*The Embodied Jewish Voice*

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'And God spoke.' In the Hebrew Bible the Creator established material reality through vocalization. Yet before God speaks, a 'ruach'- wind or spirit moves over the waters. Movement, breath, spirit, and material existence are thus tied in this story. Later in this account humans are made 'in our image,' referring perhaps to all that came before this. Humans were made from material reality as well as vocalization. Not surprisingly, within the Hebrew life portrayed in scriptures, both song and dance are a feature, as they involve breath, words, and physical movement, often in songs of embodied praise. A religion of doing, Judaism has continued to use song as an important part of ritual, along with ritual actions, and dance. In this, voice serves as a completion of movement, as it is an embodied method of conveying spiritual reality.

Within this article, I consider the intersection between religion, spirituality, voice, movement and dance within Judaism, looking first at specific understanding of speech as embodied in the Bible, a more detailed view of the relationship between voice and movement in kabbalistic Jewish spiritual tradition, and a current return to a more holistic understanding of voice in embodied prayer. I review past critical scholarship of George Lakhof and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* and Eliot Wolfson's 'The Body in the Text,' while also considering mystical and modern interpretation. The work of Storydance Theatre will be used to provide an example of a current iteration of Jewish use of voice as dance.

**Background:** it is often customary to present scholarly criticism at the start of academic articles, but since this study is based on my own research as a dancer and performer, I want to begin with my experience in dance, choreography, study of dance in Judaism, and work in embodied storytelling. In this, I find it important to consider the work of David Abram as an organizing principle. Abram created the term the 'more-than-human-world' for his influential book *The Spell of the Sensuous*. A storyteller and anthropologist, by this phrase he means recognizing not only our relationship to nature, but the role of nature in our lives and our stories and actions. He postulates that overemphasis on word, in writing especially, removed us from nature. He points to exception to this concept of work in Jewish prayer.

Abram is very critical of certain Christian and Greek Philosophic traditions that he states this separates humans from nature, but he also links Jewish tradition to a more holistic understanding. He presents a Hasidic 'commentary on prayer:'

> *See your prayer as arousing the letter*
> *through which heaven and earth*
> *and all living things were created.*
> *The letters are the life of all;*
> *when you pray through them,*

> *all Creation joins in your prayer.*
> *All that around you is uplifted;*
> *even the song of the passing bird may enter into such a prayer* (Abram1996: 248-49).

Abram comments on the use of 'wind' in Hebrew tradition, and wonders if 'the monotheism of Abraham and his descendants was borne by a new way of experiencing the invisible air, a new sense of the unity of this unseen presence that flows not just within us but between all things…' (Abram 1996: 249). Abram is Jewish in heritage, but anyone who has read the Psalms in the Bible will know there is constant reference to being in nature, and nature as expressive of human emotion. Waves clap their hands and sing, calves skip on hills, the earth quakes in prayer, and deer pant for the presence of the divine. The *Song of Songs* makes constant reference to fields, hills, plants, bees, trees, and a lush garden, with the human story of love within the text almost overshadowed by nature. In chapter 7, at the height of the song, the text presents a dancing Shulamite woman. Sensual experience and dance are within the tradition, and as Abrams points out, breath or spirit is a connecting factor. Breath gives life, and allows for dancing and singing, yet breath is also increased through these activities.

The connection between dance, song, and breath or spirit was clarified in my own training in working with scripture and dance, with the relationship between movement and voice was a driving factor in creation of dance. First, there was Israeli folk dance, built on song and phrases from the Bible, and choreographed using interpretation of steps from various Jewish cultures. Next, there were my rudimentary attempts to work with biblical text to choreograph dances with sometimes signed interpretation of Hebrew words with hand and arm gestures. Studying dance at Pacific School of Religion, I found more experienced choreographers doing the same, and at times this seemed forced and artificial, allowing text to drive movement. Finally, I encountered the sophisticated work of *Avodah*, a Jewish Dance troop, as well as the choreography of dancers working with deep theological understandings of movement. This included Judith Rock and Carla de Sola. Later, I also grew to understand the influence of Judaism in the works of renown choreographers like Meredith Monk. My own work eventually led to a doctoral dissertation on Jewish women's dance traditions and the concept of Embodied Torah, resulting in my book on *The Miriam Tradition*, where near eastern concepts of word were explored, which included an intimate understanding of the relationship between word, body, and movement. I also considered modern theological view and the speech-thinking/movement connection presented by Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (Sautter 2010).

Through all my study I was aware of the basic fact that in Jewish tradition voice did not supersede body, and that vocalization was always an embodied act. In Jewish history this included actions and gestures as part of ritual and prayer, and dance with singing as part of Jewish life. While words /*Devarim* were considered powerful enough to change reality and even be used as amulets, vocalization was physical. From a critical perspective I was aided by the work of George Lakhoff and Mark Johnson, who in *Philosophy in the Flesh* provided a detailed account of all language as body-based, with religious metaphor clearly stemming from a movement base (Lakhoff and Johnson 1990,1999).

The concept of language being body-based did, of course, not originate with Lakhoff and Johnson. Liljan Espenak is but one Dance Therapist who has already dealt with the idea, and also

notably the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and Kimerer LaMothe. However, Lakhoff and Johnson's work was and is still important for dealing with philosophy, and for conducting research that paved the way for non-binary thinking, and also inclusion of nature and eco-systems. The weight of the insights they provided has sometimes been forgotten. I am recalling them here as it works well with what I will share on biblical texts and rabbinic and Hasidic thought. Lakhoff is Jewish, and his thinking strikes me as amazingly rabbinic and midrashic, meaning giving weight multiple layers of text.

In Jewish thought, Torah – the Bible- may be interpreted in a number of ways, including metaphoric. Unsurprisingly then, in *Metaphors We Live By*, an earlier work, they found movement in the basis for language organization and conceptual, cultural expression. It's an idea consistent with Torah text. The rabbis claimed that the symbolic level of story offered deeper truths. Lakhoff and Johnson share this is because 'spatialization metaphors are rooted in physical and cultural experience'(1980:13;17-18). In *Philosophy in the Flesh* they offer more specifics about how metaphors of motion are also the basis of thought, and that the 'mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical'(1990,1999: 3). I personally liked their example of happiness, which is almost always expressed in language of elevation, much as we had discussed in dance therapy class.

The metaphor used to describe 'happy' is up. In a 'metaphorical mapping' of this phenomenon, they note expressions like 'I'm feeling up today' and is equated with 'having an upright posture.' (Lakhoff and Johnson 1990,1999: 50). In Jewish tradition, again, such metaphors abound in the Psalms, which are used regularly for worship. For example, in Psalm 121 'Esa Einai' – I will lift my eyes to the mountains, from where does my strength come. In a bit more complex metaphor from Psalm 99 'Romeimu, Adonai Eloheinu/vehishtachavu la'adom raglav kadosh hu' one exalts or lifts up God, and bows down in humble worship. In both cases, looking up or going up is a metaphor of hope. Psalm 99 also suggests real physical motion accompanied the singing or prayer practice. In some Jewish communities, the singing of such verses is accompanied by simple line and circle dancing, or might be sung in joyous procession of a Torah scroll. Lakoff and Johnson cautioned that cultural context needed to be considered in assessing metaphor and movement, just as I had been taught in studying basics of Laban movement analysis. What was and is of great importance to me is their conclusion that religion is essentially physical, and spirituality is essentially embodied. More recent studies have focused on the effects of post-Enlightenment thought creating disembodied understandings of religion and spirituality. Results were that expressive religious practices like those of some Jews were considered primitive. In the process, voice became disembodied, the product of text rather than text being a product of the embodied voice.

In Jewish ritual practices spoken word, gestures, dance, and movement are partially prescribed by rabbinic writing in the first book of Talmud. The concept of 'bending the spine' in prayer was set in tractate *Berakhot.* Bending the spine is both a metaphor for physical involvement in spirituality, and literally as movement that serves as vehicle for vocal prayer. Though limited now to small bends, voice and movement in Jewish prayer still involve bending the spine. But prayer movement is not the only instance of voice as physical in Judaism. There are dance traditions. In *The Miriam Tradition*, I explored how Jewish women's dance leadership in Sephardic communities served a spiritual function of joy at weddings and sorry at funerals. The

use of verse and movement offered a complete ritual activity that while not specific to rabbinic Judaism, was a fulfilment of the practice of Torah. This was controversial. Jewish women were not always taught to read, and less seldom schooled in textual study, yet as a religion with an oral tradition, extension of teaching through sung verse and dance is possible. With later research, I found an article by Eliot Wolfson's extremely helpful. He presented medieval Jewish spiritual practices of Kabbalah as based not on words and text, but on understanding the relationship between the body and words.

Wolfson finds the authors of the medieval Spanish Jewish mystical text the *Zohar* connect movement and word in prayer to develop what he calls the 'angelic body.' The Jewish mystics understood their prayer motions would elevate them fully to a more enlightened existence. Wolfson notes they had a medieval disdain for the physical body, inconsistent with rabbinic and biblical thought. The classic rabbinic view is based on the biblical verse in Genesis/*Bereshit* stating humans are born in the image of God. This is understood to mean physical reality is positive. The Zohar practitioners did have a concept of *malchut*/mother earth as the indwelling of the Shekinah, the divine feminine. Yet they perceived of how the physical body might be transformed to be truly a reflection of God.

In the past decades I have seen the development of 'Jewish Yoga' and somatic practices based on selective kabbalistic thinking, so it is important to consider the source material. According to Wolfon the kabbalists considered the body a means of enacting the words of Torah. These actions then affect God, and transformation occurs. Therefore, their ritual actions 'fortifies the divine attributes, which are imaginally envisioned as bodily limbs**…'** (Wolfson 2005: 490; 492). It was the ritual performance that served 'an instrument through which the physical body is conjoined to and transformed in light of the imaginal body of God.' However, it is important to remember the ritual prayers involve vocalization.

In Jewish prayer, even the silent central Amidah includes murmuring of words. Wolfson offers that for the kabbalists the physical body 'becomes the perfect vehicle to execute the will of the soul and soul becomes the perfect guide in directing the will of the body. …' This produces the 'transformed angelic body'(Wolfson 2005:492-493). The spoken words of prayer may be understood as the impetus for the actions, yet also as the completion of the ritual motions. For as Wolfson explains, the issue is not the text becoming embodied, but the conjunction of the text and body. Furthermore, Wolfson and others who study the kabbalistic texts have noted there was a conception of Hebrew letters of the text representing the human body, and the vowel points the human breath (Winkler 2003: 25, 27; Kaplan 1997: 161). In all, this suggests there was a tying together of body, breath, and voice through movement. They understood breath as *ruach* and *neshamah*. Both refere to stages of spiritual growth . Yet there are many examples within the biblical text that suggest movement and voice were frequently paired as a vehicle for conveying praise or prophecy.

**Some Specific Historical Examples**

*Bible, Voice, Dance* Like all Judaism, the medieval Jewish mystics based their work on biblical text. Examining the Torah, many who study dance note how frequently dance terms are employed, especially the word 'machol.' It is used to describe the dance of Miriam and the

women at the shore of the Reed Sea, and also the term for dancing in front of the golden calf. Scholar Carol Meyers noted it almost always refers to women's dance and song leadership, and presumably with use of a frame drum or timbrel. Meyers calls this the Drum-Dance song tradition. Such and ensemble would have employed dance and voice (Meyers 1993: 49-67). Before Meyer's study, Mayer Gruber published a now well known essay on ten terms used for dance in the Hebrew Bible. One term he mentions, *hagag* or to dance in a circle, it used in Psalm 45 referring to shouting out praise (*rinnah*), which Gruber understands to mean a circle dance was done with singing. (Gruber 1990: 48-66). Clearly singing as part of dance was a part of ancient Hebrew practice. Yet, it is also possible to turn to the biblical prophets to gain insight into the connection between words and symbolic action in ancient Israel.

There are no specific texts describing the major prophets dancing, but often they receive '*Debar Adonai*,' the word of God. This word might impel them to take on symbolic actions. Jeremiah, for example, wears a linen belt and puts a yoke around his neck as symbolic of upcoming subjugation, and then offers prophetic words on this upcoming fate. When considering the symbolic acts of the biblical prophets, Ake Viberg comments that earlier studies noted the order of such prophetic acts, and that the actions preceded the prophetic explanation; voice completed actions. Viberg himself finds that there is a type of 'street theatre' quality to the actions (Viberg 2007, 2021: 13, 15). Jeremiah also called for mourning dances to be performed by professional wailing women (*qinot*) for the destruction and death during the siege of Jerusalem. Their actions were a specific type of dance of lament that included wailing, stomping of feet, and clapping of hands (Jeremiah 9:10-21). Yet, Jeremiah also prophesized the restoration of Israel, and in this he declared the young women would lead dancing once more (chapter 31: 4,13). In all, the biblical text conveys that dance, symbolic action, and 'word' are joined together. For it is both the body and breath that give life to words, with completion in vocalization.

**Kabbalah Specifics**

After the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, Jewish leaders met to reconstruct Judaism. In some writings dance was banned for the Sabbath, since it might lead to playing of musical instruments, which was not permitted out of mourning for the loss of the Temple (*Beitzah 30a.)* Yet dance was encouraged on Simchat Torah, a holiday celebrating the giving of the Torah, and also required for weddings. Despite the early ban on dance on the Sabbath, Judaism continued to associate speech and the somatic experiences. The rabbis of the Talmud set the course for post-Temple Judaism. One of the first writings they produced was *Brachot*, dealing with prayer and blessing. There, the rabbis insisted that prayer was to include 'bending of the spine,' meaning physical participation (*B. Berachot* 28b). Many years later in medieval times, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) and Moses Maimonides would comment on this dictate. Two of the most famous Jewish scholars, they noted body-brain connections (Verman 1996: 80-92). But it was the development of spiritual and meditative techniques within Judaism where it is possible to discover what might be considered somatic exercises utilizing speech. As Wolfson explains, Jewish mystics, those who practiced *Kabbalah*, sometimes used vocal and movement techniques for both prayer and meditation. Part of the connection made was that spirit was breath, and understood to exist at different levels of development. *Ruach*/breath was a more basic level. Yet the Jewish mystics wanted to develop their *Neshamah*, a term also

associated with breath and a more refined level of soul consciousness. The methods they developed were body based, yet could include vocalization.

Moshe Idel is a scholar of Jewish *Kabbalah* who examined some of these techniques, noting actions, gestures, and motions that facilitate meditation. Isaiah Tishby and Daniel Matt note that some of the actions were done as part of prayer, where words and actions would be joined together. The *Tikkunei Zohar,* for instance notes when and how often to bow for prayer actions.

> … bow four times during the *Amidah*, twice during the initial three [blessings] and twice during the latter three. This corresponds to the four letters of [God's name]…They also straighten up four times, corresponding to its four letters… One must bend the eighteen vertebrae each time, corresponding the eighteen benedictions, which are included in the eighteen worlds…The spine is a *lulav,* for if it is split, it becomes defective…..[from *Tikkunei Zohar,* no. 18:37a] (Tishby 1995: 382, see also Matt 2004:74-75).

Other examples of prayer motion come from the introduction to the *Zohar,* where one was to prostrate before entering the sanctuary for prayer (Matt 2004: 74-75). Additionally, full prostration for prayer is discussed as part of the central *Amidah* standing prayer. Prostration is also for modesty, as there is an imagined intercourse of the *Shekhinah* with the Divine presence ((Idel 2005:75). The *Shekhinah* is the feminine presence of God on earth, so the act of prostration recognizes an embodied reality of the divine on earth. Idel comments it was understood that the body's movement had the potential, at least symbolically, to activate the 'potencies, found in [hu]man, nature, and the divinity' ((Idel 2005:149). He affirms prayer involved embodied actions, but confirms that vocalization was an important part of the process.

Idel presents methods for embodied vocalization for meditation outside of prayer services, including a focus on Hebrew letters and combining in different ways the letters of the Torah; with this, 'the ecstatic kabbalist becomes part of the Torah and it is integrated within him.'( Idel 2005:149),comments that this method understands that the 'lower and the higher realms' of realty 'are interconnected by linguistic cords' in what he calls ''linguo-theologies' or 'linguo-theosophies' (Idel 2005: 122). Voice in prayer thus embodies the divine will in human reality. Idel summarizes this by sharing 'language can be envisioned as an expression of the soul, of the subjective, which nevertheless takes place in nature' and that language has a prominently connective social role'(Idel 2005: 206). Rather than limit the experience of the sacred to the individual, vocalization assists in relating the message to the reality of the community and world. While such methods for meditation and prayer are not full dance activities, they do present an extra-ordinary role for movement with vocalization.

*Kabbalah* scholar Tomer Persico follows Idel, first offering that meditative techniques are embodied. He moves beyond the medieval period though, and provides an example of Jewish Hasidic technique of achieving an altered state of mystic consciousness had involved singing, prayer as well as dance (Persico 2022:4). The Hasidim arose in Eastern Europe in the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century, offering a more accessible method for Jewish meditative practice. In Hasidic thought dance and song are an aid to achieve an ecstatic state, and physical existence is confirmed rather than denied. Not only are words embodied, but the Hasidim locate spirituality

within the body. Persico notes that this method, which he calls ecstatic and 'shaivistic,'(Persico 2022:4) is present in many traditions, but he then examines specifically Nachman of Bratslav's methods for *Hitbodedut* – being alone with God.

> That the primary element of *Hitbodedut* and the talk between him and his Maker in wholeness is that he lays before God blessed be He his words so thoroughly, that he will be very close to abdicating his soul, perish the thought (*Khas Ve'Shalom*), until he almost dies, perish the thought, until his soul is tied to his body only by a thread because of all his real sorrow and longing and craving to God blessed be He (Persico 2022:8).

This passage seems to suggest negation of the body, but the technique is actually somatically based:

> Here, talking before God brings the hasid into an ecstatic emotional fervor that begins with 'a great arousal in body and mind' … and ends with a state that is close to the loss of consciousness, perhaps even to the loss of life.… (Persico 2022:12).

Persico examines Nachman's techniques, comparing them to two modern day interpretations, then finding the current versions focus on thought rather than whole-body engagement. Where he finds Nachman's methods 'extroverted' and 'ecstatic,' he labels the modern interpretations 'introverted' and 'enstatic'(Persico 2022:12). Persico doesn't criticize modernization of the method, but he clearly demonstrates that the original intent of *Hibodedut* was somatically based, with talking to God a physical practice. Once again, vocalization is completion of physical activity. In this case it is not necessarily dance, but might be inclusive of dance.

Idel and Persico offer fine insights into the physicality of specific Jewish practices, but they deal with those that were used by men who had access to scholarship. During the medieval period in Spain, at the time of the composition of the *Zohar*, there is evidence of Jewish women joining voice and movement in the activity of Tanyaderas or celebration leaders, as well as Endechas or mourning leaders. The Tanyaderas offered music and dance leadership, where the Endechas conducted wailing dance and led symbolic movement at gravesites (Sautter 2010). Barbara Sparti also offers a story of Jewish women dancing for the Sabbath in Renaissance Italy, sharing traveler David Reubini's account of 'women playing harps and dancing to entertain him' as well as a report that a doctor's daughter 'who read and recite scripture every day' danced 'with joy' on the Sabbath (Sparti 2012: 245). This little snapshot of the traveler reporting on women suggests that within the Jewish community it was normative for women to dance, perhaps with song, just as we see in the Torah.

The cultures in which Judaism existed changed, but active engagement with words and movement were still employed. Persico's interest is in exploring somatically based techniques for Hasidic meditation, yet he fails to mention Nachman's use of dance itself. While Persico does claim that meditation is an embodied activity, he perhaps undermines himself in not providing examples of Nachman's dance practices that once again demonstrate the connection between the voice and embodiment.

Nachman was a dancer. Many studies on dance in Judaism refer to him, and in *Kabbalah and Ecology* David Seidman also mentions Nachman's use of dance and how one's 'limbs' reflect the will of God, and actions complete the body of the *Shekinah* (Seidman 2016:21,294- 296). In a well know article on Hasidic dance *To Jump for Joy*, scholar Michael Fishbane also presents a study of Nachman's dance (Fishbane 1977: 371-387). While there has probably been overemphasis on Hasidic use of song and dance, and much less attention given their body-based methods for entering meditation, it is a major oversight to not recognize use of singing and dance as a practice of ecstatic spirituality within Jewish traditions. Not only was meditation embodied for the Hasidim, it could also involve active, ecstatic movement.

**Critical considerations and modern examples**

Of the many theories I have read on the relationship between body, movement, and spoken word, almost all conclude language is not primary but secondary to movement. In my overview of Jewish history and spirituality, my intent was to show how the relationship was active in somatically based ritual, cultural, and spiritual practices. This might be contrary to the idea of those who understand Jews to be 'People of the Book,' implying that sitting and reading a text is the primary activity of the tradition. In many ways this is true, but perhaps in modern times the association has become exaggerated within and outside the Jewish community. Scholarship is partially at fault, offering disembodied interpretations of embodied practices with lack of attention to specifics of movement. More philosophical or text based scholarship might even reject ethnographic study of ritual and dance simply because it is not abstract thought about them. Some scholars of Jewish Studies have also noted it has been too textually based. And while dance with singing has never really stopped being part of Jewish life, congregational worship often seems to have disassociated voice and body so that singing is primarily a cognitive activity. In congregational settings I have witnessed congregations that do not sing at all, relying on a cantor, song leader, or a choir to do so while they sit and listen. Reasons for this are many, including adaptation to post-enlightenment rationalist culture within Judaism. Bruno Latour has noted this disembodiment in scholarship and a bifurcated thinking even today.

Latour is not Jewish, and while his work did not focus on dance or ritual his ideas clearly apply to issues in modern Jewish workshop. As with Abram, Latour noted the importance of words as a connector of the inner and outer world. This requires recognition of the body, and language about the body. Rather than philosophical epistemology of the body, Latour demands a more integrated approach examining the epistemological and ontological reality of being. His example is of those training to be perfume testers, and how it is not their nose that is training, but their bodies. '…bodies are our common destiny because there is no meaning in saying without my body I could smell better…A direct and unmediated access to the primary qualities of odors could only be detected by a bodiless nose. But the opposite of embodied is dead, not omniscient' (Latour 2004:209). Latour applies this thought, remarking that '…The body is thus not a provisional residence of something superior-an immortal soul, the universal or thought - but what leaves a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and become sensitive to what the world is made of' (Latour 2004:205-206). Rather than create a dichotomy of words and actions of the body, he finds language has a materiality, and 'Through the materiality of the language tools…we see, feel, and act' based on 'differences registered in the world…but that does not mean that words float arbitrarily over an unspeakable world of objects'(Latour 2004:210). You

> cannot have a nose without a body, nor can dance or meditate without human physical participation; words must be understood as 'articulation' of material, physical reality.'

Dance then may serve as a bridge between the non-cognitive and cognitive, so that articulation of experience is possible, and to follow Latour, so the materiality of language is recognized (see Walz 2021). Certainly, this is true within Judaism given the history of dance in relationship to voice in Jewish traditions, whether they are considered cultural or religious. Yet modern life and post-Enlightenment Jewish worship has tended to be disembodied. Use of movement, singing, and attention to embodied spiritual practices has diminished. Rabbi Tamar Havilio wrote on this issue, noting in *(Re) Learning 'L'Hitpaleil: The Performance of Prayer as Spiritual Education* the role of the worship leaders in setting the tone of *Avodah*-service based on stance, and that a change of the worship leader facing the congregation has created prayer services of entertaining performance (Havilio 2014: 190-206). Yet I have experienced a counter movement to rationalized, disembodied practices as an active participant in progressive Judaism. Studying at a Jewish meditation center, one of the methods used to begin a silent meditation session was sitting and singing. The attention to the breath and body, especially moving from the singing to the silence, forced attention to the physical as part of thought awareness. Afterwards there was time for discussion and a lesson. But the experience came first. At this same center, Friday night Shabbat services contained time for silent meditative prayer, but this was always preceded by very engaged movement in line dancing around the sanctuary, clapping of hands, and swaying of bodies, all done while singing. Such engagement felt complete, refreshing, and redemptive. The activity acknowledged the body and increased respiration. Followed by prayer that included traditional or personal movements and murmurings of words, there was time for a relaxation and calm. The spiritually was tangible and satisfying.

Within my own work as a performer who is Jewish, and often presenting Jewish stories, I have also found it important to complete my work in voice. I started *Storydance* theatre for this very purpose. *Storydance Theatre*'s mission is to entertain, educate, and inspire through enacted story and dance. Presentations creatively combine acting, storytelling, and dance to produce works that retell old tales in new and relevant ways. I purposely re-write old stories for a modern audience, to help think through the 'moral' and meaning of the story, often updating the allegory I find in the stories and increasingly focusing on ecological aspects of the story. The project was an outgrowth of my own choreography, which I often presented with a story introduction. Audience feedback was positive, but some suggested I integrate this into the work, or simply dance. Through thinking about the relationship between movement, words, and voice, and drawing from acting training that was heavily physical, the concept occurred to me of performance that moved fluidly from stories told actively with dance movement to dance that told a story.

Starting with short tales that used dance to share almost every word of a story, a more integrated technique evolved until I was able to develop full plays. In *Storydance* plays, gestures are used to relate words back to their bodily basis. In this, I understand words are actions, and actions are words (see Lakhoff and Johnson, 1990, 1999). So while other actors might first find the 'voice' of a character, I first work on a character's' movement to find my voice. Originally, for acting technique I frequently used hand gesture, almost like in Kathak dance. I moved on to choreographing phrases that were more sophisticated. Devising the choreography of acting and

script, the techniques are now set by the frame of the story. As one director told me, the idea is to choreograph an entire scene. I understood this to mean the script already contains motion as words are based on the body and actions, so breathing life back into the words creates the dance of my actions as I deliver my lines. There is nothing revolutionary in this technique and is partially influenced by classic British methods I was taught in acting classes. I simply focus more on the movement, realizing the vocalization is the completion of movement rather than the source. This is much different though than some current methods that emphasize spoken word and the psychology of relationship rather the embodiment of words and relationships.

For the play *The Garden: A Refuge*, I was especially conscious of my choreography for spoken lines. Based on the biblical book of Job, the play was an allegory on our relationship to nature amidst the loss and re-creation we face as humans. The play moved from loss and 'winter' to hope and 'spring.' The props used, gestured employed, nature of solos, and especially dances followed this rubric. First there was a prop and movement pattern for each segment of the play. They then all correlated to 1) the hot heat of summer and global warming 2) dampness of winter, overly wet seasons 3) spring and storms 4) balanced weather and human acknowledgement of being part of nature. For instance, the first act dealt with a disastrous trip to Europe in the middle of a heat wave to portray loss and disaster caused by weather. When speaking, all my gestures were downward, moving from standings to drooping, to finally sitting down on the ground. Dance interludes between acts provided non-verbal commentary and conveyed that the words spoken were directed by the body gestures. In another play, *Golmah*, a retelling of the Golem story from a feminist perspective, running and swirling began the first act as I shouted out lines from Macbeth's the Weird Sisters on 'posters of the sea and land.' This was to establish both the 'magic' circle of time we were entering as audience and performers and represent some of the chaos that would be shared. There was also fun with 'spelling,' literally leading the audience in gestures that spelled out letter for Golmaha female golem and other words.

The effect acknowledging and emphasizing the relationship between movement and voice in my work has been a profound change in my performance. I previously found Martin Buber's insights helpful in understanding theatre as a community building event of listening and seeing one another. Buber wrote that when speech is embodied in such performance, a connection forms between the actors, audience, and story, creating a relationship that overcomes separation (Sautter 2017: 28). Buber is quick to point out that the materiality of the speech is essential, and in this voice requires a body and the connections we make with others in speech are physical. As a performer, I see this when I look at the audience communicating to me by leaning forward, sitting back, tilting heads, and offering an intent gaze. For me as a performer their movements are completed in the vocal comments they share with me after a performance.

Buber did not write much about dance. When he did, it was often more as an ecstatic experience, but what he shares about the relationship of performance I find equally true of dance. As Sam Shonkoff writes, Buber's evaluation of the Hasidim, he does not separate words and spirituality and recognizes that sacramentality involves all of life. Specifically, Buber deals with over-focus on textual study, as well over-focus on spiritual experience as problematic. In translating a tale about a rebbe engaging in prayer and returning to the everyday word, Shonkoff says specifically 'Buber rejects the notion that there is some ontological abyss between religious and interpersonal realms' and 'avoided the propagation of ontological binaries between spirituality and language,

he does so again [translating a Hasidic tale'] with regard to spirituality and corporality'(Shonkoff 2018: 11-12). This could equally apply to dance, which may serve as a means of spiritual exploration, or performance that allows for transcendence. The speech of dance, as one audience member once shared with me, is *within* the viewer. For dance allows those watching to make up their own story, and in this experience a spiritual moment. I understood what was meant, and I have received delightful feedback from those sharing what metaphors of motion they experienced when watching me dance. Their stories completed the journey of experiencing motion, literally moving them to speech.

**Conclusion**

Body, breath, soul and voice: somehow in modern consciousness they were separated into distinct entities. Times have changed, and within somatic practices there had been an attempt to look at the wisdom of religious and spiritual traditions. I have seldom seen somatic scholars look to Jewish traditions for insight. Perhaps the Hebrew language is a barrier, yet the movement practices have received new interest within the Jewish community in recent times, with some of the scholarship I referred to in this article as a base for academic study. Since ecstatic and joyful movement is woven into Jewish history, I also wonder if somatic scholars find this contrary to somatic techniques as slow and silent movement. Reviewing slices of Jewish movement history in this article, the evidence is that there have been a variety of movement traditions within various forms of Judaism, often associated with overall wellness. The traditions offer a range of experiences, from meditation to energetic dance and song. I find it refreshing and meaningful to experience singing and line dancing within Jewish ritual settings, and the role of voice does not detract but enhances the experience.

I see an attempt to include more body consciousness in Jewish life once more, I have often experienced classes and Sabbath services where the leader has instructed people to breathe. Trauma therapists remind us of how important this is for healing and relaxation. Yet having experienced such a direction when breathing was strained due to illness, the command actually made me tense my muscles. The next time I was told to 'breathe,' I realized why I was distressed. Breathing occurs with the body. I then stretched my arms and body up and out instead of simply breathing, and despite nasal congestion I was able to take a deep breath much more easily. Breath and speech that is separated from the body is incomplete. It is the movement of the body and breath that makes spoken word possible as an integral partner. And it has been so since the beginning.

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