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Over Shabbos

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VAYELEKH

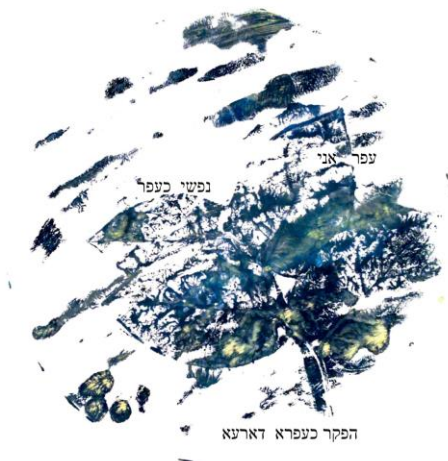
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EPILOGUE

TIKVA HECHT is a member of the content team at Aleph Beta.

Tikva Hecht's moving elegy for her mother, a lyric essay told in verse and art, reflects on the fragility of life and the final confession we recite in the Yom Kippur Amidah.

EPILOGUE



I am dust
my soul like dust
ownerless like the dust of the earth



And all my love for you becomes the earth
returned to itself on the back of a shovel.

Earth falls from the back of this shovel
the first and the last of it dust in the air.

Below is a body that once was my mother.

Fooled me good, this body did. Once
it possessed you, my mother.

עפר אני

I am dust. From the Yom Kippur prayers.
After a long, detailed confession, a final confession.

נפשי כעפר

My soul like dust. From the daily prayers.
After every request, a final request.

הפקר כעפרא דארעא

Ownerless like the dust of the earth. From the nullification of heaven.
After the last crumbs are gone, a final giving away.



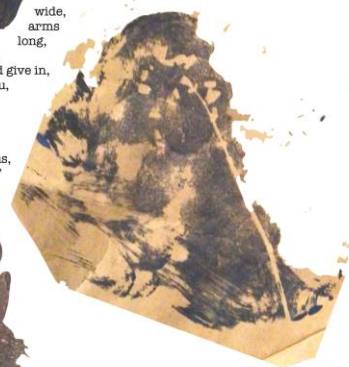
One day
you
turned
this body
to the
wind.

Eyes
wide,
arms
long,

fingers long, wide, alert—
if that day the wind would give in,
if that day it would lift you,
you would be ready.

Listen: you inhale.

"Delicious,
isn't it?"





Ownerless like
the dust of the
earth. From the
nullification of heaven.
After the last crumbs
are gone, a final giving
away. But what does it
change other than an
expectation? And isn't it funny

that the dust is what can never be
owned when it is the dark, deep
earth that we do claim to own, over
and over again? The earth, yes; what it is made of, no. It slips away just where you touch it. And
if you touch and touch and touch? Watch it carry its evasion down to the core. And if you do not
touch? It is right there. Take it. It is yours. I think sometimes there is too much resemblance
between one thing and all things, between permanence and nothingness, between dust as dead
skin and luminous, dancing dust. How will we know what is ours? Don't worry, the body says –
a gift of its stubbornness, of its solitude. Here, it says, you part ways.
Only the dust blows between us.

I am dust. From the Yom Kippur prayers.
After a long, detailed confession a final
confession. As if to ask, why did you
expect so much? In the end,
it isn't that we sinned. It isn't
that. It's that even our sins
are delicate, fray in the
wind exactly like our
kindnesses, and
God knows – this is
where we part ways.

My soul like dust.
From the daily
prayers. After every
request, a final
request. A soul like
dust to all who
curse it. Weightless
as dust, to make a
quick escape? Simple as
dust, so nothing can be
taken from it? Elusive as
dust, so no curse could
specify it? Indifferent as dust
is indifferent? Indifference as a
form of the ethereal? Either way, here
it is an aspiration.

One day you turn into a candle.

And all my love for you
becomes the earth
returned to itself
on the back
of a shovel.

Earth falls from the back of this shovel
the first and the last of it hang in the air.

Below is a body that once was my mother.

Pooled me good, this body did. Once
it possessed you, my mother.

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TESHUVAH, FROM THE (DIS)COMFORT OF YOUR OWN HOME

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Haven't you also thought, even for a moment, that it's time to run away from home? Sure—six months into the covid-19 pandemic, the living room sofa is feeling comfortable (by now it bears an indent in the shape of your back), making fresh lunch is better than packing it in the morning, and you've really gotten to know your quarantine buddies. But the restlessness is starting to set in, or maybe it's been gnawing at you since April—no more lockdown, or shutdown, or hunkering down, or all the feeling down that comes with feeling cooped up. Just to get out, to leave everything behind and breathe in some fresh air in a faraway place, to be somewhere that isn't here—you're starting to feel a deep, existential need for a vacation.

I have never been to Uman, and any responsible epidemiologist would have told you that going this year would pose a major public health threat. But as the policy conversations between Israel and Ukraine unfurled, I found myself pausing to consider what it would mean, for all of us, to escape our living rooms for just a few days on a penitential escapade, to break free of the monotony to which we're rapidly growing accustomed and to rediscover ourselves somewhere else.

This is because *teshuvah* is an essentially spatial experience, figuratively and literally. Repentance means to change, to bring oneself to a different 'place,' and that process, Maimonides teaches, is facilitated by physically journeying away from home, an embodied experience of change that allows our souls to follow suit. Consider how you think more clearly, more reflectively, on a long flight or train ride, or when you're hiking through the mountains or strolling through the woods. By fleeing 'elsewhere,' a practice R. Nachman of Breslov calls *hitbodedut* ("seclusion"), we can break free from our lives and ourselves in order to gain a fresh perspective and start anew.

In this respect, Uman—like the airplane seat or hiking trail—is what Michel Foucault would call a 'heterotopia': a real place whose very function is to stand, so to speak, 'outside of the world,'—a place standing in contrast to, and in conflict with, all the real places that fill the rest of our lives. A place designed for escaping, for fleeing, for taking refuge from what real life holds in store back at home. Heterotopias, Foucault claims, are the places away from home where we go in moments of crisis, when we feel that

the world cannot handle us—nor can we handle the world—leaving us with no choice but to step outside of the world, regain our footing, and start over again.

But we're at home this year. There is no traveling for the holidays—maybe not even synagogue services; no contemplative train or plane rides, and no visits to Rebbes or other sacred spaces. As we face the crisis of *teshuvah* this year, when we are most in need of escape—of heterotopias—we are stuck within the confines of our own homes. How, then, will we repent this year? If we cannot run away, what will our *teshuvah* be?

To this end, I believe we can find inspiration in the teachings of Sefat Emet (R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, 1847-1905), who offers—in contrast to R. Nachman's *hitbodedut*—penitential models better suited for at-home repentance. What follows is three *torot*, each suggesting that *teshuvah* is not about running away from home or one's self; rather, it has some alternate relationship with self and with home. Each of these *torot* stands independently, and Sefat Emet did not clarify if and how they relate to one another. Yet they all seem to draw on the same motif, *teshuvah* from the vantage point of home, even as each points in an alternative spiritual direction. Perhaps for this year's at-home *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), the wisdom of Sefat Emet can guide us to new kinds of *teshuvah* that resonate with our shared homebound experience.

Cleaning Up the House

The laws of the appointment of judges (Deut. 16:18-20) follow the laws of the festivals (Deut. 16:1-17), for the judges represent Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur following the three festivals. [This is because] the locus of the festivals is the Temple, while Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are focused upon 'all your gates' [i.e. the localities where judges are appointed]. (Sefat Emet, Shoftim, 5654)

Religious pilgrimage, though hardly practiced among Jews today (save, perhaps, by those who journey annually to Uman), is familiar to the Torah. Three times a year, we are commanded to ascend to Jerusalem and appear before God in the divine abode: the Temple. What's striking though is that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, among the holiest days on the calendar and just days before the start of Sukkot, there is no pilgrimage obligation. Were the Temple to be standing today, no one would be expected to show up in Jerusalem in time for Rosh Hashanah. True, this could be practical; it would be taxing to make the trek three times in a month or to stay in Jerusalem for all of Tishrei. But Sefat Emet seems to think that staying home for the penitential season is associated with the geography of the judicial

system. The Torah demands that each city and town have its own court to deal with local issues that arise. Justice, which Sefat Emet goes on to identify as both the settling of interpersonal squabbles and personal reflection regarding one's deeds, needs to happen at home. If what needs to be fixed or resolved arose between you and me, then the work of resolution needs to happen here, right where the problem lies.

Teshuvah is an act of introspection, an honest accounting of our lives, including all of our faults and failures. Penitence isn't about looking up to the heavens or down into the *mahzor*, but straight into the mirror. The family that needs my love, the community institutions waiting for my support, the dry cleaner whom I forgot to pay, the *mishnayot* I never learned—all of that is right here, at home. Maimonides (borrowing from the statement of R. Yehuda in Yoma 86b), in his formulation of what it means to be a penitent, does not allow us to suffice with trying better next time in a similar situation. *Teshuvah*, or what Maimonides calls “real *teshuvah*,” means confronting the same person, at the same time, in just the same place you were before. Still echoing in that very place is the memory of the mistake you made last time, and fixing it here means not only engaging in change but also confronting the past in order to move forward. And this year, there's no better place to look for error than the house where you've spent the past six months living through this new normal.

Mishnah Berurah (603:2), citing R. Yonatan Eybeschutz, teaches that on each of the seven intermediate days of the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (excluding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), one should reflect upon and repent for the sins committed on that day of the week. This makes sense, because who I am on a lazy Sunday differs from the me of a hectic Monday, a stressful Wednesday, or a dragged out Shabbat afternoon, and each calls for its own introspection. Maybe this year, having spent so much time within the same four walls, the same can be done with each room within our homes. Is the couch the place where I doomscroll through nonsense on my phone, or is it where I spend quality time with the people I live with? Does my kitchen reflect my values, my appetite, my budget, or some healthy combination? Is my bedroom a space to re-energize for a new day or where I arrive too late into the night (and from which I depart too late in the morning)? Have I given my roommates enough personal space, or too much? This penitential season, appoint yourself as the judge of the hyper-local court of your home, and stand as the first defendant. Take a good look at your home and ask whether the life that happens within it is the one you want to live this coming year, or whether it's time to chart the course of a better one.

Even Home Isn't Home

Regarding the verse “the boy is gone; where shall I go?”—it is stated [in the Midrash] that Reuven was [thereby] the first to repent. For this is the ultimate repentance, in discovering that, due to sin, one has no place or existence in the world. (Sefat Emet, Vayeshev, 5664)

Breaking ranks with his brothers, Reuven attempts to save his brother Joseph, but for one reason or another he arrives at the scene too late. The Midrash, through a wordplay on the word *vayashav*, claims that Reuven did not merely return to the scene; in doing so, he had actually performed *teshuvah*, though what exactly he did to repent is unstated in the biblical text. Sefat Emet, however, finds Reuven's penitence in his peculiar response to discovering his younger brother's absence: “The boy is gone; where shall I go?” (Genesis 37:30). The text leaves no indication of why he was left confused regarding his next destination. But Sefat Emet sees in the power of these words a deep act of *teshuvah* in the wake of Joseph's disappearance. The foundation of *teshuvah*, he claims, is the honest declaration that you have nowhere to go. It's the realization that the places we call home and the people we call friends and the way of life we call familiar are all fragile, transient, temporary. In the midst of strife and chaos, we reach out for a foothold or stepping stone, but there is none. Life—mine and yours and everyone's and everything in it—no matter how stable it may seem, is always up in the air.

When the pandemic broke out, so many people made their way home, seeking out places of refuge and security to wait out the storm. Cabin sickness notwithstanding, nothing beats the reassuring sense of coming home, feeling the stark contrast between the threatening outside and a welcoming within. But as those who have experienced eviction, homelessness, and house fires all know in their respective ways, even home can let us down. The same goes for those who thought over these months that home would be a place of security, only to find physical and emotional impediments to safety and wellbeing there too. And even for those still enjoying this six-month staycation, the existential meaning of vulnerability, of the real possibility that our homes and lives are here today and gone tomorrow, awaits internalization. Vulnerability inspires us to keep both the gifts and misfortunes of our lives in perspective and also to keep the lives of others—whose differences from our own lives are so drastically outweighed by their similarities in plight and fate—closer to our hearts.

That is *teshuvah*: not just technical fixes to local problems but a rude awakening to the world as it really is—a humbling before the God whose awesome glory fills the world in

which we hardly deserve a place at all. If we can embrace that our lives are indeed ‘like a puff of dust and a fleeting dream,’ if we can ask God—not R. Nachman’s iconic ‘where are You’ but Sefat Emet’s ‘where shall I go’—then God will be the one to create a special ‘place’ just for us, the itinerant penitents, beyond the world we know. Sefat Emet notes that it is not by chance that the tribe of Reuven was the first to house an *ir miklat*, a city of refuge for wrongdoers, in its territory. The *ir miklat* embodies Reuven’s understanding of *teshuvah*—the realization, in the wake of sin, that we have lost our place in the world. And only once we accept how transient our life on earth really is, how no place can ever really be home, then God reassures us: ‘And I shall make for you a place for you to flee there’ (Exodus 21:13).

Coming Home

The essence of repentance does not [address] any individual sin; rather, one must return to, and reconnect with, one’s [spiritual] root. (Sefat Emet, Nitzavim, 5650)

Returning home, or even just spending a lot more time there, has offered an opportunity to reconnect with family, with ourselves, and with the four walls within which the basic elements of our lives take place. Covid has brought a return to thoughtful cooking and collective eating, a reevaluation of whether we really need the clutter hiding in our closets, and a wardrobe makeover from what we think others expect us to wear to what feels right today. Not everyone has found this extended at-home sleepover comfortable or even manageable, and for others it has produced lethargy, take-out orders, and binge TV-watching. But I think many of us have discovered within it a return to square one, a chance to feel out what it’s like to live by ourselves and as ourselves.

If we listen closely, at the core of this experience of returning home is the challenging yet enriching question: Who am I really? What kind of person am I, especially when there’s no one watching, save for, perhaps, the people I’m closest to? The personality you wear in the comfort of your home, and the gap between it and the one you let others see—that’s what needs a check-in and tuning at this time of year. Ask yourself: When cutting costs during the pandemic, did the budget cuts come out of what makes you comfortable, or from what you spend on supporting others in need? Who are the people who have made an effort to keep in touch with or support you, and how have you reciprocated? Without community life keeping you going, have your prayers, Torah study, and Shabbat observance dwindled to the bare minimum or taken on new layers of personal flavor? How have you filled the long pockets of quiet time that the lack of commuting and ‘kiddushing’ has opened up in your schedule?

Sefat Emet teaches that this return to our home, to our roots and our rootedness, is the very essence of *teshuvah*: to strip ourselves of the layers and facades we wear in the world, to once again meet our best and truest selves and figure out how to let that person shine through year round. This is the *teshuvah* of authenticity, the *teshuvah* of journeying—not from home, but back home—a trek whose destination is clear yet whose starting point and direction await determination. Standing in stark opposition to penitential escapism, Sefat Emet teaches that home is what *teshuvah* is all about. Were Sefat Emet to join you in quarantine this Yom Kippur, perhaps he would ask: Do you feel at home with your family, your life, yourself, your God? And do you think God feels at home with you?

Conclusion: Finding Your Way Home

I conclude with three pathways of repentance: examine your home, accept the transience of home, or trace your steps back home to your truest self. Three modalities of penitence that share at their core a home-focused approach to *teshuvah*, allowing us to turn our shared Covid predicament into a spiritual opportunity. Whichever path you take, may the journey homeward strengthen and empower you for the days and months ahead. Let the time you spend at home—this week, over Yom Kippur, and over the long road ahead toward the end of Covid—be an opportunity for reflection, growth, and change. And may it be said of the home where you’re reading these words, as Sefat Emet would repeatedly remind his students, that ‘in the place where true penitents reside, even the most righteous of people have no right to stand’ (Berakhot 34b).

ANONYMOUS LEADERSHIP: THE EMOTIONAL DRAMA IN ISHAY RIBO'S SEDER HA-AVODAH

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Ishay Ribo has had a record-breaking year.¹ The French-Israeli singer, who has become popular with both secular and religious Israelis, released a version of Amir Benayoun's *Nitzah Itti ha-Kol* earlier this summer, garnering over a million views on YouTube in the first week it was posted and 4.5 million as of this writing. Then, in September, his rendition of the Yom Kippur Temple service, *Seder ha-Avodah*, "the order of the service," was released to instant acclaim, in part for blurring the lines between secular and religious. It, too, was viewed more than a million times in short order.

One of the major tensions in *Seder ha-Avodah* comes to the musical fore in the penultimate movement of the song, as it moves to an intensification as it nears the climax. After the High Priest has been accompanied to his home and thrown a party for his friends and family, two parallel musical celebrations follow. The choral voices sing:

Fortunate the people who have it thus /	אשרי העם שככה לו!
Fortunate the people whose God is the Lord!	אשרי העם שה' אלהיו!

The communal focus, then, is on the people. Ribo's own solo voice, however, praises the solo High Priest. This focus on the priest's appearance at the end of the day draws on the prayer *Mar'eh Kohen*, which itself has its roots in the Second Temple period (Ben Sira 50). Here there is no attention paid to the people or the results of the day, but on the individual at the center of it all:

As the canopy of the heavens stretched out on high /	כאהל הנמתח בדרי מעלה מראה כהן
was the appearance of the Priest.	כברקים היוצאים מזיו החיות מראה כהן

As the flashes emanating from the shine of the <i>Hayyot</i> /	כדמות הקשת בתוך הענן מראה כהן
was the appearance of the Priest.	כחסד הניתן על פני חתן מראה כהן

As the figure of the bow in the
clouds /
was the appearance of
the High Priest.

As the grace reflected in the face
of a groom /
was the appearance of
the High Priest.

The simultaneous voices, one drawing our attention to the nation and the other to the High Priest, compete for our attention. In fact, this tension lies at the heart of the Yom Kippur service, brilliantly dramatized and brought to life in Ribo's piece.

The song is a poignant and powerful reflection on leadership, individuality, and the emotional experience of Yom Kippur. It asks us to ponder the role of the leader vis-a-vis the community and the relationship between the actions in front of our eyes and the internal dramas playing out within our hearts and minds. Although the focus of the entire song is the High Priest, he is never actually introduced: the listeners are thrown into the story, expected to recognize the character. We know immediately who he is, and we know that we have just opened a window onto the powerful ritual of Yom Kippur. We know this partly because much of the song – some details, some key words and phrases, and even the rhythms – derives from classical descriptions of the service on Yom Kippur, in the Mishnah and especially in the long, detailed poems recited in *Musaf* of the day (Askenazic and Sephardic). Of course, we were primed for this by the song's title, a phrase that in rabbinic literature refers to the sacrificial service of Yom Kippur. Ribo assumes that his audience will find its bearing immediately as the song begins with a staccato description of the priest's opening moves:

He entered the place he entered, and stood in the place where he stood /	נכנס למקום שנכנס ועמד במקום שעמד
--	-------------------------------------

He washed his hands and legs, immersed, emerged, and dried off.	רחץ ידיו רגליו טבל עלה ונסתפג
---	----------------------------------

The next line sounds like more of the same, but actually takes an existential turn:

He came from the place whence he came /	בא ממקום שהוא בא והלך למקום שהלך
--	-------------------------------------

And he went to the place
thence he went.

This line is not found in any earlier source, and is Ribo's way of focusing our attention on an aspect of the ritual not usually fronted. Who is this High Priest? How did he come to occupy our attention on this holiest day? Was it through personal merit? Did he inherit? Is he tolerant? Is he a zealot? For the purposes of the song, it matters little. He has come from wherever he has come; he will go wherever he will go. For now, he is the one who is, and he is the one who matters.

The audience – about whom we will hear in a moment – is silent, waiting, watching, as the priest transitions from just a figure arriving anonymously to the star of the show: he removes his street clothes, and puts on the white garments of the priest. And the show begins. The service that will ensue has the feel of performance art. It begins with confession, a formula essentially taken from the Mishnah, a plea for forgiveness: "Please, God, forgive the sins, iniquities, and misdeeds that I have committed before You, I and the whole house of Israel."

In the Mishnaic script, this confession is recited at the time of a sacrifice. But there are no sacrifices in Ribo's song, no flesh and no blood. Instead, much more attention is paid to the human experience. In the Mishnah, the high priest takes the blood and sprinkles it on the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple, famously counting as he does: "One, one [up] and one [down], one [up] and two [down]," and so on, until "one [up] and seven [down]." The counting is here in the song, but it is not of drops of blood being counted:

If a person were able to remember /	ואם אדם היה יכול לזכור את הפגמים את החסרונות את כל הפשעים את כל העוונות
The flaws, the imperfections, the sins /	בטח כך היה מונה: אחת, אחת ואחת, אחת ושתיים, אחת ושלוש, אחת וארבע, אחת וחמש
Surely he would count this way: One, one and one, one and two, one and three, one and four, one and five...	
He would quickly give up / Unable to bear the flavor of the bitterness of sin / Of chances missed, of loss	ישר היה מתייאש כי לא יכול היה לשאת את טעם מרירות החטא, את הבושה, את הפספוס, את ההפסד

Although it sounds like we have moved away from the Temple, away from the High Priest, we suspect we are meant to imagine the High Priest himself thinking this. What was he thinking as he sprinkled? Perhaps just this: I stand here, alone, representing the people. But who am I to represent the people? I have my own flaws, my own skeletons, my own lapses and regrets. One, one and one, one and two...

He, and we, are brought back out of his thoughts, and to the performance, by the response of the people. As the Mishnah describes, when they hear the name of God, they lay prostrate in the courtyard, and proclaim in unison: "Blessed is the name of the glory of his kingship, forever and ever."

The musical transition takes a cinematic turn with a brief dramatic interlude before the next section of lyrics. We feel the drama, the power of the proclamation issuing from the crowd. The High Priest is alone on stage, but he is far from alone; the throngs are hanging on his every word. Is he a leader? He hopes for no followers. He has shouldered the burden entirely on his own, taken the sins and the hopes of the entire community with him. And as he counts, is he counting only his own? Is that infinitely long list to be multiplied again and again, as he looks at the faces around him? It is hard to see the individuals in the crowd, but as his gaze lingers on one face, and then another, as these strangers come into focus, he is crushed by the expectations laid upon him. "Blessed be the Name."

When the High Priest emerges again, he has changed from a priest into *the* priest, changing from the priestly white garments to the golden garments worn only by the High Priest. Then again, a confession. And again, counting. But this time:

If a person were able to remember /	ואם אדם היה יכול לזכור את החסדים את הטובות את כל הרחמים את כל הישועות,
The kindnesses and goodnesses, all the mercies and all the redemptions	
Surely he would count this way: one, one and one, one and two, one and three	בטח כך היה מונה: אחת, אחת ואחת, אחת ושתיים, אחת ושלוש
One of a thousand, many tens of thousands, wonders and miracles, which You have done for us, day and night.	אחת מאלף ורב רבי רבבות נסים ונפלאות שעשית עמנו ימים ולילות

If the first time, he was crushed by the sins he could not enumerate, his own and those of everyone around him, this

time he is uplifted by the thought of the innumerable kindnesses bestowed by God. Again, his thoughts run along, counting one, one and one, one and two – and the magnitude of the count overwhelms, filling him with thoughts of good fortune and covenantal kindness.

The music at this point pauses, and then again soars. The arrangement captures something profound about the end of Yom Kippur, not often palpable in many congregations: the tension of the day that is released the moment after *Neilah* comes to a crescendo. The High Priest steps out (“he emerged from where he emerged”) and is overcome with the emotion of the moment: “He trembled in the place where he stood.” For those standing in terror of the closing gates, in anxiety over the fate of the High Priest and his rituals, the end of the day brings a wave of relief. Those of us fortunate enough to have spent a Yom Kippur in the presence of Jews profoundly terrified by the day, quaking at the gates’ closing, may have experienced, or at least seen, this release, the profound joy as the day ends and the new year, hopefully now sealed for life, gets underway. The moment of relief explodes into joyous song.

It is at this point that our attention is divided between the priest, described in near angelic terms, and the people, “fortunate” that thus is their lot. The High Priest plays a stirring role in the drama, but his own identity is beside the point. On the other hand, he provides a model of leadership starkly different than the one in vogue today. Rather than facilitating the development of his flock, he takes all the work upon himself. Bearing their sins, their hopes, their anxiety, and their dreams for the future, he performs alone, under the watchful eyes of the entire nation. This sense of individualism clashes with the anonymity of the priest, “who came from wherever he came, and who went to wherever he went.”

In our world, filled with conflicts – individual vs. communal, secular vs. religious, public vs. private – the lonely figure of Ribo’s anonymous High Priest draws us in. He captivates our imagination and prompts us to think about ourselves in his place. We all know the feeling of being the actor on the stage, with the expectations of others on our shoulders. But inside our heads – that is entirely our space. Yom Kippur may be that experience, as we stand waiting, alone, counting, trying to find ourselves in the infinite world that surrounds us.

THE KING’S GREAT COVER-UP AND GREAT CONFESSION

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If there is a foundational idea for the high holiday season, it is surely the redemptive power of *viduy* or public confession. And if there is anyone in Jewish history who exemplifies this redemptive power, and how it may redress our pernicious tendency to cover up sins rather than confess them, it is King David.

Consider first the cover-up. Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508) lists five “aspects” to David’s sinning in chapter 11 of II Samuel, consisting of an ‘original sin’ and those elicited by the ensuing cover-up:

- a. He had sexual relations with Bathsheba, a woman who was married to his stalwart officer Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11:2-4).
- b. After learning from Bathsheba she was pregnant, he tried to distort the ancestry of the child by luring Uriah into having a conjugal visit with Bathsheba (11:5-13).
- c. After failing in this first plan, he committed manslaughter by issuing orders to his general Joab that put Uriah’s life (and those of others) at unnecessary risk (11:14-25).
- d. David thereby caused Uriah—and others who fell that day—to suffer an undignified death.
- e. David took Bathsheba as a wife immediately after the mourning period, thus violating the Halacha mandating a three-month waiting period to clarify paternity (11:27).

Where is there a more dramatic illustration of how a cover-up tends to exacerbate a crime?

Yet if David’s response to sin is a paradigmatic cover-up, his response when confronted by his sin seems to be a paradigm for the redemptive power of confession. Unlike Saul who reacted to the prophet Samuel’s rebuke by blaming his failure on others (I Samuel 15:20-21),² David accepts full blame when he is confronted by the prophet Nathan. As recorded in II Samuel, David offers only a simple two-word response: “I have sinned to God” (12:13). And if this version of David’s confession is perfect in its simplicity, the version in Psalm 51 (“a psalm of David, when Nathan the

Prophet came to him after he had come to Bathsheba” (51:1-2)) is perfect in its eloquence. In this moving prayer for “compassion and mercy” (51:3), David deploys the word *het* or “sin” seven times to refer to his actions, establishing it as a “guide word” for the poem. He also uses two synonyms for sin— *peshah* and *avon*—three times each, with the thirteen total references to sin likely alluding to the thirteen attributes of God’s mercy (Exodus 34:6-7).³

Strikingly, this confession seems effective. To be sure, David and Bathsheba’s newborn son is soon struck dead by a divine plague, and David’s family and monarchy suffer from unending turmoil and scandal in the ensuing years in accordance with Nathan’s curses (see 12:10-11). But David’s death sentence is commuted, and he and Bathsheba merit the birth of a second son, Solomon, who is beloved by God (12:24) and ultimately inherits the throne.

Yet to note that David’s confession had redemptive power is not to explain this power: Given the magnitude of David’s sins, could the mere uttering of words and prayers of repentance truly be sufficient to mitigate them?

One approach is to point to various technical legal considerations that mitigate David’s sins. An extreme position is reflected in the famous admonition of R. Shmuel Ben Nahmani in the name of R. Yonatan (*Shabbat* 56a): “Anyone who says that David sinned is but mistaken.”⁴

But such apologetics seem strained; and accordingly, this is hardly the consensus view.⁵ Certainly Nathan the Prophet was unimpressed by any exculpatory points in David’s favor. As R. Yaakov Medan notes, Nathan’s rebuke is consistent with the general approach of “the prophets [of Israel who] were unimpressed with formal excuses for moral transgressions based on technical-legal considerations; and in their words of rebuke, the prophets ignored such considerations as if they were naught.”⁶

Thus let us follow Abarbanel in not “countermanding the simple truth” by “tolerating a lessening of David’s sin.”⁷ At the same time, let us consider the possibility that we have yet to fully grasp the nature of David’s sin, and of the significance of his cover-up and confession.

Quite strikingly, the analysis in the next section indicates that the biblical text is hinting loudly that David’s sin has an important dimension below the surface. Furthermore, we will see that an appreciation for this dimension can resolve

several outstanding puzzles in the story of David and Bathsheba. And we will also see that it carries three important lessons regarding the perniciousness of cover-up and the redemptive power of confession.

The *Yibbum*-Theme in David’s Sin

The heart of the suggested approach is an analysis of the many textual and thematic links between the story of David-Bathsheba in chapters 11-12 of II Samuel and the story of Judah and Tamar in chapter 38 of Genesis.

To recall, the story of Judah and Tamar culminates in the birth of Peretz, who was the ancestor of David’s forebear Boaz (Ruth 4:18-22). At the heart of the story is a struggle by Tamar to ensure that a man from Judah’s family perform *yibbum* or levirate marriage, the ancient rite (found also in other ancient/patriarchal cultures) by which a brother of a man who dies without children marries the childless widow and dedicates their child to his dead brother’s legacy. Judah’s second son Onan ostensibly accepts his responsibility as levir for his deceased brother Er, whom God had killed because he was evil (Genesis 38:7). But God kills Onan as well as punishment for refusing to “give seed to his brother (38:9)” by consummating the marriage. Then, with two sons mysteriously dying while married to Tamar, Judah delays having his third son Shelah be the levir. Tamar’s patience eventually wears thin and she takes initiative by seducing Judah in the guise of a (veiled) roadside prostitute. In this way, she induces him to perform the role of levir and *inter alia* to recognize his error.

At first glance, this story would seem to have little to do with the story of David and Bathsheba. But a review of the many links between the stories strongly suggests that we take a closer look:⁸

- a) Each story begins with a leader abandoning his brothers (see Genesis 38:1) or comrades (II Samuel 11:1).
- b) An announcement of an illicit pregnancy is pivotal to each story, with parallel statements of acknowledgement that appear nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible: *harah anokhi* (II Samuel 11:5) and *anokhi harah* (Genesis 38:25).
- c) In Genesis 38, the protagonist begins the story married to a woman named Bat Shua (38:12), who is Canaanite. In II Samuel 11, the protagonist ends the story married to a woman named Bat Sheva

- (Bathsheba) (referred to as Bat Shua by I Chronicles 3:5) who was married to a Hittite.
- d) The male protagonist's lust is elicited by a woman who is dressed in an unconventional or provocative manner—uncovered in the case of Bathsheba and covered in the case of Tamar.
 - e) This woman is observed in a scene associated with water (bathing in the case of Bathsheba, at springs in the case of Tamar).⁹
 - f) In both stories, the woman is ironically referred to with the root for holy, *kadosh*, precisely to refer to preparations for the illicit relationship. In Tamar's case, it is the word for cult prostitute (*kedeishah*; Genesis 38: 21-22). In Bathsheba's case, it refers to her immersing herself after menstruating (*ve-hi mitkadeshet mi-tumata* ; II Samuel 11:4).
 - g) There is unusually extensive use of agents throughout each story, perhaps suggesting that each story is in part about how a leader goes astray when he has others do his 'dirty work'. In particular, there are five instances of *shalah* ("send") in Genesis 38, and 15 instances in II Samuel 11-12), with the heaviest use pertaining to the procurement of the woman for the illicit liaison (David-Bathsheba) or to paying her (Judah-Tamar).
 - h) In both stories, the cessation of mourning is prelude to sex. This happens twice for Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:27 and II Samuel 12:24), and once each for Judah (Genesis 38:12) and Tamar (38:14). In each case, the word *vayenahem* —"and he comforted" (II Samuel 12:24), or *vayyinnahem* —"and he was comforted" (Genesis 38:12), is the sign of movement from mourning to availability for the sexual encounter that leads to the birth of an heir.
 - i) In both stories, a man (Onan, in Genesis 38; Uriah, in II Samuel 11) refuses the opportunity/mandate to have intercourse with his wife. In both cases, this failure leads to that man's death due to the orders of a king (God, in Genesis 38; David in II Samuel 11).
 - j) Each story involves a theme of *bizayon* or denigration/calumny. In Genesis 38, Judah is reluctant to give Tamar to his third son Shelah as a levir "lest we come to calumny" (*pen niyeh lavuz* ; Genesis 38:23) and Nathan twice uses this terminology in describing David's sin ("*ekev ki bizitani*" "*madua bizita et devar Hashem*"; II Samuel 12:9-10).
 - k) The two stories contain the only two instances in the Hebrew Bible in which there is a transitive verb phrase in which (a) the object is *artzah*, to/towards the ground; (b) the subject is "and he"; and (c) the verb starts with the letter *shin*. In Samuel 12:16, David is described as *vishahav artzah*, and he prostrated himself on the ground. In Genesis 38:9, Onan is described as *vishihet artzah*, and he destroyed (his seed) towards/on the ground.
 - l) In each story, a key turning point is when (a) a judge reacts overly harshly to a case that is brought before him; (b) it turns out that he is the guilty party; and (c) he immediately recognizes his fault.
 - m) Flocks of herd animals—*tzon*—play prominent roles in each story even though they are seemingly extraneous. In II Samuel 12, there are two references to *tzon*, in the parable of the "poor man's ewe" and in Genesis 38, Judah is passing Tamar on the way to sheep-shearing festivities, and a goat from the flocks (*gedi izim min ha-tzon*; 38:17) is offered as payment for sex.
 - n) The root "to give," *latet*, plays key roles in each story.
 - o In I Samuel 12, it is the name of the prophet (Nathan has the unusual meaning of "he gave") who drives the action from sin to repentance. His name appears seven times, testifying to its significance. The root also appears three additional times, in the context of describing God's gift of the kingdom to David and once in describing his punishment.
 - o In Genesis 38, the verb also appears seven times and plays a crucial role in driving the narrative. The first two times, failure to give twice drives the action. Then there are four instances where it is part of fixing the problem via the deposit Judah gives to Tamar. Finally, it is involved in the birth of the dynastic heir.
 - o) Each story concludes with a newborn child becoming the dynastic heir, in the context of an odd naming pattern. In each story, (a) two names are given; (b) the first name is given by a "mix" of man and woman¹⁰; and (c) the second naming is performed by a man alone.¹¹

This long series of thematic and textual allusions make a strong case that the story of Judah and Tamar has

something to teach us about the story of David and Bathsheba. But what precisely?

The key is to ponder what is perhaps the most remarkable link of all. In particular, in both stories the very same unique five word phrase appears, with a slight modification of word order as appropriate to its context:

va-yeira be-einei Hashem asher asah
And what he did was evil in the eyes of the Lord
(Genesis 38:10)

va-yeira ha-davar asher asah David be-einei Hashem
And the thing that David did was evil in the eyes of the Lord (II Samuel 11:27)

This phrase, which appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, is also noteworthy because it is quite rare for God's state of mind to be described, especially His attitude towards a particular person's actions. Moreover, these phrases are the climactic descriptions of sin in each story.

I would now like to suggest that they describe the very same sin. In particular, just as Onan *refused to perpetuate his brother's legacy* by performing levirate marriage, David's taking Bathsheba as his wife and especially his taking their child as his own—the action that immediately precipitates the divine condemnation above—is *tantamount to erasing Uriah's legacy when he could have perpetuated it*.

Consider: the law of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) states that when a man dies, his "brothers" have a mandate to perform levirate marriage lest the dead brother's "name be erased from Israel." Furthermore, we know from the story of Ruth that "brothers" was interpreted liberally as a moral if not a legal mandate for any relative to help the widow carry on the name or legacy of the dead man by essentially giving a son to the dead man. But who was worrying about Uriah's legacy? Certainly not David. By taking Bathsheba as a wife and *treating the child as his own*, he was preventing anyone else from taking up the call to perpetuate Uriah's legacy. In effect, David was refusing to provide "seed" on his "brother's" behalf, just as Onan did.

Seeing David's sin in this manner renders it biographically significant in an especially tragic way. Up until this moment of history, the Davidic line was marked by increasing success

in attending to the status of women who were left vulnerable and bereft by the loss of their husbands. One side of David's family—the Moabite line—was founded in Lot's failure to find husbands for his bereft daughters.¹² The other side of the family—the Judahite/Peretz line—began somewhat more auspiciously: after his initial failures, Judah was prompted by Tamar to step up. And then Ruth and Boaz bring these two lines together in a towering success—they go beyond the letter of the law to build the house of David in exemplary acts of kindness (by Ruth towards Mahlon, and by Boaz towards Ruth). David is the quintessential "*yibbum*-man" and all this signifies. It is thus so very poignant that his great fall is a *yibbum*-themed fall.

Finally, this interpretation is consistent with two puzzling details in the story. First, Nathan does not in fact accuse David of adultery, but only of "taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 12:1-12)." It is not otherwise clear why this is such a major sin; but it looms much larger in the context of David's family history and of contemporary attitudes regarding levirate marriage. Second, David's actions are not deemed "evil in God's eyes" (leading to His sending Nathan to rebuke David) until many months have elapsed from the time of the initial liaison and pregnancy and Uriah's death—not until after the child is born and is described as having been taken by David "as his" (see II Samuel 11:27-12:1). R. Yaakov Medan suggests that it is not until this point that David's descent into sin has reached its nadir, where he is attempting to profit from someone else's misfortune.¹³ I am suggesting that it is not merely that he is taking someone else's wife and child, but that this act is a high crime by the lights of ancient near eastern society, given the institution of levirate marriage and what it signifies.

How Cover-Up Produces Sin

But surely to cast David's sin as a failure to perform *yibbum* is to fall into the trap of minimizing it. Isn't adultery even worse?

Of course it is.

But if we consider why it would not have been wise for Nathan to accuse David of adultery, we arrive at deeper lessons about the significance of the cover-up and the confession.

The most straightforward reason why Nathan did not allege adultery is that he had no evidence for it. While David's messengers would have known that Bathsheba had visited

David (see II Samuel 11:3-4), there is no evidence that this information had spread. Moreover, even if rumors had spread, and even if Nathan had special insight into what had happened (the text does not say that God informed him), he can hardly accuse David of a crime without evidence or testimony. After all, seven months had passed and no one had come forward to supply such evidence against the king. Finally, we cannot assume that Nathan knew that David would confess to his sins. David could have responded to Nathan's rebuke by declaring "fake news!" Nathan surely would have thought this risk would be even greater were he to accuse David of a crime for which he had no evidence. But he *did* have evidence that David had betrayed his family legacy and contemporary norms by stealing Uriah's legacy: it was there for the whole world to see. While David's hidden sins may have been greater than his overt sins, those overt sins were more than sufficiently serious to merit Nathan's rebuke.

This in turn suggests an important lesson about why cover-ups are so pernicious. David was apparently so focused on covering up the sin of adultery, it warped his sense of morality to the point that he *openly engaged in actions that he should have recognized as sinful*.

Indeed, consider David's overt sins (causing Uriah's undignified death and having a child with his wife) from two other angles that should have been obvious to David because of their importance in the Torah: (a) the potential for abuse of authority inherent in monarchy; and (b) the importance that each individual build a household. The former theme begins in Genesis, with a series of episodes that illustrate the great fear that pagan kings would see themselves as above morality to the point that they would kill foreign men and steal their beautiful wives.¹⁴ How could David have been blinded to the astounding fact that he did what Abraham and Isaac feared that Pharaoh and Abimelech would do?! Moreover, David was surely aware of how Deuteronomy counterpoises limits on kingly authority with the protection of the individual and his rights:¹⁵ the general worry is that the king's "heart will become haughty over his brothers" (Deuteronomy 17:20) and come to dominate them in various ways. And a specific worry is the nightmare scenario of a man dying (in war, presumably initiated by kings) before he has an opportunity to consummate his marriage and build a household, thereby allowing another man to take his place.¹⁶ This nightmare is precisely what the institution of *yibbum* is meant to address: the protection of the legacy of each "brother" of Israel. *And*

tragically, this nightmare is precisely Uriah's fate, and the man responsible is the king of Israel in a quintessential act of haughtiness. What is more haughty than the conceit that one can hide one's sins from God (cf. Genesis 3:8)?

The Power of Confession

Attention to the *yibbum*-theme in the story of David and Bathsheba not only helps us appreciate how covering up for sin induces moral blindness, it also sheds light on the redemptive power of confession.

To see this, first consider one of the great mysteries of this story: David's enigmatic pattern of behavior in response to his and Bathsheba's first son's illness and death (II Samuel 12:16-23). During the illness itself, David is beside himself, giving himself over completely to intense fasting, prostrating, and praying on behalf of the child. The court elders try to get him up from the ground—behavior unbefitting a king!—but to no avail. Indeed, his attachment to the child is so extreme that his servants are afraid to tell him that the child has passed; David must figure it out from their whispering about it. But then he surprises them again by immediately getting up, washing himself, getting dressed, going to the "house of God" and bowing, and then sitting down for a meal. Asked for an explanation, he offers only that while the child was alive, "who knows," maybe God would save the child; but that once the child is dead, he can't bring him back (II Samuel 12:22). This pattern of behavior is puzzling to say the least, and various commentators and exegetes struggle to make sense of it.

But let us consider this pattern in the context of a community that would have had lingering questions about the paternity of this boy. Note first: if it was not common knowledge that the child was David's biological child, David's dramatic devotion to the child would have clinched it. *Who but a true father would pray for a child in this way?* So his actions at this stage were tantamount to declaring to the world that he was the child's biological father.

And now consider what is signaled by his decision not to mourn the child. Indeed, and quite strikingly, not only does he not mourn the child, but the text tells us that "he comforted Bathsheba" (II Samuel 12:24) even though the child was his too! This pattern of action is also tantamount to a declaration—i.e., that *he is not the child's rightful father*. David seems to be declaring that in a moral sense and perhaps a legal sense, he has stolen Uriah's child. He is

proclaiming that he had wronged Uriah, the stalwart warrior.¹⁷

Thus David's confession does not end with his explicit declarations of having sinned to God. He seems to transcend mere admission of sin by taking action to address it: if his sin was the erasure of Uriah's legacy, anything he might do to remind the public that Uriah was a great officer who was wronged by the king would *promote Uriah's legacy*. Any such confession would be hard for David to do—David's reputation must necessarily fall as Uriah's rises—but necessary if the sin is to be addressed.

This form of confession may have taken an even subtler and more powerful form. In particular, let us now consider what is perhaps the greatest puzzle pertaining to the story of David and Bathsheba: *how and why would a king (David) allow a scribe (Nathan) to publish chapter 11 of II Samuel, where Uriah emerges as a dedicated warrior and David comes across as a scoundrel?* In the first instance, we should assume that as in other ancient near eastern cultures, scribes worked for the king and were meant to write accounts that made the king look good. They hardly could be expected to write highly negative accounts of their masters, especially concerning actions that occurred completely in private! Moreover, while it is perhaps not unreasonable to expect a scribe to write negative accounts of historical kings, this does not apply when such kings were part of the same (Davidic) dynasty.¹⁸ To be sure, rabbinic tradition implies that the prophets had full autonomy to write true accounts unfettered by kingly censorship. But we should not take this for granted. Rather, such protection of the prophetic/scrival "estate" should be regarded as a major achievement, and a great fulfillment of Deuteronomy's vision of monarchy.

More specifically, the publication of this story can be thought of a powerful act of *yibbum*. Why does our text tell us that David committed adultery with Bathsheba? After all, it seems that it was not common knowledge in David's court. And how do we know that Uriah was a great warrior who was wronged? The answer to both questions seems to be: *David authorized this story to be told*. Thus if our assumptions about the publication process are correct, David would have taken remarkable steps to correct his failure to perpetuate Uriah's legacy and address his ugly abuse of authority more generally. By publicizing this story, one that would forever stain his own legacy (I Kings 15:5), he would have been promoting Uriah's name and

publicizing his abuse of authority so that it would stand forever as a warning to all future kings and leaders.

Countering the Danger of Confession

There is one final aspect to this story that is elucidated by the *yibbum* theme: David's relationship with Bathsheba after their first son's death. An enduring mystery is why it would have been legally permissible for David to marry Bathsheba if they had indeed committed adultery. R. Yaakov Medan suggests that on a moral level if not a legal one, David earned significant merit for having accomplished what Judah (and Boaz) did via *yibbum*: ultimately doing the right thing and "spreading his wings" of protection (Ruth 3:9) over an otherwise bereft/abandoned widow.¹⁹ And if Judah (and Boaz) was duty-bound to provide such protection, how much more so would this have been the case for David who was to blame for the fact that such protection was needed. What kind of life and legacy would Bathsheba have had, especially if David had publicly proclaimed she was an adulteress?

Consider as well: While the institution of *yibbum* is ostensibly meant to promote the legacy of the dead husband, a review of the *yibbum* stories in the Hebrew Bible reveals that *yibbum* actually tended to promote the legacy of the bereft women (and their lineage) *who had to take matters into their own hands in order to induce powerful men to do the right thing*.²⁰ After all, who remembers Er or Mahlon or even Uriah today? It is Tamar, Ruth, and Bathsheba we remember. In that sense, while David's continuing his marriage with Bathsheba (recognized as "his wife" only at this point; II Samuel 12:24) was not technically a form of *yibbum*, it (a) followed on actions that promoted Uriah's legacy; and (b) protected Bathsheba's life and legacy. And an indicator that this 're-marriage' with Bathsheba was considered a form of *yibbum* is that whereas Bathsheba is described as *giving birth* to the first son for him (i.e., David; 11:27), she is described simply as *birthing a son*, when it comes to Solomon (12:24). This is striking given that Solomon is in fact the dynastic heir. But it is unsurprising if we see this as a form of *yibbum* such that the child's legacy is associated with Bathsheba and Uriah (as well as God and Nathan; see 12:25).²¹

But where does Bathsheba take initiative to secure that legacy? After all, in II Samuel 11-12 Bathsheba says only "I am pregnant" and otherwise exhibits little agency. The key moment seems to be when David is on his deathbed and Bathsheba and Nathan collude in inducing David to proclaim

Solomon king and undercut his half-brother Adonijah who had proclaimed himself king (I Kings 1). It is quite curious that Nathan and Bathsheba are so close; there is no previous indication they had ever spoken. Even more enigmatic is that Bathsheba and Nathan refer to a promise David had made that Solomon would be the heir even though no such promise is recorded. Surprisingly, David acknowledges the promise and he acts as they request.

Perhaps in fact there was no explicit promise. Rather, what Bathsheba and Nathan are saying is that if David does not act as if the crown was promised to Solomon, his act of *yibbum* will be incomplete. Indeed, Nathan's opening line to Bathsheba is that her and her son's lives are in danger (I Kings 1:11-12); after all, the natural next step for a usurper like Adonijah to take is to *kill all rivals to the throne*, as well as Nathan and everyone associated with his father's court. But their lives will be preserved if David names Solomon heir, and Solomon succeeds in assuming the throne.

Bathsheba's assignment is not easy. Like Ruth (3:1-14), she must appear at her "levir's" chamber when she was not invited. And she must suffer the indignity of petitioning David as the young and lovely Abishag is attempting to warm him. But with Nathan reinforcing her appeal, Bathsheba succeeds in preserving her life and the life of her son, as well as their legacy. And David is coaxed into protecting their legacies as well, and indirectly that of Uriah. Thus whether or not David's confessions were indeed sufficient to atone for his sins, they did serve to redress some of the harm he caused with those sins.

Conclusion

¹ Our thanks to Dr. Daniel Beliaevsky for help with the analysis of the music.

² Note in this regard the allusions in Nathan's parable of the "poor man's ewe" to Saul's sin (II Samuel 12:1-4), especially concerning the motivation of not wanting to spare—*vayahmol*—one's sheep and cattle (compare I Samuel 15:9 with II Samuel 12:4). See also R. Yaakov Medan, "Megilat Bat-Sheva," *Megadim* 18/19 (1993): 67-167, and R. Shmuel Klitsner, "Victims, Victimized and the Therapeutic Parable: A New Interpretation Of II Samuel Chapter 12 (2013) for complementary analyses showing how Nathan's parable is designed to make David think of Saul and how he wronged him, thus inducing him to find the rich man culpable.

³ See Rabbi Moshe Shamah, "On Number Symbolism in the Torah," in *Recalling the Covenant: A Contemporary*

The text of the story of David and Bathsheba hints loudly that there is an important *yibbum* dimension to David's sin lying just below the surface. The textual and thematic allusions to the story of Judah and Tamar seem so extensive as to be undeniable, and they are especially compelling in the context of David's family history. Moreover, they help resolve several puzzles in the story of David and Bathsheba.

The larger implications of the *yibbum* theme are more debatable. Three possible implications have been discussed here. First, far from minimizing David's sin, the *yibbum* theme suggests how David's attempts to cover-up that sin distorted his moral vision to the point that he openly committed major moral transgressions without realizing it. Second, this *yibbum* theme helps us appreciate the redemptive power of David's confession. In particular, he seems to have done more than admit that he "sinned to God" by taking painful steps to publicize his otherwise hidden thefts of Uriah's life and legacy, and thereby to promote that very legacy. Finally, the *yibbum* theme suggests that David was induced (by Bathsheba) to protect her life and legacy, and thereby to address the harm he had caused.

Whether or not the reader agrees that these lessons are implied by the biblical text, they nevertheless seem general and meaningful: First, covering up sin distorts moral vision. Second, true confession of moral transgression requires difficult action that may do lasting damage to one's reputation. Third, since it has the potential to help others, especially those who we have harmed, confession and repentance are worth the effort even if we will never know whether they fully atone for our sins.

Commentary on the Five Books of the Torah (Jersey City: Ktav, 2013): 1057-1066.

⁴ This approach is supported by three exculpatory possibilities: (a) that Uriah followed the common practice whereby soldiers divorced their wives (perhaps conditional on their deaths) before heading off to war (*Shabbat* 56a); (b) that "Uriah the Hittite" was not Jewish, and thus not technically subject to the laws of adultery (Medan, *op cit.*, pp. 82-83); and (c) that Uriah deserved to die because he was insubordinate in his words (seemingly calling the general Joab his "master" in front of David) and possibly his actions (not going down to Bathsheba when commanded by the king; *Shabbat* 56a).

⁵ For review, see Rav Amnon Bazak. "Chapter 12 (Part III) The Attitudes of Chazal and the Rishonim Toward the Episode of David and Bat-Sheva."

⁶ Medan, *op cit.*, p. 136.

⁷ Abarbanel *ad loc.*, II Samuel 11:14.

⁸ Parallels b, c, f, and a version of l are noted by Rav Amnon Bazak, "Chapter 11 David and Bat-Sheva (Part II)." Rav Bazak also notes the most important parallel, concerning God's judgment of Onan and David, as discussed below.

⁹ Various commentators understand *einayim* (Genesis 38:14,21) as referring to springs. Note also that David's suggestion that Uriah go home and "wash your feet" (II Samuel 11:8) is widely interpreted as an allusion to intercourse. And note that Ruth too washes herself (Ruth 3:3) before going to Boaz's bed.

¹⁰ In Genesis 38:28-29, a woman—ostensibly the midwife but perhaps Tamar—provides the rationale for Peretz's name, but a man—presumably Judah—formally names him. In II Samuel 12:24, Solomon is named by both David and Bathsheba [the literal text says that "he" named him, but the Masoretic note has us read it as "she" named him].

¹¹ In Genesis 38:30, this is a man (ostensibly Judah again), providing a name to the second twin, Zerah. In II Samuel 12:25, this is Nathan giving a second name to Solomon, Jedidiah.

¹² See Seforno and Kimhi on Genesis 19:31, and see Harold Fisch, "Ruth and the Structure of Covenant History," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 425-37.

¹³ Medan, *op cit.*, p. 144.

¹⁴ See Medan, *op cit.*, pp. 87-90.

¹⁵ See Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (New York: Oxford, 2008).

¹⁶ See Deuteronomy 20:7, 28:30.

¹⁷ It is unclear when David would have hatched this plan. But item k in our list of allusions is suggestive, in that it links David's praying for his son with Onan's destroying his seed. Perhaps the text is hinting that it was at this moment of prostrating himself before God that David realized that he needed to do the *opposite* of Onan (who was hiding from God): to promote Uriah's legacy rather than destroy it.

¹⁸ This last assumption parts company with those adopted by critical scholars (e.g., Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) who understand Samuel as hagiography designed to mask David's sins with false virtues. Such approaches have yet to come up with a plausible explanation for why chapter 11 of II Samuel would be included (see David A. Bosworth, "Evaluating King David: Old Problems and Recent Scholarship," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 191-210).

¹⁹ Medan, *op cit.*, p. 145.

²⁰ The same is true for the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11). They succeed in perpetuating their father's legacy, but the indirect effect is to promote their own legacies.

²¹ This 'pseudo-yibbum' outcome may provide something of a solution to a very difficult dilemma (thanks to Davida Kollmar for posing it): Once Uriah had died due to David's instructions to Joab, what should David have done? If he confesses at that point (or even after the initial adultery), how will Bathsheba and her son be protected? But if he does not confess, how will Uriah's legacy be protected? Ultimately, the answer is unclear. What does seem clear is not the one that David chose—i.e., to take Bathsheba and the son as "his" rather than Uriah's. It is possible that if David had turned to (Nathan and) God at that point, he would have been guided to a resolution along the lines of the one that is ultimately achieved via Solomon. And perhaps this would have occurred via the first child. But it is of course impossible to know.