Chapter Nine – Modern Midrash:
Movies, Art, Poetry, Literature, Popular Songs

#1 - Film as Midrash

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Advice to the Educator for Analyzing a Movie as a Midrash

A Generative Topic

Teaching a movie is a large commitment of time and its proper introduction takes even longer and for the movie to be seen as a midrash the Biblical text must have been analyzed in depth with an eye to its gaps. However this is a power exercise that achieves many goals: close text analysis; philosophic - psychological-theological exploration of major issues of sibling rivalry, free will and Divine justice; creative contemporary reverberations of the Biblical story that might otherwise be seen as merely Jewish and merely ancient and merely verbal; an alternative medium - a movie that models the principles of midrash and invites students to continue creating in that tradition; modeling close reading of movie etc. In short this major unit constitutes what Understanding by Design educational theorists call a "generative topic" that is worthy of indepth study because it achieves so may achieve central goals of teaching method, big ideas and a seminal classic narrative.

Presenting Midrash in its Modern Form

The exercise presupposes that a film on biblical themes and stories functions as a form of midrash. If we define midrash as both:

1. An imaginative rewriting of a classical text by members of a later generation who seek to close the gaps in time between their own consciousness and the original text,
2. A text exploring an existential question via a return to the classical Biblical paradigm for this problem, then indeed some films can be identified as a form of midrash. "East of Eden" is to be seen both as a piece of art which stands in its own right but also as an interpretative midrash on the Cain and Abel story. It should be pointed out immediately that the film is intended to function on both levels.

In this analysis and pedagogic suggestion we relate to the film rather than the book. The film, which weighs in at about two hours, is, though long for any one class, a far more workable medium for an educational context than the book (six or seven hundred pages).

Suggesting a Structure for the Exercise

Only as a summary activity does the film emerge as a close reading of the Biblical text and a surprising echo of - as well as departure from - classic commentaries and midrash. Without the knowledge of the story and its many gaps a great deal of nuance will be lost. The student must be invited to see the movie not only as a viewer but as a potential colleague of the writer and director considering ways to midrashically fill gaps.

In a class viewing of the film, the movie may be seen as a whole and then analyzed - perhaps after students have seen it at home - or divided up into a number of sections shown over three or four class periods with discussion after each. This preserves the maximum dramatic continuity.

Movie Presentation

1. A substantial introduction about author, playwright, main actor and the challenges of making a movie out of this story with its gaps.

2. The film itself divided into three parts with discussion and analysis after each part.

We will here organize our comments in the following pages according to the schema that we have outlined above, an introduction and three parts of the film. We will suggest some of the comments and ideas that you might want to make to your class at the different non-viewing moments. Obviously, these comments are guidelines and suggestions. They go into detail which you might decide to avoid, both because too much detail can clutter the main ideas and because of time considerations. In addition, having viewed the film carefully before (an absolute must!), and reviewed the suggestions that we make here, you might disagree with some of the interpretations brought here and come up with some other insights or interpretations of your own, or you might wish to put your emphasis on other aspects of the story and the film.
Movie as Midrash - Outline for Educator

Defining midrash.

Imaginative rewriting by later generations.
Dealing with relevant existential questions.

Film as midrash.

If it answers to above criteria.

This film as midrash.

Deliberate and conscious rewriting in order to answer certain key issues.

The theme of the film.

Family relationships. Examination of what is a good life.
Possibility of freewill and change.

The task of the director and the screenwriter.

Making choices:

a. Who is hero and who is the villain? How good is the hero and how really bad is the villain?
   [On one hand, Cain is the villain because he murders his brother, he denies responsibility, he
   lies to cover up, he is concerned about himself not others, he displaces his anger at God onto
   to his innocent brother. On the other hand, God is the villain because God rejects one
   brother and accepts the other, God rejects the brother - not only the offering, God is
   insensitive to Cain’s feelings rather than loving and sympathetic, God’s preference seems
   arbitrary, God creates competition between the brothers, in short, God seems very poor at
   basic emotional parenting. Yet perhaps the villain should be the system of family dynamics
   where there is miscommunication between brothers and with God. In the movie Cal = Cain will
   scream over and over: Talk to me!! In the Biblical story communication patterns are very
   troubled.]

b. If the students read the novel, then ask: How do we turn prize winning novel of 650 pages
   over two generations into a two hour tight popular movie? Do any of the characters have to be
   changed, nuanced, shaded? Should some characters be cut? Why was that done? [For
   example, Kate’s character has been substantially ‘sweetened’, which makes her more
   balanced and constitutes an improvement in realism on the original novel’s caricature of this
   woman as a serpent as in the Garden of Evil. Some biographers claim she represents
   Steinbeck’s wife who was divorcing him at the time. The screenwriter also drops Lee the
   Chinese servant who is the philosopher of the movie and transfers her wisdom to Abra who is
   not a central character in the novel. This provides what every American movie needs - a
   strong romantic interest, but also provides a very positive and nuanced female figure opposite
   Kate].
c. If the students have not read the novel, ask them how they would translate the Biblical tale directly into a modern movie set in America: How will the murder weapon and the murder scene be portrayed? Will it be portrayed as accidental or premeditated? What mood and weather conditions? What dialogue must be written between the brothers just before the murder? How can the God figure be portrayed on screen? (Recall the solution in Prince of Egypt). What modern version of the Cain and Abel rivalry captures the jealousy? (perhaps competing movie leads, lawyers, two brothers competing for their father’s love in the cattle business as cowboys etc)

d. Will this movie have a happy ending, even though it involves fratricide? Can this lead anywhere positive? Is this a tragic movie or an ultimate triumph of teshuvah and learning from tragedy?

Materials that went into the final version of this film.

Explain that there are a number of layers that lie behind the film’s finished product: The original biblical story. Generations of parshanut, both Jewish and Christian, including both literary commentators and visual (artistic) commentators. Steinbeck’s book. The screenplay based on the book. The director’s work on the script to transform it into the medium of film. (This includes camera work, lighting, scenery selection and creation, costume, music etc). Finally there is the interpretation of the actors. (In this film for example, James Dean gave an extraordinarily nuanced performance which includes some spontaneous extemporizing not written into the script. All of these layers come together to create the film that we see). Directorial decisions: Casting etc.

Ask the students to suggest contemporary actors for a modernized version of Cain and Abel. Remember the Tanakah gives us no visual clues of age, hair color, body build etc. Who would they choose and why? (For example, do you choose Al Pacino for Cain, then who would Abel be? Woody Allen? Pairs of actors must fit together. If Nicholas Cage is Cain, then is the movie going to be about Cain as villain as hero or victim? What woman can play Abra in contrast to Kate?)

Ask them to watch the actors very carefully and to see whether the choices made by Elia Kazan worked well together.

Would the students have played any key scenes differently or put them in different settings? These are questions to be set up now and asked again at the end.

About the film. Basic information.

When made? Director/Producer etc. Length of film (1 hour 54 minutes)
The Novel – *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck

**The Clash of Brother against Brother:**
*First Generation*: Charles and Adam Trask, sons of Cyrus and Alice  
*Second Generation*: Cal and Aron Trask, sons of Adam and Cathy

By Larry Kreitner, *The Old Testament in Fiction and Film*

Biblical echoes of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve abound in this novel. **For example, when** Adam Trask discusses with Samuel Hamilton (Steinbeck’s maternal grandfather, one aspect of the autobiographical aspect of this saga) his intention to build a new Eden on his property in California and raise his family on it:

‘Look, -Samuel, I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember my name is Adam. So far I’ve had no Eden, let alone been driven out.’

‘It’s the best reason I ever heard for making a garden,’ Samuel exclaimed. He chuckled. ‘Where will the orchard be?’

Adam said, ‘I won’t plant apples. That would be looking for accidents.’ ‘What does Eve say to that? She has a say, you remember. And Eves delight in apples.’

At several points within *East of Eden* Steinbeck makes it clear that father figures often stand as symbols of God himself... as ‘the cool, dependable figure of godhead’... [Eve on the other hand is portrayed as a serpent, a monster, purely maliciously, an evil one who has burned her parents alive by setting their house on fire. She bears the scar of Cain as a terrible scar on her forehead given her by her whoremaster’s beating.]

Perhaps the clearest example of the jealous rivalry of brothers, reminiscent of the struggle between Cain and Abel, is that between Charles and Adam Trask which occupies centre stage of the first part of the novel (chapters 1-11). The two brothers are in fact half-brothers, having the same father, Cyrus, but different mothers. Even here we see the roots of a rivalry developed within the story line, for Adam’s mother commits suicide very early in the novel (3:1) and his father quickly remarries and sires a second son (Charles) by his new wife Alice (the two boys are thus a year apart in age). Despite the fact that Adam’s real mother died before he was old enough to remember her, and Alice became for all practical purposes his mother, there remains in the relationship between the two boys and their parents a tension, a mutual suspicion of favoritism. Charles suspects that his father does not love him, or at least loves Adam more, and he harbors jealousy against his brother for it- a clear echo of the sibling rivalry recorded in the Genesis story.

The tension between the two brothers reaches a climax over the gifts that the two boys present to their father on his birthday. The story is strikingly reminiscent of the gifts of sacrifice that Cain and Abel offer to God in Gen. 4:3-5, only to find that God (inexplicably) accepts Abel’s offer of a lamb while rejecting Cain’s offer of grain. Steinbeck creatively reworks the story, altering the gifts, of course, but keeping their symbolic nature intact (Adam offers an animal as did Abel, while Charles offers a knife, a mechanical instrument of harvest in keeping with the gift of Cain). Thus in 3:4 we have Charles confront Adam about the gifts in the midst of a violent rage:

‘Look at his birthday!’ Charles shouted. ‘I took six bits and I bought him a knife made in Germany - three blades and a corkscrew, pearl-handled. Where’s that knife? Do you ever see him
use it? Did he give it to you? I never even saw him hone it. Have you got that knife in your pocket? What did he do with it?

"Thanks," he said, like that. And that’s the last I heard of a pearl-handled German knife that cost six bits......

What did you do on his birthday? You think I didn’t see? Did you spend six bits or even four bits? You brought him a mongrel pup you had picked up in a woodlot. He laughed like a fool and said it would make a good bird dog. That dog sleeps in his room. He plays with it while he’s reading. He’s got it all trained.

And where’s the knife? "Thanks," he said, just "Thanks".

Charles is filled with such anger and jealousy that he proceeds to beat Adam so severely that he almost kills him (not quite emulating his predecessor Cain). Their father finds out about the beating from Adam and goes looking for the wayward Charles with a shotgun; fortunately for Charles his father does not find him before his anger cools. After some weeks an uneasy truce is arrived at and life takes on some degree of normality again. The beating over the knife remains a key event in the relationship between Charles and Adam and is mentioned in several subsequent passages (including 4:2; 7:2; 7:3). In a subsequent conversation between the two brothers (7:3) the episode is explicitly described by Adam as Charles’s attempt to win the love of his father. ‘I didn’t know then, but I know now—you were fighting for your love.’

The Cain-Abel motif is also contained in the second half of the novel (chapters 22-55) where the twin sons of Adam, Cal and Aron, extend the motif of brotherly conflict into the next generation. As was the case with Adam and Charles, there is some irregularity concerning the familial connection between the two. Some doubts are raised about the paternity of the two brothers, given Cathy Trask’s adulterous affair with her brother-in-law Charles on her wedding night (11:6). Much is made of the fact that the twins are born with separate amniotic sacs (suggesting that Adam is the father of Aron and Charles the father of Cal). The two (half-)brothers are locked in the struggle from infancy; as Samuel Hamilton is made to remark (in 17:2) their entry into the world was ‘much more like a bitter, deadly combat than a birth’.

Continuing to illustrate the point of brotherly conflict, Steinbeck gives several other glimpses of their rivalry as they grow up together. Later, one of the focal points of the conflict is the struggle between the two young men for the love of the beautiful young Abra Bacon. In the end the clash between the two is interwoven with their attempts to please their father Adam. It concludes tragically with Cal ‘killing’ his brother (in true Cain-like fashion) by revealing news about their prostitute mother. This revelation is too much for the sensitive Aron and he escapes by enlisting in the army. He is sent to France with the American forces and is killed in battle. Cathy then commits suicide and Adam has a cerebral hemorrhage.
BACKGROUND:
The novelist, the director and the actor as Interpreters of the Torah

In midrash the interpreter seeks to connect his own world of experience and values to that of the Torah understood as an existentially meaningful text meant by God to speak to each and everyone of us in our present and as an open text that grows by additions and gapfilling. Therefore it is essential to know the worldview and biography of the interpreter – here - the novelist, the director and main actor. While the viewer sees only the actor and hears only the text much culled from the novel, the director clearly has much input in the presentation.

“East of Eden” was made in 1953-1954 and issued in 1955 just a few months before James Dean was killed in car accident. It was directed by Elia Kazan, his first color film, on the basis of the monumental novel of the same name by John Steinbeck that had been published in 1952. It is the first of the three films in which James Dean made his name and his myth. He would die in a car accident in 1955. The screenplay was written by the playwright Paul Osborn and the director, Elia Kazan, was also the producer, giving him full control over every decision.

As the Biblical story comes to us it is mediated through 3000 and more years of commentary and midrashic expansion. Arriving in 1950 in America the Cain and Abel narrative – some 16 lines – was received and recreated successively through the eyes, experience and approaches of a great novelist, great director and great novice actor. Having their background will help us understand them as Biblical interpreters in a novel and then a movie medium.

It was one of three versions of the film which lovers of the book will have a chance to see. A mini series was made for T.V. at the beginning of the 1980’s but more significantly, a new version of the film is presently being planned, directed by Ron Howard (Cocoon, A Beautiful Mind etc.) and is scheduled for release in 2006. It is always interesting to see and compare remakes of great films, but in this instance it will be even more interesting than usual given the allegorical nature of the film and the ability of any director to give a different reading of the allegorical story.

JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) saw his novel (written in 1951 and published in 1952) as a reworking of the Cain and Abel story. The very name of the book refers us back to the beginning of Genesis and the names of the central figures in this family saga, the father (Adam) and the two sons Cal (standing for Cain) and Aaron (standing for Abel) announces the allegorical character of the book. In addition there are pages of discussion of the story of Cain and Abel including a long textual analysis in a conversation between some of the characters in the book itself.
In Steinbeck’s novel, one of the central characters, the Chinese servant Lee, (who is absent in the film), says the following regarding the Cain and Abel story. It is especially significant because it is widely understood that Lee is the character that acts as a mouthpiece for many of Steinbeck’s own ideas. He regards the Biblical story as a basic paradigm for human life, hence in our terms a prime candidate for a midrashic retelling with existential meaning.

No story has power, nor will it last, unless we feel in ourselves that it is true and true of us.... I think this is the best known story in the world because it is everybody’s story. I think it is the symbol story of the human soul... The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved and rejection is the hell he fears. ... And with rejection - comes anger, and with anger - some kind of crime in revenge, and with the crime - guilt. And there is the story of mankind, ... The human is the only guilty animal... Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul - the secret, rejected, guilty soul.... What a great burden of guilt men have!

Yet behind the universal message that Steinbeck uncovers is also his personal biography that helps shape his midrashic reading:

a. Steinbeck when he wrote the novel was already a world famous novelist for his book *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) about the Nebraska and Oklahoma farmers driven off their land by debt who wandered from the Dust Bowl to California where they became migrant workers and there Steinbeck met them. He also wrote *Of Mice and Men* (1937) about the same migrant people. The Depression deeply shaped Steinbeck’s world as the previous generation of writers - Hemingway and Fitzgerald - had been shaped by World War One. Steinbeck belonged loosely to the school of American naturalists who described realistically people from the lower classes. In his novels nature plays a key role in shaping life and character. But he feels outrage at how life and other people treat these poor people. He believes in their free will to master their situation.

b. During World War Two Steinbeck was a war correspondent. His concern for facts was also reflected in his novel writing which is based on extensive historical research. In *East of Eden* Steinbeck continues to see himself representing the American experience and he does much exploration into the background of World War One and America’s loss of innocence. In America’s self-image, migrant to America leaving Europe for the new promised land and Americans leaving the East to go West were seeking pristine purity and anew garden of Eden and leaving corrupt and hypocritical establishment with no room for them. Yet eating the tree of knowledge and disappointment was inevitable for them and World War One symbolized that loss of innocence for the generation of writers just before Steinbeck.

c. But this novel is not just about American history or social causes. Steinbeck began the book intending it to be his own family’s saga built around Sam Hamilton who was one of his relatives who lived in Salinas, California. His initial title was *Salinas Valley* where himself grew up. Salinas is a land of wealthy farmers, like his own grandparents on both sides of the family, whom Steinbeck resented. The citizens of Salinas reciprocated this antipathy toward their famous native son and twice publicly burned his novels which reflected so badly on them. Steinbeck was attracted - as was Cal his main character to Monterey where the Chinese like his philosophic character, Lee, lived and where poor fishermen eked out a minimal subsistence. Like Adam in the book who loses his land and his fortune, Steinbeck’s father lost his job and poverty was well-known to the family.

d. Like Adam in the book, Steinbeck’s own grandparents took the Bible very seriously. Both were born in Israel, the Protestant holy land. John Adolph Steinbeck was born there to German Lutheran missionaries and his grandmother Almira was descended from new England Calvinists. Later they married and moved to California near Salinas and near the other grandparents, Sam and Lisa Hamilton. Steinbeck took not only the Bible seriously but all classic books. He wrote of
his favorite books like Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* and Doestovesky’s *Crime and Punishment*, “I remember them not at all as books but as things that happened to me!... I guess there are never enough books. Books are one of the few authentic magics our species has created.”

e. When Steinbeck was writing the novel in 1951 he was in the midst a very painful and ugly divorce in New York City. His wife was a monster as far as he was concerned and she took away his two young sons to whom the book was dedicated originally. It sought to give them their California heritage which the mother threatened to cut off. Kate, Adam’s serpent-like malicious wife who walked out on him, is supposed by many to be his literary picture of his wife. The writing of novel may have been therapeutic for Steinbeck.

f. Only later does Steinbeck broaden the perspective to make this a universal novel. Then he names it first *The Cain Sign* and finally *East of Eden*. Cal is “the Everyman, the battleground between good and evil, the most human of all, the sorry man.” It became a book not about the return to Eden but the attempt to live East of Eden in the post-expulsion world of Cain who was exiled eastward of Eden. Steinbeck considered it his ultimate novel (“I think perhaps it is the only book I have written. I think that there is only one book to a man.”)

g. Despite all the differences between the novel and the movie, Steinbeck comments, perhaps tongue in cheek and perhaps not: "It is a real good picture. I didn’t have anything to do with it. Maybe that is why. It might be one of the best films I ever saw."

ELIA KAZAN

When Elia Kazan (a friend of Steinbeck's) made the film in 1954, he took Steinbeck’s central plot (one part of a much longer and complex story) and reworked it in his own way to change some of the emphases but he retained the Biblical subtext as its allegorical character. Kazan, born in Turkey, the son of Greek Orthodox Christian, then immigrated to the USA where together with leftwing Lee Strasberg he founded the *Actor’s Guild* in New York City in the 1930s that was influenced by avant garde Russian film and especially by Stanislavsky’s acting school. Here the actor is expected to reach into his/her own personal experience to find echoes of the emotional world of the character played. Then one can let one's inner empathy flow in acting the part. Hence Kazan sought to choose actors whose life could contribute to the life of the characters as in the case of James Dean playing Cal. Actors should not be treated as puppets enslaved to the script but encouraged to improvise. He believed that each character sees him/herself as from an inner logic – “everyone has his reasons” – even the villain. So it was not the director’s job to identify the villains and heroes. “A work of art should not teach but be. Different people should see it differently. Don’t answer questions but ask them.”

Kazan was deeply influenced by *Freudianism* which is reflected in the Oedipal relationships within the script. Adam is the uptight superego and Cain struggles to control his libido. He was also affected by *German Expressionism* in movies using the sharp unrealistic camera angles and dark shadows.¹

Thematically Kazan liked to explore human nature as a jungle of powerful emotions in which human loyalty is being tested and we often betray others and ourselves in order to survive. Psychic stress,

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¹ For example, in the scene where Adam confronts Cal on throwing down the ice, they are both sitting at the same level on a table. However the camera shows the father at a steep angle looking down at Cal like an authoritarian God. Then when Cal counters by accusing his father of lying about his mother, Adam’s face falls and the camera angle shows Cal looking down on his father. For example, when Cal ventures into the whore house marked with the hanging sign “K” for Kate’s a place but also for forbidden knowledge, he proceeds down a dark corridor with heavy shadows until opening the door on his mother now basked in light as angel. The doorway to knowledge may recall the Biblical metaphor – “sin is like a crouching demon at your doorway” (Gen 4:7).
near madness, cathartic violence are typical motifs and his interest in Freud is obvious. Kazan's own loyalty was tested when he was asked by Senator Joe McCarthy's House UnAmerican Activities Committee of the Congress (1952-1953) to betray his former communist and socialist fellow travelers (Kazan belonged to Communist Party for 14 months back in 1934). He collaborated with McCarthy in the 1950s saving his own career at the expense of many of his former friends. When Kazan won the 1996 Oscar for a lifetime of work, several actors protested for honoring one who betrayed his colleagues to McCarthy.

His movies deal with social issues but even more so with the inner psyche of the characters: Gentleman’s Agreement (1948) on social anti-Semitism, A Streetcar named Desire (1952), On the Waterfront (1954) – starring Marlon Brando.²

² No other contemporary director has contributed so much to the concept of cinema as a means of artistic expression, rather than merely a means of mass entertainment. Cinema is a tool through which one can convey violence - and few of his films do not sport at least one violent scene. There is always some power struggle, some character whose forcefulness leads to violent action.

He first started out in Broadway, in the “Actors' Studio” he founded with Lee Strasberg. His theatrical work had an immense influence on his cinematic creations - in the careful adherence to the written word, in the script's importance, in the way he presented the scenes in front of the camera, culminating in the work methods he developed with Strasberg, in which he urged his actors to enter the soul of the characters they portrayed, to understand their motives, to become part of them.

His actors raked in a total of 21 Academy Awards nominations - and nine Academy Awards. Kazan was almost solely responsible for the star status of actors such as Marlon Brando, James Dean, Warren Beatty, Julie Harris and others. James Dean was nominated for Best Actor in East of Eden and Jo Van Fleet – Kate – won the best supporting actress Oscar for her role.

Elia Kazan was one of the first filmmakers to believe American cinema should deal with reality and make a serious effort to confront issues rather than produce sweet saccharine Hollywood productions providing an escape from daily problems.
James Dean first acting role in a movie was *East of Eden*. He was chosen over Paul Newman because of his personal identification with the role which was an important criterion for Elia Kazan. Like Cal, James Dean lost his mother (at age 9). He wrote in his diary: "My mother died on me when I was nine years old. What does she expect? For me to do it all alone?" Then he moved from California to Indiana growing up on a farm with his pro-prohibition Bible-belt grandparents. His first play was a Temperance Union production. His teenage years were an embodiment of the second movie role he earned - *Rebel without a Cause* - where his character says: "If only I had one day when I didn't have to be confused, when I didn't have to feel ashamed, when I felt I belonged somewhere." Dean wrote about himself: "I'm trying to find the courage to be tender. I know violent people are weak. Only the gentle are really strong." "I don't want to be alone. I don't want to be different. But I push people away. I have so much love to give." Elia Kazan said of Dean: "he belongs to a private club with only a few members." A clipping in his actor's studio said: "The complete man has three needs: love and security, creative expression and recognition and self-esteem." His relationship with his father was deeply unsatisfying to both - his father opposed his acting career regarding it as an effeminate and unpredictable profession.
Parallels – Film and Biblical Text

The general parallels to the biblical story will immediately be seen. Adam is the Godlike father who expects perfection from his sons as he expects perfection from his universe. The sons compete to offer God/Adam offerings of both material good and a good life. Abel's offering and Abel himself find favor in Adam/God's eyes and Cain is rejected. Adam/God insists on Cal/Cain's power of free will to improve and earn favor. However Cal/ Cain do not – at least initially - believe in that freedom. Adam as well as Cal and Aaron live in the shadow of the failed experiment of the Ranch / Garden of Eden. God/Adam imposes moral categories that leave little room for human complexity and human passion. God/Adam punishes, through rejection, those who do not meet his standards. Adam and the sheriff want Cal to leave, to go into exile after the death of Aron. Yet God/Adam holds out the possibility for repentance which is realized only in the last scene in the movie and perhaps in the Biblical story as well.

Aaron - Abel is modeled in his father’s image. He will please his father and the things that he can offer will always be accepted. The price that he will pay is his alienation from the harsh three-dimensional (and oh so human) aspects of real human life. He lives in a universe that he (and his father) has constructed and he is happy to dwell there, accepted by his father. He will be able to dwell there in his self-constructed Paradise but he will be unable to function in the real world. Once he leaves Paradise, he will indeed be lost. Cal / Cain, on the other hand embraces the real world with its moral ambiguity but pays the price of the loss of his father’s love and ability and willingness to accept whatever Cal-Cain might want to offer him. The father Adam does not want them to know the real world that so disappointed him; he wants to leave his sons in blissful ignorance. Knowledge is pain (for with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge the more grief). (Kohelet 1:18).

One son is obedient to his father’s way and follows him. The other son rejects the father’s way, not out of lack of love and not because he is evil, but because he is curious about the world and incapable of accepting his father’s limited blinkered existence. He wants to partake of the world and not just dwell in a failed Paradise. He will have to leave that world, eating "the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil". He cannot live in that stifling perfection. Being imperfect (human) he needs to leave his Garden of Eden, and to follow his mother, who has made the trip before him, into the real world, the world of messy human moral ambiguity. When he tries to take his brother with him, to view reality, he will kill his brother and almost kill his father ("I have killed a man for wounding me and a young man for injuring me") (Genesis 4:23).

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3 Near the end of the movie the connection to the Biblical story becomes more explicit:
Adam: Where's Aron?
Cal: I don't know. I am not my brother's keeper.
Adam: Where did you go?
Cal: For a ride.
Adam: What did you quarrel about?
Cal: You!

Just to make it clear that there is a deliberate equation between Cal and Cain, the sheriff of Salinas, quotes the critical verse from Genesis at Cal (this takes place following the departure of Aron to the military and the collapse of Adam from his stroke). The sheriff rounds off the quotation with a harsh word of advice to Cal:
'Cain rose up against his brother Abel and slew him. And Cain went away and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.' Now why don't you go away someplace?
It seems that what we have here is a bringing together of a number of biblical themes. The expulsion from Eden is brought here into direct connection with the Cain and Abel story. The family background - and specifically the responsibility of a conflated God-Adam father-figure, is seen as the necessary background to the act of murder, in a way that the biblical text does not spell out (although as we have seen, some of the midrashim, as well as some modern thinkers, have indeed gone in that suggestive direction). In that way, the film can be seen to provide an extremely strong and suggestive midrash on the biblical text.

In allegorical terms, we are left to ponder some unclear threads such as the role of women. Is Kate, the mother, not a kind of Eve-Lilith figure, unable to take the limited role that both God and Adam have consigned her to? Could Abra be a kind of substitute figure for the snake, depicted in the Bible as a knowledgeable and evil tempter, rebelling against God in order to introduce chaos into the order of Paradise? Here in the film, she is shown differently as a knowledgeable and understanding person, aware of the complexity of real human needs and caught between the garden and the outside world, ultimately explaining or interpreting that complexity to herself and to one of the human family.

As we have said, the allegorical reading leaves aspects unclear. Almost always in literary allegory, there are details that seem not to fit in comfortably with the overall interpretation. It is so here. But it is a fascinating "take" on the Cain and Abel story, a perspective that brings enormous complexity to the brief biblical narrative and suggests great depths of ambiguity that we are asked to experience and then to ponder.
Back to the Biblical Text:  
The Art of the Screen writer - specific interpretative questions:

Up to now we have started all of our analysis with the film and have moved, where appropriate from the film back to the Bible. But let us illustrate the opposite way of looking at this by taking the biblical text as our retrospective departure point and seeing how the text functions directly as a midrash to suggest answers to particular issues and questions. If we take three important questions that come out of the text, what strategies has the book/film devised to deal with these questions?

a. What is the murder weapon?

Here the film offers a fascinating and novel perspective. What kills Aaron, according to the film, is knowledge. It is the failure to bridge the gap between his mother’s real existence and the ideal picture that he has built up his head and which has served to underpin and sustain his entire life, which kills him. The world that he had inherited from his protective father was an insular world of ideals that created a basis for his own way of life, but which could not support an interaction with the harsh truths of real life. Cal forces that door open, knowing in his jealousy, that the consequences would be in some way, very difficult for Aaron to cope with. The confrontation with the world outside (East of Eden) is what kills Aaron. He can live in Eden, but he is not equipped to deal with the real world outside. His father, protecting him from all unpleasantness as much as he can, has created a psychic illusory state which can only be sustained by a retreat from the real world. When the real world enters in too harshly, the dissonance can kill. Cal might have been suspecting that this would cause a breakdown of some kind or other. He presumably was not expecting quite the dire results that occurred and which would lead to Aaron’s death. We can suggest that this murder was not premeditated.

b. What did Cain say to his brother Abel before the murder?

Note that the scene takes place in a field under the tree!

The dialogue is as follows:

_Cal_: You want to go someplace with me Aaron? I’ve got something to show you. You’ll find it very interesting.

_Aaron_: I’m not afraid to look at anything that you can show me.

_Cal_: Can you look at the truth? Just once? You can look at the truth just once, can’t you?

This is a brilliant dialogue. It fits beautifully into the film’s moral structure. The conversation is about knowledge, but note that at the back of the conversation stand two women. In the foreground, a witness to the exchange between the brothers, and in a sense a prize in the battle between the brothers, stands Abra. In the background, unbeknownst to Aaron, but in the centre of Cal’s concerns, stands Kate. It forms an interesting parallel, from that point of view to the suggestion from the multi-layered text in Genesis Rabbah that the two boys argued over their sister or their mother.
Conveniently the answer to the question – what is the murder weapon and what did Cain say to Abel – is identical. He told him the truth and that killed him rather than liberating him and helping him mature as it ultimately did for Cal thanks to Abra.

c. What is the sign (mark) of Cain in the film?

The motif of the scar – the mark – plays a large role in Steinbeck’s book (several of the characters, including Kate, are facially marked in one way or other) but no real part in the film. True, Adam carries the mark of the wound that he received from Kate, but that functions in the main to drive home the fact that he is enmeshed in a lie to his sons. It is perhaps more meaningful to see the mark or the sign of Cain in another context. In the climax to the film, in the sick Adam’s bedroom, Abra, in tears, begs the old man to repent of his harshness and to show a “sign” that he needs his son. The mark of his reconciliation and repentance will be this: "a sign."

"You never gave him your love. You never asked him for his. You never asked him for one thing. You have to give him some sign that you care for him. If you could ask him for something or let him help you so that he knows that you love him or let him do for you."

The sign (which Adam ultimately gives) is both the agent of his repentance and the vehicle of Cal’s redemption. This, the film is saying, is the real mark of Cain which in the Bible is not actually a stigma but a protective mark that signals that God still cares for Cain even after the murder.

What is the film saying? What is the midrashic “take” of the film?

Perhaps the easiest way to précis this is to look at the title of the book (chosen very carefully by Steinbeck, as his diaries reveal). The original intention was to call the book Salinas Valley, but as the book grew in scope and in ambition, it was seen that to call it by the name of one place would be too limiting. A larger title was needed and Steinbeck found it in the biblical story. The title East of Eden has a certain dynamic quality to it. Implicit in the name is a tension between Eden (Salinas Valley) and the area outside. It is not called “Eden”. It is not about Eden. It is about the tension between those who would live, sheltered in the moral certainties of Eden and those who would live outside, embracing the real world, with all its complexities, ambiguities and moral compromises. The title, it seems, suggests that there will always be tension between Eden and out-of-Eden, between ideal and reality, but that humanity ultimately has to learn to live in the world, East of Eden, embracing the ambiguity of life. To do so is to reject “the earth and the fullness thereof".
The idea of rejecting predestination and of accepting responsibility for life choices is ultimately emphasized at the end of the film, when Cal refers back to the earlier conversation over the Bible and shows his father that the lesson was not lost on him. "You see. I do remember."

Theologically the book and the film reject original sin which is inherited from one's parents' sins. They assert along with God in Genesis 4:7 that humans are defined by free will - choice - even the ability to control the emotions of shame, rejection, jealousy. But that freedom first presupposes knowledge - knowledge about where we came from. Knowledge of good and evil as intertwined. Human beings therefore need not unconditional forgiveness or grace in the Christian sense but an opportunity for reconciliation based on mitzvah, based on a mark of love, help they can offer one another as Abra dos to Cal and Cal to his father. We all wish for that love earned through our offerings of our self.

John Steinbeck presents us a Cain, the primal murderer, who is neither an anti-social animal nor a malevolent devil nor a romantic rebel nor a pathetic abused victim. In his diary written about he novel he muses:

In uncertainty I am certain that underneath their topmost layers of frailty, men want to be good and want to be loved. In deed most if their vices are attempted shortcuts to love.
The Existential Questions in the Film

1. **PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS.** The first issue that both the book and the film raise so powerfully is the relation between the world of the parent and the world of the child. The book, which is a multi-generational novel, of repeating patterns (in a type of Genesis imitation), raises the question a number of times. If we restrict ourselves merely to the Adam-Aaron-Cal story that is the centre of the film, we see a world in which parents and children do not necessarily inhabit the same moral universe or share the same way of looking at the world. By trying to model the children in their own image, the parents run the risk of both stifling and alienating the child (Cal) or succeeding in creating carbon copies who themselves suffer alienation and ignorance of part of their full humanity (Aaron). The child who leaves the parents’ world, can only do so with a certain amount of anger, if the parents have not willingly accorded freedom to that child. That act of rebellion against the parents can be accepted with love or with rejection. Rejection, suggests Steinbeck, will exact a price of death and destruction on the family. Yet parents have a role to hold up moral standards. Cal’s behavior is hurtful – stealing the coal chute from poor coal miners, making money off war supplies, staying out all night and going to brothels and bars.

2. **FREE WILL.** The second philosophical question that Steinbeck deals with very centrally in the novel is the issue of free will and personal responsibility that human beings have for the determination of their own lives. Adam says: "You have a choice, that is the difference between a man and animal." We are all conditioned by our parents and our background, but do we have the ability to move beyond this and to transcend the limitations of the lives that our parents have made for us, consciously or not? Cal announces: "You have a certain amount of good and bad you get from your parents and I got the bad."

The novel works this out and comes down firmly on the side of free will and personal choice. It does so in two major ways. Steinbeck has Cal believe that he has inherited the evil inherent in his mother (in the novel, she is truly wicked and even her facial features look like a serpent; she has no redeeming kindness or human conscience). Yet finally he understands that this is not the case.

Cal said, "I was afraid I had you in me."
"You have," said Kate.
"No I haven’t. I’m my own. I don’t have to be you."
"How do you know that?" she asked.
"I just know. It comes to me whole. If I’m mean, it’s my own mean."

In addition to this however, there is a whole philosophical discussion which winds through the last half of the book, in the form of a discussion of the Cain and Abel story that is conducted among several of the characters. A large part of this discussion revolves around the meaning of the word תמשול – wrongly spelled ‘timshel’ in the book.

What does timshel mean? Should it be understood as a divine command to control the temptation to sin and to master it (as was traditionally understood by Christian commentators especially Augustine and Luther who deny human free will to do good). How should it be translated wondered Steinbeck:

"Thou shalt - ought - to rule over it!" (King James)
Or is there another possibility of reading the text as a form of "educational encouragement", as we have seen above that some of the Jewish parshanim understand it:

"You can or may rule over it"

(E.A.Speiser: "yet you can be his master" or Umberto Cassuto's "you are not delivered into sin's power and if you only have the desire, you can oppose it and overcome it and free yourself from its influence.")

"Sin will be lying in wait for you, and are you sure, you will be bale to master it?"

(G.R.Castellino)

Steinbeck explores this tension through an interesting device. He pits the traditional Christian understanding as reflected in the King James version against the other meaning in a new translation which Lee (remember: Steinbeck's philosophical alter ego) offers him based on discussions between Chinese sages and rabbis over the meaning of the word. This struggle between the different meanings of the word becomes part of the philosophical core of the novel. 'May', or 'can', implies free will, and this understanding of the word becomes a key subject in the last part of the book. In the book Adam whispers the word 'timshel' to Cal just before he dies. The ability to take control of your own life and to master sin thus becomes his legacy.

In the film, the subject is played down but not altogether absent. There is no mention of the word 'timshel' but in a couple of different places (the Bible reading, the end of the film), Adam tells Cal that he can make something of his own life.

note this exchange between Adam and Cal early in the film, following the son's fit of anger in throwing blocks of ice down the chute and Adam's rebuke of Cal by forcing him to read from Psalm 32 at the dinner table as a forced confession of guilt and promise of forgiveness. Cal insists on reading the verse numbers, to the intense annoyance of his father.

Adam: You have no repentance! You're bad! Through and through, bad!
Cal: You're right, I am bad. I knew that for a long time.
Adam: (apologetically) I didn't mean that Cal. I spoke in anger.
Cal: Well, it's true. Aron's the good one. I guess there's just a certain amount of good and bad you get from your parents, and I just got the bad.
Adam: That's not true! Cal, listen to me! You can make of yourself anything you want, it's up to you. A man has a choice, that's where he's different from an animal.

Ultimately, at the very end of the film, Cal affirms that the lesson has not been lost when he finally responds to his father's comment in the Bible reading scene that he wouldn't remember the lesson, remarking, in tears, that he has indeed not forgotten.

"I tried to believe it was born in me and that I couldn't help it. But that is not so. A man has a choice! It's the choice that makes him a man"

In the first edition of the book there is a photograph of John Steinbeck's desk with a carved mahogany box crafted by Steinbeck himself containing the book's manuscript and engraved in it is the Hebrew timshel. Steinbeck corresponded with such great bible scholars as Louis Ginsberg at the

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4 The scene in which Cal rejects his own mother's influence on him, (which we quoted from the novel), does not have to appear here as the figure of the mother is softened sufficiently for Cal to be able to accept her as a partial "role model". Here, in the film, he can indeed take her rebellion against his father as a model that he so desperately needs. Had she been so evil, he would have had to reject her.
Jewish Theological Seminary seeking verification of his new translation of the word as "you can" not "you ought to rule over it." In the novel Steinbeck writes the following dialogue after Lee tells Adam that he has been researching the meaning of *timshel* for two years:

Adam says to Lee: Two years? One word? Don’t you think that is just a bit of ecclesiastical hairsplitting?
Lee: No, no, no! Don’t you see it may be the most important word in the history of the world because it gives man the right to choose between good and evil between right and wrong. The gift of free will in a single word.5

In Harvey Hart’s TV Mini-series (1981) written by Richard Shapiro there is much more of the original book’s concern with Timshol!

Lee whispers the word ‘Timshel!’ over the coffin of the dead Samuel Hamilton. At the graveside Lee is questioned about the incident by Adam:

What was it you said to Samuel back there in the church? Adam:
Lee: ‘Timshel!’
Adam: What?
Lee: ‘Thou mayest!’ You remember back that day when we were naming the twins we read the story of Cain and Abel and none of us really understood it?
Adam: What has that got to do with?
Lee: In the King James version we read Jehovah says; ‘And thou shalt rule over him’; it was a promise that Cain would conquer sin.
Adam: And you weren’t satisfied with that translation.
Lee: I conferred with some Chinese scholars of my acquaintance in San Francisco. Together these four old men and I approached a learned rabbi. I used to go up there every couple of weeks on my days off and study Hebrew, comparing translations.
Adam: That’s where you were, the days I needed you?
Lee: Until, after two years, we finally felt, all six of us, that we had a proper translation of the Hebrew word ‘timshel’. Not ‘Thou shalt’ or ‘Thou must’; but ‘Thou mayest.’ ‘Thou mayest rule over sin!’
Adam: Two years! One word? Don’t you think that’s just a bit of ecclesiastical hair-splitting?
Lee: No! No, no, no! Don’t you see? It may be the single most important word in the history of the world, because it gives man the right to choose between good and evil, between right and wrong.
Adam: ‘Timshel’, is it? ‘Thou mayest!’
Lee: Gift of free will in a single word.

The second scene is the conclusion of the film as a whole, where Lee, Cal and Abra are gathered at the bedside of the dying Adam.

Lee: [kneeling by the bedside and whispering to Adam] Here is your son Caleb. Your only son. Look at him, Adam. I don’t know how long you are going to live. Maybe a long time, maybe an hour. But your son will live! He will marry and his children will be the only remnant left of you. He did a thing in anger, Adam, because he thought you had rejected him. And the result of the anger is that his brother is dead. Your son is marked with guilt, almost more than he can bear. Don’t leave him with his guilt. Adam, can you hear me? Give him your blessing. Help him, Adam! Give him his chance. Give him your blessing. [With great effort Adam extends his hand toward Cal, who makes a move to the bedside as Lee begins to cry.]
Lee: Thank you, Adam! Thank you, my friend! [Cal and Lee exchange positions at the bedside.]
Lee: Can you move your lips, Adam? Make your lips form his name!
Adam: ‘Timshel!’
A third philosophical question relates to a theme that is woven throughout the novel and the film: what is essence of a good life? Adam constantly relates to this and in Adam’s perspective it is a highly moral and sheltered existence aimed at being of value to mankind and giving service to the community. It includes avoiding hurting others and sheltering them from the harshness of real life. It must not be tainted by sordid things like money and sexuality. It is in a sense, life in the garden, life back "on the ranch" away from the corruption of the city and the moral entanglements that real life imposes. "War is city people’s job" as is anything complex and messy. You cannot engage in the real things that the world offers without being corrupted. To do so is to be dragged down. One must not leave the garden. Adam in the book says: "I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember, my name is Adam. But I won’t plant apples, that would be looking for accidents."

Yet to be grown up, to be mature – a central concern of teenage characters like Cal and Abra - is to eat of the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil. The movie offers a more realistic perspective through the character of Kate, Abra and Cal. The film adds Kate as a character offering an alternative to Bible-reading Adam. She, the Madame, knows what people really want, what it takes to survive and to succeed and to make a buck. She is proud and honest about these truths making her a survivor and good business woman who parades her freedom from hypocritical social norms. Life must be lived in the real world. Cal portrays what is generally characteristic of being grown - he goes to bars and brothels – emblematic of the "adult only" pleasures of those fallen from the Garden of Eden. Yet more deeply, he and Abra earn their claim to maturity by facing the harsh truth about their origins in parental failures and their own potential for evil. Life must embrace all the messiness and contradictions that are human existence. You live life first of all by facing whatever life offers in the world of human beings. Then you can start making choices about how to navigate in that wider world. But life is not to be lived by shunning the world.

These three ideas then, the potentially poisonous or liberating relations between generations, the ability to create your own destiny and to triumph over sin through free-will and the examination of the good life as a life of retreat and contemplation (Eden) or a life of engagement with the fullness of the world, are, we suggest, the philosophical heart of East of Eden.

Cal says: ‘I gotta . know who I am. I gotta know!’ He is the young male demanding, confirmation of himself from his parents. He pleads with his cool, conventional father (‘Talk to me!’) and, when he learns of her existence, he pleads with his whorehouse madam mother (‘Let me talk to you!’). Then Cal goes to seek knowledge in his mother’s brothel. The whorehouse is marked with the hanging sign “K” for Kate’s a place but also for forbidden knowledge. Then he proceeds down a dark corridor with heavy shadows until opening the door on his mother now basked in light as angel. The doorway to knowledge may recall the Biblical metaphor – “sin is like a crouching demon at your doorway” (Gen 4:7). Sexual knowledge and knowledge about his parents dark secrets and knowledge of self are all intertwined.
The Prince of Egypt (A Dreamworks Production) tells the story of Exodus chapters one through fifteen; the slavery of the Hebrews and their divine delivery through the prophet Moses. While the Biblical text offers detail regarding Pharaoh's grand plan, the suffering of the Hebrews, God's revelation to Moses and miraculous wonders, nothing is told about Moses' childhood as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, his adolescence in the great palace of Pharaoh or of his gradual metamorphosis (as he chooses to leave his life as prince in order to identify with the suffering of his brothers and eventually lead them to freedom). In fact – in just one Biblical verse (Ex.2:11) we read of Moses "going out" to his brothers - and in the following verse he is already fighting against the tyranny of their slavery!

Similar to classical Rabbinic midrash, The Prince of Egypt, fills in the many gaps in the Biblical narrative - particularly of Moses' early life with his "brother" Ramses; his escape to Midian and his life there as shepherd and as a member of Jethro's household; his courtship and marriage to Zipporah and surprisingly - his ongoing relationship with his brother the king of Egypt - throughout God's wondrous and frightening plagues. Via animated cinematography, we are taken through the Biblical narrative not only with an additional text (or script) but through the use of music and song; color, imagery and special effects.

As a modern Midrash - we suggest using this film as a tool for enriching the study of the Biblical text. As any piece of art, it should be viewed in its entirety - on its own. Only after students have viewed the film and enjoyed it on its own merit, can the analysis of the film begin and a comparative analysis with the Biblical text be carried out.

After a general discussion of "first impressions", we suggest relating to each of the following categories perhaps through a second viewing of the film - with different groups of students taking on different categories - so that each group can focus on one element of analysis at a time.

1. Primary characters: Moses, Ramses.
2. Secondary characters - women: Miriam; Pharaoh's daughter (her maids) and Tzipporah.
4. The seven songs: "Deliver Us"; "Lullaby"; "This is your Home"; "Look at Life through Heaven's Eyes"; "You're Playing with the Big Boys Now"; "Let My People Go"; "There Can be Miracles when you Believe".

The following notes may help in unpacking the significance of the film in each category. We suggest drawing up questions for each group, based on the following analysis of the film as it relates to the Biblical narrative.

Primary Characters
- From the outset, the brothers are depicted as competitors - first in the games they play and then later on in their leadership roles. Their lives are paralleled: follow the type of games they play and their significance (i.e note the havoc they reek in the temple and among the pyramids; the banter between them - how Moses wants to "eternalize" Ramses face on the frescoes; laughing at the mere thought of bringing down the pyramids "single handedly"); the effect of their playing on the court priests; note how both brothers dream simultaneously - one receives a "vision from the gods" and sees the grandeur of the pyramids while the other has a vision of slavery and man's suffering (see
Benno Jacob on Ex.2:11): one believes in the lies his gods can provide at whim - while the other persists in truth at any cost (even of sacrificing his life as "prince"): each represents a different belief system - one of the pagan gods and the other of God on high as depicted in the confrontation between the gods. ("Your Playing with the Big Boys Now"). Emotionally, the brothers continue to care for one another and the break between them is painful to both. (During the scene of the plagues and the song "Let My People Go", they are graphically shown as a unit that eventually must divide. Note the portraits of the two combined as one that then split). The "text" in the film seems to suggest that either son could have gone either way - much depends on circumstance (to whom we are born) and environment (what we are nurtured to becoming) - but also on the choices we make and what we chose to "see".

- Note the confrontation between Pharaoh and his sons: here we are given an insight into the nurturing of a tyrant: the son's fear of disappointing the great Pharaoh, of being rejected outright as incapable and of being designated the "weak link" in the dynasty. All these feelings of inferiority are coupled with the inherited position of grandeur, of being the "morning sun and the evening star".

- Moses' metamorphosis occurs gradually: the stages are three:
  - a) he learns of his origins by a perchance meeting with his biological brothers beyond the palace grounds (a possible interpretation of Ex.2:11 "he went out to his brothers"):  
  - b) a dream/vision (as depicted in the film through his eyes - a motif which highlights the keyword "see" in the Biblical text) which takes him from the frescoes in the palace to deep seated memories of his infancy; and  
  - c) through confronting both Pharaoh and his Egyptian mother. (Moses' dilemma is sharpened through the opposing positions of both parents: Pharaoh justifies the tyranny ("sometimes the individual has to be sacrificed for the greater good"), while his mother expresses compassion and love for Moses and the fate that brought him "home".

- Moses' life in Midian is depicted as one of ease. Yet is also one of responsibility which prepares him for the mission he will soon be forced to bear. The life of a shepherd tending his flock (in ancient literature - both Greek and Rabbinic) was seen as a forerunner for the leadership of men.

- The scene at the burning bush telescopes chapters 3-4 and closely (although not accurately) follows the biblical wording. Note the motifs of the signs - the hand and the rod as well as Moses' reactions to the divine calling.

- According to the film, Moses' empathy with the suffering slaves never hardens his empathy for the suffering Egyptians nor diminishes his feelings for his brother and his family. Follow the narrative throughout the plagues to determine whether the Biblical text suggests this. (Ex. 7-11) (These complex feelings of Moshe's - particularly towards his Egyptian parents are depicted clearly in Philo's, The Life of Moses)

**Secondary Characters**

- Miriam is given the role of prophetess (in line with Rabbinic midrash and Numbers 12). Follow her from the moment she oversees the baby Moses by the Nile; through their perchance meeting by the well (her taking on her mother's persona and singing the lullaby in order to jar Moses' memory); among the slaves in the work camp and among the freed slaves as they begin their exodus. Compare these with the Biblical text.

- Pharaoh's daughter is depicted as a woman of compassion (for the Hebrew child; for the captured Tzipporah), a loving mother (to both sons); assertiveness (vis a vis her maids and her decision to take the child "home") and influence (upon the king). What of these are coherent with the Biblical narrative and what are the additions.
- Tzipporah in the film is depicted as a **feisty** young woman and a **supportive wife** of Moshe. What of this is Biblical text and what echoes Rabbinical midrash?

- Jethro - is depicted as **warm and welcoming; wise and good man**. Compare to the Biblical text.

- Aaron - seems to be a **weak** older brother who cannot decide where his loyalties lie (with the slaves and their disbelief or with his younger brother and his visions of hope). Aaron does not become a supportive brother until the splitting of the Sea. Compare to the Biblical text. (What might the film gain from deviating from the Biblical narrative)

**Songs**

- **"Deliver Us"**: This opening theme song serves as a backdrop to Ex. 1. Follow the lyrics closely and try and determine how they reflect Ex.1 and particularly Ex 2: 23-25. This song also frames the story of Moses' being hidden in the reeds of the Nile - so that Moses' mother echoes the words of the theme song in her own lullaby. The links between the main theme song and the lullaby **link the larger story of slavery to the particular story of Moses** and his family. Note how is this reflected in the text of Ex. 2:1-4.

- **"Look at Life through Heaven's Eyes"** - Jethro's song highlights the motif of **"seeing"** which is so central to chapters 1-3. Note the significance of this song in Midian - as the turning point in Moses' life - just prior to God's revelation. (see Philo - on Midian.)

- **"This is My Home"** - **"This is Your Home"** Sung first by Moses and then by Pharaoh's daughter, the words to this song reinforce the **dilemma** in which Moshe finds himself. Find evidence of this in the Biblical text.

- **"You're Playing with the Big Boys Now"** - follow the lyrics of the song and the significance of the new "league" that Moshe has advanced to in his "competition" with Ramses. Note: the lyrics emphasis the nature of the new duel, the participants and the issues at stake. There is a clear break with the past relationship between the brothers as depicted in their portraits which come together only to be split apart.

"**There can be Miracles When you Believe**" -the final theme song captures the spirit of the deliverance narrative. Note the lyrics which suggest a **mutuality** between divine deliverance and man's actions and belief. Determine whether the Biblical text reflects this mutuality.
Movies, art and sculpture have sought to give "rounded" portrayals of the shadow characters of the Tanakh. But beyond the aesthetic effect, each midrash - classical and contemporary - puts an interpretive, value spin on its rewritten story. Let us examine those interpolations, extrapolations and rewritings and pay attention to their role as sophisticated commentaries on the Biblical text as well as on the perennial issues raised by the Tanakh.

20th Century-Fox presents the Warrior... the Woman... the World of David and Batsheva.

7 In the 1985 film King David, drastic changes are made to make David look better. Paramount Pictures; produced by Martin Elfand; directed by Bruce Beresford; and starring Richard Gere. Alice Krige has a minor role as Bathsheba.
The Movie Midrash written for Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward (1951)

The 1951 movie script is a rewriting of the David and Bathsheba story with many liberties taken for dramatic effect, for condensation of the plot but also to reflect a deeply Christian and romantic ethos. Let us review the script’s story to highlight these interesting and legitimate but not at all innocent movie midrashim.

Opening Scene – David the aging king at the front in TransJordan besieging Rabbah capital of Ammon.

The Tanakh has King David sitting at home restlessly, while his men are off at the front, even though it is the king’s role to lead his armies. Is this cowardice? Does she prefer to fight by proxy? Not according to the movie which has King David on the front sneaking off to join a small patrol led by Captain Uriah. Chief of Staff Yoav is appalled by the risk, but David loves the exhilaration. Ultimately David needs to go back to Jerusalem to rule.

In discussion with Captain Uriah, the older wiser more mellow David contrasts with the war-eager young soldier that reminds David of himself as a young soldier.

David – In war time it is always the best soldiers who die. But you Uriah will serve me best by staying alive.
Uriah – We will gladly die for our king.
David – But what then will I say to your wife who comes wailing to my doorstep?
Uriah – If I am unlucky and fall in battle, she will weep with tears of pride.

Scene – David with Michal and then David with Bathsheba

There is a bitter exchange between David the shepherd’s son and Queen Michal daughter of the aristocratic Saul. The exchange in I Samuel 6 is reflected here. Here the dialogue shows that David has lost his passion for life and love and found no satisfaction in his official wives.

David – We are past the age of our passion, hate or love or anguish... but we have to go on living.

Yet David's emotional acquiescence is immediately reversed by sighting from his roof porch the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. He invites her to come to receive a medal on behalf of her husband's bravery and to dine with him that evening.

David – As a soldier’s wife you must hate me for sending your husband away?
Bathsheba – Not really. That is your duty.
David – But we Hebrews are a passionate people. Like the hot desert winds from which we come, we are fight fiercely, we love fiercely and we worship fiercely. So we feel sorrow fiercely even in the absence of a loved one.
Bathsheva – But I only met Uriah when my father brought him home and we were married only six days when he went off to war.

David - Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days
for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood? Has he no blood, no heart?.

Batsheba - You are the king. You have sent for me and made known to me your will. What else is there for me to say?
David - In Egypt Pharaoh has that right but be thankful that I'm not Pharaoh. I have never used my power to take anything by force. All I have ever had was given to me as a gift. Freely and without restraint! Even the kingship I refused to take until every elder begged me to be their king. It is a matter of pride never to force myself on anyone. I did not ask for you until you and Uriah told me there was no love in your marriage. Uriah's dream of glory is his wife in tears.

Then David tries to send Batsheva home without having intercourse saying: At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.

Bathsheba - Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.
D: And you knew that I...
B: You'd be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.
D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?
B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

David tries to kiss Bathsheba, but she holds back until she can explain: Wait. There are women you can send for and send away again, but I am not one of them.
D: I will never send you away!
B: Think not of one night but of all nights and days. Can I give you what you need as your wife?
D: But you are not free....

D - What I need is a friend, not like those who call themselves the friends of the king. I see only the top of their heads as they bow to me and their palms stretched out to make requests. I am only a man. I need someone to understand that. I need someone to share my heart.
B: The man I saw on the roof was not a king but a man whose heart is well worth sharing...

Scene - David and Batsheba pass by an attractive woman pleading for mercy against the city gate.
Then the crowd invites the wife of the man who committed adultery with the accused woman to cast the first stone. She does and the adulteress is stoned to death horribly.

Scene - Batsheba tells David she is pregnant, after the couple have spent many nights and outings together. They discuss their options as David realizes that Batsheba - but not David - will be stoned to death for the adultery which cannot be denied due to the pregnancy.

D: What if I sent for Uriah and told him everything?
B: We both know what he would say.
D - Honor is everything, charity is nothing. For the sake of honor, blood must flow, lives must be ruined, and humanity denied. I can see Uriah hurrying to the gate to be the first to cast a stone.

D- Then I will just invite him back for one night...
B- David, it is not worthy of you.
D - I know, but it is your life, Bathsheba, that is in danger. There is no act so vile I would not do it to save my love.

Scene - Uriah has been summoned back to the palace and David plies him with wine and entertains him with a sexually arousing belly dancer before sending him home to Bathsheba.

Uriah: My only desire is to serve my king!
David: I might believe that, but you have a wife.
U: My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
D: A woman does not always share her husband’s devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
U: No sire.
D: Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
U: A woman’s wishes cannot conflict with her husband’s, sire. That is the law.
D: The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
U: I do not know, sire.
D: Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman’s occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?
U: With another man? It is against the law!
D: Yet if her husband feels pity for her, he may forgive her under the law.
U: No, then it is doubly his duty to make sure the law is obeyed.
D: Could you condemn your own wife?
U: Yes if she had broken the law, I would not hesitate to do my duty, sire

U: Sire, please do me a boon [a favor]. Dispatch to Yoav to set me in the forefront in the hottest battle so I may serve my king to the utmost.

Later that night David discovers that Uriah has not returned to his wife but sleeps with the king’s guards.

D: Why did you not go home to sleep with your wife?
U: I ask your pardon, sire, perhaps you will consider this foolish thing. I swore on my sword that as long as Yoav and the armies sleep in the field, I would deny myself the comfort of my wife’s bed. I would keep myself clean for battle as if entering the tabernacle of the ark.
D: You stupid fool!

Later David adds a dispatch to Yoav: Set me in the forefront in the hottest battle.
Avihai his military attache questions David who defends himself: *It is his own wish, even his own words! Yet I will not add hypocrisy to my other sins. I cannot ask Yoav to share the burden of guilt. Place him at the hottest point of the battle – then retire from him that he may be smitten!*

**Scene** - David married Batsheba immediately to save her from suspicion of adultery that could have been fatal to her and her alone.

Then Nathan echoing Elijah prophesies a drought and famine for Israel’s unspecified sins. Then Nathan reports on Avshalom who is stirring up a coup by saying to the people that his father the king will not give them justice [The move telescopes and deletes completely the rape of Tamar but moves Avshalom’s complaints about David’s injustice up front.]

**Scene** - After the marriage to Batsheba the child dies in the palace and a severe drought rages outside. The Nathan approaches the king with the parable.

> David concludes: Pay the lamb sevenfold or let him be killed of showing no pity.
> Nathan: You are the man!
> David: You have made me pronounce judgment on myself and I accept it. It is the will of God and I accept it.
> Nathan: Bathsheba has sinned also and she must be punished according to the law.
> David: She is innocent. I was the king. She could not have refused! I alone am responsible. She came with love and tenderness, not evil.
> Nathan: She has brought evil, the wrath of God on Israel!
> David: No!

**Scene** - David flees Nathan and goes to meet and to defend Bathsheba from the mob.

> David to Bathsheba: I killed him.
> B: NO, I too bear the guilt. God sees into our hearts, David.

> Bathsheba: David, take this harp. I have never heard you play. Play something from your childhood as a shepherd.

> David plays and sings Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... surely goodness and mercy..."

> David who had become an agnostic recalls: I believed in that God of my youth, but I lost that faith. Now Nathan has found God for me – but not a God of mercy! Only a God who thinks only of his justice. So you Bathsheba must die. But I will not let you die!"

**Scene** - David confronts Nathan and the crowd and then goes into the Ohel Moed to pray.

> David: I will not believe in a God who will condemn a woman for another’s sin. I will go to the Tabernacle of the Ark to pray.
> Nathan: If the young David of faith prays to God, God will not deny him mercy.

> David kneels by the Ark in the Holy of Holies: God, God of my early youth. Let thine eyes which alone see clearly fall upon your unworthy servant. In all things I have failed Thee....I have abused Thee with ingratitude. I have been a faithless shepherd.
Yet, Oh God, I am your creation. Your holy spirit abides in me...By my sin I have put myself beyond the compass of your forgiveness. But forgive the people for the sin I did. And let Bathsheba live to praise thy name and testify to thy mercy. Show her your loving kindness and let they punishment fall on your servant who earned it. Look on the boy I was who loved Thee and would have died for Thee. Let the boy live again in innocence!

David then touches the Ark in suicidal act which he knows will cause him to be struck down by Dine thunderbolts like Uzzah the servant who touched the Ark when it was brought to Jerusalem.

David enters a reverie of flashbacks to his faithful youth. When he opens his eyes the thunderbolts have not killed him but they have brought long desired rain as a sign of Divine mercy and forgiveness.

The choir sings Psalm 23 and Batsheba and David are reunited.

[Note that the Psalm 23 replaces the Tanakh's Psalm 51 attributed by the editors of Psalms as David's penitential prayer after sinning with Batsheva. The script also conflates the drought brought on Israel for David's census in II Sam 23-24 with God's punishment for the sin of Batsheba.

To Summarize:

The movie script turns Uriah into the adulterer betraying his wife for the perfume of war. He thus betrays true manhood which must learn from womanhood about love and emotions. In effect the marriage is a mere legal sham, but truthfully marriage without love has no standing. The romantic critique of institutions like the Christian critique of Pharisaic Judaism raises love above law. In same sense David the artist is above David the warrior and the ruler, for the private life is true life. The sacredness of matrimony has been voided by Uriah's betrayal of love. So David is permitted to take Batsheva who is not coerced but herself a lover who took the initiative to attract David. However Batsheva is not a seducer or even a collaborator in her husband's death. Batsheva opposes David's plan to kill Uriah so she is not passive as is her Biblical character. She does not seek to manipulate David but to offer him love and liberation only after she knows he wants that. Batsheva is a woman as enabler of men's self-fulfillment reviving David's artistry as well as his love life which have been corrupted through institutionalization of his roles.

However reading the Tanakh simultaneously we as readers may feel deep ironies about the movie. How can David insists that he has never taken anything by force. Samuel in I Samuel 8 has warned us that kings are takers and David surely does take Batsheva from Uriah. The betrayal of a soldier at the front recalls the Japanese radio propagandain which Tokyo Rose warend American soldiers that while they fought Japan abroad, their wives and sweethearts were betraying them at home. David says Be thankful that I'm not Pharaoh yet David is worse than the Pharaoh who took Sarah from Avraham not knowing they were married. Abraham worried that they might kill him if Pharaoh knew Abraham was beautiful Sarah's wife, but it David, God's messiah who lacks "fear of the Lord" - conscience. He takes batsheva nd then has Uriah her husband killed.
Gregory Peck, Susan Hayward, Raymond Massey produced by Darryl Zanuck and written by Phillip Dunne.

"For this woman - David the Lion of Judah, conqueror of Goliath, broke God's own commandment!"

"Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood" by David Gunn

Not a Biblical Epic but a Chic Flick?

In terms of genre, biblical movies are generally considered in the category of epic. Action, spectacle, and great public events are their stock in trade. This movie, however, has at its center David's world weariness, his isolation from his family, cynicism about religion, and his search for meaning. It is a movie, in other words, about a man's mid-life crisis. This context helps delineate a role for Bathsheba: she is the Other Woman who enables his recovery of both love and faith. Here, then, is a domestic love story centering around a searching man and a strong woman.

In 1951 that places it in an interesting relationship with a family of movies that critics call "the woman's film." In such movies Susan Hayward had made her reputation. Throughout the '40s, during World War II and its aftermath, and into the early '50s until the advent of television soap operas, a large number of movies were made expressly to meet what producers understood to be primarily a market of women [more prosaically, a chic flick].

The narrative structure [of the Woman's Film] revolves around the female protagonist’s quest for happiness, a quest played out thematically around issues of sexuality, marriage, the family, and independence. What the majority of these female protagonists quickly discover, however, is that in the patriarchal society of their diegetic [film] world, there is no place for an active, independent woman .... Only through renunciation and sacrifice [do] they achieve their ultimate goal; indeed, have any hope of achieving it.... Directed to women, but rarely by them, these films entertained, superficially, while beneath the surface they laid out rigid guidelines which informed woman as to the correct path to take, the right choice to make. (Morrison: 49)

Now although Bathsheba, is not strictly the protagonist, she plays a pivotal role without which the script would collapse. While her search for happiness is subordinated, structurally, to David's, it is not eclipsed as a source of interest or motivation in the plot. She is depicted as desiring and being in love with him. Yet her refusal to countenance the murder of Uriah, her rebuke to David when he insists on proceeding with the marriage (why had he left her alone for so long if he truly loved her?), and her stony faced acquiescence, all speak of struggle within her. Sexuality, marriage, the family, and independence are all thematic issues.

8 First published in Semeia, pp. 92ff, and reprinted in Goliath's Head: Sex, Politics, and the Authority of the Bible
Conventional, too, in this movie is the "woman's film" theme of waiting. But even more striking is the film's use of another characteristic of the genre, namely the identity of the male protagonist as an artist.

The love story has a way of feminizing the male, argues Mary Ann Doane, and art is "the only culturally sanctioned and simultaneously 'feminized' activity" (97). David's rediscovery of his harp, and through it his identity, marks the final turning point of the movie. David is not only king but God's musician. Of signal importance for the resolution of the plot, the discovery is engineered by Bathsheba. So we end with ...Bathsheba as the wife (as she is now) that every man of creative genius in a mid-life crisis needs.

But there is something odd about this movie which has to do with the biblical text which parents it. Normally in the Woman's Film, the woman's desire cannot be sustained - she must renounce it or be subject to filmic sanctions: separation from her lover (often by her self-sacrifice) or even death. Indeed, in the movie, Nathan, Michal and David's neglected sons demand just that-death for her for adultery. This does not happen, however, because in this particular film the biblical text which parents it insists on the marriage both happening and continuing....to the typological scenes of Bathsheba's enthronement. So the movie ends not only with the miracle of the rain that relieves the drought, but with the miracle of David rededicated to his lover-wife. Thus they walk hand-in-hand, happily into the rain-drenched sunrise. So she gets away with it!

Not another Femme Fatale, but a Liberated Women?

The movie presents some words about women's subjectivity that must have been disturbing to some men in 1951. The scene is between David and Uriah whom the king has summoned from the battlefield upon learning that Bathsheba is pregnant. David invites the soldier to speak with him alone. After assuring David that Joab, the general, is confident of success, Uriah seeks permission to return to the field. David replies that there will be dispatches for him to take back and suggests that he might desire to stay in Jerusalem longer.

Uriah: My only desire is to serve my king!
David: I might believe that, but you have a wife.
U: My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
D: A woman does not always share her husband's devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
U: No sire.
D: Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
U: A woman's wishes cannot conflict with her husband's, sire. That is the law.
D: The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
U: I do not know, sire.
D: Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman’s occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?

Something is happening in this movie that is exploiting the fundamental ambiguities of the social and ideological forces that created the genre in the first place. As women during the war moved rapidly into the workforce outside the home, their economic power grew, as did their perceptions of their capabilities as independent agents in many other areas of public and private life. This was a critical growth point in the history of women’s subjectivity in this country and in the West. The Woman’s Film encoded the tension between the emerging desire of women as subjects - and women were willing to pay to see themselves as such - and the latent anxiety of men as subjects over the impending collapse of their privileged status.

Bathing in Hollywood

I wonder, then, if the bathing scene may not be viewed as an emblem of the ambiguities of the film, the genre, and the social order of the early fifties as it related to women. Does Bathsheba beckon David or her women viewers? Does she beckon at all? As she turns, her eyes seem fleetingly to meet the camera. Is her gaze towards David, or the viewer? Or nowhere in particular - her own space? What about that solid screen? Does it invite the male gaze behind it to contemplate her nakedness? Or does it mark off her body as her own to give? Her boundary-to be crossed at her choice? Does the screen signal that her body is a source of vulnerability, needing protection? Or does it constitute a shield for battle, signaling that the body behind it has a power over the man? If so, what (given the movie’s outcome) is the moral nature of that power? Is she a victim? A survivor? A schemer? A femme fatale? A femme forte? All or none of the above? Can she slip out from behind the viewer’s labels as easily as she can slip out from behind the screen?

A Speech for Women’s Liberation by a Man
In the last analysis I would not argue that these ambiguities are finely balanced. The patriarchal rules are still in place at the end. Certainly the messages are mixed. Even the speech for women’s liberation has to be spoken by the man. Yet it is spoken, self-serving as it may sound on David’s lips. And Susan Hayward plays no stereotyped steamy "seductress" as many male critics desired but instead she brings dignity to a character of multiple dimensions.

David: Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood? Has he no blood, no heart?... Be thankful that I’m not Pharaoh. At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.

Bathsheba: Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.

D: And you knew that I ...

B: You’d be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.

D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?

B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

Bathsheba - a character of multiple dimensions:
A woman who desires, perhaps initiates and certainly collaborates in an affair, makes love, refuses to harm her husband, calls the king on his failings, entertains fear, despair, hope, and happiness. ...A Woman’s Film...
To Summarize:

The movie script turns Uriah into the adulterer betraying his wife for the perfume of war. He thus betrays true manhood which must learn from womanhood about love and emotions. In effect the marriage is a mere legal sham, but truthfully marriage without love has no standing. The romantic critique of institutions like the Christian critique of Pharisaic Judaism raises love above law. In same sense David the artist is above David the warrior and the ruler, for the private life is true life. The sacredness of matrimony has been voided by Uriah’s betrayal of love. So David is permitted to take Batsheva who is not coerced but herself a lover who took the initiative to attract David. However Batsheva is not a seducer or even a collaborator in her husband’s death. Batsheva opposes David’s plan to kill Uriah so she is not passive as is her Biblical character. She does not seek to manipulate David but to offer him love and liberation only after she knows he wants that. Batsheva is a woman as enabler of men’s self-fulfillment reviving David’s artistry as well as his love life which have been corrupted through institutionalization of his roles.

However reading the Tanakh simultaneously we as readers may feel deep ironies about the movie. How can David insists that he has never taken anything by force. Samuel in I Samuel 8 has warned us that kings are takers and David surely does take Batsheva from Uriah. The betrayal of a soldier at the front recalls the Japanese radio propaganda which Tokyo Rose wared American soldiers that while they fought Japan abroad, their wives and sweethearts were betraying them at home. David says Be thankful that I’m not Pharaoh yet David is worse than the Pharaoh who took Sarah from Abraham not knowing they were married. Abraham worried that they might kill him if Pharaoh knew Abraham was beautiful Sarah’s wife, but it David, God’s messiah who lacks “fear of the Lord” – conscience. He takes batsheva nd then has Uriah her husband killed.

Cheryl Exum: Is Bathsheba Free to say No?

The movie David and Bathsheva is sensitive to the possibility of coercion: is Bathsheba free to say no? "You are the king’, says’ Bathsheba. ‘What other answer can I give, sire You have sent for me and made known to me your will, what, else is there for me to say?" This response represents Bathsheba as a subject who feels she cannot refuse her king, one who yields to his authority, and at this point we may think that the film is out to restore Bathsheba’s honor. But pursuing this characterization of Bathsheba would cast King David in too negative a light. David therefore responds to Bathsheba’s submission to his will with a long speech in which he prides himself for refusing ever to take anything by force, not even the kingdom:

`So I said nothing to you until you told me that there is no love in your marriage. Yes, you told me that, and so did Uriah...'

Only when he tells Bathsheba that she may leave, proving his respect for her right to refute, does Bathsheba confess to having planned the whole thing! She watched him walking on his balcony every evening and knew she could count on his being there to see her. She had heard he had found no woman to please him. She wants to be the woman who will make him happy. She wants to be his wife.

(J. Cheryl Exum, Plotted, Shot, and Painted, p 23)
A Systematic Analysis of Art as Commentary

We bring here a systematic pedagogic suggestion for examining works of art that are based on texts. There are five stages of examination that can be made into a work-page or can be asked in the classroom. We suggest, for each stage, a number of questions that can be asked.

1. First reactions.
   - What catches your eye in the picture? What feeling or atmosphere does the picture evoke?
   - At first glance, what do you like or dislike in the picture?
   - Does the picture remind you of anything or make you think of anything specific?

2. Identification of the subject - between the story and the picture.
   - What is shown from the p'shat of the biblical story? (Characters, events, ideas, values).
   - What if anything, did the artist leave out?
   - What did the artist add to the text as he or she came to express his or her version of the text?
- Give a title to the painting and sum up what is the main emphasis of the picture.

For example:

- After reading the story in the Biblical text, look at each of three artistic portrayals. Try and identify the scene in the text if you can. If it is a scene that you think does not appear in the Biblical text, identify it and say that it does not appear.

- Imagine that there is a thought bubble (as in a comic strip) coming out of the head of each of the figures. What do you think it would say? Don’t write this in comic strip language but in a short precise sentence or two which captures as precisely as possible the thoughts and feelings of the character at the precise moment represented in the picture.

- Draw a fourth picture that you think needs to be represented in order for the story to be filled out as well as possible. Which crucial scene would you put in? Why that one? What thought bubble(s) would you put in there for the figure(s) that you have drawn?

3. Artistic fashioning – describing what the artist has done.
- What means has the artist used to portray the story? Note the colors (warm, cold, realistic, imaginative etc.), technique (oil, water, brushstrokes etc), the use of light and shade, the lines (broad, delicate, clear, unclear etc.), the organization of the subject (composition, location of figures and objects, size of objects and people, accentuation and emphasis etc.).

- How do the artistic means focus the main emphasis and the message of the picture?

- Which of the techniques of the artist had the most effect on you? 

- Compare the artistic means used to those that appear in other pictures in this series?

4. Examining the meaning in the light of the Historical Background.
- Prior to the students’ interpretation or subsequent to it, the teacher needs to give some historical background. For example, plump women were considered beautiful in many artistic eras but not so to our students in early 21st century when dieting is a very high value. For example, in the Netherlands David and Gideon are understood as a representative of the national war of liberation for the Spanish tyrant. For example, Jacob crossing his hands to bless his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe is seen by Christians as a prefiguration of the cross and a preference for the younger son - the Church - over the older - the Synagogue.

- What is the meaning of the choice of figures and subjects that the artist has put in the picture or those that the artist has left out?

- What human problems was the artist attempting to address in the picture?

- What lies behind the artistic choices that the artist has made in terms of how the scene is portrayed?
- What is the personal meaning of this picture to you when compared to other pictures in the series being viewed?

5. Connecting back with the text.
- Looking back now on the text, what were the gaps or the questions opened up by the text that the artist attempted to address?
- What contribution did the culture and the period of the artist make to the picture?
- Compare the picture as a midrash of the text with classic Rabbinic midrashim (brought in the booklet) and with other pictures in the series. What are the central questions that both the Rabbis and the artists attempt to answer? How are the answers they give similar or different?
- In your opinion, to what extent did the artist succeed in listening to the messages and the problems of the biblical texts and succeed in creating a novel point of view in understanding the story?
- To what extent does the picture succeed in speaking to you and your generation, in relation to the other pictures in this series?

The “Gallery Tour” by Judith May

On Objective and Subjective Approaches to Art as Parshanut

Most high school students have not studied art so the teacher must teach them how to analyze color, technique, line, composition, etc. Otherwise they simply don’t have the vocabulary. They don’t know how to begin. So lacking the tools of analysis, the kids tend to talk about whether or not they like the painting—not a very interesting question. They have trouble getting past their own aesthetic judgments. They see Rubens’s Bathsheba as a fatty, not a beauty (Rubens’s model was his adored young second wife), and project that Rubens thought Batsheva was fat and ugly.

In a more objective art historical approach, I don’t ask for first reactions, because the kids’ first reactions are about themselves, not about the art. Instead I ask focused questions about each work. However given amore midrashic personal search the first reactions are valuable as long as they are later placed in a context in dialogue with other views informed by greater Biblical and artistic knowledge.

The Rotating Gallery Tour

1- I gather pictures—some cut from old books, but mostly color printouts made on my computer. I put each picture in a plastic sheet protector, and hang them around the room. I station a desk in front of each picture, to give the students a surface to write on.

2- The students get worksheets with specific questions for each picture. Sometimes I’ll ask the same question for more than one of the images. The questions center around an issue of parshanut we have worked on. The students work in pairs or groups, and each pair starts with a different
picture. Each pair has, say, 5 minutes per picture. Then every 5 minutes I call “Rotate!”, and the
groups have to go on to the next picture, whether they are finished or not. This prevents traffic jams.

If you want the kids to compare two images, you can hang them in pairs, and give more time for
each station.

(A variation on this method: You hang the questions around the room with the pictures.
Underneath each one, you hand a blank piece of paper, for the kids to write answers and reactions.
This creates a discussion board underneath each picture.)

3- After all the groups have had a chance to view all the pictures, we discuss them as a class. For
this, I like to use my laptop and a projector, when the technology gods are favorable.

For my Gan Eden picture assignment, the central question was “Who was most responsible?” For
the Batsheva pictures, the question might be whether she was a seductress or a victim.
(Rembrandt, amazingly, manages to make her both at the same time.) Another question might be
about that letter. What letter is it? In some of the paintings it’s clear, and in others it isn’t. The
students would have to list the evidence.

**ACTIVITY: CREATING A MURAL**

Archie Rand is an innovative Jewish artist, world famous for his giant murals, many of which are on
Jewish themes and include Biblical motifs, often in contemporary form. He is also famous for his
monumental paintings and murals which cover the 13,000 square foot interior of B’nai Yosef synagogue in
Brooklyn, the only such muraled synagogue in the world. If you are interested in seeing pictures of
Rand’s work in the synagogue, you can look at the essay by art critic Richard McBee at

B. David and Avigail in Art - I Samuel 25

Begin the exploration of the art work by rereading the Biblical encounter of David and Avigail. Recall the background - David leads a band of desperate fugitives from King Saul who came for support to Naval, one of the wealthiest men in David’s tribe of Judah. However Naval insulted him and refused to share any of his harvest with David's men. So David has asked all his men to belt themselves with swords and he has just sworn to kill every male in Naval’s household by morning. It is late at night and Avigail sets out to appease David with the very gifts Naval had refused and with the very honor that Naval has denied David. Naval’s name means scoundrel, drunk, arrogant ungrateful fool etc and Avigail is known to be beautiful and wise, diplomatic, practical and a gifted speech maker.

Everything depends on Avigail stopping David’s negative momentum but her only weapons are her words, her gestures, her beauty and her femininity. The happy ending will be her marriage to David after the death of her useless, boorish husband she is now trying to save from David's sword.

Reread the text twice.

▪ First note all the physical details that an artist would notice - time of day, gestures, clothing, and objects.

▪ Second, assign three dramatic readers - narrator, Avigail and David and read the dialogue out loud with the appropriate emotional intonation.

2   Now (there was) a man in Ma’on, with his stock in Carmel, and the man was very great (in wealth): he had sheep, three thousand, and a thousand goats, and he was (occupied in) shearing his sheep in Carmel.
3   The man’s name was Naval/Vile-One, and his wife's name was Avigayil. Now the woman had a good mind and lovely looks, but the man was hard and evil in deeds, and he was a Calevite....

10   And Naval answered David's servants, he said: “Who is David? Who is the son of Yishai? Nowadays (there are) many servants who break away, each one from his lord!
11   So should I take-away my bread, and my water and my butchered meat - that I butchered for my shearers - and give (it) to men who come from I don't know where?”

18   Avigayil hurried and took two hundred loaves-of-bread and two skins/navalei of wine and five sheep made-ready and five seals of parched-grain and a hundred raisin-cakes and two hundred pressed-figs, and she put them on the donkeys.
19   Then she said to her lads: “Cross-on ahead of me, here, I'll be coming behind you.” But her husband Naval she did not tell.

20   Now just as it was, as she was riding on the donkey, going-down in the cover of the hill; here David and his men were going-down towards her, and she met them.

21   Now David had said (to himself): “For sure it was in vain that I guarded all that belongs - to that one - in the wilderness,
so that nothing was missing from all that belongs to him.
Now he paid back to me evil in place of good!
22 Thus may God do to "the enemies of" David, and thus may he add,
if I leave from all that belongs to him, by the light of daybreak,
a single pisser against the wall!

23 Avigayil saw David, and she hurried and got-down from the donkey
and threw herself down before David, on her face, and bowed to the ground.
24 She threw herself down at his feet and she said:
"On me, my lord, is the blame!
Please let your maidservant speak in your ears.
Hear the words of your maidservant.
25 Please do not let my lord pay no mind to this worthless man, to Naval,
for as his name is, so is he:
Naval/ Vile-One is his name, and vileness is with him!
But as for me, your maidservant,
I did never saw my lord's lads whom you sent.

26 So-now, my lord, as YHWH lives and as you yourself live,
YHWH who has prevented you from coming into bloodguilt
by saving yourself by your own hand ..
So-now, may your enemies be like Naval,
And those who seek evil against my lord!
27 And so-now, this bracha/ blessing that your handmaid has brought to my lord,
let it be given to the lads who go-about in my lord's footsteps....

31 And when YHWH does good to my lord,
then remember your maidservant!

32 David said to Avigayil:
"Blessed/baruch is YHWH, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me!
And blessed/baruch is your discernment, and blessed/ baruch are you,
who has restrained me this day from coming into blood-guilt
and saving myself by my own hand (alone)....

39 When David heard that Naval was dead...

David sent and spoke for Avigayil, to take her for him as a wife.

Now let us get our first impression of the artistic rendition of this fateful nocturnal meeting by
comparing them.
- First, respond globally and emotionally. Compare the pictures using the pairs: warm/cold;
  intimate, private / public, multiple attendees; romantic / official.
- Second, identify the objects and colors and see what symbolic significance they may have or how
  they create associations.
- Third, compare the body language between David and Avigail in both pictures. Now turn the body
  language into a verbal message in a word or two. What is each character saying to the other?
  (Stop! Have mercy! Forgive me! You are lovely! Have no fear! Who are you? Please rise! Come
  closer! How can I help you? Out of my way!)
- Fourth, what Biblical details have been changed? What gaps filled? Why?
C. Renaissance Art of the Bible

1- David Teniers (Holland 1582-1649) – Avigail Pleading before David

2- Juan Antonio (Spain, 1630 -1670)
2- Juan Antonio (Spain, 1630-1670)

1- David is a general dressed in red and black, but he is very dynamic.
2- David stretches out his hands to Avigail whose hand are outstretched to him. Rather than mercy we see here intimacy. "Come close" they say in a private scene as if no one else is watching. Neither David’s nor Avigail’s servants play a role in this encounter.
3- The gift is sheep tied up and ready to slaughter recalling perhaps the fact that David is about to kill all Naval’s family including Avigail’s children. Avigail looks like the white sheep which are about to be slaughtered, for she feels her own life is on the line. Does this arouse David’s and the viewer’s sympathy? Do we feel the same about the slaughtered meat in Teniers’ picture?
4- Is Avigail more sensuous in this picture? Is she seductive or pure? How else might the artists have portrayed this good looking woman? Does David seem moved by the woman’s beauty? Could he be thinking of marriage already or at least sex?

NOTE: Art historians compare Teniers’ picture to Rubens’ picture of the Greek mythological encounter between the god of war Mars and the god of love Eros or Venus. Avigail like Venus is curbing the forces of aggression with the power of love.

1- David Teniers (Holland 1582-1649) - Avigail Pleading before David

1- David appears very royal though the Tanakh describes him as a fugitive. His soldiers seem aristocratic. He stands statically in a public scene with a large audience. .
2- David seems ready to show mercy to this aristocratic woman, modest, a suppliant on her knees. David extends his royal scepter but he keeps his distance and his social and physical hierarchy.
Avigail acknowledges David’s authority, unlike her husband who treated him as a rebel servant.
3- The appeasement offering is slaughtered meat recalling both Naval’s refusal to share his slaughtered meat and David’s oath to slaughter every male in Naval’s house.
4- Both pictures present David in red and black - both signs of royalty and yet ominous colors of spilling blood and mourning or evil. Both present Avigail in white, a symbol of purity and innocence that belies her speech about how she is guilty.
The King David Report by Stefan Heym

An Anti-Totalitarian Novel about Writing David’s “Official History”

Introduction by Walter Brueggemann, from
DAVID’S TRUTH IN ISRAEL’S IMAGINATION AND MEMORY. p. 69ff

The King David Report by Stefan Heym. Heym is a Jewish East German literary figure who fled Nazi Germany for the United States in the 1930s but returned to communist East Germany in the 1950s out of a commitment to communism. However, his experience as an intellectual and as writer with the East German Communist regime raised many doubts about the way governments manipulate history writing. So in East Berlin in 1972 he wrote a novel about a young writer Eitan (mentioned in I Kings 4:31 and author of Psalm 89) who is asked to produce the official history of King David, father of the present ruler, King Solomon.

In this novel he constructs a notion of how the David materials came to be written as they were. He conjures that at the initiative of King Solomon, there was a committee charged to produce a literary glorification of David, in order to enhance the legitimacy of Solomon which needed all the help it could get. That is, its work is the generation of literature that serves a quite specific political end. It is clear that Heym understands the material to be ideological, that is, truth in the service of the regime.

On this committee are Benayah, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, and Zadok, Solomon’s high priest. Note that they are the survivors in the bureaucratic jungle after the purge of Abiathar, the alternative priest, and Joab, the older military man (I Kings 1:38; 2:26-35). These are the new young ones whose success is much too recent. The purpose of the committee is to produce ideological literature in the service of Solomon, but each of these committee members also has his own political well-being to consider along with that of the king. The mockery is that they must write ideology, but they must be generative and imaginative about it, almost a contradiction in terms.

As Heym imagines it, this committee hires a skilled but frightened scribe to write things down, because none of the principal men has such a skill. This nobody of a scribe is cast in a hopeless role, because he dares not displease any member of the committee or his life will be endangered. Yet obviously he cannot please them all, because they have very different truths they want to express, or at least they have very different versions of Solomonic truth they want to serve.

Its official title is:
The One and Only True and Authoritative, Historically Correct and Officially Approved Report on the Amazing Rise, God-Fearing Life, Heroic Deeds, and Wonderful Achievements of David the Son of Jesse, King of Judah for Seven Years and of both Judah and Israel for Thirty-three, Chosen of God, and Father of King Solomon.
Heym adds, "For short called The King David Report."

It is important to note that Heym treats the whole of the David account under this single rubric, Heym is not in fact writing about the Davidic material. His appeal to the Davidic material is heuristic, because his intention is to comment on the way in which his own totalitarian regime manipulates truth for the sake of the regime. It should come as no surprise to know that Heym is frequently in trouble with the regime. He has observed how memory is daily turned into propaganda, and he has the temerity to suggest that the same thing is happening in the Bible.

**The King David Report by Stefan Heym**

Author’s Note

This format offered itself for a new telling of the David story. If one retraced the steps of the editorial Commission which met under King Solomon, if one went back to the sources and let these speak - the royal annals, army records, letters, eye-witness testimonies, songs and myths from which the King David Report was carefully pieced together - one might be able to lay bare the essence of the King and to make the many-faceted man that David was come alive. That one is in this case Ethan of Ezrah, author of the 89th Psalm and secretary of the Royal Commission, the same Ethan about whom it is said in I Kings, 4, 31 that he was one of the wisest men in Israel; only King Solomon was alleged to have been wiser than he.

Then something occurred that frequently happens in the telling of a tale: Ethan, who was to be a mere narrator, assumed a life of his own. Around the David novel grew an Ethan novel, the story of an intellectual who must face the conflicts of his time and who is tormented by the limitations which are set to his writing the truth.

Whether Ethan is the protagonist of this book or whether it is David as seen through Ethan I couldn’t say. Opinions might also differ on the question whether The King David Report is to be considered a historical novel or a biblical one, or a story of today, charged with political meaning. To me, it is all three.

Berlin, 1972 Stefan Heym

Questions to consider while reading Stefan Heym’s novel / political midrash:

1- What is King Solomon’s goal in asking that the King David Report be prepared?
   Do you think that Stefan Heym is correct when he writes that “The King David Report actually exists and it may be found in the Bible (I Samuel 6 - I Kings 2).” In other words, do you think the story of Batsheva as reported in the Shmuel II is edited to suppress all doubts about the Solomon’s glorious father David?

2- Yes-men. Define that concept. What arguments do David’s advisors make to him about his desire to sleep with Batsheva? Do you think political advisors of leaders are usually such yes-men? If so, why? Is this Nathan’s role in the Tanakh? Why not?
3- How is Bathseva portrayed in her interview, in her letter to her husband, and in King David's comments about her? How do you feel about this political midrash? Does it fit your view of Bathseva from the Tanakh?

4- What is Nathan's character like in Heym's novel?

5- In comparing David's confession in the Tanakh and in the novel what are the most important differences? Do you think Heym's version recalls what Adam said to God when caught violating God's law back in the Garden of Eden - "The woman you gave me, she gave me, so I ate"?

6- How do you understand Ethan's blessing upon completing the report: 'PRAISED BE THE NAME of the Lord our God, who has made man in his image; but his image is of many hues'?

7- Would you like to continue this political midrash by rewriting sections or interviewing the characters again?

EXERCISE: Compare Heym's thesis about a censored official history of David (created by those claiming his legitimacy as their origin of authority - Solomon) to the historiographical approach of Chronicles. There David is the source of authority for the Temple and his genealogy is central to all Jewish rule. (See Chronicles I 28-29 compared to II Sam. 6). Notice what is left out of David's history: rivalry with Saul; Bathsheva affair; Amnon, rape of Tamar and Avshalom rebellion and Solomon's rivalry with Adoniyahu.

KING SOLOMON CREATES THE KING DAVID REPORT COMMISSION

King Solomon said, "Israel abounds with stories about [my father King David], most of them useless, some even harmful. Just as I will build a temple for our Lord Yahveh to put an end to this praying and sacrificing on every hilltop behind every village, and to force under one roof what passes between a man and his God, so we must have one authoritative report, to the exclusion of all others, on the life and great works and heroic battles of my father, King David, who chose me to sit upon his throne."

And Jehoshaphat stepped forth and drew a clay tablet from his sleeve and read out:

"This is the Royal Commission on the Preparation of The One and Only True and Authoritative, Historically Correct and Officially Approved Report on the Amazing Rise, God-fearing Life, Heroic Deeds, and Wonderful Achievements of David the Son of Jesse, King of Judah for Seven Years and of Both Judah and Israel for Thirty-three, Chosen of God, and Father of King Solomon.... The King David Report is to be composed by careful selection from and judicious use of all materials extant on the Amazing Rise and so forth of the late King David, such as royal records, correspondence, and annals, as well as available testimony, further legends and lore, songs, psalms, proverbs and prophecies, especially those referring to the great love and preference shown by King David to his beloved son and successor, King Solomon."
The said Report is to establish for this and all time to come One Truth, thus ending All Contradiction and Controversy, eliminating All Disbelief of the Choice by our Lord Yahveh of David ben Jesse, and allaying All Doubt of the Glorious Promises made to him by our Lord Yahveh in regard to his Seed and Progeny."

Jehoshaphat bowed. King Solomon looked exceedingly pleased. (page 9)

The research began for the report and Ethan recalls (page 155 - 170, selections)

I HAD LONG DREADED having to deal with the story of Bathsheba. It was even more difficult to treat than the hanging of the seven surviving sons and grandsons of King Saul, for it directly concerned the Wisest of Kings, Solomon; moreover Queen Mother Bathsheba is very much alive.

All Israel knows that Uriah the Hittite, Bath-sheba’s husband, died just in time for David to marry the widow and make their first-born a genuine prince of the blood. The matter was noised about everywhere as those involved in it behaved with a strange lack of discretion; but the facts of it are hard to separate from fable.

Nathan the prophet has written about it at length in his book of remembrances, and I am inclined to believe much of what he says: he watched the dangerous relationship develop, and he interfered in it according to his lights. Speaking as a historian, I feel we are fortunate in having Nathan and his book; it is most useful if one keeps in mind his official rank and the kind of person he is: self-important, self-righteous, self-seeking....

The Vision of Bathsheba: READING BY NATHAN FROM HIS BOOK OF REMEMBRANCES

Nathan reported to me that the King David had invited his intimates over to discuss a vision that was disturbing him mightily.

King David said: It was truly a vision!

Abiathar the priest, and Seraiah the scribe, and several others enquired as to the vision: had the King had it in his sleep and had it been more of an angel or more of a human, and suchlike questions; so there was tohubohu.

But the King, David stroked his beard, saying, he would have thought it an angel but for the fact that it was doing its ritual ablutions as he saw it from the roof of the palace, against the setting sun after he had risen from his bed.

Whereupon Seraiah the scribe said that certainly it must be Bath-sheba the daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was captain of a thousand and serving under Joab in the siege of the city of Rabbath-ammon, for she and her husband had recently moved into the army officers’ houses located to the west of the palace. If the King so wished, added Seraiah, he would go there and knock at her door and tell the woman that she was found pleasing to the eye of the King; and the rest would be simple.

Not quite so simple, said the King.
But Seraiah asked: Did not all the daughters of Israel belong to the King, including those married to foreigners like Uriah the Hittite?
All, replied the King: Excepting the wives of soldiers who serve in the field. These may not be touched, neither by an elder of the tribe nor by the King; for how could a man be moved to go out and fight the Lord's battles, unless he knew his house protected and his wife?
And Abiathar the priest confirmed this, saying it was a law of the Lord which the uncircumcised call taboo, and that King David was exceeding wise and equitable.
But the King hit the table with his fist, and he cried out: Shall I then have this fire consume my bowels and not quench it?
Abiathar was so startled that the morsel in his mouth slid into his windpipe, and he had to be helped. Having regained his breath, he said, The fire which consumes the bowels of the King must be quenched, for the well-being of the Chosen of the Lord is the overriding law. Moreover, did not Lord Yahveh plainly denote his will by his timing of the woman's washing herself and of the sun's setting and of the King's entering upon the roof?
And Seraiah the scribe said that the taboo did not apply in this case because Uriah the Hittite would not be deprived of a thing by the King's lying with Bath-sheba Uriah's wife; on the contrary, Uriah would be honored and enriched by the relationship.

And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

Bathsheba's Memoirs

Ethan asked Nathan about the first night with Batsheba: "Since from the couple in question issued the Wisest of Kings, Solomon, we would not want the reader to assume that there was only the crudest form of copulation. Has not King David ever hinted at some tender dalliance, some words of endearment which he and the lady Bathsheba exchanged in their first night?"

Nathan answered: "King David once remarked to me he never found a male or female more capable than Bath-sheba the daughter of Eliam. As for what was said between them that night, Ethan, I fear you will have to enquire of the Queen Mother in person."
Ethan: "Then my lord could easily ask the Queen Mother to let me see her face for just a few questions?"

Nathan raised his faded brow. "You would find her most uncommunicative."...

Queen Mother Bath-sheba sat languidly on her cushions, observant eyes peering from between her veils now at Nathan, now at me.
I wanted to lead her gently to the point that interested me: had she been just the helpless soldier's wife coerced to quench the fire in the bowels of the King, or was she the moving spirit of the crimes which followed upon the original sin, using her body and the fruit of her womb to beguile the King until it was her son that sat on the throne—not Amnon, not Absalom, not Adonijah, not any of the older sons from wives of longer standing—but her Solomon, the late-comer, out of a junior wife?

I tried every way. I spoke of the misfortune of her first husband's untimely death; she said, as did David, "The sword devours one as well as another." I spoke of the kindness
of the Lord, who caused Uriah to come to Jerusalem to see her one last time; she said.
"The ways of the Lord were beyond our power to discern."...

Yoav’s Archives

Ethan: I gained access to several letters found in the files of Joab, who commanded the
siege of Rabbath-ammon. The first of these reads as follows:

To Uriah the Hittite, Captain of a Thousand, at present under the
walls of Rabbath-ammon, from his Loving Wife Bath-sheba, the
daughter of Eliam.
May Yahveh grant my husband long life and spoil aplenty. Your loving wife
is wasting away, pining for the embrace of your arms.
Do come! The feel of your loins is unto me ‘like paradise, I melt under
you like snow in the sun.
Do come! King David has heard of your name and wishes you well; you will
sit at his table and grow mighty in his sight; but at night you will lie with
your little turtledove.
Do come! May Yahveh cause you to hear my sighs....

READING BY NATHAN FROM HIS BOOK OF REMEMBRANCES: Uriah rides into Town

Nathan: The best-laid plans of man are as chaff in the wind unto the Lord. And
who would have thought that Uriah the Hittite would turn out to be such a paragon
of virtue, such a model of temperance, such a stickler for principle?

Uriah rode into Jerusalem and reported to the palace; but King David bade him to come
to his face, and demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war
prospered.
Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.”
And Uriah departed out of the king’s palace, and there followed him a mess of meat
from the King.
But Uriah slept at the door of the palace, with the officers and the guard, and went not
down to his house.
.... A servant came from Bathsheba, saying unto King David, “Uriah the Hittite was seen
riding into Jerusalem, and my mistress has readied water for his feet and has baked
the meat which the King sent, and also the bed is prepared for Uriah to lie with
her; but he has not gone down to his house.”
And the King sent, and was told that Uriah slept at the door of the palace; and he had
him fetched to his face. And the King said unto Uriah, “Was not that a pretty hard ride
you had from under the walls of Rabbath-ammon to Jerusalem all in four days? Why
then did you not go down unto your house?”

But Uriah bowed his face, saying, “If it please my lord, I may be a Hittite, but I
have embraced the true faith, so that I set principle above pleasure. The ark, and
the host of Israel and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab and the officers of my
lord Joab are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into my house, to eat and to
drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing!"

_Bad News? Uriah’s Death In Battle and Bathsheba’s Mourning_

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. And Eliam her father came, and her mother also, and the whole family came, even the cousins and nieces, and they sat in mourning and tore their clothes and wailed and yammered, so it reached the ear of the King.

The King said [to his servant], "Now I am all for honoring the dead, but Bath-sheba seems to be overdoing it, and I fear the evil tongues saying. Has the wife of Uriah not cherished her husband in life that she carries on so at his death? Has she by chance had a lover? Therefore, go you to the widow and console her, and tell her to send away the countless relatives who clutter up her house."

He did as King David commanded and found Bath-sheba in torn clothes, and her hair in a simple knot, and looking altogether very striking.
Bathsheba said: "Why should I not weep, and wail, and mourn Uriah, and have my relatives lament him? Do I not carry a child inside me which will be born an orphan and have neither father nor inheritance, although it is of royal blood? It is one thing to have a poor helpless soldier’s wife come unto the King, and have her lie with him and minister to him topwise and bottomwise, but another to stand by her in her distress and fulfill the royal promise."
And she held her hands to her face, and cried out loud, and said how too terrible it would be if Eliam her father and all her family were to learn of her predicament.
So the servant informed the King of the words of the lady Bathsheba, and enquired as to what royal promise he made her, if any. David replied, "How should I remember: a man says this and that when he lies with a woman."…

The King said, "Go you, and tell the woman that when the time of mourning is past she can move into the palace, and I will marry her, but without ado, for enough has been noised about this among the people."
And after her time of mourning Bath-sheba moved into the palace, with all her coffers and rugs and earthenware and silver, and with her servants; and all Jerusalem talked of the wedding on which the woman insisted, for she was big with child when she walked with David under the baldachin/huppah, and she waddled like a duck.

(Ethan asked: "But why did the King behave so meekly and give in to the lady Bathsheba in all that she demanded of him?"
Nathan shrugged: "The Queen Mother is a forceful enough personality.")

Shortly after the wedding Bath-sheba bore King David a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

_**Nathan’s big Moment: The Parable and the King’s Surprising Reaction**_

N - Nathan recalls: And the Lord sent me unto David. I came unto him and said to him, There were two men ……[and I told him the whole parable].
And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the rich man; and he said to me: “As the Lord lives, the man that has done this thing shall surely die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he had no pity.”
N - I said to David, “You are that man!”

D - But the King said, “I thought there was something surreptitious about your story; now, therefore, tell me: did the Lord truly appear to you, or have you been fibbing?”

N - My knees trembled greatly, but the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I said, “Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, I anointed you King over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, and I gave you plenty of wives, and I gave you the house of Israel and of Judah: and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto you such and such things. Wherefore then have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the children of Ammon and have taken his wife to be your wife.”

D - But the King said, “Either the Lord is truly speaking through you, Nathan, or you are the most insolent man this side of Jordan, for have you not been part of this from the beginning, and where was your fine righteous voice then?”

N - My bowels were filled with fear, but the Lord went on speaking through me unto David, saying, “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house. Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them unto your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.”

I surely thought that the King would strike out at me, and that I should lose my place at his table and my emoluments and title.
D - But the King bowed his face and said, “Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. But it is mostly Bathsheba's doing, I don't know how and I don't know why, I am like clay in the hands of that woman.”

Thereupon I pleaded with the Lord; and the spirit of the Lord once more came down upon me and spoke unto David, saying, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

After which the spirit of the Lord departed from me. But as the King said nothing and seemed thoughtful, I left quietly and went my way.

(Nathan sighed deeply and put aside the last tablet of his chapter. I, Ethan, rose and gripped his hand, and in a voice deep from the chest said unto him, “Great! Just great! Shattering!”)

Ethan’s Postscript

Praised be the Name of the Lord our God, who has made man in his image; but his image is of many hues.
When I was done with the documents from the files of Joab and came to return them to Benaiah ben Jehoiada, he had me called unto him and enquired whether I was satisfied with what I had learned.

So I said that these letters and notations were of great value to the King David Report, and that they supplemented in the most curious manner the story of the heart-warming, tender love of King David and the lady Bath-sheba as related in the book of remembrances of my lord Nathan.

Benaiah asked: "What precisely has he written on the subject?"
I told him in brief.

"And you believe all that?" Benaiah grinned, displaying his teeth. "Especially the part about the timely death of Uriah the Hittite?"
I said: "But for overly stressing the importance of his own person, my lord Nathan seems largely to have recorded what he saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears."

"Which shows," commented Benaiah, "that man should use not only his eyes and ears, but also the bit of brain which the Lord gave him."...
Midrash has always filled in gaps with analogies from the everyday sayings and anecdotes (mashal l'ma hadavar domeh) and with dramatic dialogue where the Biblical text was reticent about the inner feelings or even contradictory. The emotional power of visual imagery in the midrash makes up for the paucity of detail - especially physical detail - in the Tanakh.
#4 - Contemporary Poetry and Song as Midrash

**Guidelines to Use Poetry as Interpretation of Torah**

1- What are the associations and expectations aroused by the title? How does that connect up to the Biblical text?
2- What does the biographical background on the poet contribute to the interpretation? Recall, for example, that Israeli poets live in a society that recreated itself based on an ideology of return to the Bible and its language made into a living language.
3- Examine the Biblical texts alluded to and how their phraseology and their facts have been transformed.
4- What images and what metaphors dominate?
5- What tensions, reversals, polarities are constructed?
6- Which Biblical scenes were chosen and which ignored?
7- What is the characterization of the Biblical character? Feelings? Does the poem speak in third person or first person, monologue or dialogue?
8- Is the poem set in the past or does it move from past to present and back?
9- How does modern Israel or other contemporary phenomena enter into the portrayal of the biblical scenes?

**TALKING LITERARY by Steve Israel**

There are many possible ways of using literature as midrash. One possibility that we have already included is to take different poems that illustrate different moments in the story and analyse them together with the relevant piece of text. Here we suggest something slightly different.

- We suggest a simple Talmud page type of activity where the whole text that we have been studying is placed at the centre of a large page with some or all of the poems ranged about it on the page in a fixed pattern. Outside each poem there should be a space which should be used for interpretations or comments that the students should add to the page.
- One possible step is to link each poem to a particular part of the text by stretching a balloon in colour from the specific poem to the relevant part of the text. Some poems will encircle all the text. Others will circle specific parts.
- A discussion can then take place in which different students present different poems or parts of poems and explain why those poems speak to them.
- Finally, each student should attempt to write their poem on the story, representing their own particular take, centering on the story as a whole or any detail on which they would like to expand.
- Finally, share the results and discuss, not the quality of the poems, but the choices the students made and the "takes" that they had on the story and the characters.
A few years ago, Bruce Springsteen wrote a song which featured the characters of Cain and Adam and used them to talk about family relationships. The song was called "Adam raised a Cain".

The protagonist of the song reflects on his baptism, that same baptism that is meant to remove the stain of sin from the individual, to cleanse him spiritually and to enable him to be received as a pure soul, unspotted by sin, into the church. However, it is clear that the action has not worked. The child labours through his life under the burden of his father’s shadow. He cannot come out from under that shadow and be accepted as an individual. His mother can call him by his “true name”. With her he can be himself. For his father, and for everybody else, he represents his father’s son and will spend his life paying for the sins and the past of his father. He has inherited the sins and the flames. He can never break free. "You are born into this life paying for the sins of somebody else’s past”. His father looks for someone to blame for his own failures and they have settled on him.

**ADAM RAISED A CAIN** by Bruce Springsteen

In the summer that I was baptized,

My father held me to his side,

As they put me to the water,

He said how on that day I cried.

We were prisoners of love, a love in chains,

He was standin’ in the door, I was standin’ in the rain,

With the same hot blood burning in our veins,

Adam raised a Cain.

All of the old faces,

Ask you why you’re back, they fit you with position,

And the keys to your daddy’s Cadillac,

In the darkness of your room,

Your mother calls you by your true name,

You remember the faces, the places, the names,

You know it’s never over, it’s relentless

As the rain,

Adam raised a Cain.

In the Bible Cain slew Abel

And East of Eden he was cast,

You’re born into this life paying,

For the sins of somebody else’s past,

Daddy worked his whole life,

For nothing but the pain,

Now he walks these empty rooms,

Looking for something to blame,

You inherit the sins, you inherit the flames,
Adam raised a Cain.  
Lost but not forgotten, from the dark heart
Of a dream,
Adam raised a Cain.

☐ Look at the lyrics to the song 'Adam raised a Cain', by Bruce Springsteen. In pairs, try and work out what the song is all about. What is the feeling of the protagonist? How does he appear to feel towards each of his parents? In what way is he paying for his father’s past? In whose eyes?

☐ Why do you think Springsteen decided to reflect upon this particular family situation through the figures of Adam and Cain?

☐ How do you understand the title of the song?

☐ In what ways do you think that you can read the figure of Cain in the Biblical story through the prism of the song lyrics? Do you think it’s a good way of looking at Cain? Can it supply insight into Cain’s character and actions? If you needed more information about the figures in the song in order to decide on the answer to that question what would you want to know about the song’s characters?

☐ If you were to read the song through the prism of the Biblical story (instead of the opposite), how would it affect or change the reading of the song compared to a situation where the characters in the song had different names? If you needed more information about the figures in the Bible in order to decide on the answer to that question what would you want to know about the Biblical characters?

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Hide and Seek by Dan Pagis on Avram - The Man of Faith and Doubt

We have presented Sarai as a barren woman and Hagar as a foreign house servant. These designations are natural and clear. Which designation is right for Avram to help enter the world of his mind and behaviour is, however, a real question. The decision here is to present him as a man who is caught between great faith and great doubt - faith in the promise he has been given starting with Lech Lecha, Genesis 12, and doubt and skepticism as the years go on and the promise remains unfulfilled. Thus the introduction to him here is through a poem about theological questioning.

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Hide and Seek by Dan Pagis

In the backyard of the world
We played, Him and I.
I covered my eyes, He hid.
One two three,
Not in front of me, not behind me,
Not inside me.

Since then, I've been looking
For so many years.
So what if I cannot find You?
Come out already, come out,
You can see that I've given in.

□ ANALYSIS. What is the game of hide-and-seek that is being played here? Who is looking for whom? Why do you think that the poet uses the metaphor of a children's game to address his real concern? What is his real concern? Doesn't the metaphor of a children's game, make the whole thing look superficial?

□ CONTEXTUALIZING WITH THE TORAH. What do you know about Avram's relationship to God? Who is testing whom? On one hand the Rabbis thought of God as testing God ten times both before and after Isaac was born. On the other hand, Avram also had his doubts (See Genesis 17:17-18). How does this fit or not with the poem?

○ PERSONALIZING. Can you identify in any way with the poem? Have there been times when you too have looked for God, for faith, for certainty? Did you come any nearer than Dan Pagis to finding whatever it was that you were looking for? If you were to write a poem such as this, about your search for faith, would it be the same kind of search, would it be the same kind of faith, and would the metaphor be the same kind of game?
“David, King of Israel, is Alive Forever” (Prayerbook – Blessing of the New Moon) . . . “You are the Man” (II Samuel 12:7)

adapted from a translation by Chana Bloch

1
Recently I’ve been thinking a lot about King David, not the one who is “alive forever” in the song, and not the one who is dead forever under the heavy carpets on his tomb that is not really his tomb, but the one who played and played for Saul and kept dodging the spear until he became king, the one who changed his temperament so they [the Philistines] would think him mad, in order to save his life. As for me, I change my temperament so they will think me sane, in order to save my life. If he were alive today, he would tell me: No, it’s the other way around. Every nation once had a first king like a first love. The other way around.

2
King David loves Bathsheba, hugs her tight, strokes her with his hands, the very same hands that cut off the head of Goliath the Philistine, the very same hands. The same man who tore his clothes when his son died and scattered ashes on his head, the very same man. And when the sun rose in the east, he raised himself above her [Bathsheba] like the lion [of Judah] on the banner of Jerusalem and said to her: “You are the woman.” And she to him: “You are the man!” Sometime later the prophet [Nathan] told him the very same words: “You are the man!”

3
King David lies with Bathsheba on the heights of the roof. They are heavy as a cloud and light as a cloud. Her untamed black hair and the wild red hair of his beard entangled one in the other and interwoven. Never have they seen each other’s ears, nor will they never see them. He plays the weak one, weepy, lost, betrayed, He flees into her body and hides himself inside it As in the caves and crevices when he fled from Saul. And she counts all his battle scars. She tells him: “You will be mine,
you will be a tower, a citadel, a city, a street, a hotel.
You will be names, names, and in the end
you will be a desert wadi for two lovers in 1965
in the wadi of David in Ein Gedi.

4
King David took Bathsheba in the small hours between midnight and dawn.
Those are the best hours for a surprise attack and the best time for making love.
He declared to her: "Now you are permitted unto me, now you are a widow,
Now the attack is over in Rabbah [capital] of Ammon."
In their bodies, David and Bathsheba mimicked the death throes of Uriah the Hittite in the attack.
Their cries carried right up to Yom Kippur and up to our very own day.
The instruments of their love rang out like the bells of Bethlehem where he was born.
He took her coming from the west to the east,
the way his descendants turn to pray towards the east.

5
King David and Bathsheba [Bat-Sheva = seven] are doing Sheva Brachot
[to celebrate their wedding with seven blessings], Seven Curses.
They lie as do mourners lying on the ground for Shiva [seven days].
King David sings, cries out from the high roof [the Psalm] "from the depths I cried out to You," but God did not hear, God was hiding below.
Bat-Sheva sang, cried out: "David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam!
And her voice already knew that in a few thousand years
The cry "Chai v Kayam!" would turn into a cry of catastrophe for Jews in trouble:
"Chai v Kayam! Chai v Kayam! Save us! Save us! Chai v Kayam!"

6
King David loves many women. He has an ark of love
full of beautiful women, like the holy ark filled with Torah scrolls,
brilliant in their beauty, filled with prohibitions and orders, of Shall and Shalt Not,
weighted with ornaments, round and sweet as Sephardi Torah scrolls,
and heavy as Ashkenazi scrolls with a heavy crown,
dressed in silk and lace and soft velvet embroidered in many colors,
and the breastplates hanging like a pendant around the neck,
and the long, delicate hand-shaped pointers of silver inlaid with precious stones.
And on Simchat Torah, the Feast of the Law, which Is the Feast of Love,
he takes them all out of the ark,
kisses them one by one and hugs them, makes seven rounds and dances with every one –
even with Michal and Meirav [Saul’s daughters]
who in their lives never wanted him to dance.
Then he puts them back into the depths of the ark,
closes the heavy curtain, and sits down to write psalms.

7
And all the women said: "Me he loved me, most of all."
But only Abishag the Shunamite, the girl who came to him in his old age to keep him warm, said:
"I kept him warm, I stroked his battle scars and his love scars,
I anointed him with oil, not for kingship, but for cure.
I never heard him play or sing, but I wiped his month - toothless - after I fed him sweet porridge.
I never saw his hands in battle but I kissed his old white hands.

I am the poor man’s ewe lamb, warm and full of compassion,
I came to him from the pasture
as he came from pasture to kingship.
I am the poor man’s ewe lamb that rose out of the parable
and I am yours until death do us part."
דוד מלך ישראל ע"י וקימא אעלח תאני

אותה קבוש

1

 الأن חומת פֶּקָשׁה פֶּרְחָה על דוד מלך
לא הוא כי קים עוד מת apo נון לאוים
שפחת לפניי חמד כבד כבוד שארית כבד.
אלא כי זה שגוי להט נינם חסינה
דר שמה ילב. שמחה את שמה
שימשר לע ישראל כי למשה את כורי
והי אש[this] או שועור שרווש אתי שפע.
כבר לילעתי את כית. אל כי הוא ניכרים.
כפיixo合い ישבתי שמחה.
לכל עם כי הים recalled כל שארית.
כפיixo合い ישבתי שמחה.

2

דוד מלך אולאי ע"י והשמיע.
יהו משמי עזים קים ליקף ואות קבידי,
כן כי 짬 יבהק והו את רצון יזה קלפי.
אתו יביס. אתה חזק שערר והו גידי.
כמל נבג דרש רח פרוש לא נימתי
 themsשיק הבושה וכרות המלך, של.
כמי לקוי לקל נוכל ויחיי.
אמרו ли: או מהיה?
אתו יביס. אך יביס יביסיוק שבע.
הוא ראש עスペא יבֶיしない בין עשה
אותו יביס. או מהיה: שהיוק שלימה.
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כל שמעת או זנות יותר, או קולות המחברים.
An Analysis of Yehuda Amichai's David

Background connecting the poet with the poem's subject.

Yehuda Amichai is personally intertwined with David his subject, for they are both poets and warriors. Both are tied to the city of Jerusalem which David captured and in which Amichai resided (Amichai lived in the Yemin Moshe artist's colony near the windmill opposite the walls of the old city) and about which both wrote. The city and both men became symbols of Israel (Recall that Israeli nationalism is called Zion-ism after the city of Zion = Jerusalem, city of David). Both are connected to Yehuda – Amichai's first name, David's tribe, and modern Jerusalem's symbol – the lion of Judah.

Both poets reflect the private, the personal, and at the same time, the national. David's poetry (as attributed to him in Psalms) has many private moments, just as Amichai's poetry makes the personal its main theme (more than the previous generation of Hebrew poets who wrote mostly about the nation). Yet Amichai is Israel's national poet and his personal life is intertwined with all the national events of its establishment – especially its wars in which he fought. He connects himself to David as Zionism's most important forbearer who lent his name to the actual founder of modern Israel - "David" Ben Gurion. This identification, even over-identification, between David, Amichai and Amichai's generation is reflected in the intentionally undisciplined passage in Amichai's poetry between the Biblical past and personal or national present, then on to a sometimes messianic future and back.

Therefore our guiding question for this poem is: what aspects or events of David's life do and do not evoke Amichai's identification? Why?
Title – *David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam....Ata HaIsh* –

What associations and tensions arise between the two halves of this combined title?

The title combines a third person description of David from an Israeli popular song drawn from the traditional blessing of the new moon and a second person dialogue fragment from the prophet Nathan accusing David of murder, adultery and theft.

The song declares the immortality of David and hence of his nation's political aspirations. Paradoxically, despite the literal meaning of its lyrics, it was first sung in blessing the new moon in an era of Galut when the Jewish people's existence was in doubt and its political independence still merely a hope expressed defiantly as a counterfactual statement of fact – in the song’s lyrics *David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam* – “alive and standing.” The poet’s family name – “Ami-chai = my nation lives” – reflects the nationalist revival of his generation who believed in the resurrection of a threatened people. Amichai came as a child as a refugee from Germany and changed his name to Amichai very early on. He fought in the Palmach reliving David’s military career (before he became a king and his nation an independent nation). The first half of the title of the poem evokes the rebirth of national life and emphasizes renewed life – *David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam* – alive and still standing!

Yet the second half of the title – “*Ata HaIsh = you are the man!*” is taken from II Samuel 12: 7 where King David is identified by Nathan and the prophet as the criminal who killed Uriah and stole his wife. Here David loses his right to his kingdom and his life. The covenant of an immortal dynasty (II Samuel 7:8-16) seems about to be abrogated. Dream and reality are clashing, our selective national memory of David, the invulnerable hero of our songs, with the historic reality of a corrupt regime and the subsequent exile of our people.

On a more personal level, *Ata HaIsh* may mean that Yehuda Amichai, the poet – he is the *Ish* – the true King David, who is to see his life reflected in David’s Biblical life. **Just as Nathan taught King David to see himself in the parable that he had just told about the poorman’s sheep, so Amichai and his generation seek to find their own life mirrored in the Biblical story and its language, which they have turned into a living language.** However they must choose the image David who is relevant to their self-understanding. Is it the first half of the title – the king – or the second half – the man? Is it the national symbol of success, the religious messiah or the guilt-ridden, corrupted and vulnerable human being? Is it the David of triumph and immortality or the David always seeking to hide in order to save his life?

**Stanza #1 - Ani Hosheiv - “I think”**

Which image and scenes of David's life arouse the poet's identification?

The first line contrasts the “*ata = you*” of Nathan with the “*ani = I*” of the poet. Amichai is now himself an old man retrospecting on his whole life. In fact, the poem comes from Amichai’s collection of poems entitled *Patuach Sagur Patuach* (1998) which was written or at least edited at the end of his life. The poet selects which of the many images of David to think about. The David with which the poet identifies is not the song’s “David...
Melech chai v kayam' - the immortal symbol of Israeli sovereignty and not the traditional religious symbol whose grave is a place of worship on Mount Zion and not the archeologist's historic but dead David who they claim was not buried in the religious grave site on Mount Zion. With which of these many Davids does the poet identify?

One David is the musician, the prototype of the poet, Amichai's calling. (Note that the Hebrew term for song and for poem is almost identical - shir/shira). Here David's singing brought from the fields into the palace to serve King Shaul who sought to kill him with a spear - twice - while David played. The other is David pretending to be crazy to escape the accusation of disloyalty from the Philistine king with whom he was taking refuge from King Shaul (I Samuel 21:11-16 and Psalms 34). In both images David is not royal or powerful or immortal or courageous but a survivor wholly vulnerable and fearful before two kings.

How did David survive the political-military threats to his existence? David pretending to be crazy. The poet identifies with David but tries to reverse his survival technique. The poet is really crazy = meshuga but he pretends to be sane to save his own life. (Meshuga can also mean a prophet). Yet David if he were to return would surely advise "the opposite" - survival means pretending to be crazy. (The theme may recall Rabbi Nachman's story of the prince who thought he was a chicken).

The poet confesses his love for David as his and his people's first king - like one's first girl friend. It seems that the first king is David - not Shaul whom the people never loved. David's name means the beloved as well as the great lover and friend.

The poet's a personal idealization of the young David the man (haish) - the vulnerable David escaping Saul's spear while playing music and escaping the Philistine's suspicions while playing crazy - is contrasted with the political idolization of the eternal David - hamelech whose kingdom is chai vkaya.

Stanza #2 "David loves Batsheva"

How do the Biblical scenes of David in the first stanza contrast with those in the second? What words and images repeat? Why?

The poet now shifts scenes from David the musician - the master escape artist - to King David the victor over Batsheva and Goliath. Instead of the vulnerable David, we have the conquering David - conquering Batsheva in bed with "strong hugs" and conquering Goliath on the battle field with the same "hands" - yet also the mourning father tearing his clothes. Even the powerful mature David is inseparable from the mourning David burying his sons - aware of the limits of his power and perhaps his own personal failings that brought on their deaths.

The poet puns on the second half of the poem's title - Ata HaIsh. Now it means not only "you are the man," but "you are the same man = Oto HaIsh" - the same one who with his bare hands cut off Goliath's head and with his bare hands stroked strongly Batsheva. You are the same man who tore his clothes mourning the death of his first illicit first
child with Batsheva and then rose up from the mourning suddenly and inexplicably (II Samuel 12: 15-23). The repeating phrases, “the hands” and the title “ata haish”, are used to show David that he is one and the same in contradictory moods over a long lifespan.

Then the poet changes the phrase again by putting it into David and Batsheva’s mouths. Perhaps now it is the secret code of the reciprocal recognition of the lovers - David and Batsheva - that “you are the man who was meant for me” - and you are the woman who was meant for me. Perhaps we hear an echo of the first man - Adam - recognizing the first woman as his bashert - “This time is it. You shall be called isha = woman because you were taken from ish - man.” (Genesis 2: 23). Ish means a husband, a lover, not a king. Here David and Batsheva’s relationship is one of mutual love, while a few lines previous, Batsheva was described as a conquered, even raped animal who was David’s prey from which he arose like the Lion of Judah after ravishing an animal pursued and eaten. Nathan had also described Batsheva as an animal victim consumed by David. In the parable David is the rich man taking the poor man’s beloved pet lamb and slaughtering and eating her.

Now Nathan in the poem turns that phrase “you are the man” against David. By the very act of making love with Batsheva you are the lover hence adulterer, hence murderer, hence thief! Here the phrase is an accusation, not a loving acknowledgement of commitment and oneness of those Divinely meant for one another. Nathan does not allow David or the Jews who love David to disassociate these contradictory images of the beloved David, the first king of the underdogs who defeated Goliath, from David the murderer, the abuser of power. In the Tanakh Nathan the prophet basically shamed David by showing him that the man he had become was not the man he had always seen himself to be - the man of the underdog. But the poet is insisting somehow that all of these Davids are authentic, the same man. The pun on the name of the poem gets at the mystery of our personal identity over multiple personalities doing contradictory things over many years of life.

Stanza #3 - David Melech lying with Batsheva on the roof

What is the imagery of the roof?
What are the metaphors of David’s love fantasy as opposed to Batsheva’s?

Here the poet explores the spatial imagery of David on the roof. In the Tanakh David spies Batsheva from his roof or on her roof but the location of their lovemaking is not mentioned. Amichai’s uses the rooftop as the place of the lovemaking to describe their liminal position between heavy and light, between heaven and earth. Then he adds colors to show the intersecting opposites - his red and her black hair.

Then he describes the love fantasies between them which are polar opposite images of the David. David plays the hiding game of the one who is vulnerable taking refuge in her

9 The image of David arising from his mourning over his first son from Batsheva is taken from Jacob’s blessing for Yehudah in Genesis 49:8-12 where Yehudah is described as rising like “gar aryeh = a lion cub rising from the victim of his hunt, his son.” Lion is also the symbol of modern Jerusalem – on all the manhole covers and garbage trucks. Here Jacob predicts that David’s tribe will produce a dynasty of unending rulers. But they will be covered in blood. The “hands” will be at the enemies’ neck.
body. This is not King David – *chai v kayam* - the one Amichai does not identify with, but the one who sees himself as hiding from Shaul and from the Philistines. In contrast Batsheva fingers David’s military scars and praises him in the spatial language of all the sites to be named after David - the tower, the street, the hotel, the nature preserve in Ein Gedi where he hid from Shaul. . His manliness, his national strength is what she sees, not his vulnerability. Thus the first half of the poem’s title, but it is a messianic image which does not fit David’s self-image. Even as a king, he still sees himself as a man in flight hiding in his lover’s body like a lover’s cave in Ein Gedi where David hid from the king.

Amichai the poet slips back into the present with mention of the Hotel King David - images of the national David - and suddenly he jumps to his personal midrash on David. He recalls his own love making in David’s vaadi in Ein Gedi in 1965. David’s name means lover and his famed exploits suggest the archetypal lover but still also the soldier. Amichai shares those two contradictory images - lover and warrior, so the next stanza mixes the metaphors again.

**Stanza #4 - “David comes to Batsheva in the small hours of the night”**

*What phrases repeat? Hours, battle.*
*What scenes are juxtaposed?*
*What incongruous analogies are constructed?*

The hour of David’s sexual conquest is compared to the hour of a surprise attack. (The word for battle – *krav* - is also related to the word “approach or being close.”) The scene of lovemaking has shifted from the first onetime adultery on the roof from the previous stanza to a second lovemaking just as David’s plan to have Uriah killed in battle in Amman is being “consummated.” David appears now as he does in some midrashim as a judge of women's menstrual purity but here he declares her permitted - no longer a forbidden married woman but a permitted widow at the moment of the death of her husband. The shaking of bodies in orgasm recapitulates the death rattle of the body. (In Shakespearean English “to die” is to have an orgasm and in French the *petite mort* is the small death of lovemaking. The sexual organs - *klei ahava* - also have military connotations - *zayin* meaning in modern Hebrew both penis and weapon). Making war and making love become one for David's love motivated the deaths in battle of Uriah and his compatriots. Suddenly Israel’s wars - the surprise attack of the Yom Kippur War - comes to mind.

Then the analogy of war and love is completed with the analogy of prayer - bowing toward the east - and making love from west to east. (In rabbinic tradition even the direction of lovemaking is also prescribed). The ringing of bells is compared to lovemaking recalling the church bell’s of the church of the nativity in Bethlehem - David’s and therefore Jesus’ birthplace but also a place of battle in the Six day War in 1967 when the West Bank was captured.

**Stanza #5  David and Batsheva’s Sheva Brachot**

10 Midrash Genesis Rabbah on Genesis 2:23 - “zot hapaam” - *vayifaameini kol halaila*
How are the traditional seven days of mourning and the seven days of wedding celebration related to the Biblical story in II Samuel 12:15-25?
What are the puns on sheva = seven?
How does the poet use this narrative to make his own points?

The story in II Samuel 11-12 and play on the word and the action shachav - lie on the ground or lie with a woman. David lay with Bathsheba. Uriah refused to lay with Batsheva but lay on the ground to sleep. After Nathan said: you are the man and this is your punishment, your curse, David and Batsheva’s first son became ill. Then David lay down in mourning and prayer to save him but to no avail. He then stopped his acts of mourning when the child died, though usually the shivah = the seven day mourning period of sitting on the ground begins after the death. Rather David went to lie with Batsheva to comfort her and produced their next son Solomon.

The poem puns on:
(1) Bat-sheva = daughter of seven;
(2) the Sheva Brachot of the wedding celebration for seven days (after Batsheva had mourned for Uriah);
(3) seven curses identified here perhaps with Nathan’s cursing of David;
(4) the shiva period of lying on the ground for seven days of mourning.

Like the contrast of Batsheva’s and David’s love fantasies in stanza #3, now the poet contrasted their songs of prayer/mourning. David sings/screams on the roof recalling not only the death of his first son with Batsheva but of his rebel son Avshalom - II Samuel 19:1-4 - which is the result of Nathan’s curse about a sword emerging from David’s own house (II Samuel 12: 9-12). David cries out using the Psalm of mima’amakim = “from the depths” while up on the roof, but ironically God cannot hear him since God is hiding below. (Perhaps this a reference to the theological image from Psalms of God’s hester panim = the eclipse of God who abandons his royal office in heaven where God is meant to be guiding the world).

Batsheva representing the Jewish people in all ages sings/calls out for messianic help in the form of the poem’s title “David Melech chai v kayam.” In Yiddish the phrase “shreien chai vkayam” means to scream bloody murder when threatened with disaster. The Batsheva of the previous stanza was confident in her lover who would be an invincible tower of support but no longer. Perhaps Batsheva looks even beyond the Galut to the 1973 the surprise attack on Yom Kippur War (1973) which reversed the Biblical sense of a David versus Goliath miraculous victory in the Six Day War (1967). Israelis become again like the Jews of the Exile who sang David Melech chai v kayamin hope for the messiah while suffering pogroms and crying out “save us!”

Stanza #6 – David loved many women

What scenes of David’s life does the stanza recall?
What traditional Jewish customs are evoked?
What effect does this strange analogy have on you?

I Kings 10:1 reports that “Solomon [David’s son] loved many foreign women” and that led to his downfall but the poet’s David loved many women - from many edot, Ashkenazim
and Sefardim, fat and thin etc - and his love brought them all together healing all rifts. The love for the Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah when we take them out of the aron - the Torah ark/cabinet, march around, hug them and dance with them is analogized to David dancing before the aron - the portable ark - which so incensed a jealous Michal, his first wife (I Samuel 6). Now David dances even with Michal and her sister - his intended first wife - Meirav. Historical and biographical conflicts are healed in this love for David who united all the tribes because he loves them all. Then David turns these lovemaking experiences drawn from all stages in his life into poetry - he writes tehillim. Ironically Tehillim sagen - reciting Psalms - associated in Jerusalem with the ultraOrthodox is now associated with lovemaking that produces those life experiences that nourish the personal poetry of David and of Amichai.

Stanza #7 All the women said: He loved me the most.

How does the imagery of the old age home shape the description of David’s relationship with Avishag?

What images from the earlier stanzas return in new ways? The hands, the scars of war and now of love, the music and singing, coming of a man to a woman

Why would the poet end his poem on this note? Is this a tragic ending?

What is the role of the quote from Megilla Ruth 1:16-17?

David is portrayed as the one everyone loved - Shaul, Michal, Yonatan, the people, God, Amichai and his name means the beloved one. Even though the Tanakh never describes David as loving Batsheva or Batsheva as loving David, Amichai in this poem has described that love in detail. Despite all David has done in the Batsheva affair, he is still beloved. “All the women said: He loved me the most.”

Yet the poet chooses a winner - Avishag David’s last intimate even though she never consummated sex with him (I Kings 1: 1-4), even though she only knew him as a physically decrepit old man whom she fed like a nurse in an old age home. The oil of coronation becomes the oil of massage, the hands of war are still beloved as the elderly hands of memory, the stroking of love and the coming into another’s body for love become acts of comfort. Yet this love is intense and it wins the field like the love of compassion (hemla) of the lamb of the poor man from the parable of Nathan where the lamb is described like a daughter = bat recalling Uriah’s love for Batsheva. Lying in his lap, feeding him is Avishag’s role as nurse. David the virile rich king has become David the impotent poor man. Now that is the love of Avishag for David. Ata HaIsh now means that David has become the poor man beloved of women and of his people, not the rich man who did not feel compassion and took and killed the lamb (II Samuel 12: 1-4). The poet has chosen the second half of the title over the first half. David is for him not the messianic king of the song/prayer but the vulnerable man of Nathan’s parable.

Ironically Avishag maintains she is the most loved while David is described both in the last stanza of the poem and in the story of Avishag in I Kings 1 as impotent and passive. She in fact is the one who loves David the most - showing loyalty to him even in his decrepit old age. She is not treated by David as the poor man treated the lamb, but she

11 According to Deuteronomy 17 all kings are supposed to write their own copy of the Torah scroll and studied it daily and follow its laws.
treats him lovingly as if David were the poor man's lamb - feeding him, holding him in her lap.

The poem's ending appears to be sad and yet hopeful. The quote "until death do us part" from Megillat Ruth 1:16-17 "(often used in the Anglican marriage ceremony) recalls the unconditional loyalty of a young woman following an old barren woman - Naomi - back to the land of Yehudah, the city of Bethlehem. There in the future David will be born to her descendants and hope will spring up in place of tragedy. David's death and even his corruption will not necessarily end the dream of messianic return for our love for and our loyalty to David is immortal.

I believe Amichai allows Avishag to be his spokeswoman. He too declares his undying loyalty to David, an immortal love that will never die but a love for the vulnerable David and for the remembered first love, not for the messiah and conqueror.
"Handmade midrash" is visual theology. It is an approach to biblical narrative that draws on the traditional study of Bible, midrash (rabbinic commentaries), and the cognate disciplines of literature, history, archaeology, and linguistics. However, it moves beyond these to form a new synthesis with comparative symbolism, art history, and psychology to create a new discipline. This study was provoked by the limitations of academic study of Scripture in addressing present-day spiritual needs. Its intended audience is not only teachers and students of the university; it is also widely applicable to the continuing education of adults and to secondary schools as well.

The format of the book is a series of chapters that present workshops in which a biblical text, its midrashic expansions, and its art historical parallels are integrated into an individual handmade exercise whereby related spiritual issues become whole with the academic study. The thesis of this book has been influenced by Carl Jung, who discovered that the psyche spontaneously produces images with a religious content and is "nature religious."

In addition, my research has been enriched by the science of Synectics (creative problem solving) of William J. J. Gordon and by Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Artist Within, from whom I learned much about making thought visible.

Why is handmade midrash important? It is an original interdisciplinary approach that relates biblical knowledge to inner personal development while continuing to support the contributions of historical criticism to classical biblical study. It is also ground-breaking in its dual use of art materials by those untrained in art. Finally, the joining of these several disciplines touches an integrative life principle that brings together the scattered and opposing parts of oneself.

Whereas a discipline normally demands expertise, our use of art materials to give visual form to thought invites neither skill nor training. As a result, one’s awkward slowing down allows a reconsidering of "the obvious that wants to know more," the self-knowledge and symbolic meanings of life’s ordinary encounters. The bottom line and startling irony of this method are that the vulnerability and insight achieved in the unskilled tactile activity are precisely what give "newfound personal relevance to the academic disciplines and make them more accessible.

The term midrash describes both a method and a genre of literature in which imaginative interpretation discovers biblical meanings that are continually contemporary. Its classical period extended from the third to the twelfth centuries, but midrash is found even within the Bible, and as this book affirms, it continues to flourish creatively today. (p. ix-x)

The goal of the handmade midrash exercises is to awaken and nourish each individual’s capacity for the creation of midrash by introducing to the study of Bible and religion a visual language that is parallel but antecedent to the language of words. To be truly creative, one must set aside normal modes of thought to see things in a new way.

Research on creativity suggests that verbal language can be inappropriate for certain
creative tasks and that words at times can even hinder thinking and discovery. Although this book has no need to discredit verbal language in order to champion the visual/nonverbal, it demonstrates how both can work together and enrich each other in biblical and religious studies. (p.3)

... The nonverbal imagination of the participants is engaged through simple art activities for those untrained in art, such as tearing and pasting construction paper or muslin, working with clay, or penciling various kinds of lines to explain a text more fully. The goal is to help the interfering ego stand aside and allow fragments of fantasy to emerge into consciousness. Natural inhibitions are disarmed by the utter simplicity of the task, the absence of expectations, and the honoring of ordinary materials of daily living. Thus the participant embarks on an inner journey in search of what Erich Neumann calls "the hidden treasure that in humble form conceals a fragment of the Godhead. (p.6)

Taking Play Seriously

As Carl Jung wrote, "The creative activity of imagination frees man ... and raises him to the status of one who plays." As Schiller put it,

*Man is completely human only when he is at play:* What is really required ... is the attitude of the child at play. The hardest things for adults to learn about play is to take it seriously. They usually feel they can indulge in play only after having taken care of serious business. Yet play is a serious matter for the child, who continually creates, destroys, and recreates new worlds. Recognizing the importance of this kind of play is essential for active imagination.

These forms, produced through innocent, childlike (as opposed to the pejorative "childish") play, speak to those who have made them and to everyone — present in the language of symbols. They always mean something, irrespective of aesthetics or value judgments. These drawings, sculptures, or collages cannot be wrong, bad, or ugly. Their meanings are processed first in the actual doing, then in writing, in small-group dialogue, and sometimes in another writing. Often these works can be directly related to existing midrashim and art, providing evidence of the common reservoir of timeless human images and concerns.

Something else happens in the Handmade Midrash Workshop. The study ceases to be only cognitive and academic. It becomes personal, sometimes even intimate, as the strangers in the group become known to one another through the expression of their individual concerns and dilemmas. They recognize the commonality of the human condition. One may also engage in the "handmade midrash" exercises as a private meditative activity, as part of a journaling process, alone or with a spiritual counselor, in a classroom setting, or in a retreat.

**Handmade Midrash: The Basic Recipe**
Each workshop presented in this book contains three elements: verbal, visual, and symbolic. These elements are introduced through textual study, which is followed by an art history presentation and then linked to an elementary art exercise. They culminate in personal synthesis directed toward active growth and change.

Each workshop requires approximately three hours and has three parts:
1. biblical text study, often including midrashic texts;
2. slides relating the texts to matters of art history; and
3. hands-on creative art play, which we here call "handmade midrash."

Thus the handmade midrash does not stand by itself but follows a more formal study period that combines word and image. The creation of a handmade midrash constitutes the final third. If, for whatever reason, there is no art history component, the art activity then constitutes the entire second half of the workshop. ...

Art for the Untrained

Many participants worry that they are going to have "to do art" and Untrained that they may make fools out of themselves in the process. "But I don't do art," many protest, to which I respond with expressions of relief. All the better. Neither do I. Handmade midrash is not art for art's sake; it is form for symbol's sake. Rough, untutored shapes responding to a biblical, passage, shapes resembling something or nothing - these will be invested with whatever meaning the maker gives them. There is no right or wrong. The idea is to give the hands autonomy, to be a child, to allow the soul to play and to make shapes that the rational mind may at first consider worthless. Once those forms find their voice, they can become powerful personal metaphors resonating the individual's very nature an embodying a deep personal experience of the text.

Workshop participants are given assignments with specific instructions and materials: for example, to interpret the binding of Isaac of Isaac (Gen. 22) by tearing forms out of four sheets of colored construction paper without using scissors. In this case, the instructions are to represent Abraham, Isaac, the ram, the altar, and the Divine Presence, gluing them in a relationship to a background sheet of paper.

Some people respond to the assignment by thinking and planning; others start to tear almost immediately. The forms may be figural; they may be geometric or abstract; or they may be amorphous blobs. It doesn't matter what they look like. All that matters is the meaning that the maker ascribes to them. It makes no difference whether there is a plan or not; the hands assert autonomy as they create a collage assemblage, either flat (two-dimensional) or sculptural (three-dimensional), in about twenty minutes.

What is really going on? The process lifts the participant out of logic and sequential time, drawing on imaginative life to relate to a biblical passage with forms that surface in the mind's eye, even before one can think of the associated words. These shapes reflect the synectic principle at work: Creative analogy makes the familiar strange in order to see it in a new. It's like looking at the world upside down from between your legs. Defining biblical concepts (the familiar) through creative metaphor (the strange) is the raw material of midrash.
The Small-Group Experience

At each level of the Handmade Midrash Workshop something new surfaces. Therefore, no part can be omitted. I once discovered, after a particular workshop, that writing a second time, after several days of reflection, could be even better than writing only once. So when you are finished, or when you have decided you can’t do any more, or don’t want to do any more, form small groups of two to six people, depending on the size of the total group. **Describe to each other what you have done** and what it means. Ask someone else to describe what she or he sees in what you have done. Tell what was the hardest, or the easiest, form to make and why.

Discuss the role that color plays. What about sizes, proportion, movement? How do the parts relate to one another? In the Akedah Exercise (the binding of Isaac), you might ask what your handmade midrash says about parent/child relationships or about the nature of God. What does your altar mean? Would you like to add a sixth element of your choosing? Would you like to change any part of your collage? Where are you in your representation of the Akedah? Do you identify with any particular element of it? The group leader should allow each participant three or four minutes to talk and to receive input.

Writing a Synthesis

When the discussion is over, at least for the time being, it is time for the participants to write using as many of the following approaches as they wish:

1. **Free-associate**, allowing strange images and thoughts to surface and be expressed.
2. **Depolarize by bringing opposites together**. For example, think of love and hate as closely related rather than as poles apart. Bridge a gap between two things that seem different but, from a different point of view, may be closely related.
3. **Find correspondences** between what is happening in the picture and in your inner feelings and thoughts.
4. **Look for a balance** of feeling, form, and concept. Does one figure dominate or emerge from the background? Does the total configuration obscure the parts? Can you see the whole through a part, thus deriving a universal concept from the particular? The bottom line is your personal application.

Both in writing and in group discussion, address how the visual closure experience of handmade midrash has affected your earlier interpretations. Reflect on the most important thing that happened to you in the workshop. One of the most exciting aspects of these workshops is that participants unknowingly come up with concepts or images to be found in the classical midrashim or in the history of art, as well as elements common to other religious traditions. This affirms my belief in the collective unconscious. It also makes ordinary people feel very much part and partner with the noblest expressions of art and thought.(p.7-12)
Workshop Summary by Noam Zion:

1- Text study - identify characters, scenes, dilemmas or tensions, emotions, literary features that have aesthetic power, gaps you would like to fill

2- Optional: Show more than one piece of art depicting a scene from the text and discuss how the art (color, shape, perspective, material, composition etc) interprets the text

3- Make your own handmade visual midrash: choose a background color, pick a scene (for example, Abraham raising knife over Isaac), identify the "characters" to be represented on the background (for example, knife, Abraham, Isaac, donkey, bush, angel, tear paper), compose the scene and only after considering alternatives glue it on.

4- Write about your creation and how it interprets the story and how it expresses your feeling, your images of God and parent-child relationship etc

5- Exhibit and compare. Ask others to offer their interpretation of the handmade midrash - without judging it and without trying to guess what artist had in mind but what it means to them. Then ask artist to add what the artist sees even if that was not the original intention of artist. Often meaning emerges in doing and in seeing rather than a prior premeditated meaning embodied in art.

6- Debrief and reflect on the process. What were the stages in this process? Why? What did you feel and what did you learn about the text, the art and about yourself? Let heart, head and hand work have a say. Suggest improvements in the method.

7- Now reread the biblical text and have teacher bring classical parshanut and midrash in dialogue with the student art as midrash.