“ALL OF MY LIMBS SHALL SAY, GOD, WHO IS LIKE YOU?”

(Psalm 35:10)

BRINGING BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER IN PRAYER

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“So, the limbs that You have set in us,
The breath and soul that You have breathed in our nostrils,
And the tongue that You have placed in our mouths—
They will thank, and bless, and praise,
And make beautiful, and raise up, and revere, and sanctify,
And they will make You king.
Every mouth thanks You.
Every tongue testifies to You.
Every knee bends to You.
Every spine bows to You.
Every heart is in awe of You,
And every innermost thought praises your name.
As it is written: All of my bones say,
God, who is like You?”

[*Nishmat Kol Chai*, morning liturgy]

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Introduction

Silent meditation came to a close on that typical Shabbat morning. As student cantor of the synagogue, I stepped up to the podium to lead congregants in the transition from their own individual, silent prayers back into the communal prayers. “May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable to You, Oh God, my Rock and my Redeemer.” After singing through it once I invited the congregation with my body language to join me in prayer. I continued to sing the familiar melody and I noticed an older man stand up. His eyes were closed and he slowly started moving his arms with purpose in front and to the side of his body. I continued singing and quickly realized that he was dancing the prayer. Chills ran through my body as I realized how connected this man was with the prayer, with himself, with the Divine. It brought me great joy to notice how he followed where the music and spirit brought him. From side to side, he kept his knees bent and swayed fluidly. I found myself being pulled even deeper into my own prayer. “…and the meditations of my heart,” I felt my arms move towards my chest. “…be acceptable to You,” my arms naturally moved out in front of my body and then to the sides. He had inspired me to have a private moment. However, all of a sudden I became very aware of the congregation. I noticed that many were watching this man in discomfort, rather than responding to him as an inspiration, as I had. I thought to myself, “Isn’t one of the main reasons to attend a prayer service to be spiritually moved? How did prayer become such a passive and unemotional experience that it would cause people discomfort to see someone spiritually moved?”

As someone who grew up as a dancer, movement has always felt natural to me. I have always felt comfortable expressing myself with my body; from using my hands to

talk, to freely dancing to music that inspires me to do so. My involvement with Israeli folk dance as well as dancing at camp song sessions only solidified more the connection I felt between movement and Jewish practice. The sacred choreography and natural movement associated with Jewish prayer always intrigued me. At Jewish camp they encouraged us to bow in certain places in the service and to rise up on our toes at "Holy, holy, holy." Perhaps I just looked up to the older staff and wanted to emulate them, but the way they explained the movement always made it sound exciting, and I wanted to be a part of something special. At home, without even realizing it, I imitated my mom's way of swaying from side to side during prayer.

"The Talmud tells of a rabbi so devout in his prayer that he would start on one end of the room and end up on the other."[1] Prayer is ideally about bringing our body and soul together. It is this holy meeting of body and soul that helps us transcend the words on the page.

Traditionally, Jewish prayer is accompanied with movement such as swaying, davening, and dancing. This kind of embodiment has the power to transform our prayer experiences by reconnecting us with our physical selves, allowing our mind to wander, and letting the body reconnect with the soul.

Judaism, especially Reform Judaism, born out of The Enlightenment, has always valued the intellect. This value has informed much of Jewish prayer practice over the last two centuries, which tends to address mostly the intellect in prayer services, depending on interesting explanations and historic ties to feed the hungry soul. However, "Forgetting the body in favor of the soul is like forgetting the foundation of a house in

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[1] Jay Michaelson, *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2010, p. 21.

favor of the living room; it will not hold."[2]

Today, sometimes our rational side gets in the way of our spirit's journey. We become self-conscious of what our body is telling us and we focus too much on what our intellect is telling us. But, for many people, spirituality is not a matter of intellect. In fact, most people describe their spiritual experiences as moments when they have been able to let go of rationalism and intellect.

The Jewish tradition has always been a very physical one, built upon a system of actions. The majority of commandments are performed with the body; like washing hands, shaking the lulav, lighting candles. Our sacred narratives are embodied; Abraham's circumcising himself, Jacob's wrestling with G-d, and Shifrah and Puah's midwifery work with the Israelite women. Jewish prayer was originally a substitute for the physical actions involved in bringing sacrifices to the Temple. The words of liturgy were then brought to life by sacred choreography. We have always accompanied our prayers with natural, as well as prescribed movements.

Music is a rich tool that we use to achieve transcendence, for it has the ability to reach us on many levels: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Movement and the awareness of our bodies are also valuable tools to achieve transcendence, yet they are highly under utilized today, in the Reform Community.

It is my goal in this thesis to show how physical the Jewish tradition has been historically and the beauty that involvement of the body can bring to prayer. I will explore how contemporary liberal communities are thoughtfully reconnecting the body to Jewish practices, through guided movement in prayer, through Jewish yoga, and by use

[2] Ibid. p. x-xi.

of purposeful worship leading.

Movement in Jewish Tradition

Jewish prayer has always been connected to our bodies. As Jews, we are so familiar with this fact that we take it for granted until a friend or visitor comes to synagogue, notices and asks us why we do what we do. We stand, bow, cover our eyes, kiss the fringes of our tallit, we take steps forward and we take steps back. These prescribed movements help us focus on the intention of the prayers that touch our soul, they generate a type of body memory, and they cause our bodies, mouths and souls to speak simultaneously.

In the Liturgy

Jewish liturgy, especially the morning liturgy, shows how concerned the Jewish people have historically been with the body and soul. From the Bible to the Talmud, we find references that recognize the act of going to sleep as a liminal time in one's daily life, a time of transition that caused some anxiety. Our ancestors were unclear about what exactly happened to the body and the soul while one was asleep. According to Talmudic teaching, "Sleep is one-sixtieth part of death,"[3] and people believed that the soul left the body while one was asleep. Therefore, the experience of waking up each day came to be considered a miracle. Rituals and liturgy evolved in response to this perception. To this day, each morning, the individual recognizes this miracle by reciting Modeh Ani, thanking God for restoring the soul to the body upon waking up. This is clear recognition that without body and soul united, we can serve no purpose; we cannot study, we cannot

[3] The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Zera'im, *Berachot* 57b, The Soncino Press, London, 1948. Soncino English translation used through this chapter, edited by Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein.

pray, we cannot do good deeds.[4]

When we continue with Asher Yatzar, we give thanks to God for forming the human body with wisdom. Traditionally it is said after one goes to the bathroom and is a humble acknowledgement that if any of our orifices did not open or close properly, we would not be alive. Elohai N'shama is our daily reminder that we have been given the gift of a pure, good soul. Commentator Steven Sager in the *Kol Haneshamah Daily Prayerbook* offers an explanation of the word neshama as both breath and soul. He suggests that this dual word meaning provides a linguistic connection between the blessings for body and soul. "The blessing for our soul uses the vocabulary of the Creation story [*Genesis* 2:6], which describes how God created the human form and then animated it with the breath of life. Hence, the language of celebrating each awakening carries an echo of the primal joining of human form to life force. Every awakening is nothing less than a rehearsal of the mystery of creation."[5]

As the *Talmud* prescribes, the Nisim B'chol Yom were also originally chanted in one's home, connected to the movements of waking up. Each blessing opens with, "Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam," "Blessed are You God, Ruler of the universe." Each blessing ends with a different reason for offering praise; who gives sight to the blind [to be recited as you open your eyes], who removes sleep from the eyes and slumber from the eyelids [to be recited as you wipe the sleep away from your eyes], who makes firm each person's steps [as you plant your feet on the ground], and who straightens the bent [to be recited as you stretch and stand up straight]. We are reminded

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[4] Steven A. Rapp, *Aleph-Bet Yoga: Embodying the Hebrew Letters for Physical and Spiritual Well-Being*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2002, 5.
[5] *Kol Haneshama: Daily prayer book*, The Reconstructionist Press, Wyncote, PA 1996, 22.

that even these ordinary daily occurrences are occasion for blessing. Today, the Birchot HaShachar liturgy, or the blessings said upon awakening, can also serve as a daily check-in with the body. We can do a survey of what is working, what is not, what we are grateful for and what we are praying for.

Embodied Texts

The writers of our holy texts used embodied images to express emotion and connection. From the piyut, Yedid Nefesh: "Like a darting deer I will flee to You. Before Your Glorious presence humbly do I bow," to Song of Songs, "Hark! My beloved! There he comes, leaping over mountains, bounding over hills….Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away,"[6] the expressive powers of these embodied images serve as inspiration for our prayers and relationships. Sometimes it is only when we are given a picture to aspire to, that we succeed in attaining it. The images spark our imaginations and allow us to picture ourselves in the words. Rabbi David A. Katz suggests, "We must realize that imagination is necessary in order to worship, and that we must utilize every strategy we know to unleash the power of the mind and the longings of the heart."[7]

"Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands."[8] The prophet Isaiah gives us a powerful and yet surprising image here. He helps us imagine a world so grateful to The Creator, that everything praises God, including nature. In Psalm 30 we read the words, "You turn my mourning into dancing."

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[6] Song of Songs 2:8,10, translation from the *Jewish Publication Society Hebrew-English Tanakh.*
[7] Rabbi David A. Katz, "The Dramaturgy of Reform Worship*," CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly,* 1992.
[8] Isaiah 55:12, translation from the *Jewish Publication Society Hebrew-English Tanakh.*

Both mourning and dancing are embodied activities that go beyond mere words. Their physicality expresses the depths of our soul's experience.

Sacred Choreography

Nearly 40 years ago, Shulamit Saltzman wrote in *The Second Jewish Catalog* about the significance of movement in our prayer service, from the Barechu to the Hakafa.[9] When the cantor sings, "Barechu" as well as when the congregation responds, "Baruch," worshippers bend the knees and bow from the waist, to signify humbling themselves before the King. For the Shema, worshippers cover their eyes to aid in concentration of the proclamation, that there is one God. Today, due to the importance of the words of Sh'ma, many congregants, especially in Reform congregations, rise as a witness does. During the third paragraph of the Shema, when the instruction to wear tzitzit [fringes of the tallit] is read, it is customary to kiss one's fringes to remember the symbolism that the fringes represent the 613 commandments in the Torah.

The Amidah has various movements associated with it. We take three steps back and then three steps forward at the beginning of the Amidah, to suggest entering the presence of the divine. There are four traditional bows throughout, signifying humbling oneself before God. During the Kedushah section of the Amidah, we bow to each side, as well as rise up on our tiptoes. Michaelson explains, "According to mystical lore, this prayer is recited by the angels; the posture mimics their form and represents an embodied

[9] Shulamit Saltzman, "Movement of Prayer," *The Second Jewish Catalog: Sources and Resources,* edited by Strassfeld, Michael and Sharon, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976, 293-295.

aspiration to be "higher" than we are."[10]

Choreography has been incorporated into the Torah service as well. When the Torah is taken from the ark, after the Sh'ma is recited, the person holding the Torah bows and chants, "Gadlu l'Adonai iti unrom'mah sh'mo yachdav." Immediately following these words, the clergy and/or congregants parade the Torah around the congregation, referred to as the hakafa. Worshippers have the opportunity to kiss, touch, or bow towards the Torah out of respect, as it passes by them.

When we recite the Aleinu, which acknowledges God's Sovereignty over the world, the worshipper bends knees at "Va'anachnu korim," and bows at "Umishtachavim," and stands up straight at Umodim, lifnei Melech…" We are bowing before God as we say the words, "We bend the knee and bow…" Finally, at the conclusion of the Mourner's Kaddish, when the words "Oseh shalom bimromav…" the worshipper takes three steps backward, and makes a small bow to the right, to the left, and then forward, and at "v'imru Amen," the worshipper stands upright. This is the reverse of how we approach God at the beginning of the Amidah. Through these movements, we acknowledge God's presence is everywhere, as we take leave of God.

Parts of the sacred choreography help re-focus the worshipper on the prayer, and other movement helps to dramatize the liturgy. For example, the "beating" of one's chest during the Ashamnu prayer on the High Holidays, is a symbolic "I'm sorry" movement and a reminder to strive to do better. Similarly, Jews who recite daily Vidui, confessionary prayers, choose to beat their chests as well as the same reminder. Jews who recite the Tachanun prayers, petitionary prayers, recite the liturgy with heads bent down,

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[10] Jay Michaelson, *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice,* Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2007, 26.

leaning on their arm, showing embarrassment for having sinned.

In the 1970s, Saltzman was attempting to make Jewish prayer accessible to the Jewish community and help people reconnect with the movements of prayer that had been lost in many Jewish circles. Many Jews have attempted to make laws and practices more accessible to Jews. The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*,[11] written by Shlomo Ganzfried, is an abridgement of Joseph Caro's *Shulchan Aruch*. It outlines Jewish law as an attempt to make it easier for Jews to follow Jewish law. The *Shulchan Aruch* goes into minute detail about the movements and ways that the worshipper should be aware of his or her body during prayer.

For example, Ganzfried outlines how according to halacha, Jewish law, the Sh'ma may be read either sitting or standing. If the worshipper happens to be seated when it comes time to recite the Sh'ma, he or she should remain seated to recite the Sh'ma. If the worshipper is lying down, he or she should at least recline to one side when reciting the Sh'ma. It is so important that the worshipper acknowledge the Sh'ma, that even if the worshipper is sick and lying down, he or she should at least lean a little to the side.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* goes into more detailed explanations of how one should use their body during prayer. For example, in the Amidah,[12] one should make sure that he or she has removed any phlegm or extra saliva that would be distracting during prayer. The worshipper should place his feet close together as if they were one, simulating the angels, as in Ezekiel 1:7, "And their feet were straight feet," or as the Hebrew literally says, "straight foot," implying that the feet appeared to be one. He or she

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[11] Ganzfried-Goldin, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, 1961. Originally written and printed in 1864, Ungvar, Hungary.
[12] All information about the movements of the Amidah are based on the Ganzfried-Golden, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch,* 53-59.

should droop his or her head slightly, and lower his or her eyes on the prayer book so that he or she is not distracted by anything. According to *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, during the Amidah, the worshipper should not lean against anything while praying, unless he is sick, in which case he may read it sitting or even lying down, as long as he concentrates his thoughts on the prayer. Traditionally one should bend the knees and bow four times while saying the Amidah: at the beginning and at the end of the first benediction, and at the beginning and the end of the benediction Modim (We give thanks). When one says Baruch, blessed, one should bend the knees, and when one says atah, You, one should bow, "so that the vertebrae of the spinal column protrude," and the head should be bowed. Jewish law states that one should rise up again before or as we say God's name, for it is written in Psalms 146:8, "The Lord raises up them that are bowed down." Bending down too much, so that your head is in line with your waist is considered to be showing off and is therefore not allowed.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* even goes into great detail on what it means to take the customary steps forward and back. Upon concluding the Amidah, just before the worshipper says, "Oseh Shalom bimromav, God who makes peace," the worshipper should bow and walk only three steps backward, starting with the left foot. The steps should be of average size, the minimum of which is that the toe should touch the heel. While still bowed the worshipper should turn his or her head to the left, which is the right side of the Divine, who is metaphorically in front of us as we pray. Then as the worshipper says, "hu ya'aseh shalom," he or she turns his or her head to the right, and finally saying, "v'al kol Yisrael v'imru Amen," bows forward. Interestingly, the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* includes a reason for why the worshipper should start the steps backward

with the left foot. It states that people generally take their first step with their right foot, and on this occasion we show that it is difficult to leave the presence of the Divine, we are reluctant, so we start with our left foot.

Our ancestors were so concerned with making sure that Jews properly focused on prayer, that Jewish Law outlines detailed descriptions on exactly how to pray in a way that will help focus one's attention on praying and creating a connection with the Divine. Shulamit Saltzman writes in *The Second Jewish Catalog*, "The remnants of Jewish choreography are so clear in our ritual. They await our rediscovery, they await our need to dance them again."[13]

Davening

The Yiddish word daven is usually translated and understood as praying, it literally refers to the swaying of one's body during prayer. In essence, we joined the idea of praying and moving into one word, daven. Davening helps get the blood flowing, and some say it sets a type of "movement" mantra for them to return to when they need to refocus their prayer. The earliest reference to davening is in connection with the study of Torah.[14] Judah HaLevi in his Kuzari suggests a very practical explanation for the origins of davening. He explains that often 10 men would take turns reading the same volume of Torah, and so would take turns bending down to read the text from the table and then standing to give the next person a turn to read. "Thus swaying [davening] became a habit through constant seeing, observing, and imitating, which is human nature."[15] Rabbi Louis

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[13] Shulamit Saltzman, "Movement of Prayer," *The Second Jewish Catalog: Sources and Resources,* Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976.
[14] Louis Jacobs, *Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999. 249.
[15] Ibid.

Jacobs suggests that in the Middle Ages, this habit eventually spread to prayer as well as study of Torah. He suggests that early authorities also quoted Psalm 35:10 to justify this custom. “All of my limbs shall say, Who is like You, O God?” was taken literally to mean that every bone in one’s body should be involved in prayer, by a swaying motion of the body. A more spiritual explanation is offered in the Zohar: "When a Jew utters one word of Torah, the light [in his soul] is kindled…and he sways to and fro like the flame of a candle."[16]

Bowing

Bowing signifies humbling oneself, or acknowledging subservience. There are a number of places in the Talmud and Tanakh that suggest bowing and prostration have been a part of our tradition since ancient times. The Talmud states, “In saying the Tefillah [the Amidah] one should bow down (at the appropriate places) until all the vertebrae in the spinal column are loosened.”[17] In addition, Isaiah 45:23 states, “…To Me every knee shall bend.” This statement informs the way we bow during prayer. We do not simply bow from the waist, rather we bend from the knee. Prostration has also been a tradition in Jewish praying, although it is not as common today. There are many instances in scriptures in which people fall on their face, or prostrate, before God. One example is in Numbers 20:6, “Moses and Aaron came away from the congregation to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and fell on their faces.” Today, Jews in specific Ashkenazic communities still prostrate themselves once a year on the High Holidays, during the recitation of the Great Aleinu. This not only points out how long this tradition has been

[16] Zohar, Numbers, 218b-219a.
The Zohar is the foundational work on Jewish mystical thought, Kabbalah, and contains commentary on the books of Torah.
[17] BT Berachot 28b

important to our people, but it is also the inspiration for many Jewish yoga teachers today who teach the value that stretching brings to prayer. Bowing is often associated with the root, "B-R-CH" as in "Barechu and Baruch," meaning praise and bless. In addition, the same root spells "birkayim," meaning knees. Both standing and bowing eventually became halachically mandated at various parts of the service.

Standing

Standing might be the most common prayer stance. It signifies readiness, uprightness, standing at attention. We have many associations with standing. In English, we attribute importance to something that we are willing to "stand for." This idea seems to reflect the Reform movement's decision in the late 19th century to have congregants rise for the Sh'ma. The Reform movement attributed great importance to the affirmation of one God, and therefore instated the tradition of standing at this time in the service.

Movement Affects the Mind

Jay Michaelson points out that the names of the prayers are evidence in of themselves to how embodied our liturgy is. As mentioned above, the word Barechu comes from the same root as knee, and is the main prayer in which we bow. The word Shema comes from the same root as to hear, and the Amidah, means standing. In other words, three of the most important prayers are named after actions of the body.[18] Michaelson teaches that this says something about how the body affects the mind. For on a purely intellectual level, there is no reason why a text should be any different when read sitting, standing, or bowing. Yet we all know there is a difference that can only be felt by

[18] Jay Michaelson, *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice,* Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2007, 22.

the person experiencing it.[19] For example, when we recite the Barechu, the call to worship, we stand up, a movement associated with paying special attention and respect, like when a bride is about to walk down the aisle, or when the national anthem is sung. We then bow before God. When we bow, our head is facing down, and we can no longer see who is in front of us. This communicates a type of respect and trust, and is a movement also associated with humbling oneself before an almighty King.

Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist and associate professor at Harvard Business School, whose TED Talk, "Power Poses" is among the most viewed of all time, speaks of personal transformation through specific body postures. Lauren Bush Lauren, the founder and CEO of FEED, says that "Power posing is the physical answer to mindfulness."[20] Cuddy speaks to audiences ranging from teachers to politicians, as well as victims of bullying and sexual assault, to people dealing with mental illness, and teaches them how body language shapes not only how other people view them, but their perceptions and ideas about themselves. Cuddy teaches that "making yourself big" for just two minutes before a meeting changes the brain in a way that builds confidence, reduces anxiety and inspires courageous leadership. "Making yourself big" could be standing straight, with your hands on your waist and legs spread wide on the floor. Cuddy shares in her TED Talk, "Let your body tell you you're powerful and deserving, and you become more present, enthusiastic and authentically yourself."[21] Cuddy's research reveals that the postures we make with our bodies have great power in how we feel, and what we perceive. If movement and posing help someone go into an interview feeling more

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[19] Ibid.
[20] David Hochman, "Amy Cuddy Takes a Stand," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2014.
[21] Ibid.

confident, it surely stands to reason that movement and posture can evoke emotion within our prayer.

Priestly Benediction

In a Hasidic teaching of Parashat Naso,[22] we are instructed to imagine that just as one's shadow does precisely what a person does, so does God emulate what we do. If we think of our actions influencing God in this way, then we see how important it is to do mitzvoth, give tzedekah and have compassion on the poor in order that God will express goodness toward us as well. In this example, we take the lead, and God acts as our shadow. We inspire God by our deeds. The teaching continues and points out that God wants to do good for the people of Israel, and compares this to the idea that more than the calf desires to suck, the cow wants to suckle [Pesachim 112a]. Therefore, when we stand to pray before God, reciting the Amidah or any other prayer, we are challenged to keep our intention on delighting God through the prayer.

The teaching describes that the way we hold our hands in prayer when we want something is palms up and the backs of our hands downward. But when we pray only so that God will find delight from our prayers, we are the one who is providing the help to God. So we hold our hands, as the provider would, with the back of the hands upward and the palms downward.

So, in the Priestly Benediction, which is described in Parashat Naso, the priests are instructed to recite the words with raised hands, with the backs upward and the palms down, just like one who is in the position of providing for another. This helps us imagine the verse in a new way, "Thus shall you bless the people of Israel." In this way, if the

[22] Levi Yitzchak, *Kedushat Levi,* commentary on Naso

priests are the provider of blessing for the people of Israel, so too will God provide blessings for Israel, taking the lead from the priest. If our actions inspire God, then every one of our movements is significant and meaningful.

Reform Judaism

With the rise of the Reform movement came many changes in Jewish worship. The Reform movement was born out of both eighteenth century rationalism and nineteenth century idealism.[23] It was a passionate response from an evolving people to meet the demands of a new time. Early Reformers were deeply concerned with reforming the traditional worship service so that it could be dignified and attractive to the Enlightened Jew. They did this by introducing a sermon in the vernacular, a more elevated style of music, ceremonies such as confirmation, and eliminating parts of the liturgy that had been added and were no longer relevant to the modern Jew. Overall, the aesthetics of the service were changed with the intention of creating a unified, formal, and reverent worship service.

Early Reformers noticed that a lot of the texts had been added to the liturgy over the centuries, such as the recitation of psalms and piyutim. They claimed that many of these traditions were the result of Jews living under persecution and for this reason no longer applied to the world that the modern Jew lived. The purpose of eliminating liturgy was to beautify the ancient texts. The early Reformers drew wisdom from *Pirkei Avot*, the *Ethics of our Fathers*, to justify their decision to abbreviate the services. "Do not make

[23] W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, World Union for Progressive Judaism, LTD., New York, NY, 1963, 152.

your prayer a routine,"[24] Early Reformers were also known to reference the *Shulchan Aruch*[25], "Better few prayers with devotion, than many without."

Reformers did not take these decisions lightly. Abraham Geiger stated, "As we draw from the past, we nourish the future; as we prepare ourselves for higher goals, we yet rejoice in our heritage and heighten its value for the present." In *Worship as an Educational Force*, Leopold Zunz stated that, "…the congregation should be able to strengthen its religious sense through public worship and fill its thirst for the word of God in the synagogue. Therefore, when Judaeo-German language and education made room for their German counterparts, when exclusive occupation with the Talmud, the reading of Kabbalistic books, and the taste for humdrum interpretations decreased, an increased knowledge of the Bible became observable and with it a rise in the level of scientific culture. This had come to the Jews with their civil emancipation, and through better schools and religious classes we became more receptive to worthwhile things."[26]

This reforming attitude applied not only to the words of liturgy, but the experience of worship. Changes in attire and conduct while in the synagogue would need to change with the times. Repetitions of certain prayers were deemed unnecessary, boring, tiresome, and negated the devotion that one could be giving in prayer. Repetitions of prayers were eliminated, as well as anything that would encourage talking to one's neighbor, or interfere with order and quiet. Criteria for the worship service were established that identified elements that would promote dignity of the house of God and the worship service. "They banned indecent swinging to and fro, swaying from one side

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[24] Pirkei Avot 2:18
[25] Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 1:4
[26] W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, World Union for Progressive Judaism, LTD., New York, NY, 1963, 158-9.

to the other, irreverent screeching, senseless facial contortions, all of which were formerly customary during prayers."[27] Hence, the old movements that brought meaning to our ancestors' prayers were removed.

Perhaps for the early reformers, taking movement out of worship seemed necessary in order to progress forward. However, the beauty of Reform Judaism is its commitment to constantly be reforming. It is clear that we are overdue for reinstating and emphasizing the importance of movement in our worship. What works for one generation, changes for the next.

[27] Ibid. 153.

Movement in Contemporary Synagogue Worship

The period from the mid 20th century through the early 21st century has been a time of worship innovation in response to the formality of worship that the Reform movement instituted. Some Reform synagogues began to introduce more accessible, intimate and casual worship experience. Along with music that fostered participation, came more intimate seating arrangements and a bimah which allowed clergy to stand on the same level as the congregation. Jewish musicians such as Debbie Friedman and Jeff Klepper, inspired by the folk music movement, wrote Jewish music that congregants sang along with. These melodies often encouraged chanting, swaying and clapping of hands, and sometimes even putting ones arms around one's neighbor. The organ was slowly replaced by a piano and guitar in many synagogues.

By the mid 20th century, new Jewish denominations branched off from the three existing denominations Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism, creating a bigger umbrella for liberal Jews. The Reconstructionist movement branched off from Conservative Judaism, and the Renewal movement branched off from the Orthodox movement. Jewish Renewal attempts to reinvigorate Judaism with mystical, Hasidic, musical and meditative practices drawn from a variety of traditional and non-traditional, Jewish and non-Jewish, sources. Slowly, liberal communities were redefining what synagogue worship could look like. It did not look like worship that the original Reformers created, and it no longer resembled Orthodox worship either. Instead, a fusion of cultures and understandings began influencing Jewish liberal worship.

Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg

Although Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg came to the rabbinate later in life, she has

had a significant impact on the liberal Jewish community. As a runner, martial artist, and dancer, Weinberg admits to always having been interested in the phenomenon of movement. She can barely talk without using her hands, let alone pray. Weinberg was a student of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of the Jewish Renewal movement. She remembers Schachter-Shalomi gathering her and his other students in a circle to pray the Birchot HaShachar liturgy, "…we would move how we wanted." She also explains that Schachter-Shalomi was very interested in other cultures and drew a lot of his teachings from Sufism in particular.

After being ordained as a Rabbi in the 1990s, she brought in a drummer and guitarist to her synagogue and led people in a version of Shalom Aleichem in which congregants danced and greeted each other. Inspired by Israeli folk dance, Weinberg created circle dances for most of the prayers. In fact she joked, "We didn't really have chairs."[28] The movements she created were very accessible. "The cool thing was that everybody could do it," Weinberg explained. Among Weinberg's many inspirations to integrate movement and prayer, was an organization called The Dances of Universal Peace, a practice which blends chant, music and movement from many spiritual traditions. Weinberg reported that this was a powerful form of prayer in her life.

Weinberg got involved in meditation in the early 1990s as well and brought these practices to the synagogue where she worked. "Meditation is very embodied. You're bringing awareness into your body and this moment. Chanting is like this too."[29]

Weinberg was among the founders of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality in 2000, an organization that seeks to transform Jewish life by cultivating mindfulness. In 2010,

[28] Interview with Sheila Weinberg, September 15, 2014.
[29] Ibid.

she founded the Jewish Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Training program within the IJS. After Rabbi Myriam Klotz was hired to teach yoga for the Institute in 2003, Weinberg was inspired to engage in a personal yoga practice and it became a significant part of her life. The two of them would pull out a text from a parashah, a section of Torah, and find where it resonated as a way of "illuminating Jewish text through mindfulness or yoga."

Weinberg developed with her colleague at IJS, Rabbi Nancy Flam, a set of movements for the Birchot HaShachar liturgy that she had been so inspired by earlier in life with Schachter-Shalomi. In their version of Birchot HaShachar, they have people stand comfortably, with both feet planted firmly on the ground. Worshippers are gently instructed to take a breath in and out with each movement. For baruch, hands are raised in front of the body, for Ata the fingers extend out, for Adonai, the arms are pulled into chest and then float down back to one's sides, for Eloheinu, arms are stretched all the way over head, and at Ruach ha'olam[30], the arms open and float back down to the sides of the body. For the blessing over being created in God's image, everyone is instructed in focusing on the breath. For the blessing that praises God for lifting up the fallen, everyone lifts the neck and back straight up and down. For the blessing praising God for making us free, worshippers are encouraged to stretch and roll out joints- knees, wrists, ankles and elbows. Connecting the blessings with the movements they symbolically refer to helps makes the blessing more real, and less abstract.

In addition to incorporating movement into Shabbat services, Weinberg developed yoga classes based on the different Jewish holidays as well as a yoga magid,

[30] Sheila Weinberg changed the wording of this traditional blessing formula from "King of the World," to "Spirit of the World."

storytelling, for Passover. Weinberg believes that the slow return of movement into prayer is very much connected with gender and the fact that women were becoming leaders in the community. "Women are very connected to their bodies and expressing their feelings through their bodies."

Worship at B'nai Jeshurun[31]

B'nai Jeshurun, BJ, a progressive Conservative-style synagogue also on the upper west side of Manhattan, is known as a place to find worship that is spiritual, with moving music and weekly dancing throughout the aisles. With clergy who report that they are influenced by the Renewal movement, as well as their own personal history growing up in Argentina, worship at B'nai Jeshurun fosters a personal connection to prayer.

A study on the spirituality of B'nai Jeshurun comments on the changing nature of contemporary Jewish spirituality in North America, and how many BJ congregants reported an "experience of God" during prayer. According to the study, conducted in the mid-1990s, the two head Rabbis, J. Rolando Matalon and Marcelo Bronstein, began to focus on what they called, "turning inward" during prayer services. They promote this through a musically driven, emotionally engaged, and embodied form of prayer. The study explains that BJ members and clergy claim that "in order to experience God, individuals must 'let go' of rationalism and the intellect." Rolando "Roly" and Marcelo say that their aim is to have religious practice create opportunities for what they call 'spiritual experiences,' meaning the experience of God; but they say, God must be re-conceptualized in order to be relevant in the contemporary world.

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[31] Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman. "Spirituality at B'nai Jeshurun: Reflections of Two Scholars and Three Rabbis," *S3K Synagogue Studies Institute*, November 2009, Number 7.

It is common for congregants to talk about God as a generator of "energy" at BJ. This study describes how B'nai Jeshurun creates an atmosphere that welcomes this energy. The music is intentionally a key component in creating this space. Since three of the clergy at BJ are Argentinian, they are naturally inspired by Argentinian culture and synagogue music, which in the 1950s-1970s, when the clergy lived there, looked to Israel and used the Carlebach melodies. Today the music at BJ is a mix of styles that are explicitly not Ashkenazic and that draw instead on other ethnic Jewish traditions, and non-Jewish meditative traditions as well, such as Sufism, Native American religious traditions and Middle Eastern Culture.

"…Anything that we know has served to touch the spirit in other religions we are immediately interested in. We are particularly drawn to Middle Eastern music, some Eastern music, and some chants…We have an attraction to those things…to world music."[32] The musical ensembles at B'nai Jeshurun consist of instruments that vary from week to week, but usually include electric keyboard, and could include mandolin, guitar, percussion, dumbek, and cello. Similar to Romemu, the transitions between liturgical melodies are significant. Hazzan and Music Director, Priven explains, "The tendency at the end of the song is not to finish at the very high of the energy. I lower the energy either by not playing and allowing the voices to have a clear, nice, mellow harmony, or by changing the instrumentation to something more mellow and slow down the tempo…"[33] The music affects how we are able to connect to the prayer through our bodies.

At B'nai Jeshurun a great deal of attention is given to the sound system. Speakers are placed all around the congregation, a technique that Central Synagogue of the upper-

[32] Ibid. 8.
[33] Ibid. 9.

east side employs as well. The BJ study shows that congregants report that this produces a sound that envelops the congregation. It seems that this sound set up makes congregants feel a part of the experience, rather than spectators. When the congregation feels more of an active part of the experience, they are more likely to participate by singing, speaking, and moving.

A good deal of the study was devoted to exploring the role of embodied emotion and prayer. For Jews at BJ, God is experienced when there is an outpouring of emotion, whether it be crying, dancing, or singing. "There is a conflation of the individual's consciousness and God, so that when an individual is moved by prayer, the emotional experience is "read" as a contact with God."[34] During services, the clergy role model for the congregants what the experience of God looks like. They sway their bodies when they feel moved to do so, they clap their hands, wave their arms, close their eyes and sing out. A member of BJ shares his prayer style in the study, "Yoga, Zen, breath. I do meditation at BJ. In the synagogue, in the Amidah. It's silent. I put the siddur [prayer book] down. I bend my knees slightly. I put my arms out…It's a very meditative experience…You can meditate on the Hebrew words, or the prayers or the kavannah [the intention]. I usually just chill."[35]

Liz Lerman

Many people refer to the Jewish People, as "People of the Book." Liz Lerman begs to differ. She believes the Jewish people are the "People of the Body." For over a decade now, Temple Micah in Washington, D.C. has been a laboratory for Lerman to explore the role that dance and movement can play in worship and communities of faith.

[34] Ibid. 9.
[35] Ibid. 10.

Lerman has a way of encouraging communities to use movement as a spiritual pathway. Lerman is a dancer, choreographer, teacher and author. She is the founder of the Dance Exchange, the renowned, intergenerational dance company that creates dance and engages people in making art. She has also spent a significant amount of time bringing movement to the elderly community. She is a recipient of a 2002 MacArthur "genius" grant, given for both "exceptional merit and promise" in creative work. Jewish concepts have been an integral part of her creative works over the decades. In addition, she has learned how to make guided movement an accepted and meaningful part of worship experiences.

While the focus of her life today, dance and Judaism were not always an integrated part of her life. Lerman was born and raised Jewish in Milwaukie, Wisconsin, in a classical Reform synagogue. Lerman reports that at the time, in the 1950s and early 1960s, most of Jewish prayer in the synagogue was being "handled" by the professionals in the synagogue. She remembers, the choir sang for the congregation, the rabbi spoke to God, and besides a few responsive readings, there was not anything for the congregation to do. She was a dancer, but it never occurred to her to combine her love for dance and identity as a Jew. She lost engagement in synagogue life for a while, but began to re-engage as an adult as she became involved in the Havurah movement in Washington, D.C.

In 1991 she choreographed a dance performance called "The Good Jew," in which she examined the challenges of Jewish identity and the possibilities of living in both the secular and religious worlds. "I was on a trial for whether I was Jewish

enough,"[36] she shared. Another one of her well-known pieces of work is "Miss Galaxy and her Three Raps with God."[37] In this performance, Lerman grappled with more questions of what it meant to be a Jew in the late 20th century. She wrestled with God in spoken monologue and dance. "It was a big beauty pageant for the cosmos and the winner got to spend the weekend with God."[38] Lerman was trying so hard to figure out her relationship with God and it was through movement that she felt comfortable exploring what that relationship looked like.[39]

Her own restlessness in synagogue growing up inspired her to use dance in worship in a participatory way, a way that would work for everyone in the room, especially for those who thought they could not dance. After the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in Israel in 1995, Rabbi Danny Zemel of Temple Micah, asked Lerman to teach movement within the synagogue to foster healing. This was the beginning of her relationship with Zemel and Temple Micah.

A Typical Friday Night

On a typical Friday night at Temple Micah, when Lerman has been asked to incorporate movement, the congregation starts out in the lobby to light Shabbat candles and say the blessing over the wine and challah. Before everyone enters the sanctuary, Lerman asks them to move in small ways that will help them prepare for prayer. People roll their neck from side to side, others twist at the waist, and some arch their backs. Lerman notices the movements that congregants are offering, and she mirrors back to

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[36] Interview with Liz Lerman, August 13, 2014.
[37] Lisa Traiger, "Separating the Dancer from the Dance Exchange," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, June 22, 2011.
[38] Interview with Liz Lerman, August 13, 2014.
[39] Ibid.

them what she sees. As she joins the movements together forming a dance, the group repeats the movements after her. The movements are small and easy, and since they are generated from the congregation, they feel accessible and approachable to all.

As congregants prepare to enter the sanctuary, Lerman invites them to hold hands and walk in in lines. She tells those at the front of the lines to wander through the sanctuary, leading their snake around chairs and through rows before taking a seat. Lines often encounter each other, causing congregants to see, notice, and acknowledge another congregant they may not have otherwise come into contact with. "It is a fun, simple, way to connect to others who have chosen to come that night."[40] After reciting some of the traditional Shabbat psalms and prayers, Lerman leads the congregation in a dance to a particular prayer. Often times this is a familiar dance that has been repeated from month to month. The movements usually depict words and images in a "readable" way, so that the movements look like the images and concepts the prayer is about.

At some point in the service, Lerman will lead the congregation in creating a new dance. She calls this activity, "Big Story, Little Story" because it is when the congregants reflect on their lives to find a personal story that relates to the larger story of the prayer or the Torah portion. She asks people to join with one or two other congregants near them and talk a while in response to this question. Then she has congregants share the images that they described or heard. Lerman notices the movements that naturally emerge from each story and mirrors them back to the congregation. She then has the congregation help her make a dance out of the movements that the images conjure up. After the dance is created, it is "performed" by the congregation while chanting or singing the piece of

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[40] Liz Lerman, "Faith and Form," *Journal of the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture,* Volume XXXVii number 3, 2004.

liturgy that prompted the activity. The juxtapositions that occur between the movement and the text are often quite amazing, surprising and insightful. At what might seem like just a coincidence, the movement seems to express the spoken word or phrase, and it is evident that there can be many meanings to a single movement. The movements take on a meaning of their own and may take one's imagination to a place that their mind would not have previously been open to.

Sometimes our words limit our ability to express ourselves. In an issue of *CrossCurrents*, a publication dedicated to people of faith, David L. Johns suggests, "How much more could we increase the capacity for description and expression if we were to relinquish the need to speak with words? Perhaps the language necessary to express one's encounter with God is already present in our skin."[41]

Lerman uses dance to call up different parts of the self during worship. She recalls facilitating a conversation with the congregation one time about the Hashkiveinu prayer. As part of her "Big Story, Little Story" exercise, she asked congregants to share what images came up in their minds for being "sheltered under God's wings." She prompted congregants by saying, "Tell me something powerful that came up for you in this prayer." Again, Lerman noticed the movements that naturally emerge from each story and mirrors them back to the congregation, who would eventually join in the dance. She called on a man who had not spoken yet. He "passed," as Lerman explained is always an option. After a few people had shared their images, he felt comfortable to share that when he was five years old, his mother had knit him a sweater. He could not explain why, but for some reason that sweater came to mind as an image. Lerman explained, that now when he

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[41] David L. Johns, "Sometimes You Just Gotta Dance: Physical Expressiveness in Worship," *Crosscurrents,* Summer 2002.

prays about being "sheltered under God's wings," he has the meaningful image of that sweater that his mother made him so long ago to comfort him. Each time he recites that liturgy, he can be reminded of that image, that movement, and the story that goes along with it all.

Yom Kippur Afternoon

"On the afternoon of Yom Kippur, we dance. It wasn't always like that."[42] For over a decade, Lerman had worked with Rabbi Danny Zemel at Temple Micah in Washington, D.C. to incorporate movement into prayer, movement into studying, movement into storytelling and just plain moving. When Zemel suggested introducing movement into the Yom Kippur afternoon service, Lerman knew it was only a possibility because of the trust they had gained within the community and the culture that they had created. Lerman likes to point out that many people naturally connect by moving in prayer, and some do not. "With every innovation, comes loss for someone."[43] She adds that they, the clergy and she, have always made it clear that participation is key, but participation is measured not by how many are dancing, but rather how many feel that they are part of the moment because they are connected to each other through the beauty, through ideas and through the meaning.

Each year, weeks before Yom Kippur, Zemel asks the congregation a question pertinent to the theme of atonement. He encourages people to write their responses anonymously and return them to the synagogue. The clergy and Lerman meet and choose about 8 responses to use for Yom Kippur. Lerman reports that having your response

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[42] Liz Lerman, "Dancing on the Holiest Day," *Sh'ma Journal*: *A Journal of Jewish Ideas*, September 2009.
[43] Interview with Liz Lerman, August 13, 2014

chosen is beginning to be treated as a big honor at Temple Micah. The clergy and Lerman make sure to choose different people each year, and they also make sure to choose a broad range of people so that it is clear to the congregation that no prior dance experience or talent is necessary for this to be a meaningful experience. The small planning group takes the congregants' responses and creates a series of gestures that eventually resemble a dance. The music team at the synagogue creates a basic score based on the words and movements.

During the service "I try to make people feel that they have an opportunity to go beyond themselves and to see the people, the synagogue, and the story in a new light."[44] Zemel is known to have had congregants pick up their High Holiday prayer books, hold them over their heads and shake them. He announces, "Shake them until all the prayers are out of them. Now we can create our own prayers through our personal experiences."[45] The Yom Kippur afternoon experience begins as a congregant reads from the script that has been created based on the chosen responses. For example, a congregant might ask for forgiveness, "For the sins which I have sinned by yelling at my children," and then perform the gesture that was created for the moment. One by one people step up, read the response and perform the gesture. Lerman explains the feeling of vulnerability within the text, the moment and the movement. 500-700 people are usually present and join in the series of gestures that have been created, to music, and then the words of Jewish liturgy. They dance the series a few times, Lerman says that "each time the dance gets easier and

[44] Liz Lerman, "Dancing on the Holiest Day," *Sh'ma Journal*: *A Journal of Jewish Ideas*, September 2009.
[45] Interview with Liz Lerman, August 13, 2014.

the commitment gets stronger."[46] They dance through their sins, growing through the experience of dance. They dance through their request for forgiveness, some cry, some laugh, and Lerman explains that "all feel renewed."

Challenges of Introducing Movement

Lerman does not doubt that there are some challenges to bringing dance into the synagogue. First of all, everyone who is doing this work is still isolated, there is no formal "Jewish dance movement" yet. Lerman explains that especially adults have a tendency to think of dancing as childish and when asked to try something new, they have a tendency to feel embarrassed or self-conscious. In addition, she has learned that people often associate movement with "being touchy feely." This idea turns some people off. She says often times when people have used movement or dance in a new setting, they have a difficult time explaining the experience and putting it into words. Since they cannot explain it, it makes them feel frustrated like a child. It makes them feel like they do not know stuff, and are not intelligent. [47] However, the biggest reason that Lerman offers for why people do not move anymore in synagogue is that it has become the tradition for people to not move in services, and that's difficult to change.

However, Lerman has managed to change the tradition at Temple Micah with the support of Rabbi Danny Zemel, or atleast she has made innovation the new tradition. Congregants look forward to her leadership in services and she even now teaches an elective in Temple Micah's Life Long Learning called T'fillah through Movement. Lerman uses movement to call up different parts of ourselves so that we can learn and

[46] Ibid.
[47] Interview with Liz Lerman, August 13, 2014.

grow. She teaches, "Turn your discomfort into inquiry."[48] Through personal stories and guided interactions, congregants not only learn about themselves, and become closer to others in the community, but they find ways that they personally relate to the Jewish narrative. She has found an effective way to integrate movement that is accessible for all, into the inherited Jewish practice of prayer services. Lerman states, "I am convinced that it is the human connection to the body, and the body's connection to the mind, that provides a ladder, a safety net, or a trampoline, enabling people to experience the spiritual."[49]

Worship at Romemu

Romemu, a post-denominational synagogue on the upper west side of Manhattan, is known for its spiritual worship and meaningful practices. The Romemu website tag line is inspiring in of itself; Romemu: Judaism for body, mind and spirit. According to the synagogue's mission,[50] Romemu is attempting to transform the way that Judaism is practiced and experienced by combining Eastern spiritual practices with Orthodox influences. The congregation shows this commitment through weekly experiences such as ShabbatAsana Yoga and meditation, as well as the culture they have created in prayer and general life of the synagogue. For example, their Hanukah party this year invited people to "grab their dancing shoes" and join Romemu for a celebration of the Festival of Lights. At Romemu, there seems to be a shared understanding that involving the body in Jewish practice is beneficial.

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Liz Lerman, *Hiking the Horizontal*: *Field Notes from a Choreographer,* Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 2014, 134.
[50] For more information on Romemu visit website: https://romemu.org/

From the extensive list of weekly activities at Romemu, and the fact that Friday evening Shabbat services have become a "standing room only" event, one would think that Romemu has been around for decades. However, Rabbi David Ingber began Romemu with a monthly service on the upper west side in March 2006. With an Orthodox upbringing, Rabbi Ingber spent many adult years learning about Eastern Religions and other schools of thought, immersing himself in the words of Ken Wilbur and Carl Jung, as well as engaging in body practices. Rabbi Ingber re-engaged in Jewish life when he met Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of Jewish Renewal. After two years as Rabbi-in-residence at the Elat Chayim Spiritual Retreat Center, Rabbi Ingber created the Romemu community. Finally, after 2 years of part-time services, in 2008 the Romemu community became a full-time synagogue.

Romemu creates a holistic prayer experience based upon five basic freedoms: movement, voice, thought, silence, and commitment. Movement refers to the idea that each person should have space to stretch and dance, and find the natural movement of one's body that is capable of opening oneself to prayer.

Romemu's sanctuary has red velvet, carpeted floors, and pews set up in a sanctuary that is wider than it is deep, allowing congregants to see each other. A wooden ark and podium are brought in each week and are set up on the floor, rather than the stage, and the clergy lead from the podium on the floor, on the same level as the congregation. Although most congregants sit in seats, there is a small area in the front left corner where congregants choose to sit on the floor and take advantage of the space to move their bodies as they feel inspired. Romemu is another congregation that

incorporates dancing during the piyut for Shabbat, L'cha Dodi. It is the tradition for congregants that wish to dance, to get up and dance circles around the sanctuary.

Unlike many Reform prayer services, chorographical instructions are seldom given at Romemu. Congregants have learned when one stands and sits in Romemu's prayer service by observing others who have more experience. At the same time, there is a clear acceptance within the community that if someone feels moved to stand or sit or dance, that they have the freedom to do so outside of the general custom, and are even encouraged to do so.

Music plays a huge role in Romemu's worship and in the freedom that congregants feel to move in prayer. It is because of the talents, diverse backgrounds and set-intention of its musical team that Romemu's worship is so moving both literally and emotionally. The clergy and musical team bring a vast array of cultural influences that contribute to the atmosphere they are creating from the neohasidic world, to Brazillian music, from Eastern spiritual experiences to jazz and Middle Eastern music as well.

The music of Romemu's worship lends itself to movement for many reasons. In most synagogues the band accompanies the liturgical text with a musical introduction and ending for each prayer. The drawback to this musical structure is that the pieces of liturgy then have a tendency to sound like a musical performance, and may cause the congregant to feel that they should be sitting back passively and listening to a show. At Romemu, the congregant is never quite aware of the music starting or ending. One prayer blends into the next, and one chant turns into the next encouraging a constant and active, rather than passive role of the congregant.

Often times, the musical team uses nigunim, wordless melodies often sung with "ya lai lai lai." At Romemu, as a nigun begins, the energy inevitably rises, hands begin to clap, people stand up if they feel moved to do so, some people's arms move in fluid motion in the air. Nigunim encourage movement because the congregant does not need to think about getting the words right, or reading from the prayerbook. The nigun allows peoples' eyes to close, which helps people feel less self-conscious about moving their bodies. The percussion serves as a heart beat, grounding everyone in their own body, connecting their body to the prayer. The percussion also encourages movement, as peoples' bodies move to the enticing rhythms. At Romemu, the music encourages people to find their own personal connection to the Divine.

Movement in prayer services can serve two purposes. On one hand, ecstatic dancing has the ability to help us escape our minds, allowing our bodies and emotions to take the lead. On the other hand, movement or dancing has the ability to help us focus our intention on what we are saying. We are not meant to choose one of these, but instead, be open to which we need on any particular day. Rabbi David A. Katz, in "The Dramaturgy of Reform Worship," reminds the reader that escapism is a key motivating factor in synagogue, just as in theatre. In the sanctuary, he suggests, we are transported to a pure, clean place, which is "exciting because of its potential to move our hearts and shape our actions in clearly defined ways."[51]

[51] Rabbi David A. Katz, "The Dramaturgy of Reform Worship," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly,* Summer 1992, 24.

Jewish Yoga

The Seeds of Jewish Yoga

Jewish yoga is a phenomenon that has grown out of the desire among some liberal Jews to re-connect Jewish practice with the body. It is one more way that Jews have begun to do the important work of recovering the combination of physical expression and liturgy. For many, Yoga practices, which unite body, mind, and soul, have become a meaningful expression of Jewish prayer. For others, it is a meaningful way to connect with Jewish teachings outside of the framework of formal Jewish prayer.

Rabbi Myriam Klotz was among the first to teach how yoga and Judaism can be integrated. The former Director of Yoga and Embodied Practices at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, Klotz now serves as Director of the Spirituality Initiative at HUC-JIR New York. Klotz brings decades of experience to the various Jewish yoga and meditation classes that she teaches. She explains that Shira Yoga, the Jewish yoga class that she teaches at HUC-JIR, is a very recent outgrowth of Jewish inspired yoga and is only possible because of the decade and a half of Jewish yoga that has paved the way.[52] Today, Jews who feel that something physical is missing from their Jewish practice can choose to take a Jewish yoga class through their synagogue or Jewish Community Center, or by buying one of Klotz's guided Jewish Yoga cds on-line. However, it is only very recently that Jews have had such opportunities.

Klotz made the connection between Judaism and yoga out of a personal need and a personal yearning, and has made it possible for Jews today to learn from the unique integration of Jewish and yoga practices. While Klotz's ability to combine Judaism and

[52] Interview with Myriam Klotz. December 17, 2014.

embodied practices came very naturally to her, her teachings and practices evolved over decades of soul searching. Klotz reports that she grew up in an assimilated Reform Jewish family, but did not practice it in an embodied way at all. In her teens she explored different Jewish denominations until her curiosity led her to major in religious studies in college. It was only when she traveled to Israel in the early 1980s that she found a connection to Orthodox Judaism, and therefore a physical practice. She says, "It was never about Orthodox theology for me, it was about the experience of living Judaism."[53] Klotz went on to explain that it was the embodied practices that she was drawn to. She describes the way that Shabbat affected her. She can still smell the challah, see the candles being lit, feel the waving motion of her arms as she drew the Sabbath lights in towards her body. She recalls the melody of Yedid Nefesh and explains how chanting is an embodied practice. The sights, movements, postures, deep kavannah, and chanting all attracted her to Orthodox Judaism. Movement and embodiment were her way into Judaism and brought her into a deeper relationship with her Jewish roots.

Although she had not yet discovered yoga, she had always been deeply rooted in her body and felt the connection with her body to the divine. "How you experience yourself in your body is actually an authentic rooting of experiencing the sacred dimension of life."[54] Over time it became more evident that, theologically, Orthodox Judaism was not right for her. She was searching for a way that she could integrate all of her truths, her theology and way of living. She wanted to be herself and still practice an embodied Judaism at the same time. She finally made the difficult decision to leave

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

behind Orthodox practices in search of something that would feed her soul. However, she felt a vast emptiness where the embodied practice used to be.

One day, in the mid-1980s, she literally stumbled upon a yoga class and the physical practice felt natural to her. It was a physical experience with a spiritual and sacred focus. She felt that yoga helped her "hold her spirituality in a physical way," a connection that she had always longed for in her Orthodox practice. This combination of the mind, body and soul through dedication and commitment was what she yearned for in Judaism. In Reform Judaism, she struggled to find a commitment to embodied practices, and in Orthodox Judaism she was unable to connect theologically. Yoga gave her a home that fulfilled something missing within her.

Inspired by the idea that "the body will offer you insight based on your dedication," she became trained as a yoga instructor and later a massage therapist. She learned to use movement therapeutically. She reports, "Body-based healing called to me."[55] However, there was still emptiness where her Judaism once was prominent. "I missed being a part of a tribe. Although I could not say it then, it was the rootedness, and feeling of being grounded that I was missing, literally and metaphorically."[56]

She began noticing the similarities between Jewish practice and yoga practice. Where once she had a prayer practice from the siddur, the prayer book, she now had a yoga practice. She acknowledged that Sanskrit and Hebrew are both sacred languages. But she missed the resonance of Hebrew and the rhythms of Jewish practice. She came to the conclusion that yoga was a great home for her physical existence and spirit to rest in her body. In addition, she was thankful for a home in which she did not have to sacrifice

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

her own self to be a part of the culture, but she still longed for her tribe. She began wondering what it would look like to return and help her tribe evolve.

She continued to make connections between yoga and Jewish practice naturally. She noticed that with both practices, cumulative practice made a difference, and that the more one practices, the more meaning one can draw. When she was on her yoga mat, she said, she could not help but think of the Biblical verse or liturgical verse that was fitting for the moment. Today, she explains one of her favorite verses to focus on is the blessing found in Numbers 24:5, often called "Mah Tovu" in the liturgy. Specifically the words, "Va'ani T'fillati," meaning "I am my prayer to you God," inspire her. She explains that for her this means, whatever you bring to the moment is your prayer and is your offering to God. In addition, it serves as a reminder that, "If I'm not present with myself, how will I know what to offer?"[57] She explains that in prayer there is always a challenge of ending up with an outer shell that is praying, with nothing inside as a foundation.

In the early 1990s, she approached a Jewish Community Center in the Bay Area about teaching a class on Kabbalah and Yoga. "I wanted the depth that I could learn from Jewish sources to continue to harvest my yoga work."[58] She set out on a personal quest to deepen her yoga practice in a Jewish way. Klotz went on to study for s'micha, Rabbinic ordination, from the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College, RRC, and she continued to teach the art of connecting yoga practice with Judaism, and how each practice can enhance the other. In school, Klotz created Torat HaGuf, Torah of the Body, as she explains, "a way to relate to God when our bodies are breaking."[59] Today she teaches a

[57] Interview with Myriam Klotz, September 10, 2014.
[58] Interview with Myriam Klotz, December 17, 2014.
[59] Ibid.

course entitled Torat HaGuf at RRC. The course description reads, "This course seeks to foster the integration of body-based ways of knowing— through yoga practices that include postures, breathing exercises and meditations—into the rhythm of the Jewish year cycle of Torah reading…Over time, students will become adept at sensing how the body and yoga practice can help illuminate the teachings of the text in one's personal experience and how the text can be used as a framework for deepening mindful appreciation of the body and yoga."

Piyut America is a joint organization created by B'nai Jeshurun of Manhattan and Hazmanah Piyut of Israel, whose goal it is to bring the beauty of piyutim, from Israel to America through cultural programs, music, yoga and meditation in New York, Boston and San Francisco. Shira Yoga was born out of the efforts of Piyut America, and because of her expertise, Klotz was hired to teach these yoga classes.

Klotz has been able to use yoga to enhance her Jewish practice, as well as use Jewish teachings to enhance her yoga practice. "Meditation and yoga has helped me with prayer. It let me go into the deepest parts of myself."[60] At the same time, "Jewish teachings and practices illuminate yoga and give its practice a meaningful context for living a Jewish life. The devotional aspects of practice are heightened and focused when a Jewish teaching or principle can be brought. It is also potent when the teachings overlap and reinforce each other."[61] From the first moment that Klotz had a sense that Judaism and yoga fit together, the seeds were planted. Then it was just a matter of finding

[60] Interview with Myriam Klotz, September 10, 2014.
[61] Interview with Myriam Klotz, January 3, 2015.

ways to integrate them. "Where the asana practice and the Jewish teaching dance together, they come alive."[62]

Torah Yoga

Klotz inspired others to deepen the connection between yoga and Jewish practices. Diane Bloomfield, a good friend of Klotz and also Jewish, was inspired by Klotz's yoga practice. Being a dancer, Bloomfield was always a physical person, but she had not yet connected her Judaism to movement. Bloomfield was so moved by the integration of practices that she created Torah Yoga and wrote a book about it: *Torah Yoga: Experiencing Jewish Wisdom Through Classic Postures*. In her book, Bloomfield presents classic yoga instruction in light of Jewish wisdom. It teaches both fundamental yoga postures that are suitable for beginning and advanced students, and it offers guided meditations based on Jewish concepts. She includes classic Jewish teachings and quotes and helps the reader make a connection between the Jewish texts and yoga. "Torah Yoga is a way to discover and experience yourself through the study of Jewish wisdom, meditation, and yoga."[63]

Bloomfield writes of both seeing yoga with "Torah-centered eyes" as well as experiencing Torah with a "yoga-centered body." From her perspective, it is this two-way relationship that makes Jewish yoga so unique. Just like Klotz, Bloomfield remembers hearing her yoga teacher explain the principles of yoga, and automatically relating those to Jewish teachings and texts. She writes how excited she was to point this out to an Indian yoga teacher once, "Everything you are saying is in Torah," she exclaimed. He

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[62] Interview with Myriam Klotz, December 17, 2014.
[63] Diane Bloomfield, *Torah Yoga: Experiencing Jewish Wisdom Through Classic Postures*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2004, xi.

calmly replied, "Of course it is."[64] She explains that although yoga is most often linked with Vedic, Hindu, Buddhist and even New Age Spirituality and philosophy, B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the foremost yoga masters of our time says, "Yoga was given for the human race, not for the Hindus." His daughter, Geeta S. Iyengar added, "Yoga is not for Hinduism, or any other 'ism.' It is something eternal."[65] Yoga is clearly spiritual, but does not need to be tied to any one religion to be affective.

Bloomfield explains that yoga helped her discover that Torah was embodied and already inside of her. "I experienced Torah teachings as a reality that I could know and feel within myself, with my body."[66] She concluded that if Torah was within her, then practicing yoga was a way to study Torah. She says that, "Every yoga posture was a gateway to greater Torah consciousness."[67] Yoga helped Bloomfield understand Torah concepts on a deeper level, a level deep inside her body, mind, heart and soul.

Bloomfield teaches of the twelfth-century Torah commentator from Spain, Ibn Ezra, who realized the important role that the body plays within the spiritual journey. He said, "The one who knows the secret of his soul and the characteristics of his body can know things of the upper world, because the human being is a little world."[68] Bloomfield connects this teaching with Torah Yoga by explaining that through study and experience of your own person "little world," one learns of the "upper world."

In her book, Bloomfield offers guided Torah Yoga experiences based on seven central Jewish concepts: hidden light, constant renewal, leaving Egypt, essential self,

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[64] Ibid. xiii.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid. xiv.

body prayer and alignment, daily satisfaction, and remember to rest. Each chapter is divided into three sections: Torah Yoga [the connection between you, Torah and yoga], Torah study, and Yoga Practice.

For example, the guided experience entitled "Leaving Egypt" connects the Jewish peoples' narrative of the Exodus from Egypt with the ongoing personal liberation from limitation, pain and trouble. By explaining the meaning of the Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, meaning narrow places, one is able to experience new and deeper layers of the Exodus narrative. It becomes "a paradigm for personal experience of release from trouble of all kinds, a release into new possibilities."[69] Bloomfield guides the individual through a series of thought-provoking questions such as, "What is your Egypt?" "What troubles and limitations are you facing right now? Do you see any possibilities for release or expansion?"[70] She offers rabbinic teachings that teach that the exodus from Egypt does not end in the Bible, but rather it is an ancient and ever evolving story of our lives. She offers Torah study for leaving Egypt that includes biblical verses, teachings from Mishnah and a careful look at the Hebrew letters that make up the Hebrew word Egypt. She ends with a guided yoga experience based on the theme. Pictures and descriptions help the reader practice yoga at home on their own.

Although Bloomfield comes from an Orthodox background and Klotz is an active member of the liberal Jewish community, they both teach the benefits of integrating Judaism and yoga, and they both use their practices to enhance the other.

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[69] Ibid. 41.
[70] Ibid.

Aleph-Bet Yoga

Steven A. Rapp introduces another method of Jewish yoga in his book, *Aleph-Bet Yoga: Embodying The Hebrew Letters for Physical and Spiritual Well-Being*. Rapp suggests that hatha yoga is a practice that helps him be the best person he can be in this world, and overall more present in his relationships with others and the world around him. Rapp says that after his time as a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa, he spent a lot of time looking for similarities and connections among peoples and cultures. He says, "I believe that our underlying human nature connects us all."[71] Rapp recalls a time in his life in which a Torah scribe came to his synagogue and had people form the Hebrew letters with their body to understand what different letters represented. Some letters give a hint of their origin, like yud, which looks like a hand. He explains that he learned each word was really a series of pictures ordered in a special way. That was the moment Rapp realized that there were many ways to internalize Hebrew and Torah, using our bodies, not just our minds. Rapp's book is aimed at a variety of audiences, from children who are looking to learn the Aleph-Bet, to adults who are familiar with yoga or other forms of meditation but would like their practice to have a Jewish context. He claims that Aleph-Bet yoga enhances one's religious identity.

Rapp identifies ways that yoga can enhance one's Jewish practice. In Judaism, Jews pay a lot of attention to the kavannah, intention, that they have as they do mitzvot, G-d's commandments, as well as in prayer. "As yoga increases self-awareness it helps Jews to be conscious in their decisions and be present in their actions, thereby increasing their kavannah. Many people find that yoga also opens their intuitive channels, making

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[71] Steven A. Rapp, *Aleph-Bet Yoga: Embodying the Hebrew Letters for Physical and Spiritual Well-Being*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2002, 2.

them more receptive to subtle spiritual experiences that some might describe as an increased sense of awe."[72] "Aleph-Bet Yoga is a bridge between the physical and intellectual aspects of Judaism…and allows us to use our whole selves—body and mind…to relate to Judaism…"[73]

Rapp presents two parallel teachings: "In *Light on Yoga*, Iyenger tells us that in the Hindu system, 'the man who combines within his mortal frame knowledge, love, and selfless service is holy.'"[74] Rapp compares this teaching with a Jewish one from *Pirkei Avot, The Ethics of our Fathers,* "Al Shlosha D'varim," which says that the world depends on three things: study, service [of God], and acts of loving kindness. Overall, Rapp believes that combining Judaism and yoga prepares people to do the holy work of tikun olam, repairing the world.

In practice, Aleph-Bet Yoga connects all twenty-seven Hebrew letters with Hatha yoga poses that correspond in some way to the shapes of the letters. Rapp points out that Lawrence Kushner's *The Book of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alphabet*, portrays the many levels of meaning of the Hebrew alphabet. Similar in style, Rapp proposes an explanation for what each letter symbolizes, as well as a corresponding Biblical or liturgical verse, poem, and yoga pose. For example, the Hebrew letter tet is a symbol for goodness, such as in the word "tov" or good. A corresponding yoga pose is ardha navasana, the half boat pose, which looks like the letter tet. The Biblical verse that Rapp uses to demonstrate "goodness" is Genesis 1:31, "And God saw all that God had made and found it very good." He offers this poem:

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[72] Ibid. 11-12.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid. 14.

Our bodies formed
in harmony with our surroundings,
with explicit instructions
to tend and to care.
A mission by ship,
To care for the creation.
Land, water, and air,
We hold them all within.

Rapp's Aleph-Bet Yoga is yet another technique for combining yoga and Jewish concepts to enhance prayer, to internalize Hebrew and Jewish concepts, as well as to make connections between Judaism and the body.

Jewish Yoga Network

The Jewish Yoga Network, JYN, was founded by Estelle Eugene in the UK under the name Yoga Mosaic, twenty years ago. The JYN is a community of teachers and students who integrate yoga, meditation and Jewish teachings. JYN provides resources and information for both teachers and students of Jewish yoga. The International Director of Interreligious Affairs states on the website, "Whether one sees Yoga as helping recapture Jewish wisdom and practice which may have been lost over time, or as incorporating wisdom from other parts of the world into Jewish life; the physical and spiritual benefits of such practice offer much blessing and enlightenment."[75]

In April 2013, at Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, yogis and the yoga-curious gathered for a panel hosted by the JYN entitled, "Is Yoga Kosher? Why These Jews Stand on their Heads." Rabbi Anne Brener moderated, and the panel was made up of Jewish yoga teachers; Rabbi Avivah Erlick, Michelle Azar, Zac Lodmer and Ida Unger. Rabbi Anne Brener started by telling a story about a time when she was in need of healing. Judaism did not seem to have what she needed and eventually she began doing

[75] http://jewishyoganetwork.org/about-us/

yoga to cope. One day when she was in the bridge pose, she all of a sudden, "realized she knew what the Sh'ma was about." "I had a sense that veils were being pulled that separated worlds. I felt like I hadn't really lost my mother and sister. I felt a real connection with them."[76] She reported feeling a sense of oneness and began weeping uncontrollably. One day, when she was at a conference, she ran into Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and he validated her feelings. He said, "Yes. That is what the Sh'ma is about. That sense that you experienced of oneness." From then on, Rabbi Anne Brener felt that her yoga and Jewish practice were one and the Sh'ma continues to be a common chant during her yoga practice.

Panelist Rabbi Avivah Erlick wrote, *Gentle Jewish Yoga,* and admits that yoga led her to become a Rabbi. Before rabbinic school she was a journalist who loved to chant Torah and do yoga. One day she noticed that something unique was happening in her yoga class. When she approached her rabbi she said, "I have been coming to services for every Shabbat, all the holidays, but I'm going to yoga and something is happening that feels like religion. Is yoga converting me to Hinduism?" She remembers that the rabbi said, "Actually, God has been trying to reach you through all that Jewish prayer for years and is now finally reaching you through yoga."[77] She began to think about the liturgy as the poetry that it is. She was inspired to learn what the prayers meant and what their purpose was. One thing led to another, and she went to rabbinic school as well as going on to learn Restorative Yoga. For her, yoga has always been a mental exercise, not a physical exercise.

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[76] "Is Yoga Kosher? Why These Jews Stand on their Heads," http://jewishyoganetwork.org/2014/10/video-jewish-yoga-network-panel-in-la/, video posted on October 2, 2014.
[77] Ibid.

Zack Lodmer, teacher of Om Shalom Yoga and member of the JYN panel, decided to use yoga instead of surgery to heal his hurt knee. After a while, he realized that he was rehabbing not only his knee, but also his mind and heart. As a clarinet player for Friday Night Live in Los Angeles, he shared that the beautiful melodies have always been inside of him. "When I added yoga to the mix, I noticed my prayer deepening, and my ability to be present within prayer was increasing."[78] The creation of Om Shalom Yoga came from an experience that Lodmer had before Friday Night Live services one Shabbat. He tells the story; he was stretching and breathing as he prepared for services one day with another musician. The musician mused that he wished they could create a musical, Jewish-based yoga Shabbat experience. So, they did.

Panelist Rabbi Avivah Erlick says that when she meditates or does yoga for a while, "Jewish stuff just starts coming up." She quotes Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's book *Paradigm Shift*, when he uses the expression "burping up Jewish stuff" in result of meditating and yoga. She explains that the pressures of everyday life often get in the way of these feelings and connections coming up, but if one utilizes these techniques, people find themselves asking questions about their Judaism through yoga.

Rabbi Ida Unger, a Renewal rabbi on the panel, practices therapeutic yoga and wrote, *Sacred Shapes*. In this book, she uses yoga as prayer, and provides exercise and reflection for a path to health. Growing up in an Orthodox home, she noticed at the time, that many Jews were asking their rabbis about yoga, and if it was acceptable to be Jewish and practice yoga. For her, yoga was exercise and Judaism was life cycle, spirituality and prayer. She explained that in the 1990s she started having "Jewish revelations" in yoga,

[78] Ibid.

which was uncomfortable for her because she used to keep them separate. When the Hindu prayer was going on, she felt herself go to Jewish prayer. After 15 years or so of practice, she began to open herself to new possibilities, and one day as she stood in a yoga pose, she noticed energy running through her in a new way. She realized that she was in the shape of the Hebrew letter, Aleph. "At first I was scared of it. Was this supposed to be happening?"[79] She wondered about this curious connection she had made. Over the next few weeks she noticed new letters and she began writing them into her copy of Iyenger's book, *Light on Yoga*. "Within myself, I figured out where the essence of Judaism and where the essence of yoga connect."[80]

Not all Jews have welcomed this fusion of Judaism and yoga. Just as Rabbi Ida Unger admitted her attempts, at first, to keep yoga and Judaism separate, other notable liberal Jews still feel this way. Anita Diamant, author best known for her novel, *The Red Tent*, wrote a blog post on August 4, 2010 about how she actively keeps her Judaism and yoga separate. She recalls a young rabbi who approached her after a presentation one day. When he asked her if her yoga practice informed her Judaism practice at all, and she answered, "No. Yoga is for emptying my head. The Jewish stuff is about filling it up. I try to keep them separate."[81] However, she reports that several years ago she attended a Jewish yoga class in which the instructor had the class make their bodies into the shape of the Hebrew letter aleph. She explains the frustration that came from this instruction. First, she had to remember what an aleph looked like, then she wondered if the teacher meant in cursive or block letter, because they are different. At the end of the class her instructor

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Anita Diamant, A Happily Bifurcated Yoga Jew: Why I Keep My Asanas and My 'Adonais' Separate, *The Huffington Post,* 2010.

had them chant the Sh'ma, and again, she reports having to be too "in her head." When she heard the words of the Sh'ma, she was faced with the theological names and concepts of God, like Lord and Kingdom. This blocked her from gaining appreciation for the integration of her Judaism and yoga. Diamant explains further that, for her, "experiencing the sacred" comes only when she is able to shut down her ego. She says, "I'm pretty sure the only way to experience the sacred is by shutting down the ego—whether you're balancing on one foot or pouring over a page of Talmud."[82] While she admits that these types of sacred experiences can be found both in Judaism and yoga, she explains that for her personally, yoga is the time in which she manages to shut down her ego. She thinks of Judaism being the place she goes to engage, and yoga to detach. "But the truth is, I am not interested in a reconciling of my yoga practice and my Jewish practice. I feel no tension or contradiction in this double life."[83]

In response to Diamant's piece, Klotz wrote her own piece entitled, "Asanas in Service of Adonai"[84] explaining that her experience has shown her an approach that differs from Diamant's. Referencing the great spiritual value that Diamant writes about her yoga experience, and how it engages her fully which makes her feel satisfied and present, Klotz suggests that this is exactly why Jewish Yoga sessions are so nourishing. "When we can hear sacred Jewish phrases or teachings offered just at those moments when we are most alive and attuned to the deeper strata of our cells and our souls, we can be stirred towards spiritual growth and transformation."[85] Myriam finds that through practicing asana one can open up to Adonai, God. She explains that when a Jewish

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Myriam Klotz, "Asanas in Service of Adonai," *The Huffington Post,* 2010.
[85] Ibid.

insight is taught and paired with an intentional yoga practice like asana, "a formerly abstract point can take on concrete meaning in a person's life so that they can feel then connected Jewishly where before they had not."[86] Klotz agrees with Rapp of Aleph Bet Yoga, that this type of awareness and practice fosters a life of being more effective in living Jewish values in accordance with our beliefs and desires. Klotz also agrees with Diamant that yoga helps us "empty the mind," but she pushes that it can be meaningful to "fill our awareness" with positive Jewish teachings. Klotz suggests that yoga is a time to take in Jewish insights without the chatter of daily synagogue life. Klotz explains that yoga is a means through which she can truly "sit in the House of God," as it says in Psalm 27. She does this by sitting on her yoga matt with the awareness and attention of being present. Cultivating this kind of awareness is heightened when she can bring her consciousness to the intention that she desires to sit not just with herself, but with God, or in God's House. "The awareness stirs my soul to attention even as I am highly aware of the placement of the ankle bones and the inner arch of the feet in a simple seated pose."[87] In this integrative kind of moment, "Asana" and "Adonai" reverberate in meaningful [if silent] discourse…"

This chapter includes only a handful of people who are striving to integrate yoga and Judaism today. Jay Michaelson in *God in Your Body* finds yoga poses in Jewish prayer choreography. He compares bowing in various places of our prayer service to the sensation of being in child's pose. He labels the feeling as "a curious blend of intimacy

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

and power, immanence and transcendence, humility and presence."[88] He claims that even if your body is just going through the motions, it can shift a part of the soul. He compares the standing prayer, Amidah, to mountain pose showing the basic idea is similar: readiness, uprightness, standing at attention.[89] Jewish spiritual practice encourages us not to favor the body, soul or mind, but to raise them up together. Wherever connections can be found, there is potential for deeper meaning to be found. As Klotz beautifully says, "The place in which yoga practice meets Jewish practice, is the answer to a prayer."[90]

Contemporary Synagogues and Yoga

Many liberal synagogues today are attempting to incorporate yoga into their prayer experiences. While most seem to offer Jewish yoga before Shabbat services, or instead of Shabbat services, some are also incorporating yoga into the service, commonly into Birchot HaShachar, as part of the morning liturgy. Just as the sacred choreography is seamlessly woven in and out throughout our inherited prayer practices, so have some leaders woven yoga stretches and poses into the service. Partly, this is an attempt to help those who have reported having a difficult time finding meaning in traditional Jewish prayer services. Perhaps it is the trendiness of yoga today, or perhaps yoga class seems more approachable than a synagogue for some people. However, many people, including many of the rabbis who were mentioned in this chapter, felt more spiritually connected through yoga, before they discovered how to connect spiritually through Jewish prayer. As Klotz suggests, "…one's yoga practice can become itself an expression of personal

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[88] Jay Michaelson, *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness, and Embodied Spiritual Practice,* Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2010, 23.
[89] Ibid. 25.
[90] Interview with Myriam Klotz, September 10, 2014.

prayer that has not been experienced (yet?) in shul."[91] Many Jewish clergy have acknowledged how Jewish yoga can be a gateway to Jewish spirituality. As Rabbi Brener stated, "Yoga is healing not only our bodies, but our tradition."[92]

[91] Myriam Klotz, "Asanas in Service of Adonai," *The Huffington Post,* 2010.
[92] "Is Yoga Kosher? Why These Jews Stand on their Heads," http://jewishyoganetwork.org/2014/10/video-jewish-yoga-network-panel-in-la/, video posted on October 2, 2014.

Conclusion

Movement has always been an important part of Jewish tradition. It is a gateway for people to express themselves and connect with the Divine. The sacred choreography of our prayer service not only connects us to our ancestors, it also serves as a tool to help us focus on the prayer's intention. Dancing and other natural movements such as davening, have the ability to let us let go of the thoughts clouding our mind, and float away to new spiritual realms. Guided movement can foster new insight from within ourselves and therefore promote personal and spiritual growth.

The beauty of yoga is how the practice unites the body, the mind and the spirit, bringing us closer to our whole selves. The integration of yoga and Judaism has the ability to deepen and strengthen both practices, resulting in a greater sense of Jewish identity as well as a heightened sense of self-awareness. As the Jewish community witnesses the phenomenon of this fusion, I hope that it serves as a reminder of how religions and cultures can learn and benefit from each other.

It is important to acknowledge that implementing change takes time. Under Lerman's guidance, it has become the tradition to use the body in prayer at Temple Micah, but it did not happen over night. Just as Romemu includes the "freedom to move" in worship as part of their synagogue vision, so should other synagogues be considering how movement and body can contribute to the synagogue's vision. Clergy and music leaders of synagogues have work to do in creating an atmosphere in which congregants feel encouraged and invited to pray with their body. Just as B'nai Jeshurun clergy explain, we need to be purposeful about musical instrumentation, musical transitions, and

how we role model for the congregation. Most of all, we need to be true to ourselves and encourage others to express themselves in the way that is most meaningful to them.

This thesis is only one step in beginning to study how movement enhances prayer. It is my hope that others will continue to study its benefits. I also hope others will continue to be inspired by the individuals and congregations mentioned in this thesis. We should all learn from their vision and gifts. Romemu and B'nai Jeshurun happen to both be located in New York City, but there are certainly other synagogues in North America who are implementing movement.

The clergy at Central Synagogue, New York City, are also intentional about their worship. With a liturgical consultant on staff, they reflect and make changes within their prayer services on a regular basis. Although they do not implement movement into their worship, they utilize a custom that is used by many other Reform synagogues. To celebrate the joyous occasions going on in congregants' lives, the clergy lead the congregation in standing, putting their arms around one another, and singing the Shehechianu blessing. While this is not movement as I explored in this thesis, it is a form of actively engaging the congregation in a way that could be a stepping stone to more.

As a cantor, I look forward to implementing movement into worship at my synagogue, and raising congregants' awareness on how beneficial and meaningful it can be in prayer. As Jay Michaelson said, "Judaism is an embodied tradition that has lost some of its self-awareness over the years."[93] With mindfulness and specific practices, we can recapture the role that our bodies play in prayer and achieve new spiritual heights.

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[93] Jay Michaelson, *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness, and Embodied Spiritual Practice,* Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2010, 23.

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