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Trusting the Unseen: Hannah and Embodied Prayer

Elizabeth Diane Abraham

Sarah Lawrence College, eabraham@gm.sl.c.edu

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Running Head: TRUSTING THE UNSEEN

Trusting the Unseen: Hannah and Embodied Prayer

by

Elizabeth Diane Abraham

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Dance/Movement Therapy at Sarah Lawrence College

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Abstract

Both Mystical Judaic teachings and Body-Mind Centering discuss the spiritual and psychological meanings of the body's organs, beyond their physical function. Using the biblical story of Hannah's prayer as a starting point, this thesis discusses each discipline's approach to the organs, with a specific focus on the heart and lungs, and investigates how these can be used as tools toward body and soul integration. The body and the journey of embodiment, central to dance/movement therapy, allow access to the experience of the organs as performing vital physical functions, providing meaningful structural support, opening a gateway into the emotional world and the possibility of touching upon the more esoteric and spiritual aspects of experience.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father,

Julio Abraham

&

In loving memory of my brother,

Samuel Abraham

(December 31, 1989 – January 16, 1990)

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Hannah's Prayer

The story of Hannah takes place in the late 11th century B.C.E¹ before the monarchy system existed in Israel. Hannah is introduced in the Bible as Elkanah's wife with no genealogy, no other form of identity and only appears in the first book of Samuel, yet she plays a vital role in biblical history. Hannah was the mother of Samuel, who was the first prophet of Israel and a key figure in the transition of Israel's tribal existence and its monarchic political structure. Samuel anointed the first king of Israel, Saul, and later his successor, King David. He handed down all the ancient teachings since the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai to King David (Mindel, n.d.). Samuel's birth and life of service to the Lord are attributed to his mother's prayer:

O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your servant and will remember me and not forget Your servant, and if You will grant Your servant a child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life; and there shall no razor come upon his head.

1 Samuel 1:11 (Bronner, n.d.)

Hannah was the only woman whose prayer was recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures (Bronner, n.d.). Her story is significant because she is the first person to recite a personal prayer at the Holy Tabernacle at Shiloh in Israel. Hannah's prayer is an example to all, men and women, as the kind of prayer that is answered by God.

¹ B.C.E. – Before Common Era

Like some of the matriarchs in Jewish history, Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel, Hannah was barren. However, unlike the matriarchs, Hannah did not doubt her capacity to be a mother. During biblical times, motherhood was the main form of identity for women, so not birthing children resulted in women feeling a lack of purpose, as well as low standing in the existing social structure. Hannah's husband, Elkanah, from the tribe of Levi, loved her, but had to take a second wife, Penninah, in order to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful and multiply (Kadari, 2009), the custom during the pre-monarchic period. Penninah resented Hannah's position as the favored wife and would constantly mock Hannah for not being able to have children. Each morning, Penninah would ask Hannah if she was going to prepare her children for school and, in the evening, if she was waiting for her children to return from school (Kadari, 2009).² There was not a day that passed that Hannah was not reminded by Penninah of her barrenness, which caused her to weep and not want to eat. Elkanah, in his attempt to comfort Hannah, seems not to fully understand Hannah's pain and longing for a child. When he asked her the following questions, Hannah never responded:

Hannah why are you weeping?

Why don't you eat?

Why are you downhearted?

Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?

1 Samuel 1:8 (New International Version)

Despite her anguish, Hannah did not let her sorrow consume her; instead she turned to her faith in God and asked for the impossible.

² Found in the Midrash, a form of rabbinical literature containing interpretations of biblical texts.

The Holy Tabernacle was located in Shiloh before the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was built circa 3,000 B.C.E. Each year, Elkanah and Hannah made a 14-mile pilgrimage to Shiloh and along the way, they both would encourage others to join them. They would take a different route every year, so eventually entire villages would join their pilgrimage. One year, the crowd that joined was large and Elkanah gathered everyone to partake in the holiday offering (Silberstein, n.d.). The finest and largest portions were always given to Hannah, yet she barely participated in the celebration and did not eat.

Once everyone finished their meal, Hannah went by herself to the Tabernacle, stood before the ark and prayed. Eli, a priest who was sitting by the doorpost of the Tabernacle, noticed Hannah praying. With tears in her eyes, Hannah poured out her heart to God. She prayed fervently for a son, moving her lips without speaking aloud. In this instant by privately praying to God and asking for her heart's desires, the meaning of prayer was forever changed. Until that point men did all liturgical speaking and prayer publicly, for the entire community, making Hannah's prayer a revolutionary act. Eli, the Elder, witnessed someone for the first time visibly praying within sacred walls, since the Tabernacle was not considered a House of Prayer and synagogues had not yet appeared in history (Ozick, 1994). Eli then falsely accuses Hannah of being drunk. Hannah did not allow Eli's role of authority stop her from using her voice to stand up and defend herself and her prayer. In an act of self-respect and empowerment, Hannah courageously responds to Eli:

No, it is not wine, but my soul that pours out to God. For my desire for a child has purpose and meaning beyond the pursuits and follies of man. My child, the precious jewel of my heart's desire — I have already given him to God.

1 Samuel 1:15 (Freeman, n.d.)

Eli then blessed Hannah, praying that God would hear her heart's wishes. Hannah's prayer was a turning point in which Hannah went from being a petitioner to a beneficiary whose prayer was answered by God. That year, Hannah gave birth to a son she named Samuel which means, "I have asked him of God." Once Samuel was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle, keeping her promise to dedicate him to God. There he was raised under the guidance of Eli and grew up to be known as Samuel the Prophet. Hannah's courage in using her voice to pray and speak up for herself, her ability to trust not only God but herself demonstrate the connection between body and soul, the physical and spiritual. Today, this story is read each Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) as a reminder of Hannah's lesson, "prayer comes not from one's lips, but from one's heart" (Silberstein, n.d.).

At the Western Wall: A *Personal Narrative*

The biblical story of Hannah came to life for me during my pilgrimage to the Western Wall. There is a pitch-black sky with only the moon in sight and a cool breeze on this early January Friday night. A contrast exists between the wide intersection with modern traffic lights and ancient buildings that share the cross street. Large sand-colored stones make up what looks like a colossal castle with different leveled towers, the top layer creating a continual, squared zigzag pattern. Leaving the modern world behind, I enter the narrow brick

alleys that have been in existence for thousands of years. To the right, a black iron windowsill creates two hearts beside each other. I walk through King David's gates, the oldest entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem. It is like stepping into a time capsule, traveling back to biblical times walking the same land upon which King David danced.

I left New York with a group of 28 young adults I had just met for the first time, and we took a 9.5-hour plane ride across the Atlantic Ocean. This entire Birthright trip to Israel is a gift and an opportunity to reconnect to one's roots, heritage, and spirituality as well as meet fellow Jews. We arrived at the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, took a bus north to Tiberias, Tsfat, then back to Tel Aviv, and finally Jerusalem. Jerusalem—quiet, ancient brick-paved carless streets, closed for Shabbat businesses, with only pedestrians, the majority walking to pray at the Western Wall. The previous adventures of this trip, including bike rides alongside the Jordan River, visiting a mystical artist in Tsfat, going to the Golan Heights and a night out dancing in Tel Aviv, had been magical.

Walking alongside my fellow Birthright group members, I feel a strong desire to connect with my true self, not wanting to waste this sacred moment, as I recognize all of the emotions buried within. With each step, sadness I was not aware of seeps in creating a void that could only be filled with love. Years of longing to be loved show up uninvited latching onto me during this walk, as well as the grief still felt since my grandmother's passing only a year and a half ago. Wanting so badly to let her know about this trip, this walk and that the prayer made by her son, my father, at the Western Wall years ago was about to be answered. I remember the story of my parents getting married in this very city and how my father left a

note to God praying that the children he and my mother would have would visit the Western Wall someday—where he inserted his prayer—where I was heading. This walk is filled with meaning, purpose and a sense of knowing exactly where I am supposed to be. Disconnected from the outside world with no technology permitted tonight, extra observant wanting to take in every single second since pictures cannot be taken. Wishing for a photographic memory, never wanting to forget this once in a lifetime first trip to the Holy Land.

Hundreds are gathered in the large square plaza that leads to the Western Wall, men to the left and women to the right. At last, there it is and *here I am*, captivated, seeing this immense historic wall for the first time. The stones at the top are small, and appear as if they are crunched together. There are bushes growing from some of the cracks in the wall; it is entralling to see plant life in the midst of concrete. I feel pulled as I separate from my group, passing through circles of women singing and dancing, feeling their joy as I move by, then squeezing my way through the crowd waiting to reach the wall, shoulders touching with other people in the crowd at all times. The sounds of singing and dancing diminish with each step toward the ancient stones. The loud voices fade, becoming the low whispers and cries of the women around me, moving while praying with their entire being like ocean waves, swaying to and fro before the wall; the energy shifting from overt joy to implicit private dialogues. I inhale the reverence with each breath.

Patently waiting for one of the women to finish with her tiny space of concrete, I finally reach my so longed for sacred destination, standing in front of the last remnant of the Holy Temple. A visceral sensation submerges into all of my being enlivening my pulse as my

head and hands come in contact with the ancient stones, and I am suddenly only there. Sight is not needed. My eyes close, connecting to the faith that lies deep within while gravity holds me. The sorrow and yearning to be loved turns into a prayer, my heart pours out to God. My heart's most profound desires rise to the present moment and are sent to God from my soul, moving my lips without speaking aloud.

Although surrounded by hundreds of people, only God, the wall, and I exist. The pain and grief felt just a moment ago transform into an overflow of gratitude knowing that God's love was always and will always be more than enough, it is all that I need. A turning point occurs when wholeness is experienced for the first time as the heaviness and emptiness within disappear. It is expected to keep one's face toward the wall, an act of respect to the holy site, so I slowly step backwards toward the dancing crowd without turning away immediately. This moment flows into a rush of joy and laughter as my hands lock with the dancing women. A private dialogue with my soul and God transforms to singing and dancing songs of peace and worship, "*Salaam, aleinu ve al kol ha olam, salaam, salaam!*" "Peace on us and on everyone!" Pure fulfillment and love are experienced on this Shabbat evening. From the deepest place within out unto the universe, from a private moment to an open gathering; from secular to holy, the physical and spiritual, body and soul can be perceived as one when trusting the unseen.

Judaic Concepts of Body and Soul

Five Levels of the Soul

The concept of a soul, an aspect distinct from the body that resides in it, exists since prehistoric times and varies across cultures and religions (Soul, 2015). According to Kabbalah, the source of mystical Judaism, the soul is known to have five levels, the lowest living in the body. The five levels are: Unique Essence (*Yechidah*), one with the Creator; Living Essence (*Chayah*), the life force of the soul; Divine Soul (*Neshamah*), the breath, where one's intellect is reflected; Spirit (*Ruach*), one's spiritual essence and represents a person's character; and the Indwelling Soul (*Nefesh*), which is the lowest extremity of the soul corresponding to the bloodstream in the body, giving life to the cells. The soul in this lowest level is part of the human pulse giving the soul a physical component that is produced by the human heart. "The five levels of the soul thus form a chain linking man to the supernal universes, and ultimately to God" (Kramer, 1998, p. 29). Each of the higher levels is concealed in the levels below and each lower level becomes a garment of the levels above. When trusting the invisible link between the body and the five levels of the soul, there is a constant connection to the Highest Power. Praying serves as an interface between the physical and spiritual when one's soul elevates.

Divergent Nature of Body and Soul

The Judaic concept of uniting the body and soul dates back to creation and the story of Adam and Eve. The late Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, former *Rebbe* (Hasidic

religious leader) of the Lubavitcher movement, taught that God created the body and soul in two distinct phases (Jacobson, 1995). The body was formed out of dust and then God breathed into it the soul of life. It is believed that in the beginning before the first sin, body and soul were united, one recognizing the need and role of the other. After the first sin, the two were split into materialistic desires and spiritual desires. Ever since, part of our mission is to restore the harmony between body and soul (Jacobson, 1995). Based on this teaching, the unification of body and soul becomes part of humankind's responsibility. It is now in the hands of each soul and its body counterpart to find a way to synchronize. "*Chomer*, the body, is actually pliable 'raw material' that assumes the shape of the soul as it is molded...so that eventually the soul's own innate spirituality will radiate from his body" (Kramer, 1998, p. 33). When the body and soul are in unison, one's core essence can shine forth. For some it may be easier to check in with the body and harder to access the soul and for others the opposite can be true. In either case, a merging of the body and soul instead of choosing one over the other sparks meaning into our lives (Jacobson, 1995). The entire constellation of each individual, the physical, spiritual, emotional, cognitive and social are knitted together making up one person. Although different aspects of the individual, these components within are not entirely separate. Just as the soul has five layers yet is still one, each human being is made up of many layers.

Relationship Between Body and Soul

Rabbi Isaac Luria, the 15th century mystic considered to be the father of Kabbalah, states that there are three garments that clothe the human spirit, the innermost, middle and

outer. The innermost garment represents one's thoughts, the middle, one's speech and the outer, one's deeds (Aaron, 2009). The soul travels from deep within expressing itself outwardly through one's thoughts, words and actions. Through the body, words are spoken and movements are performed on the physical plane, yet the inner spirit that enlivens them exists in a different dimension, interconnecting with the physical (Greenbaum, 1995). The body then becomes the link between the soul and one's thoughts, words and deeds. When connected to the soul, each thought, word and action is full of insight and meaning because it is coming from the most profound place within.

In order to further understand the body and soul I will use the differentiation between the Me, the Self and the "I" described by Rabbi David Aaron (2009), the founder and dean of the Isralight Institute in Jerusalem. The Me is the ego consciousness which contains our psychological clothing such as our thoughts and feelings as well as the physical sensations of our body. Our persona and character are also considered the Me. "The Self is the soul, the actor who plays the character" (p. 9). The Self consists of two parts, which will be later discussed, the creative self and the sacred self. Lastly, the 'I' is the Ultimate Self, the Souls of Souls, God (Aaron, 2009). When describing their relationship and who we want to be, Rabbi Aaron states, "The question is what type of Me is worth wanting to be. The Me we want to be is a Me that enables our Self to shine out as an expression of the Great 'I'" (Aaron, 2009, p. 9). Based on this concept, the soul not only shines forth, but is also considered an expression of God himself. When using these lenses, each person is a spark of the greater power that links us all.

In regards to the two parts of the Self, the sacred side tends to pull inward yearning for connection with the supernatural, while the creative side goes outward to use its persona in order to present itself to the world (Aaron, 2009, p. 41). An interaction between going inward and presenting oneself to the world depicts the constant dialogue between the body and soul. In this case, the creative and sacred sides are two components of the soul. The creative side has a close relationship to the body. In order for the creative side to express itself to the external world, it needs the body to execute the creative idea. Using the body as a resource to connect the body and soul is a way to help bridge the complexities within each person.

The Unseen Within the Body

The spiritual and psychological meanings of the organs found in Judaic (specifically the mystical stream of Judaism) and Body-Mind Centering concepts can be used as tools toward body and soul integration. Although completely different schools of thought, Judaic and Body-Mind Centering concepts both believe there is more to the organs than their physical function. Establishing a connection or simply becoming aware of the organs opens the doors to accessing valuable information about ourselves and can influence how we move in this world. “As the primary habitats of our emotions, aspirations, and memories of our past experiences, the organs imbue our movement with personal involvement and meaning” (Cohen, 2012, p. 30). Each person has access to a continuum from the most concrete, physical functioning of the organs through the psychological and emotional to the more expansive and spiritual realms. The body and the journey of embodiment, central to

dance/movement therapy, allow us access to the experience of the organs as performing vital physical functions, access to meaningful structural support, serve as a gateway into our emotional world and the possibility of touching upon the more esoteric and spiritual aspects. Everything we need is already within, moment to moment, right here, right now.

Body-Mind Centering

Body-Mind Centering is a practice that focuses on developing cellular awareness of the major body systems—skeletal, muscular, fluid, organ, neuroendocrine and the developmental patterns that are present in human movement. The founder of Body-Mind Centering, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, explains in her book, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action* how she focused on the skeletal and muscular systems for years without incorporating the organ system. In her practice, Cohen found that explaining her experiences and observations could not be fully expressed solely using the skeletal and muscular systems. She began to make contact with her organs and explore the role of the organs in movement and skeletal support first through breath and voice. In her work, Cohen discovered what is considered the “mind” of each organ and body system. In other words, Cohen found that by spending time making contact with each organ through imagery, breath, touch and movement, a quality of “mind” would emerge.

The human body is made up of systems that work together to keep us alive while functioning individually. Each system has specific qualities that enhance the rest of the body’s wellbeing. The digestive, circulatory, reproductive, urinary, and respiratory systems

are made up of organs. The organs work as a foundation and underlying support of the skeletal and muscular systems. When we move our bodies, we see our bones and muscles in action, yet the inner organs, like the soul, enliven the movement making it fuller. The organs are contained within the cavities of the body, from the skeleton, rib cage, and pelvis on a deeper layer to the connective tissues and skin on the outermost layers, providing a sense of volume and full-bodiedness (Cohen, 2012). Each organ has its own specialized function, which interrelates with the other organs.

Compassionate Heart. In Body-Mind Centering concepts, the heart is associated with compassion and is considered the seat of emotions (Cohen, 2012). The body-mind psychotherapist, Susan Aposhyan (1999) states that the heart has the most powerful electromagnetic fields in the body resulting in being 5,000 times stronger than that of the brain. This means that the electromagnetic field in the heart has the capacity to entrain all of the cells in the body. This may be one explanation for empathetic resonance between people and how emotions are shared. Through these magnetic fields, which extend indefinitely throughout space (Mao, 2011), states of compassion may be transmitted from person to person resulting in empathy and understanding (Aposhyan, 1999).

Lungs as a Vehicle of Exchange. The circulatory and respiratory systems work together and serve as a vehicle of exchange between the inner organs and the external world. The lungs surround the heart and connect to it by the pulmonary arteries. The heart sends blood to the lungs, then receives the oxygenated blood from the pulmonary veins and sends it throughout the entire body, providing energy (Heart, 2015). During this process, carbon

dioxide, which is toxic to the body is collected by the red blood cells and carried back to the lungs through which it is exhaled. In this way, the lungs bring oxygen into the body, the heart spreads it throughout the entire body and the carbon dioxide is released through the breath.

In addition to working together concretely in their basic bodily function, the heart and lungs play a role in the connection between what is felt inside the body and how it is expressed out into the external world. Cohen (2012) elaborates on the use of voice as a means of expression, communication, and relationship between ourselves and others. She describes the pharynx — a passageway leading from the oral and nasal cavities to the esophagus and larynx — as the instrument of expression. The larynx houses the vocal chords, which vibrate at the passage of air when breathing. This process is the power source of our vocalization; through the pharyngeal cavities we can use our voices to express our feelings and attitudes.

Mystical Judaic Concepts

The Hasidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov saw the soul in every component of the human anatomy; thus, all of his treatments of the body were spiritual-Kabbalistic. Kabbalah is a set of esoteric teachings from the ancient Jewish tradition. Rabbi Chaim Kramer, in his book *Anatomy of The Soul* includes teachings of Rebbe Nachman discussing every limb of the body and the inherent spiritual power of each organ. The material in *Anatomy of the Soul* mainly comes from *Likutey Moharan*, the teachings of Rebbe Nachman (as recorded by his disciple and scribe, Reb Noson) and *Likutey Halakhot*, the discourses of

Reb Noson. The organs of the body have unique characteristics that relate to different spiritual and emotional components of each person. Rebbe Nachman believed that the physical body and its soul counterparts were completely interrelated. The organs are unseen yet physically function to sustain the life of the body, which is the home of the soul, making their role vital in the connection of the two.

Understanding of the Heart. The heart, a vital organ that pumps blood throughout the entire body, begins to beat in the embryo during the fourth week in utero. In some traditions such as Kundalini Yoga, the beating of the heart coincides with the time that the soul enters the human body (Bhajan, 1982). In Judaism the soul enters the body with the first breath taken, yet in its lowest level, the indwelling soul, corresponds to the bloodstream. According to Avraham Greenbaum (1995), a Torah scholar, the phrase “the soul is in the blood” is found in the Bible in Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:11 & 17:14, and Deuteronomy 12:23. In this way, the heart and soul enliven all of the cells of the body.

Similarly to the Body-Mind Centering concept, Jewish mystical teachings state that understanding is rooted in the heart (Kramer, 1998). In order to understand what someone is saying one must first listen, which requires paying attention to what is being said. In Hebrew the term ‘paying attention’ translates as ‘*tesumat lev,*’ which means attentiveness of the heart (Kramer). Although the hearing process occurs via the ears, what is heard must transfer to the heart in order for understanding to take place. Yearning and longing, as experienced by Hannah’s yearning for a child and my longing for love, are also felt in the heart. By accessing the heart, one can connect to and understand the emotions inside and become

aware of one's desires. By paying attention and listening "from the heart," one can better understand what others are expressing. In this way, the heart plays a role in making internal and external connections.

Breath as a Messenger. The Jewish mystical concepts also demonstrate that the interconnection between the words we speak and what is felt in the heart occurs through breath. David Friedman, a Kabbalistic artist states that, "Your breath and the letters of speech that flow from your mouth engrave and carve the story of your soul into the elastic tablet of Space-Time" (Friedman, n.d.). According to Rebbe Nachman's teachings, the breath carries the desires of the heart (Kramer, 1998). When pouring out one's soul through prayer, the desires felt in the heart rise and are expressed outwardly into the spiritual realms. When Hannah prayed her words were not heard, yet her lips were moving, as her breath carried out her heart's most profound desire to have a child to the Highest Power. When I prayed at the Western Wall my lips too moved, without speaking aloud, sending out what was felt in my soul to God. In this way, the air that passes through the larynx, during the vocalization of the prayer corresponds to the Spirit level of the soul known as *ruach* (Winston, 2000).

The Ruach. The Hebrew word *ruach* has several meanings. In the physical world it refers to air that becomes wind once we breathe it or to a wind that blows. In the metaphysical world it means a spirit or spirituality, man's spiritual essence, the fourth level of the soul, described in chapter one. *Ruach HaKodesh* refers to God's spirit, known as the Holy Spirit in other religions (Kramer, 1998).

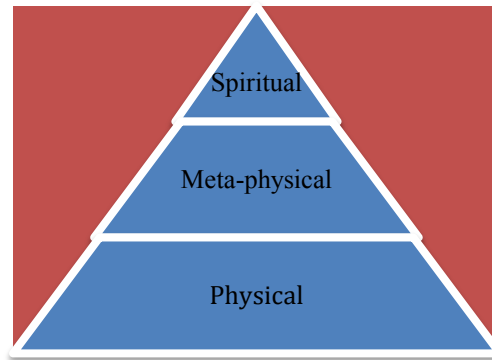


Figure 1: The word *ruach* represented in three levels all in one shape. Spiritual- Godly spirit, Metaphysical- spiritual essence, Physical- breath.

Using the same word, *ruach*, to describe the physical, metaphysical and spiritual allows us to explore the concept that they can all exist within the body. These three levels are all inside one pyramid, representing one body. The top of the pyramid is connected to the heavens and the bottom to the earth. This alludes to the idea that the first level of the soul is still one with the Higher Power and the fifth level is one with the body. Through our soul, through our breath, we are both of this earth and the universe.

Trudi Schoop (2000), a pioneer of dance/movement therapy believed that we live in two realities. The first is the *Ur*, which is a German word that can be translated as “cosmic” or “universal” and represents a life force or energy that includes time and space. Then there is the reality of the physical here and now on this planet including the family we are born into, where we are born, and the roles we physically adopt (Schoop). In Figure.1, the *Ur* would be at the top, the physical reality at the bottom, and movement would be in the middle. Movement is the bridge connecting the conscious with the unconscious, spiritual,

metaphysical and physical. All of these reside in the body and the body moves through time and space. The body dances from within, from the soul and from the spirit.

Conclusion

Hineni

The grass sways

To the movement of

The wind

That caresses my skin

The wind

I breathe in

The wind

I breathe out

Like a butterfly that forms

Inside its cocoon

My prayer forms inside me,

Making its way out of my mouth,

I whisper, "Thank you God."

From deep within

To the highest power

My soul pours forth

Like a flame

Ascending upward

Higher and higher

Rays of sun warm my face

Grass interlaces with my bare toes

Earth

Below

Heavens

Above.

Held by gravity

Eyes close

Yield

Yield to the

Here and now

Voice,

Heart,

Breath,

Are

My strength,

My power,

My truth.

After learning about the organ-based bodywork, I have experienced being more connected to others and to my faith. In my internships I am more present when interacting with patients. My heart alerts me when I must speak up, my breath calms me down and fills me with serenity. Knowing I have my heart and breath nourishing me and supporting me, enhances my sense of myself as a vessel for those in my groups. My thinking becomes more clear and flexible, knowing I have choices. When I move from my organs judgment disappears and biases are blurred and I am one with my soul.

When I pray I feel a visceral sensation as gratitude infiltrates my being. Just as a flame that dances upward while being held down by the wick, my soul ascends higher while being embraced by my body. By accessing my heart, I sense my desires from the most profound place within, fully enjoy the love I so longed for, and find comfort amidst the grieving process I have experienced once more. After lighting my Shabbat candles on Friday evenings, sensing it rise from my core, I free my voice and it fills the room, “*Salaam, aleinu ve al kol ha olam, salaam, salaam.*” My prayer and song lead to movement and I joyfully dance as I danced that night at the Western Wall two and a half years ago. I am aware of the power in my voice and reflect on the power in Hannah’s voice.

After Hannah kept her promise and dedicated Samuel to God, she was blessed with five more children. Her sorrow turned into joy and was expressed to the entire community in the form of a song of praise to the Lord. From a private prayer to a public one Hannah’s Song

is one of reversals where she envisions a world where the mighty fall and the disempowered gain access to a place of honor (Falk, 1994):

My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn (strength) is lifted high...
The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away...The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor...

1 Samuel 2:1-8 (New International Version)

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