Shmuel Klitsner

Shmuel Klitsner is a veteran educator at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Jerusalem, the director of Ohr Torah's groundbreaking women's Institute for Halakhic Leadership and the author of *Wrestling Jacob* on Bereshit.

Victims, Victimizing and the Therapeutic Parable: A New Interpretation of II Samuel Chapter 12

> I and the public know
> What all school children learn,
> Those to whom evil is done
> Do evil in return.
> W.H. Auden[1]

Introduction

The story of David and Bathsheba and the subsequent parable of Nathan in II Samuel, (ch. 11 and 12) are generally viewed by traditional Jewish commentaries as a paradigm of repentance.[2] Biblical commentaries of the historical critical school often see the story as an anti-Davidic story, most probably told from the perspective of a northern kingdom political rival to the southern Davidic House of Judah.

However, when one looks at the story in the larger context of the books of Samuel and one takes into account the story's intertextual allusions, all seen through the lens of a complex psycho-literary approach, the focus of the story is not a simple anti- or pro-Davidic morality tale.[3] It is, rather, a subtle and complicated study of transformations

[1] W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 127.

[2] I do not refer here to the apologetic school typified by the Talmudic statement in tractate *Shabbat* 56a, in which David is seen as without sin (this despite the explicit statement of David, "I have sinned to the Lord"!). Rather, I am referring to the educational agenda-driven Midrashim and commentaries that emphasize David's capacity to admit failure. See, for example, *Midrash Tehillim* 51.

[3] I refer the readers to the *Tradition* article (Summer 2009, 42:2) by Judy Taubes

TRADITION 46:1 / © 2013 Rabbinical Council of America

and identities. The primary focus, one that has largely escaped prior readings, is the question of how a basically good king, who repeatedly refuses to kill his enemy[4] and who is concerned with an equitable division of spoils among his soldiers[5], could become a callous perpetrator of the same actions that had victimized him in the past. Whereas many Biblical passages and their various commentaries are concerned with divine justice and with the processes through which protagonists reverse their sinful ways, little attention has been paid to the opposite psychological process embedded in Biblical passages in which the reversal of behaviour is from good to bad.

Modern social science has explored this issue with increasing sensitivity, from the early experiments of Milgram[6] to the contributions of Zimbardo.[7] One of the questions they raise is whether evil behaviour should be analyzed as a personal phenomenon involving the complexities of individual psychological makeup, or should it rather be seen as a universal phenomenon that depends on social and political structures and restraints. A further extension of this question may pose the issue as whether power almost always corrupts or if those predisposed to corruption are often those who seek and attain positions of power. Some recent experimentation by Adam Galinsky[8] and others has attempted to test this question, with interesting results. Judith Herman[9] and others have written about the phenomenon of victims who become victimizers. All this research has refined the sensibilities of readers who may see some of the empirical findings as well as some of the various theories reflected in Biblical stories.

As for this writer – both out of a caution not to be reductionist in looking at these timeless stories through the lens of parochial contemporary wisdom and out of recognition that there is no need to assume that particular literary characters act in accordance with standard deviation statistical research – I will try to refrain from easy identification of literary phenomena with current social scientific theory. That being said, close

Sterman, *A Tale of Two Men in One City*, as background to prior literary readings of Nathan's parable. My own approach differs in the extent of inter-textual analysis, in its psychological orientation, and in the methodology wherein subtext is seen as a purposeful indicator of a manipulated subconscious.

[4] See I Samuel, chapters 24 and 26.

[5] See I Samuel 30:20-25.

[6] See S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

[7] See P. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect* (New York: Random House, 2007).

[8] See Adam Galinsky, "The Psychology of Power Absolutely," *The Economist*, Jan. 21, 2010.

[9] See Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery – The Aftermath of Violence -From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

reading of a text can only be enhanced by the cumulative wisdom of prior psychological insights. As long as the interpretation of literary data is guided by the clues of the story itself and its dramatic trajectory, and not by a rigid notion of preconceived psychological categories, the reading may be seen as a legitimate "reading out" of the text and not a tendentious exercise of "reading in."

That being said, any attempt to analyse the character of David and the therapeutic use of parable on the part of Nathan will of necessity involve a reckoning with the evidence of the subtle relationship between the trauma of David's early years as a vulnerable fugitive and his later years as an unquestioned monarch. Any attempt to view the Bathsheba/ Uriah incident as an isolated succumbing to temptation entails turning a blind eye to both the trajectory and the inconsistencies of the larger story of David's life.

In many of my previous readings of Biblical narratives, I have noticed what seems to be an authorial awareness of the presence of unconscious motivations and neuroses –of course, without the theoretical language to describe them as such. In my readings of the Jacob stories of Genesis,[10] I have noted literary evidence of the use of artificially reproduced repetition scenes, transference, the *telling* use of odd wording (Freudian slips), and wordplay indicating subtext. In the following essay, I find the most compelling evidence of an early literary sense of the unconscious and of a therapeutic manipulation of the layer of behavioural motivation that is often "hidden in plain sight."

The Exegetical Problems

In II Samuel, chapters 11 and 12, we are told of King David's descent into the most severe depths of moral depravity and into cynicism with regard to the most elementary instincts of humane behavior. Chapter 11 describes David's premeditated adultery with the wife of one of his military officers – Uriah – while the latter is off at war. It moves on to David's attempt to cover up the resulting pregnancy by calling Uriah back from the front, and, when this fails, the King arranges for Uriah to die in battle. In order to accomplish this without arousing suspicion, David commands his general Yoav to undertake a foolhardy mission in which Uriah is to be killed. In order to make this look plausible, Yoav arranges the circumstances in such a way that Uriah dies not alone but alongside several comrades in arms.

[10] S. Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity and Freudian Slips in Genesis* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2006).

When Yoav is apparently full of resentment and guilt over his part in the treacherous plot – David sends veiled words of comfort to his chief henchman – "Let this thing not seem evil in your eyes, for the sword devours sometimes one way and sometimes another… (II Sam. 11:25)."[11] These words may very well comprise the most cynical statement in the entire Bible. David then proceeds to take the martyred soldier's pregnant widow – Bathsheba – as his wife.

It would seem that King David has not only become a most cold-hearted perpetrator of capital crimes but has also become impervious to even the most elementary emotions of guilt and shame. And yet the following chapter records the entry of Nathan the prophet with a thinly veiled parable that manages to miraculously pierce the thick layers of moral indifference and arouse within the seemingly soulless David true feelings of righteous indignation that immediately transform into profound remorse. Just how the parable manages to work this magic is unclear and requires the mining of context, subtext, and intertext in order to reveal the true genius of the therapeutic effect of Nathan's words and of the medium of parable.

While most commentaries on the *parable of the poor man's ewe* focus on the lack of precise parallel between the fictional sin of the rich man and the actual sin of David, we are equally puzzled by the dramatic effect of Nathan's metaphor that surprises the reader as much as it does the King. In attempting to account for the powerful impact of the parable on David's consciousness, we may also have stumbled upon the key to understanding the age-old exegetical problem of the discrepancies between the parable and the reality of David's sin that the parable was designed to reflect.

While we will need to return to the specific language deployed in the depiction of David's sin in chapter 11, our reading will be best served by first examining the verses in chapter 12 that comprise Nathan's parable and David's reaction:

> **1** And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him: 'There were two men in one city: the one rich, and the other poor. **2** The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; **3** but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and reared; and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own morsel, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. **4** And there came a passer-by unto the

[11] All biblical references henceforth refer to II Samuel unless otherwise stated.

> rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the guest that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.' **5** And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan: 'As the Lord lives, the man that hath done this deserves to die; **6** and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.' **7** And Nathan said to David: 'Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord....[12] **9** Wherefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do that which is evil in My sight? Uriah the Hittite thou hast smitten with the sword, and his wife thou hast taken to be thy wife, and him thou hast slain with the sword of the children of Ammon. **10** Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house... **11** Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. **12** For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' **13** And David said unto Nathan: 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said unto David: 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. **14** Howbeit, because by this deed ... the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.'[13]

Presumably, David is meant to hear Nathan's parable as a real case – to be judged by the king in accordance with the king's role as judge (see 15:2). In fact, as cited by Uriel Simon in his fine chapter "*The Poor Man's Ewe*" in *Reading Prophetic Narratives*[14], there is a Bedouin tribal law that survived until modern times concerning an apparently not uncommon case in which an unexpected visitor comes to the home of a host who does not have a lamb to slaughter in order to feed the guest. With several restrictive limitations, the unprepared host is allowed to take his neighbor's sheep in order to feed the guest and fulfill his obligation to provide a hospitable meal.

Remarkably, the limitations listed in the tribal law all correspond to the unjustness of the rich man's behavior in Nathan's story. If one has

[12] For the time being, I have not quoted most of verses 7 and 8. They are seemingly of minor significance as their gist would appear to be – I (the Lord) have done well by you; how could you repay me with sinfulness? We shall return to these verses later, as they will take on greater significance in the suggested new reading.

[13] The longer translated biblical quotations in this essay have used the 1917 JPS translation unless otherwise indicated.

[14] Uriel Simon, *Keri'a Sifrutit Be-Mikra* [in Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Mosad Bialik, 1997), 140-143.

one's own sheep, one may not take from his neighbor. If the sheep is a household pet (as described in 12:3) it may not be taken. Afterward, the neighbor must be immediately informed and compensated (i.e., no cover-up). Moreover, according to the tribal law, one who takes the sheep unjustifiably must pay four times the worth of the sheep to the owner (see 12:6 above)! All this further supports the possibility that at least on one level David hears the parable as an actual case to be judged.

The reader, on the other hand, is meant to see the parable as a thinly veiled allusion to David's sin in which David is the rich man, Uriah the poor man, and Bathsheba the beloved ewe. Presumably, when Nathan unveils the parable and pronounces to David "**you** are the man," - both David and the reader are to understand that David had not identified himself in the story at all and is now being told that he is none other than the rich man concerning whom he himself has declared –"he is deserving of death."[15]

At the outset, we are impressed with Nathan's strategy. The greatest problem facing the prophet is the problem of kingship per se. Being above all others, the king is most likely to see himself as above all law, and therefore most likely to transgress moral boundaries. On the other hand, who can judge the king? Surely, only the king himself! Nathan, by arranging for David to pronounce judgment on himself without seeing through the parable, has accomplished just this. The King has judged the King.

And yet, as many have pointed out, there is an extra character in the parable – the passer-by – for whom there is no parallel in the preceding story of David and Bathsheba.[16] Moreover, the sheep is slaughtered by the rich man and given to the wayfarer – a third party; whereas David as rich man takes the "beloved ewe" for himself. Not only do these two details in the parable seem extraneous to the intended application to

[15] See Robert Polzin's creative interpretation in *Samuel and the Deuteronomist,* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 120-130, in which he proposes that Nathan's "you are the man" may refer back to any and therefore all of the characters previously referred to as "the man," namely, the rich man, the poor man, or the wayfarer. I will also argue for an intentional ambiguity, but only on the level of a secondary reading (subtext) that is geared to intrude on David's unconscious processing of the parable. See the foregoing psycho-literary analysis.

[16] There is a masterful midrashic attempt to identify the third party wayfarer as the personification of the "*yetser ha-ra*" – the proverbial evil urge. Thus David feeds this urge which is variously referred to in the verses as an unexpected wayfarer (*heilekh)*, next as a guest (*ore'ah*), and finally as an "*ish*," a man. The Rabbinic instinct for literary nuance and homiletic education produced a further insight into the nature of evil impulses in that they may come upon one without warning (*heilekh*), but if one lets them roost they become regular guests (*ore'ah*) and ultimately masters (*ish*). See *Bereishit Rabba* (Albeck), 22.

David, but there is also an important part of the king's crime – the murder of Uriah – with no parallel detail in the parable.

In response, some commentaries have suggested that the parable originated in connection with another story and in its appropriation here we are left with a literary remainder that bears a vestige of its original context.[17] Others suggest that the parable might have been designed as only partially applicable so that David would not suspect too quickly that he was the subject of the parable's critique – thereby reducing the likelihood of arousing his righteous indignation[18]. We will suggest a third solution to account for the discrepancies.

Alternative Identification of the Rich Man and Poor Man

As we return to the language of the parable in 12:1, we are struck by the use of the word "*rash*" for poor man (variously spelled *r-sh* and *r-a-sh* in this passage). The term *rash* as "poor man" is used several times in Biblical wisdom literature (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Psalms 82).[19] Yet in the narrative expanse of the Bible, the term is only used in Nathan's parable and in one other context – David referring to himself as a "*rash*" in I Samuel 18:23 – as David protests the suggestion that he become King Saul's son-in-law. It may be instructive to quote an entire section from that chapter in I Samuel, as the circumstances eerily resemble those of David's sin in our own story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah:

> **6** And it came to pass… when David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines… 7 And **the women sang** one to another in play, and said: Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands… **9** And Saul had a jealous eye for David from that day forward… **13** Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he **went out and came in** before the people… **16** All Israel and Judah **loved David; for he went out and came in** before them. **17** And Saul said to David: 'Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife; only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles.' For Saul said: **'Let not my hand be upon him, but let**

[17] See David Daube's "Nathan's Parable" in *Novum Testamentum* 24 (1982), 275-288, quoted by Simon in *Reading Prophetic Narrative* [in Hebrew] 140, n. 43. I will be keenly interested in Daube's suggestion of original context and will see it alternatively as a crucial and artfully crafted subliminal subtext.

[18] See Shimon Bar-Efrat in *Mikra Le-Yisrael*, *2Samuel* (Jerusalem: Am Oved, Magnes Press. 1996), 118.

[19] There may even be some oblique references to chapters 11-12 in this Psalm.

> **the hand of the Philistines be upon him**.' **18** And David said unto Saul: 'Who am I, and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?' **19** But it came to pass at the time **when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife**. **20** And Michal Saul's daughter loved David; and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. **21** And Saul said: 'I will give him her,that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him'… **22** And Saul commanded his servants: 'Speak with David secretly, and say: Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee; now therefore be the king's son-in-law.' **23** And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. **And David said**: 'Seemeth it to you a light thing to be the king's son-in-law, seeing that **I am a poor man**, (***r-sh***) and lightly esteemed?'… **25** And Saul said: 'Thus shall ye say to David: The king desireth not any dowry, but a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies.' For **Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.**[20]

Here, as in the latter case of David and Uriah (ch. 11), a king plots to rid himself of an adversary (competing for, among other things, the affection of women). In both cases, Kings Saul and (later) David are neither interested in bloodying their own hands nor in having the deed of doing away with a popular military officer traced back to them, so they orchestrate an impossible military mission with the express purpose of having their target die in battle. (In the case of David, he survives; Uriah is not as fortunate.)

The "chance" appearance of the term *rash*, "poor man," in this plot against David as well as in the parallel story of David's plot against Uriah in the subsequent damnation of David by Nathan's parable – is too curious to be anything but intentional intertextual reference. (This is particularly evident in light of these two stories being the only two Biblical narrative contexts in which the word *rash* appears.)

When one compares this narrative in I Samuel 18 to the narrative in II Samuel 11 in which David is the king and Uriah the "poor" victim of David's need to procure the love of a woman and still retain popularity among the populace through cover-up, the modus operandi of having Uriah killed in a contrived impossible mission completes the parallel.

[20] I Samuel Chapter 18: 6-10, 12-25.

Is it possible then, if not probable, that on some level David is meant to be seen by the reader or to subliminally see himself also – in Nathan's parable as the "poor man" – as the victim turned victimizer? One might even tentatively suggest that the variant spelling of *r-sh* as *r-o-sh* is meant to subtly clue the reader as to the unlikely identification of the man now king (or *head* of state- *rosh)* as the former shepherd and -poor man- *rash*.[21]

Moving from this literary allusion in one David story back to an earlier one, a psychologically minded reader would want to ponder the interesting and disturbing idea of how it is that a victim becomes a perpetrator of much the same modus operandi that characterized his own prior victimization. The professional literature on this takes caution to stress that only a small percentage of the abused become abusers, while, at the same time, a large percentage of abusers were formerly abused. Theories to explain the phenomenon vary, and some seem more than others to suffer confusion between the notions of correlation and causality. So, without succumbing to overreaching theorizing that will inevitably miss the mark, we simply suggest that there seems to be an inability on the part of the former victim to see himself as now playing the role of perpetrator. It is as if the sense of victimization grants the victim more than a history; it confers an identity. This identity, in turn, becomes an immunity card, as the identities of victim and victimizer are seen as mutually exclusive by the person who has become both. It is into this space of cognitive dissonance that Nathan and his parable enter with subtle but powerful connecting verbal links between David as perpetrator and as former victim.

The verbal cues are not exhausted with the poignant use of the word "*rash*" that David had used to describe himself. Yet another thinly veiled allusion is the term used to describe the behavior of the rich man. The rich man's refusal to take sheep for feeding the passerby is described as "*va-yahmol lakahat mi-tsono*" – "He was *disinclined* to take from his own flock." The JPS translation renders the word *va-yahmol* as "he was *loath* to take…" Yet both translations obfuscate the awkwardness of the phrase in the original Biblical Hebrew. The word *h.m.l.* means "to have compassion," and, on the face of it, this is an odd word choice on the part of Nathan who so carefully chooses his words for this short parable – a parable with so much riding on its intended effect upon David.

[21] For a similar psycho-literary phenomenon, see the reference to Saul (by the prophet Samuel) who sees himself as "small" though he is already "head (*rosh*) of the tribes of Israel." (I Sam. 15:17)

The clear intention of the phrase that literally means “he had compassion on his own flock” is that the rich man “spared” his own flock. Indeed, the verb *h.m.l.* appears with this idiomatic sense in at least one other verse in the Bible – Jeremiah 50:14 “Do not *spare* arrows.” Yet the unusual word choice here (a more apparent choice might have been *avah*), creates both an irony and an allusion. The irony is that the rich man, who acts without compassion for his neighbor the poor man, is described as having compassion for his own sheep (or for his proverbial pocketbook). The allusion takes us back to an earlier story in I Samuel, where we will find the only other two instances in the Hebrew Bible of the verb h.m.l. with the direct object being sheep.

In I Samuel 15, it is Saul who is described in the same terms used in Nathan’s parable to describe the rich man. The famous episode in which Saul defies the Divine command to obliterate the Amalekites as well as their flocks has Saul taking “compassion upon (i.e., sparing) the sheep.” (This phrase, in its context, may also contain no small amount of irony, as Saul has just slaughtered men, women, and children, sparing only the king of Amalek and the choice booty, including the finest sheep.) This episode is not only the instance that comprises Saul’s ironic failure to execute the Divine command but it serves as well as the immediate cause of God’s decision to depose Saul and replace him with a better man (David).

The literary effect of this intertextual allusion (sparing the sheep) is to identify the rich man in Nathan’s parable with Saul, just as the intertextual allusion of the term *r-ash* had identified the poor man with David. Although the roles played in the previous chapter (11) would certainly yield David in the role of the rich man, Uriah as the poor man, and presumably Bathsheba as the ewe, (and surely this identification is the ultimate destination of Nathan’s words), it seems there is another level of identification indicated by the language of the parable. According to this reading, David is to identify (at least unconsciously) with the victim in the story, the man identified as the *rash.* He is to feel moral outrage at the cruelty of the rich man –to be identified with the man who as king and father-in-law had persecuted and relentlessly pursued David – with the man who had plotted to have him killed in battle, and to the man who took his well-earned wives (Merav and later Mikhal as well) and gave them to another.

The transformation of the formerly poor man (David) into the formerly rich man (Saul) is further indicated by the verses at the beginning of I Samuel 18. These verses emphasize repeatedly that David

was more beloved by the people than Saul because Saul stayed at home while David the warrior "went out" to battle. At the beginning of ch. 11, (introducing the crime of taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed in battle), David is pointedly described as "staying at home in Jerusalem" in the season in which kings [are supposed to] "go out to do battle." Again, David has become Saul (just as Uriah has become David).

In short, if David is incapable of seeing how he has become Saul, is unable to see himself as the rich man with no compassion or moral constraints, then Nathan's only avenue toward moral instruction and therapeutic intervention is through a subtle and devious metaphor. Only by resurrecting David's earlier associations with his own victimhood might Nathan gain access to David's repressed capacity for moral indignation.

Indeed, this whole story of David's penitent rehabilitation only begins to make sense if one reads into the parable a deeper layer of David's personal connection to Nathan's words. For otherwise, what sense is there in so sudden a moral epiphany in one who yesterday could so cynically console Yoav the guilt stricken commander with the words, "let this not seem evil... the sword devours this way and that." The separation of degree of injustice between what David has just done and the behaviour of the rich man in Nathan's story is infinite. The chasm between David's actions (without moral compunction) and the righteous indignation of David moments later at hearing of the rich man taking the poor man's ewe is also too great to be bridged by a simple use of parable therapy on the part of Nathan.

Rather, one must attribute greater sophistication to Nathan and to the Biblical author. Only by tapping into David's repressed anger at Saul, the father-in-law whom David repeatedly refuses to kill (see chapters 24 and 26 in I Samuel), can Nathan reach past David's layers of jaded immunity from self-critique. Only by arousing David's own buried but persistently disabling sense of victimhood could he begin to see himself in the mirror as the "reincarnated" Saul and see Uriah as his own victim – as the innocent target of royal avarice and unlimited political power.

Nathan accomplishes this through a subtle insertion of vocabulary that sneaks its message, as it were, through the back door of David's consciousness. (We shall speak later of psychologists who write about the unique capacity of metaphor to circumvent defence mechanisms and to promote therapeutic breakthrough).

It seems that the power of cognitive dissonance is such that, from the standpoint of a more objective reality, men who are no longer poor or

victimized by others but are now rich and powerful and in a position to traumatize others, still see themselves as victims. That this is how Nathan perceives David's mindset is strikingly apparent from the epilogue to Nathan's parable. In fact, the verses omitted earlier in my quote of the passage (those immediately following the unveiling of the parable with the words "**you** are the man") in 12:7-9, comprise a powerful proof text for the above reading:

> **7** Thus says the Lord, God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the **hand of Saul**; **8** and I gave you your master's house, and **your master's women** into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that were little, then would I add for you more of this and that. **9** Why have you despised the word of the Lord, doing that which is evil in My eyes? Uriah the Hittite you have smitten with the sword, and his wife you have taken to be your wife, and you have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

Here Nathan is finally able to speak to David directly and not through the guise of metaphor. What is the first thing that needs to be said? Look at yourself! You are not the poor man, the victim, the persecuted! You are the King! Things are reversed. Saul is not holding your women. You now possess *his* women. (In fact, the ancient Syriac translation of Samuel indicates a Hebrew *vorlage* that reads "daughters of Israel" in verse 8 instead of "house of Israel" (*benot* instead of *beit*,[22] making the point even more strongly that David had been living with an inappropriately abiding sense of victimhood regarding Saul's daughters.)

In other words, Nathan is telling David that the reversal is complete. What began for Saul as the maddening betrayal of the women who went out to sing the glories of David instead of Saul, and escalated into the devious entrapment of David to be felled in the course of a contrived "impossible mission," has now come full circle. David has become Saul. The monarchy, the women, the devious contrived battles designed to remove his adversaries – all these are now David's. If David's deep-rooted identity as victim precluded his ability to recognize his own metamorphosis into victimizer, Nathan's parable ultimately unveils the false identifications and allows David to see that Uriah was the victim of David's own "Saul–like" victimization.

In fact, the epilogue to the parable in verses 7-9 reads as an inexplicable intrusion upon the thrust of Nathan's message, unless one reads the

[22] See *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. R. Kittel and P. Kahle (Stuttgart: PWB, 1952), ad. loc.

allusions in the manner of the above analysis: David needs to move from his residual victim identity as the poor man to his present reality as the victimizing rich man.

Alternate Identifications of the Ewe and the Wayfarer

Key discrepancies between the parable and its intended target still remain. What are we to make of the third party character, the wayfarer? He appears in the parable of chapter 12 but seems to have no corresponding element in David's crime in chapter 11. Who is the passerby? And what are we to make of the ewe that is given to a third party, whereas in the original crime the ewe (Bathsheba) is taken by the rich man (David) himself?

Here too, the answer is to be found in the inter-textual superimposition of I Samuel 18 onto the story of II Samuel 11 and 12. In that earlier story, David refers to himself as the "*rash*," and is sent into battle with the Philistines in order to win the promised daughter of Saul –Merav. Yet, when he returns unexpectedly victorious from this impossible mission – Saul reneges, instead giving Merav to Adriel from Mehola (see I Samuel 18:19 quoted above). This sequence nearly repeats itself later in the life of David. When David had become a fugitive fleeing Saul's relentless pursuit, Saul took his second daughter from her husband David and transferred her as well to a third party:

"And Saul gave his daughter Michal, the wife of David, to Palti son of Layish..." (I Samuel 25:44).

Conflating the two instances of the promised Merav and the wife Michal with the two third-party characters Adriel and Palti, we suddenly perceive the identity of the third-party wayfarer to whom the wealthy man in the parable delivers the precious ewe. In the interim (but not ultimate) target of Nathan's parable, David and the readers are to unconsciously associate the details of this contrived story with the former suffering of David the "poor man" victim, whose "rich man" (father-in-law and king) takes away the sole sheep that "sleeps next to his bosom" (12:3) and gives her to a third party. The third party is clearly Adriel/Palti.

The enduring pain of injury and insult for David in having Saul's women taken from him and given to another is again underscored by the otherwise inexplicable epilogue to Nathan's parable that we noted above. Immediately after unmasking the ultimate target of the parable ("you [David] are the man"), Nathan moves toward dismantling the interim subliminal associations of David and swipes immediately at David's inappropriate focus on the vestigial pain of his wives being taken by Saul:

> Thus says 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 your master's house, and your master's women into your bosom… (12:7-8).

That this injury particularly preoccupies David is also evident from verses earlier in II Samuel, Chapter 3. After Saul dies in battle and David is no longer a fugitive, a bloody civil war breaks out between those loyal to David and those loyal to the House of Saul. When Avner, the rival general from the Saul camp, finally approaches David with an offer for a truce, promising that he personally will "bring all of Israel over to your side," David has one condition. "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid a dowry of one hundred Philistine foreskins!" (3:13-14).

Further attesting to the abiding trauma for David (from the first betrayal of Saul and the delivery of his wife to a third party) is the almost identical language used to describe David's obstinate need to regain Michal in chapter 2 of II Samuel and his desperate measures to obtain Bathsheba nine chapters later. In both we have two of the three appearances in the book of the phrase "and David sent forth messengers (*va-yishlah david malakhim*). Only in these two instances, (the return of Michal and the taking of Bathsheba), do we find this phrase followed by the word *va-yikkaheha* – "and he took her."[23] The various intertextual allusions between the two events in David's life draw connecting lines yet again between the trauma of victimhood at the hands of Saul and the later transformation of David into a victimizing king with an almost identical modus operandi to that of Saul.

Further indication as to the identity the third person character of the passerby –*heilekh* – to whom the poor man's ewe is given, is to be found as well in chapter 3. When Michal is returned to David, her interim husband (to whom she was given by Saul after being married to David), Palti ben Layish, is described pathetically as "walking with her weeping as he walked" –**va-yelekh**... halokh u-vakho.. The use of the word "*heilekh*" to mean wayfarer or passer-by is unique in Nathan's parable. It appears nowhere else with this meaning in the Hebrew Bible. Often, an anomalous word, or anomalous meaning for a common word, is a signal of intertextual allusion.

In our newly revealed level of meaning to the parable, Palti is the *heilekh* (the wayfarer), just as Michal was the ewe, David the poor man,

[23] Technically, the subject of this verb in the case of the taking of Michal was Ish Boshet son of Saul, but the comparison stands nonetheless as the "taking" is done at David's command.

and Saul the rich man. If the discrepancies between the sin with Bathsheba and Nathan's contrived story remain –there are no gaps in the equivalency of the parable with David's early trauma –and with the events regarding which David had called himself a *rash*, a poor man.

Nathan's therapeutic technique in the parable, in order to work, had to stir David on three levels: the conscious immediate perception of the story as an actual case to be judged, the unconscious associations with his own victimhood – necessary to arouse David's moral indignation, and, finally, the level of a harsh mirror at the stage of unmasking the ultimate destination of the prophet's instruction, when Nathan's "**You** are the man" would result in David seeing himself as the rich man – not the poor one. If there were discrepancies between the morality parable and the sinful reality of David and Bathsheba, they were present in order to make the first two levels resonate for David and to set him up for a previously impossible encounter with his own dormant moral conscience.

The Medium of Parable and the Therapeutic Power of Metaphor

One of the most elegant definitions of the concept of metaphor was phrased by means of its particular metaphor by A. Paivio when he described it as a "solar eclipse that hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its most salient and interesting characteristics when viewed through the right telescope.[24]"

In an article examining the use of metaphor in psychotherapy, Muran and DiGiuseppe describe prior research in which metaphor is seen as involving "an interplay between the meaning of one object and that of another, which results in an entirely new meaning that transcends both." As such, metaphors are seen as "affording different ways of perceiving and organizing the world, and of generating "frame restructuring" and "new patterns of consciousness."[25]

In the Biblical narrative we examined above, a different organization or reframing of David's world was precisely the task at hand. The challenge that faced the prophet, however, comprised a double bind. On the one hand, Nathan needed to confront a king, who could only be judged by the king. Yet, the king had become incapable of seeing himself as having become a victimizer. This self-perception could not coexist with his ironically abiding sense of himself as victim. The only way to bring the

[24] See D. E. Berlyne, *Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity*, (NY: McGraw Hill, 1960).

[25] J. Muran and R. DiGiuseppe, "Towards A Cognitive Formulation of Metaphor Use in Psychotherapy," *Clinical Psychological Review,* vol. 10 (1990), 69-85.

jaded monarch to introspection would be to tap into the very same indignation at victimhood that presently prevented David from perceiving his own metamorphosis into a victimizer. This therapeutic goal on the part of Nathan required a veiled medium, one in which the initial appeal to moral conscience would bypass the resistances and repressions that obstructed any true look in the mirror for David.

Indeed, it is no surprise that for psychoanalysts including Freud, Jung, and Erickson, metaphor is seen as the language of the unconscious, with powerful potential to evoke change, precisely because of the metaphor's feature of indirect approach that circumvents the activation of defense and denial, as well as because of its capacity to arouse and activate the creative forces of repressed insight.

It would seem that long before theorists argued that metaphorical communication has the capacity to produce shifts in attitude, in emotion, and ultimately in behavior, the author of Samuel deployed this insight in a literary tale with exquisitely weaved layers of text, subtext, and intertext.

How precisely does the therapeutic device operate? Berlyne spoke of the idea that the incongruity of metaphor induces arousal, which the hearer seeks to reduce by means of a conceptual resolution of the disparate elements. Now, of course, in the case of David within the story, it is entirely possible that no such arousal and reduction are stimulated because David hears this parable not as metaphor but as an actual real life case. Nonetheless, the conscious processing of the parable alone is insufficient to have produced the overwrought response of David – "the man is deserving of death!" The real life situation, as in the Bedouin law and custom described above, does not call for the severity of a death penalty. Therefore, the text has heavily implied that David is reacting to another level of processing of the story and has imposed that level of extreme indignation on the "real life" case before him. Thus, the likelihood increases that the narrator has portrayed David as activated by unconscious associations that perform their inner workings in much the same way as described by the metaphor theorists.

Finally, the inter-textual associations involving the poor man (*rash*), the rich man (*h.m.l.*), and the third party (*heilekh*, *va-yelekh halokh*) function most effectively on the literary level when one assumes an awareness of the psychological level of an unconscious. In short, if our view of the literary agenda of chapters 11 and 12 as described above is convincing, the text contains powerful and complex psychological insight. This should, in turn, lead to a reexamination of other biblical stories for similar levels of sophistication.

An Afterword: The Victim as Victimizer

The awareness and concern on the part of the Bible that the victim may, indeed, ironically turn into a victimizer, are not new to scriptural narratives. In the Joseph stories of Genesis, the half-brother who is cast into a pit and sold into slavery will penultimately cast his own half- brother into the Egyptian prison (also referred to as a pit) and will threaten to turn his brothers into slaves.

One might also offer a slightly nuanced interpretation for the oft repeated verse in the Torah that cautions the Israelites against mistreatment of the stranger,[26] regularly with the added phrase, "because you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Instead of seeing the relationship between the commandment and the causality as simply stating the ostensible reason for empathy, one might interpret the phrase as cautioning against the tendency to victimize others in much the same way one has been victimized in the past. This interpretation is somewhat bolstered by the sequence of abuses reported in the second chapter of Exodus, wherein Moses intercedes twice on behalf of a victim. In the first instance, (verses 11-12) the abuser is an Egyptian master. In the second, (verse 13), the abuser of the Israelite is a fellow Israelite, who has apparently taken on the modus operandi of his own tormenters.

The idea that identity as victim offers a kind of immunity from guilt for the potential victimizer is also borne out by contemporary political reality. Years ago, I participated in a dialogue between Israeli Jewish and Palestinian educators that met bi-weekly for a year. At one point, I was astonished to discover that, even while talking of the phenomenon of the "*Shahid*" – the "holy martyrs" – ironically describing those who perpetrate suicide (more accurately 'homicide') bombings, my Arab partners in dialogue were seemingly unaware of the young Jewish victims who had been killed. When they asked me if I was referring to Israeli soldiers, and I replied that the victims I knew personally were teenage girls eating pizza and shopping in the *shuk*, they looked genuinely perplexed. Their identity as victims did not allow for an obvious but dissonant additional identification as victimizing others. Identity as victim, it would seem, is also an all-encompassing immunity card for all real and potential guilt – thus proving invaluable in external polemics, but even more so in internal discomfort reduction.

Without drawing equivalence, there are certainly Israelis for whom the conflict is so clearly drawn between righteous victims and egregious

[26] E.g. Ex. 22:20, 23:9, Lev. 19:33-34, Deut. 10:19, 23:8.

aggressors (the enduring and powerful strength of Jewish victimhood goes back far prior to the Holocaust and continues through several Israeli wars of self-defense) that some cannot see the possible existence of victims on the other side of this supposedly simple equation.[27]

In reality, the exigencies of life and the complexities of the human soul create paradoxical actualities, in which both parties are potentially both victims and victimizers, sometimes even simultaneously. Fortunately, for readers of the Bible, this complexity is implicit and at times nearly explicit in the richness of text, context, subtext, and intertext.

[27] This article was submitted for publication well before the recent missile attacks on Israel from Gaza and the IDF's Operation Pillar of Defense. These closing comments were not intended, in any case, to express any political opinion. Rather, they speak to the very human but oversimplified and mistaken tendency to see identities of victimhood and victimization as mutually exclusive categories.