literarily it is quite satisfying that David succeeds in the end in his technical solution to the coverup challenge. But what a moral price to pay - though no one is asking the moral question - before God's perspective is introduced. Now the reader/student is requested to identify and to fill the gaps left by this hiddenness with the exercise called a "Voyage in the footsteps of one's Character" (see below).

Subtext: The communications in this story of coverup and fear of the king's anger often go underground. They can be read ironically but will not state things directly. Even Nathan in II Samuel 12 will speak through a parable before he lets loose with God's condemnation.

Read David's irony in II Sam. 11: 7 - "David asked for the *shalom* of Yoav, the *shalom* of the people, and the *shalom* of the war."

But what is the subtext?

David really meant: Let's get through the small talk of national matters, and get to the main thing - my own shalom - how to get you in bed with Batsheva without getting caught red-handed in my private indiscretion. The narrator has now ironized David to show us what hypocrite he is as a national leader.

Read Uriah's ironies in II Sam 11: 11:

11 Uriah said to David:

"The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in sukkot,
[BUT Subtext: While you are walking on the roof ?]

And my lord Yo'av and my lord's servants are camping on the face of the open-field

[BUT Subtext: But you are not my lord! I cannot be loyal to you as I am to them. You back at home lack solidarity with your men in the field.]

and I, I should come into my house

to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?

[BUT Subtext: You did do exactly that - you lay with my wife!]

By your very life, by your being, if I were I do this thing ... !"

[BUT Subtext: I swear I will not be part of your coverup. My life but also your life is on the line because I trust God to be true judgment who cannot be corrupted.]

If Uriah has heard the rumors about Batsheva then his ironies are intended. If not they are the narrator's way of ironizing David the hypocrite.

Yoav's irony is II Sam 11: 20

18 Then Yo'av sent and had David told all the details of the battle,
19 he charged the messenger, saying:
"When you have finished reporting everything about the battle to the king,
20 it will be:
if the king's anger starts up and he says to you: 'Why did you draw-near the city to do battle? Didn't you know that they would shoot down from on the wall?
21 Who struck-down Avimelekh son of Yerubboshet--wasn't it a woman, (who) threw down on him a riding millstone from on the wall, so that he died at Tevetz?
For what (reason) did you approach the wall?' -
[BUT the subtext is beware of women, David!. They have brought down great kings and warriors before. How did you let yourself get into such a vulnerable and unmanly position of being exposed to a woman's wiles.]

Then you are to say: 'Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.'
[BUT the subtext is "mission accomplished!" Remember you wanted this to look natural so no one would suspect.
Don't you dare blame me for this ignominious loss because it was your idea and because I have scandalous secret information that I can use against you.
I now know you can betray your comrades-in-arms, so I will beware of you and you beware of me.]

And back to David's irony in II Sam. 11:25

25 David said to the messenger:
"Say thus to Yo'av: 'Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes, for like-this and like-that the sword devours!'
[BUT the subtext is I am now off scott -free. No one will blame me or you. That is just the way things go in this harsh cynical world of love and war.

CONCEPT: Point of View - "What you see from here, you cannot see from there"

Family therapy and Biblical narrative share the concern for how the same event can be seen and evaluated from multiple perspectives. This recalls the Israeli popular song "What you see from here, you can see from there - *ma she roim mi sham, lo roim mi-kaan.*"

The group activity of inquiry now invites each student to go on a "Voyage in the footsteps of one's Character." Our goal is to move from a summary judgment of the character based on what happened to a close reading of what is said and what is left unsaid then to an empathy with his/her inner world and then back to evaluation.

STEPS:

- 1) Choose a character from our story whom you wish to follow and into his/her head you wish to get. **David/Batsheva/Yoav/Uriah / (optional - Messengers** combining David's messengers and Yoav's.
NOTE that often students want to avoid choosing David because he seems so disgusting and they have a hard time identifying with him. Yet they must go on this voyage and try to understand him sympathetically from the inside.
- 2) Read the chapter line by line to collect information about your character's interests, motives, personality, background, relation to all other characters etc
- 3) Lay out four (or five) big poster boards each with the name of one of the characters and ask students to gather around their choice. Even out the "character groups" but David may require two groups since he plays such a major role.
- 4) Each group spends 25 minutes (no more even if not finished) to flesh out their character with sources from the text and hypotheses filling in their gaps. Then summarize the character on regular paper and make a copy for each representative who needs to make their own notes. For Uriah add II Sam 23:34,39 and for Yoav add II Samuel 3:12-22, 31-32. 38; I Kings 2:1-6.
- 5) One or two representative of each group form new "encounter groups" with representatives from each character. Each student must then present their character in **first person "I" language**. (For example, I was bathing on a cool night and really enjoying the water, when suddenly I felt someone's eyes on me..). Remember the presentation is to the others who have not studied your character in such depth. Five minutes each should allow everyone to hear how the character sees itself and its world, **but no questions or interactions yet**.
- 6) Now the group enters the "World of Truthfulness." Here every other character may ask in character questions to the other characters. Here we explore what was hidden - what did you think when you heard Uriah was killed? What did you feel when you recited the note " I am pregnant"? Here characters may confront one another emotionally: confess, accuse, cry, defend, plead. Here characters may come back from the dead (like Uriah) and ask questions they would never dare to ask when alive, since now they are safe and they know all that has happened. The other character is now asked **to answer truthfully** to his/her

character, filling in gaps as necessary and filling out the character. 20 minutes is usually adequate.

- 7) Return to character groups to prepare a collective summary of your character on the **poster board**. But first do a debriefing and sharing how your character was received in each encounter group, what you learned about him/her, whether your character is based on the text or a product of filling in from our imagination.
- 8) Optional: **add traditional and modern commentaries** on your character and evaluate them. They too may be included in the poster board summary. Often the board will listen two or three alternative readings of each character (Bathsheva as victim or Bathsheva as seductress; Uriah as naïve victim or Uriah as ironic critic of the king; David as lover or as lecher; David as feeling guilty or as afraid to calculating how to save his political reputation).
- 9) Post the poster boards in an **exhibition**.
Make a one-line statement for your character:

(For example, David - **I sinned, but I am only flesh and blood;**
Uriah -**If I will die I will preserve my integrity in a corrupt world.**
Bathsheva - **What could I do? After all he is the king!**
Yoav - **I am loyal to my king no matter what, but will he be loyal to me?**

Now let this lead into a **general discussion**: Did your attitude and understanding of your character grow through this process? Do you think your character is trustworthy (Uriah's moralistic speech, David's concern for the troops, David's love for Bathsheva whom he marries, Bathsheva's mourning for her husband. Do you like your character?

- 10) **Revisiting the crime**: Did your evaluation of the crime change? Of David our king?
- 11) **Reflecting on our learning**. What do you think of this learning process as a whole? What was helpful and what was difficult for you personally? What would you change?

#6 - Haya Ben Natan's the Board of Colored Light Bulbs Technique - II Samuel 12 - - Nathan's Parable

The literary aspects of the parable of Nathan are often read over by students too quickly, as they look beyond the mashal to the nimshal or to the final result - Nathan's accusation and David's confession. However **to slow the rereading process down and to weigh how each word in this brief parable casts its own associative light on our story, let us use the Board of Colored Light Bulbs Technique.**

- 1) Introduction: What great talent Nathan showed in his parable. His literary ability to compose and play act a short story posing as a real event that would transform King David's perspective on his crime, the one he worked so hard to cover up, is amazing. Let us discover how each word contributes to this feat.
- 2) Read the parable II Samuel 12:1-4 to yourself and circle three words or short phrases that seem remarkable to you.
- 3) Optional: Share with the student next to you (or get up and walk around the room) comparing your three words with other student's choices. Explain and ask for reasons for this choice of the key words.
- 4) Examine as a group the full text on the board and mark with colored markers the key words circled by your students. Think of the meaning, the associations, the figurative imagery of each word.
- 5) Imagine that each word of the parable is a differently colored bulb that when touched lights up and casts its particular light on the whole parable. (Recall the English phrase "to look at something through tinted glasses or rose colored glasses" because each angle of vision or color makes u focus on a different aspect of reality or of the text). Take a few examples and ask how the whole parable is understood different "in the light of" those three words/bulbs.
- 6) Now ask each person to present their overall feeling of the parable through the eyes of his/her three words in a visual manner - poster/dance/tableaux/ etc and explain his presentation.

Summarizing the Personalization Approach - What Have we Gained?

In these two exercises, the creative writing is aimed at helping the students to make the text their own. Ultimately this is one of the great gifts of creative writing (or music, or theatre or dance). A creative act connected to a Biblical text, something that comes from the students themselves, can be a major tool in promoting an act of ownership on behalf of the students. It can help them make the text theirs, internalize it, care about it. This surely, should be one of our great concerns as we come to teach the Tanakh.

7- Synectics – Metaphor Id – *Mashal l'mah hadavar domeh?*

A drama technique can be used to bring students to enrich their associations of the Biblical story with analogies from other realms. Such free-form analogies are used in the classical midrash when they ask: *mashal l'mah hadavar domeh?* Literally, give me an everyday analogy of the relationships in the Biblical narrative.

In this actor's warmup, the teacher asks the students who have read a story like David and Batsheva:

Please think of David in our story. Answer your first impression:

If David is compared to a house, what room would he be:

Bath, bedroom, living room, porch, garage.

Why did you chose what you chose?

If Batsheva is compared to a meal, what course is she like:

Desert, appetizer, side dish, main dish, drink.

Why did you chose what you chose?

This technique allows for free imaginative analogies which serve as a test for how we feel about the characters. It maximizes initial involvement with safe answers that cannot be wrong but also generating hypotheses about their characterization that may be checked against a second closer look at the text.

8 - Once Over Lightly – First Impressions of a Text

In reading a narrative or even an article students may begin to summarize it with an exercise that identifies its parts in a subjective personalizing way before deeper analysis and a summation.

Read the text out loud or silently. High light or underline a phrase that draws your attention that is a particularly revealing. The teacher collects a phrase from each student, noting who chose similar phrases but without asking the student to justify their choice. Then the whole class has reviewed the text in this exercise and the teacher can proceed to focus on what is the main point. Students have a slight but still personal investment in how the text will be explicated relative to their handle on what was important in it.