

One evening, while his army is off to war without him, Israel's great King David rises from his bed and strolls about his palace roof. From this vantage point he happens to see a most beautiful woman bathing herself. Captivated, he asks his servants about her and is told that she is Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite who is off at war with the army. Overtaken by lust, David sends for Bathsheba and he sleeps with her. (I doubt she had any say in the matter.)

She later sends word, actually three simple, yet powerful words to David, "I am pregnant (2 Samuel 11: 5)."

Her husband Uriah is then mysteriously granted leave from the front. When he returns to Jerusalem David welcomes him and wants him to go home to be with his wife. David's trying to make it look like the child Bathsheba's carrying is not his.

Yet Uriah does not go home to Bathsheba. It was customary for soldiers not at the front to show solidarity with those who were by abstaining from pleasures of the flesh; so instead of going home to Bathsheba and her bed, Uriah sleeps at David's palace gate – a soldier protecting his King.

David's in a predicament. He hatches another scheme. He decides to get Uriah drunk, hoping this will weaken his spirit and induce him to return home to Bathsheba. Yet Uriah, the ever-dedicated soldier refuses once again and sleeps at the palace gate.

David then hatches yet another most evil scheme. He sends Uriah back to the front with a letter to his military commander. The letter said to "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die (2 Samuel 11: 15)."

David's military commander later summons his messenger to tell David that the fighting was fierce and it resulted in a minor military setback as we had to retreat. The commander then mentions to the messenger, "Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead (2 Samuel 11:24)."

When the messenger relays this message to David, the messenger, expecting David to be angry with this report must have been surprised when David nonchalantly replies, "The sword devours one as well as another (2 Samuel 11:25)."

Nathan was King David's prophet. Kings generally had prophets whose job was to provide moral guidance and critique. Nathan tells David a story.

There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.

Nathan point to David and says, "You are that man!" This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul, I

gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the work of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore the sword will never depart from your house....Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel. (2 Samuel 12: 1-12)

"I have sinned against the Lord (2 Samuel 12: 13)." David immediately says to Nathan,

David immediately repents – and he means it. I am no biblical scholar but in my opinion, David, as described in the Hebrew Bible, doesn't show much love or emotion for any of his wives. He might admire his wives, but he seems to admire them for what they might be able to give him. They might be beautiful, resourceful or clever – but I don't see any real love for any of his many wives. But David does love God – not for what God can give in any particular moment, but David simply loves the God of Israel, the God who has made everything possible for both him and the people of Israel.

Out of his love for God, David repents. This is teshuvah. David returns to the will of God. Teshuvah out of love. Although David, like many biblical characters is problematic, he uses his wives, but David never uses God. His teshuvah, his repentance, his seeking to return to God's will is sincere.

From this time on, calamity does befall the house of David. The child that Bathsheba carries dies. One of his sons rapes one of his daughters. This son is then murdered by Absalom,

another of David's sons. Absalom then rises up against David and overthrows him for time. During that time Absalom sleeps with David's concubines, in broad daylight, just as God promised. (Yes, there always seem to be concubines.)

Yet despite the calamity David repents. He repents not to weasel his way out of this calamity; not to be spared by God's wrath; not to later benefit from God's grace; but David practices teshuvah. David returns to the will of God out of love for God. Come what may, David wants to return to right relationship with God because, for David, God's path restores his soul, God's path is the path of righteousness.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul;
He leads me along righteous paths
For his name's sake
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23: 1-6)

David's not perfect, far from it – but you can't question his love for his God. And again, because of his great love for God he practices teshuvah. He seeks to return to the will of God.

So, what about us? What if we don't believe in David's God? What if we don't have, or believe in, any such God to love? If that is the case, what does teshuvah mean for us? What does returning to God's will mean for us? Does it mean anything? For us, what is that thing, that entity, that idea...that whatever...that we love so much that we are willing to return to, to submit to, come what may, despite any calamity that might befall us?

I must admit that when I first left the religious faith of my past, there was some relief – I felt free; but there was also some hurt also – maybe a tinge of envy. I was envious of the relationship that others had with their God; envious of the relationship that someone like David had with his God....With a God that could...

Make me lie down in green pastures;
Lead me beside still waters;
Restore my soul;

So, again, for us, what is that thing, that entity, that idea...that whatever...that we love so much that we are willing to return to, to submit to, come what may, despite any calamity that might befall us?

To me, that is a big question. Can you think of anything? How many things? How long is your list? How deep are your wells?

Many have been blessed with very long lists and deep wells while others have not been so blessed. How can we begin to cultivate deeper wells?

Last year I said in a sermon that if you believe in karma, cause and effect, that what goes around comes around, that you reap what you sow, the way for you to be forgiven begins with your forgiving.

So think about it this way. Is there something, some entity...whatever...that you love so much that you'd accept forgiveness from unconditionally....a relationship that means so much to you that despite them wronging you, you are willing to forgive? What comes to mind? What's on that list?

Could Unitarian Universalism, could UUMAN, be on that list?

In the Hebrew Bible, God loved David. David loved God. David may not necessarily have liked God at all times...may not have liked what God asked him to do. But David loved God at all times; to the extent he'd unconditionally forgive God and he'd unconditionally practice teshuvah, seek to be forgiven, seek to return to the will of God come what may.

Is UUMAN such an entity to you? We are all so beautifully imperfect. Isn't that wonderful! We are all so beautifully imperfect! Should you transgress and break covenant with UUMAN, would you wish to be unconditionally forgiven? If so, would you be willing to grant unconditional forgiveness to a beautifully imperfect UUMAN?

May your list of that which you love be long. May your wells be deep. May they be refuges of unconditional teshuvah. And may you never forget that it is all so beautifully imperfect.