

Bibliodrama – Contemporary Midrash

An outline of Bibliodrama and example in the Parable: *A Father and Two Sons*

Dennice M. Gooley

Proactive Ministry in a Media Culture

CE4515 Professor Hess

30 April 2001

This project is an amalgamation from the book *Scripture Windows* by Peter A. Pitzele, Ph.D. and participating in the 16<sup>th</sup> Jewish-Christian Seminar: “An Experience of Contemporary Midrash”, which convened at Luther Seminary on March 12, 2001. For many the terms “bibliodrama” and “midrash” may or may not be familiar. I begin with an overview of each, along with basic definitions and background, the relationship they have within this particular context and will conclude with an example of Bibliodrama as midrash.

Some may recognize the Greek word “*biblio*” in “bibliodrama” indicating that it has something to do with a book or books (think: bibliography, bibliophile, biblioteche). Webster’s Dictionary defines *drama* as “a literary composition that tells a story, usually of human conflict by means of dialogue and action, to be performed on the stage by actors”. We might conclude that bibliodrama is drama based on a book, and we would be partially correct.

Bibliodrama, when used with a small “b”, is the type of drama methods used by psychologists and psychotherapists as a form of therapy. This method is also known as “drama therapy”. Drama therapy was created and developed by Dr. Jacob L. Moreno and used to examine and identify new ways to address issues and/or problems. Bibliodrama (or Drama therapy) uses experiential methods and role-playing as well as group dynamics and theory. The goal of this method is to integrate new understandings of a problem or situation and does so on three levels: cognitive, affective and behavioral.

When used in psychotherapy, there are certain operational elements present:

- A protagonist who represents the central theme;
- Additional players who take on a role(s) of the other important characters in a drama;
- An audience who watches the drama and who may represent the world at-large; and
- A created space or stage where the drama takes place.

Traditionally, psychodrama sessions have three separate and identifiable structural elements when used in an interactive group:

- A warm-up stage: Where the focus or theme and protagonist are identified.
- Action stage: Where the problem is dramatized and the protagonist explores new ways of resolving and/or understanding the problem.
- Sharing Stage: Where all the participants are invited to express how they connected with the protagonist's work.<sup>1</sup>

The idea, practice and use of psychodrama has grown and expanded adding to it a new category called expressive therapy where in addition to using drama, other expressive arts are used including: art, dance, and poetry.

When we speak of Bibliodrama using a capital “B”, we move in another direction entirely. In this case, Bibliodrama uses the same kind of action methods and group dynamic theories as psychodrama but applies them to a piece of writing: in this case, the Hebrew Bible. Instead of identifying a theme or problem and a protagonist, the primary roles are all found and identified in a familiar portion of biblical text. It might be difficult to make what at first seems like a huge leap from the realms of psychoanalysis to the Bible, however, when we begin to understand Bibliodrama as a form of *midrash*, these difficulties diminish.

Those familiar with Judaism and its literature, will already be familiar with midrash, and perhaps have engaged in lively debates on what constitutes midrash. *Midrash* is both a product and a process. Midrash is from the Hebrew word *darash*, meaning to inquire into, to investigate or explore. When spelled with a capital “M” and with the definite article “The Midrash” refers to the commentaries and explanatory notes on the Scriptures written and codified by Jewish rabbis

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<sup>1</sup> Personal conversation with Dr. Richard Thoni, February 2001.

from the Babylonian exile until around 1200 AD. It is comprised of two parts: *halakah* and *haggadah* (which can be translated as the way and story).

*The Midrash* is the record of the rabbis' interpretation based on their engagement of the Tanakh and “manifested itself in word-plays, analogies, and even puns that intensified the active experience of the texts...In a more generic sense, midrash – now in lower case – may be extended in time to later ages and to our own. From a more liberal perspective midrash may include extra-literary acts of interpretation such as movement, song, visual art, and drama ...which serve to illuminate meaning in the biblical narrative” (Pitzele, 12). Both Bibliodrama and midrash are experiential and didactic.

Some find it difficult to understand *The Midrash*'s variant interpretations of the Tanakh. The purpose of midrash is not to determine a single meaning or to codify a comprehensive list of the meanings, rather for the one who engages as a midrashic interpreter, s/he literally translates and negotiates the space between the text and its comprehension. Midrash allows for a personal and intimate relationship to this ancient sacred text: it is here that inspiration is found, where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not just historical figures who lived mythical lives, but who are members of our family, who had problems, strengths and weaknesses, not unlike our own.

Classical midrash was shaped and formed by the rabbis worldview, that is, what they thought were the important and unimportant issues, their likes and dislikes and so on, all of these things shape their stories and also precipitate their telling. To summarize: how they saw their world supports their stories by providing the opportunity and reason for telling the stories.

Likewise, in the present age, the creation of modern midrash and understanding the Hebrew Bible in contemporary ways, our stories are shaped and informed with and by our own worldview, not unlike it did for the ancient rabbis. Bibliodrama is one way in which we can

imitate these ancients, by reading and infusing our reading of the Hebrew Bible with our own worldview.

In order to understand Bibliodrama and the methods used, more definitions or redefining of some words is necessary. I have condensed this as much as possible believing that more will be understood by reading a Bibliodrama session. My goal here is to provide only a broad framework (construction, methods and application). I do this because I believe that Bibliodrama is experiential. It is the point and place where the sacred text comes alive, and familiar. The texts used in Bibliodrama are taken from the narrative portion of the Hebrew Scriptures. Judaism understands that the Bible is both a living history and a human story. Any assumption that the Bible is telling an old story is abandoned.

When performing a Bibliodramatic session, *Voicing* is the act of speaking in the first person, whether speaking as a biblical character or as an object. It is the act of speaking in the here and now that makes the story alive and in the present. The *Stage* is an area that has a defined boundary where the action of the Bibliodrama occurs. It can be as formal as a real theater stage or as simple as a chair in the center of a circle. It is any space that is created (mentally and/or physically) in order for participants to be comfortable. Unlike traditional plays, there is no script, which allows the stage to be anywhere. The *Actor* in Bibliodrama, is anyone who chooses to participate, to speak and/or act in any number of ways.

As mentioned there is no formal script in Bibliodrama, rather the *Script* is what is taken from Scripture and the *Performance* is built from it. The performance is based on a number of possible variables, including: the participants' knowledge level of the text and/or commentaries, personal life experience, knowledge of other biblical texts as well as extra-biblical knowledge.

Bibliodrama is conducted by a *Director* or *Facilitator* and who functions similarly to that of a psychotherapist in psychodrama.<sup>2</sup> The director must be skilled and/or develop skills in a number of areas and through whom the success of the performance and the overall experience depends. Because Bibliodrama is an interactive process, it is necessary for the director to guide the process. While s/he can never truly control its outcome, there are pitfalls. Minimally, a director must be skilled in textual studies, the practice of improvisation or improvisational play, and be able to play a number of rolls at any given moment. According to Peter Pitzele the leading torchbearer, teacher and trainer of this technique says that a director should be a “scholar, gypsy, actor, poet, therapist, humorist, raconteur and dramaturge” (34).<sup>3</sup>

The methods used in Bibliodrama parallels those found in psychodrama in that the *Warm-up*, *Action*, and *Reviewing* steps remain the same but three new steps are added: *Derolling*, *Sharing*, and *Exegesis*. The description that follows is the “short form” and used when a group has never done this kind of activity and/or when there is no more than an hour of time available. The “longer form” is used when a group has previously worked with and participated in Bibliodrama and when there is more time available. The longer form merely expands on these steps. Although I am presenting the short form, the example will be done in the longer, and outside of the example’s length, one may not be able to distinguish the difference. Furthermore, the participants may not necessarily be able to easily distinguish the steps used in the two forms.

The *Warm-up* has two components. In the first part of the warm-up, the director will select the narrative text to be explored. S/He will then create and develop a storyboard or agenda. This process may include a wide range of possible questions that might be asked of the text, a list

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<sup>2</sup> I prefer the term Director/Facilitator as it is a “both - and”. The Director is in charge and must guide, while the facilitator must be in the drama without drawing attention to himself or herself.

of characters: those who are actually named in the text as well as those presumed to be present.

The director will do all the exegetical work the same as if s/he were preparing for any serious study of scripture, including extra-biblical texts, commentaries etc.

The second part of the warm-up is when the director meets the group who will be participants in the Bibliodrama. This may be the most difficult part of the director's work, for s/he must communicate the idea that there are no real right and wrong answers, nor is any one forced to participate. In addition to this, the director must create an atmosphere and environment that is safe for every one. In these types of activities, I have found that those who are the most silent have important things to contribute. It takes a highly skilled person to find ways to make them comfortable enough to express themselves. Anyone who has been involved with interactive work or activities in the past, knows just how difficult it is to create an atmosphere of safety and trust in a room full of strangers.

The real *action* stage is where the group or participants first begin to give voice to a character (36). How this voice is portrayed is dependent upon the director understanding the group's composition. Because this is an interactive group activity, there are dynamics constantly at play that require a skillful hand on the part of the director/facilitator. The director/facilitator determines where, how and when the action begins and ends. Following the action comes the *reviewing stage*, which begins after the action stage is complete and processes what has been learned from the activity.

*De-roling* is critical. This is the time spent moving those who were actors, out of their roles and back to the present. The *Sharing stage* is similar to reviewing, only it goes into what it was actually like to be a particular character or what it was like to hear from the character,

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<sup>3</sup> This list seems daunting and the more as Pitzele indicates that anyone can lead or learn to lead and downplays the difficulty of being a director of Bibliodrama. For example, how one handles situations where a participant connects

especially when some understanding is revealed that had not been considered before. Following the sharing stage, the director will connect the Bibliodrama to the text and connect it as commentary: this is the *Exegetical* stage. Here the director takes on the role of teacher while simultaneously assisting the participants to move back to their role as students.

The final two stages are the *introduction of other sources* and *processing*. The first is when other sources are introduced and where participants can be directed to for additional reading, reflection or exegetical work. This will assist in bringing a new and/or fuller understanding because of the Bibliodrama experience. It is important to say that Bibliodrama is not meant nor intended to be a substitute for traditional methods of exegesis. The *Processing stage* is optional and might cover such things as how the Bibliodrama was conducted (39). For example why a particular text was chosen, or why a character was looked at in one way over another, or for participants to share what the experience was like for them: as listener, and/or as actor. This stage is helpful to the director, allowing for the honing of her/his skills. There are no right or wrong answers and how the story is understood will depend on which character or object is being explored. For example, acting as Moses rod, rather than Moses: there are multiple sides to most stories.

Before moving to the example, I wish to address the question: “Why Bibliodrama and why now?” For me there are at least three reasons. In the April 7, 2001 *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, in the “Faith and Values” section, I read an article that describes a recent Gallop poll on Biblical literacy and of one pastor who gave a simple quiz to his congregants. Gallup poll data indicated that only 2 of 10 could name who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The article says that people know less and less about the primary text of their faith: A society that claims a Judeo-Christian foundation. The article also reported that one pastor gave a quiz of basic Bible

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too closely to the story or character, who has personal issues. This can be difficult and delicate to handle in a group.

knowledge to his congregation: their average score was 40 percent. The article concluded that occasional Bible readers declined from 79 percent in the 1980s to 59 percent, this is according to a Gallop Poll conducted in October. Only 16 percent of Christians polled said they read the Bible daily. I agree with Pitzele that the average person has been gradually loosing the benefit that the Biblical text can bring to the modern life. The Bible can still reflect and inform our lives – one way this can happen is through Bibliodrama.

The third reason Bibliodrama is attractive is personal. The largest hurdle I face when teaching and talking about intra-faith matters is how to address our value-laden language. Often, Christians and Jews are not aware of this laden-ness. It takes large blocks of time to unpack the language, leaving less time to get to the heart of the message or topic. Bibliodrama provides a method and a means to move into a discussion of Scripture that moves us beyond the language barrier, at least initially. In some sense, Bibliodrama creates a new community in which the Bible is not relegated as just another text like other classical texts.

The *Zohar* (*The Book of Splendor*, 13<sup>th</sup> century) a Jewish commentary on the Torah says that the Torah (First Testament) is written with black fire and with white fire. The black fire is the letters of the received text (cannon): it is unchangeable. The white fire is midrash: the time-honored process of interpretation that gives voice to silence. It can reconcile contradictions and express contemporary values. The white fire is the place of endless potential where Bibliodrama occurs (24). The white fire and black fire live together, standing in tension to one another, always providing a new way to understand the words that do not change with the changing milieu of world and life, regardless of the age in which we live. Thus, Bibliodrama provides opportunity to come to new understanding and interpretation of the text.

I have been primarily speaking inside the Jewish context thus far for there is little that one can call a Christian Midrash. Unless one wants to consider a movie like Kazantzaki's, "The Last Temptation of Christ or possibly the miracle/passion plays of the Middle Ages - these might be considered a Christian Midrash. Bibliodrama almost exclusively uses as its source the First Testament. Three reasons stand out as most obvious for this practice: there is simply more narrative material in the First Testament and Christians in particular, spend less time in the First Testament. Finally, the more we can participate together with those texts that both use, the increased opportunities we have in learning and understanding ourselves and creates more opportunities for Jews and Christians to study together.

As I indicated, this work is based on part through having participated in a Bibliodrama workshop. The last time Dr. Pitzele was here, the group suggested looking at a Second Testament text, to which Dr. Pitzele agreed to consider. The workshop I attended, did examine a Second Testament text: Luke 15 – The Parable of a Father and Two Sons. The example that follows is based on this text.

To help clarify who is speaking, the Director's words are in italics and bold. This will be for commentary and instructions. Any comments outside the drama, will be footnoted or in parenthesis. This was conducted with a large group of approximately 100 persons, both Jews and Christians. The entire room is the stage. When a new person speaks, their words are noted within quotations and indented. I indicated earlier that this is a long-form session, I have intentionally not included the introduction and the other stages are integrated. It is my hope that this 're-enactment' will be a cogent example of Bibliodrama.

*When we read biblical texts there are divisions between us, I understand and speak of them as “Intra-Jewish” not inter-religious. No understanding of Judaism in the First Century can be done without the Gospels. We will be examining the parable Christians call “The Prodigal Son”. I want to acknowledge that for the Jewish members of the group examining a traditionally Christian text, may be foreign and uncomfortable. I have not used this text in a mixed group before, so this will be a learning journey for all of us.*<sup>4</sup>

*We will begin with the text found in Luke 15:11-33. It is the parable of the prodigal son. The question that should be asked of this text is whether this is a Jewish text. Is it the story of a father and two sons, a Cain and Abel story or perhaps a story about Jacob and Esau? As we ask this question, we can begin to see that what we call the story may affect our interpretation and application of it.*

*The word “Parable” is from the Greek parabole, meaning a placing beside; a comparison. Its equivalent in Hebrew is mashal, a similitude. In the First Testament, it is often used to indicate a proverb, a prophetic utterance, or an enigmatic saying. In the Second Testament, it can be a proverb, a typical emblem or a similitude or allegory, or a narrower rendering would be as a comparison of earthly things with heavenly things. Parables have been used for millennia and should not be thought of as something new or exclusive to the Second Testament.*

*I want us to pretend that we have never encountered this text before, so that it unfolds for us as for the first time. As I have already asked, is this a Jewish story? As we consider this story over the next few hours, I want us to be considering how our defining of this text affects how we understand it and its message? And could it be entitled: A father and two sons?*

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<sup>4</sup> The risk of using a text from the Second Testament is the level of discomfort for Jews. This was a very new experience for Dr. Pitzele to do and had never been convened before.

*I am reading from the NKJV. Those who have a Bible with Second Testament, please share with those who do not.*

Read:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood.

- **You are the younger son. Tell me why you have gone to your father for your inheritance?**
  - “My older brother is going to get the majority, I want what is mine.”
  - “I am tired of the farm – I am feeling claustrophobic. My world is closing in.”
  - “I want to get what I can while Dad is around because I am not sure my brother will be all that charitable to me.”
  
- **Has he done something in the past that you think he will do again?**
  - “Yes. Once father gave him money for me, but he only gave me half of what he was supposed to.”
  - “I don’t trust my brother, and I am ready to get started with my life.”
  - “I am tired of living in his shadow: I am always number 2.”
  - “Forget work – I want to party! I’m not a baby anymore.”
  - “A guest of my father’s once told me about the work and I want to see it for myself. I can’t get it out of my mind.”

▪ **You are the father and you know you are going to tell your youngest son “yes”, when he requests his inheritance and his freedom. Why do you agree?**

- “He has more guts than I do.”
- “I know that if I don’t let him go, he’ll be lost forever.”
- “I love him, and did you notice – he has his mother’s eyes. I can’t deny him anything.”
- “I am so tired of saying no to him.”
- “He has “Chutzpah” – the world needs to teach him his lessons.”
- “He needs to be something more – more than a younger brother.”
- “I am old and weary, I am tired of trying to hold the family together – Besides he and his brother don’t get along.”
- “I do worry about what the neighbors will say, but I will let him go, because I love him. For all practical purposes he is gone already.”

<sup>13 a</sup> And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country,

▪ **Your father has said “yes” to your request, and you leave for a distant country – Why?**

- “The farther the better as far as I’m concerned.”
- “I want to go where no one knows me. I want to create a name for myself. I have been living under the shadow of my brother for too long.”
- “I remember the words the man used to describe places that were so different from what I knew – I want to see and experience them for myself.”

13b and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

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<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, c1982.

▪ **Tell me why you squander your money and on what?**

- “On foreign women – you know we don’t have girls like that back home!”
- “Everything this is utterly different from what I know and have known.”
- “I can’t get enough of this new world! There are parties and friends – there are new wonders – wine and women!”
- “I never had to manage money before. How will I ever learn except by doing?”
- “I am like my big brother now – I have the power.”
- “I am going to go home a star, a hero.”

<sup>14</sup> But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

▪ **You spent everything, tell me what it was like to be in want, tell me what it feels like.**

- “You know, I had a good line of credit. I don’t understand what the problem is.”
- “I thought those people I spent all that money on, buying them things, that well, they were my friends, now they won’t even look at me on the street!”
- “I don’t care – I have my memories and that is enough for me!”

▪ **Things have gotten worse, there is now a severe famine in this foreign land, and now you are in need: What is this?**

- “This is just another new experience.”
- I am feeling pretty ashamed, I am a foreigner here– what can I do. I feel alone, isolated and afraid.”
- “I don’t know what to do. I have debts I cannot pay.”

- “I don’t have a job and no one has hired me. I am a foreigner and they are giving jobs to their family.”
- “I am hungry and I am ill.”
- “This wasn’t supposed to happen.”
- “I have stepped from the land of plenty (home) into the land of need.”
- “I have never experienced anything like this before, I am really frightened.”

<sup>15</sup> Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

▪ **You hired yourself out to feed pigs – as a Jew this is the lowest form of work for you to be in isn’t it?**

- “This is a gross place to be.”
- “This is the pits – its not only degrading it is demoralizing.”
- “I am really glad my father and brother can’t see me, right now.”
- “Hey don’t feel sorry for me, I am taking care of myself, at least I found a job, and am not feeling quite so hungry. I being responsible.”
- “When I was at home, we had servants to do this, I didn’t know what they went through on account of us.”
- “I can’t think about home, it is too humiliating.”

<sup>16</sup> And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*.

**So you are to the point that you would have eaten the unclean food fed to the pigs, it isn’t bad enough that you are with them, but you have resorted to eating with them.**

<sup>17</sup> “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

▪ **Do you think about home, brother, father? Tell me what brought you to your senses.**

- “I lived in a land and a house of plenty.”
- “I didn’t know how good I had it.”
- “Home is a reminder of the love and care I received from my family.”
- “I remembered that at home, slaves and servants are treated this way – they are treated much better.”
- “This is only temporary – it can’t last – can it?”

<sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,<sup>19</sup> and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”

▪ **How can you get home, what strength or means do you have? What has kept you from going before?**

- “I am so full of shame – it is standing between me and home.”
- “Pride.”
- “Fear – if I go home, I won’t be accepted besides I smell like swine and my father doesn’t keep swine.”
- “I already got my share and wasted it. There isn’t anything there for me.”
- “My father believes I am gone and gone for good.”

- “I know I hurt him when I left and my going home will only cause him more pain – I can’t do that to him.”
  
- **What forces you to go home (When he came to himself where was I) – The “experience” is over.**
  - “All around me is death, there are children and babies dying or dead on the road side, left because the mothers didn’t have the strength to carry them any further or the strength to bury them. It was an awful sight.”
  - “I saw that anyone who didn’t have family support was in worse shape than those who did, and foreigners were treated even worse than those without families.”
  - “My need is so great, that I overcome my fear and pride. It is better to be alive than dead.”
  - “I have learned something – I took a risk, now it is time to go home.”
  - “I have an unconditional relationship with my father, and I believe that relationship still exists.”
  - “I was naively innocent of the world.”
  - “I am ready to become a robber / murderer and came to my senses this isn’t me.”
  - I know that not only does my father have food, but even his servants have bread and bread to spare – that is better than this. I know that I have sinned against heaven forever, and will be treated like a hired hand – that is better than dying here.”

<sup>20</sup> “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

- **But the father sees him from a distance – what are you the father thinking/doing?**

- “I have missed my son so much. I have watched for him everyday.”
- “I had a dream he was coming back.”
- “I knew I had to let him go – but my heart still clung to him.”
- “I heard of the hardship in distant countries and was worried, so I have been so worried and have been watching and hoping he survived.”
- “I would recognize his walk anywhere.”
- “I used to wait for him like this when he lived at home– I am always there.”
- “He hasn’t called, no news good news.”

- **You see him and are filled with compassion – why?**

- “I didn’t teach him skills for the world.”
- “I see him stooped over, dead, no vitality. I can see his defeat – his head down. I can tell things are not good with him.”
- “He is skin and bones and half naked.”
- “I know what it would have taken for him to return, he had so much pride.”
- “He has aged.”
- “Somehow, I feel like part of myself is coming back.”
- “It is more painful to see him return than when he left.”
- “He looks worse than my poorest slave.”

<sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. <sup>23</sup> And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; <sup>24</sup> for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

- **Father runs to him, and kisses you and you say that you have sinned. Your father dresses you with his best garments, puts rings on you and has a feast prepared on your behalf.**

<sup>25</sup> “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

- **You the older son see and hear and ask a slave what was happening. Told that your brother has returned and the feast is for him and your Father pleads with you.**

<sup>28</sup> “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

▪ **What are you the father thinking as you are hearing your older son's words?**

- “I never thought about that.”
- “This alienation began long before his brother left and it hurts me.”
- “I am afraid that family is going to be divided.”
- “I may have screwed up – but I can’t undo the past.”
- “This celebration isn’t just for the younger son – it is about the whole family.”
- “I am afraid that my older son will ask for his inheritance and leave.”
- “He is justified in his anger – but he needs to hear that he is special too.”
- “It has taken something like this in order for my older son to be honest and tell how he feels for the first time.”
- “Where is his mother – she will know how to handle this.”

<sup>31</sup> “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.’ <sup>32</sup> It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”

▪ **As the older brother, you hear your father say that all that he has is yours – that your brother was lost and is now found – do these words help?**

- “Listen, my Father is the problem, he has never acknowledged me. I work hard and what do I get?”
- “I am angry with my brother for hurting my father.”
- “Everyone knows what they want to do – but I have not been given a choice.”

- “What about my own hopes and dreams – doesn’t anyone care about them?”
- “My father thought so little of me – he didn’t even send a servant to tell me my brother was back.”
- “I have always been here – don’t I get something for it.”

*The text goes no further, and we are left with the older brother in torment.*

▪ **What is it like to have your younger brother back ?**

- “I don’t know what to do when we both are in the same room.”
- “I am suffering (self-imposed).”
- “I can’t help but think about the old family stories of Esau – Jacob/ Cain – Able/ Isaac – Ishmael/ Joseph and Brothers (Ancient conversations).”

▪ **What is it like as the younger brother to be around your older brother? Who are you?**

**Who else is hearing this story when Jesus tells it. Who are you as a first ring listener?**

**Response from first ring listener?**

- *Disciples – Father = God*
- *Elder brother – Pharisees – As disciple is there any of the older brother in you?*
- *As disciple is there any of the younger brother in you?*
- *Who is the favorite / who is going to sit on the right/left?*
- *This isn’t fair.*

- **The Audience may be the – sinners, Pharisees and scribes; What do the rules mean – why have them? As a Pharisee – my position is secure, no threat**

- “I can’t deal with a God that is that generous.”
- “God is the prodigal – he is wasting forgiveness (no limit to God’s forgiveness, parable of the seeds) before *t’shuva* (repentance) – son’s decision to act is the *t’shuva*.”
- “Older brother walked away from brother and father.”

(We now begin the process of moving away from the action and begin the processing stages.)

- **Can you imagine a way that this text could be interpreted as offensive to Jews. Abuse - discrimination**

- “Jews = Older brother who can’t handle relationship”
- “Jews won’t let us be at the father’s table without jumping through all sorts of hoops.”
- “Younger brother in and older brother (Jews) is out.”
- “As younger brother – I am a special case – I don’t have to follow the rules.”
- “Father has freedom to choose.”
- “Don’t have a relationship with dad or you the younger brother.”
- “Supersessionism – younger supersedes the older and gets true inheritance.”
- “Older is just old – stuck – rigid – insecure.”
- “Jew’s can’t open themselves up to others.”
- “Jews are dumb and don’t get it – they are not a happy folk.”

- “Christians invented this thing – therefore God loves us because of it.”
- “God of Law versus God of Love.”
  
- **What is the Jewish resistance to this parable/ how would a Jew interpret?**
  - “View it as Midrash not as a Christian text, but as part of the set of ancient family stories.”
  - “It had nothing to do with Christian and Jews at the time.”
  - “It is a family story.”
  - “It is a story of reinforcement of the ancient teachings: father.”
  - “Ambiguous texts – older supposed to get – yet younger gets. Primal consciences – Parent/child. “
  - “Love with Abraham and Isaac – first time used in text – a real story about parent and child.”
  - “Don’t want other Jews to read because there is no atonement in this story.”
  - “Good example of t’shuva and compassionate God – it is the paradigm of t’shuva.”
  - “As a Jew I need to recover my story – that Christians have appropriated.”
  
- **A story has the capacity to be troubling regardless of persuasion of the hearer. Do our histories determine our understanding of the text? Can we come to a new understanding and Read text in innocence with intellectual complexity to understand? Read as though for the first time.<sup>6</sup>**
  - *Is it possible to create a theology without favorites?*

- *Parable becomes a critique by a Jew when God plays favorites.*
- *Don't have to be playing favorites when treating a child differently.*
- *Being fair isn't equal.*
- *Ultimate strength of Parable is its lack of a title and any name given skews it to a "preferred theology". (Ex. Steven Wallace – 13 Ways of a Blackbird).*
- *Text is Black Fire and White Fire by Jewish tradition. Actual letter are the black fire. The space between the letters is room to maneuver – midrash to explore*
- *Parable is offered as a model not content.*
- *Who told the parable?*
- *Who was listening?*
- *What if never read and only heard: Oral versus Aural? How does reading it, examining its grammatical structure etc., affect or change the meaning and our understanding?*
- *Heard a child and a parent – How would your telling it and to whom and from what perspective change the understanding?*
- *Gaps affect many aspects of a narrative. There may, for example, be*
  - *Missing links in a series of events;*
  - *Missing motives;*
  - *A lack of explanation;*
  - *An apparent contradiction; or even*
  - *An unexplained departure from expected behavior.*

*Thus, we have seen Bibliodrama not change the written sacred text, but we were able to experience and explore the many possibilities within the text. Through our role-playing we have moved beyond flat characters on a page, without contradicting them. We have seen ourselves*

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1: A diagram showing possible audiences and relationships of the Jewish and Christian traditions.

*move through time and realize new interpretations that arose and came forth out of the role within one's own self. At the beginning I asked you to write down what questions you came with today. Let us close in prayer.*

“Forty-Eight: A Song of Teshuvah”<sup>7</sup>

You are the Guardian Who protects me  
From my self-doubt'  
You are the Opening  
Before my stubbornness.

You will wait for me;  
You will await my turning to You.

You are the Coverlet Who warms  
The coldness of my heart,  
Wrapping up my distancing  
With the radiance of Your care.

You will call to me;  
You will call me to You.

For You stand ready to take my hand'  
It is I who will not give it forth.  
You wait for my smallest motion,  
And, reaching toward me,  
And I fend off this healing,  
Covering my lost chances with excuses,  
Uncovering still open wounds.

O let my heart open to the Eternal God!  
Let me relax this stiff-necked vigilance  
To turn and be healed.  
Let me turn and be made whole.

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<sup>7</sup> Taken from Flames To Heaven: New Praises for Healing & Praise by Debbie Perlman.