

# The Dance that Heals Us

## Yardena Cohen's work and her contribution to Dance Movement Therapy

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In the studio of the dancer and teacher Yardena Cohen dance was a powerful means of expression that generated change. In this article I describe Yardena Cohen, relating to her childhood and her sources of inspiration while exploring the cultural developments of her time; the course of her professional development and how these affected her work as a dance teacher. I demonstrate her methods, by presenting examples emphasizing some of her guiding principles, which were later manifested in the profession of Dance Movement Therapy in Israel, of which she was among the founders. The article includes a description of a healing process of a young woman who reached the studio with a sense of emotional death, who was brought back to a creative life through dance and through Cohen's dedicated care.

Dance is a powerful means of expression which enables one to experience diverse emotions such as sadness, anger and happiness. Sometimes it is exciting and liberating and sometimes soothing. Dance is a multi-sensory experience in which there is a total involvement of all body organs, and a complete sense of self, in the experience and in the emotional release and sense of letting go. Dancing within an inclusive group and in the presence of an empathic therapist intensifies the experience and the positive effect of dance. This is what reigned in Yardena's studio.

### My acquaintance with Yardena Cohen

My first encounter with Yardena Cohen occurred more than 60 years ago. My mother, who immigrated to Israel from Germany and was influenced by the schools of thought relating to healthy and natural movement connecting body and mind, suggested that I meet her friend a dance teacher, who was teaching a new type of dance different to the ballet which I had been dancing until then. That was how I reached Yardena's home in Haifa, at the age of 11. The meeting was surprising and wonderful. She greeted me cordially, dressed in a long colorful skirt, her red hair wavy and long, her arms adorned with oriental bracelets. The colorful room, the straw baskets hanging on the wall, the copper utensils and the oriental musical instruments all impressed me very much. Her intensity, great charm, amiability, the fascinating conversation and her unique image captured my heart, and I joined her studio as a student.

I was deeply impressed by her experiential and creative way of work, which was entirely steeped in Hebrew and Israeli culture, and in the landscapes and sounds of the Middle-East. In her studio everything was different from what was customary in classical ballet. I learned to express myself through personal dance. I sensed my legs more and the center of my body – my center. Everything was much simpler and yet deeper, more touching and nurturing growth. I was affected by Yardena to the extent that at the age of 14 I gave dance lessons to the children at the *Ahava* boarding-school in Kiryat Bialik together with a friend who accompanied the lessons playing the piano. At the end of the meeting I knew: this was going to be my profession, I was going to help children through dance. Other girls were also similarly affected by Yardena Cohen. Yardena enabled us to experience dance as healing us and as nurturing growth, and we were captivated by her. In time some of her students became dancers and choreographers and for others, she paved the way to what ultimately became the profession of Dance Movement Therapy.

When I established the division of training for movement therapists at the Kibbutzim Seminar in Tel-Aviv, I used to come to Yardena with students, so they might experience and be impressed by the atmosphere she inspired and by her methods. In those meetings Yardena recounted that she regarded dance as the greatest doctor of the soul. She chose to call her method of work by the name *The Dance that Heals Us*<sup>1</sup> as in Hebrew 'dance' (*Maḥol*) is linguistically related to illness (*maḥalla*), dream (*ḥalom*), and recovery (*hahlama*).

### A glance at the development of dance movement therapy in the world

Yardena Cohen, born in 1910, pioneered the use of dance as a means of enabling healing in Israel. Cohen grew up and developed professionally in a historic period, in which voices of freedom and personal expression began to be heard in the United States and Europe, and these voices also found their way into her work.

These voices of free expression and individualism were also expressed in the modes of artistic expression. With the blossoming of psychology; and as painting, theatre and dancing became more liberated, expressive and personal; evidence from the field began emerging concern-

ing the healing power of the arts. J.L. Moreno, the creator of psychodrama, lived and worked in Vienna during the period in which the city was the center of psychology, following World War I. The essence of psychodrama is the expression of emotions via verbal and non-verbal dramatic dialogue in a group (Levy, 1988, p.12). Moreno also continued developing, implementing and disseminating psychodrama and group therapy when he moved to New York in 1925 (Artzi, 1991).

The revolution in dance was an integral part of the cultural climate at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Modern dance, including Expressive dance [Ausdruckstanz], began developing in Germany in the 20's, and from there gradually spread to other parts of Europe and the USA (Brin-Ingber, 2009, p.35) and affected those dancers and dance teachers in the USA, who are currently considered the pioneers of dance movement therapy. Dancers such as Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman had a great influence. The psychological approaches of Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Wilhelm Reich, Frederick Perls and others also influenced the development of dance as a therapeutic tool (Bernstein, 1982, p. 5; Levy, 1988, pp. 6-7). Among the mothers of movement therapy the works of Marian Chace, Mary Whitehouse, Trudy Schoop, Blanche Evan, Imgard Bartenieff and Liljan Espenak should be noted.

Most of these dance teachers began working with the new approaches, based on integrating body and mind, their lessons being attended not only by dance students but also by people who found healing through dance. Marian Chace, for example, recounted how people who were not dancers were also passionate about dance lessons, finding that they were beneficial to them. She delved into the connection between body and mind and psychiatrists and doctors began sending her patients who could not talk, yet responded to music and movement. In 1942 Chace was invited to work with mentally-ill patients who were admitted to the Saint Elizabeths Psychiatric Hospital in Washington D.C. (Levy, 1988, p.21; Sandel, Chaiklin & Lohn, 1993, p.63). Chace had the ability to adapt herself to the person in front of her, no matter how vacant their stare, and how frozen their movement might be, and to adjust the energy level required for their needs. By means of movements she created communication with the patients, motivating them to dance; they continued moving even after the dance had ended.<sup>2</sup>

Each one of the pioneer therapists worked in a unique way, putting a different emphasis on the relationship between verbal expression and movement expression. Each one of them contributed to the development of the field in a unique way. Since it is impossible in this short article, to elaborate on each one of the pioneers in the field, I will, as an example, compare the guiding principles of Chace with those of Yardena Cohen.

Over the years a need arose to gain a better understanding of the moving person and to diagnose that person through his or her movement. Rudolf Laban, one of the central figures of expressive dance, developed theories regarding movement and its essence, which were later on integrated into dance movement therapy. Underlying Laban's theory was his concept that movement both expresses the person and his or her emotions and also affects them (White 2009). His successor was Judith Kestenberg, a psychiatrist and neurologist who developed the Kestenberg movement profile, by means of which it was possible to learn about the individual's development, their patterns of behavior, their feelings and so forth (Loman & Sossin, 2009).

Yona Shahar-Levy developed a conceptual paradigm of emotive motor behavior: *EMOTORICS- EBMMP*. The *Emotoric Paradigm* is an integrative theoretical structure, which defines the structural and dynamic potentials of the motor system as the physical executor of the self's drives, emotions, perception, and interpersonal relations from a developmental perspective. It contains a theoretical level, a core-grammar of emotive-movement based on specific psychomotor diagnostic indexes, and a level of derivative clinical implications. *EMOTORICS- EBMMP* is currently being used by dance/movement therapists, psychologists, educators and researchers in Israel and abroad (Shahar-Levy, 2001,2004).

The transition to dance movement therapy as a profession was gradual. The pioneers of dance movement therapy in the United States were the founders of the professional association, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) in 1966. As of 1972, dance movement therapy is defined as "The psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional and physical integration of the individual" (Levy, 1988, p. 15).

### *A glance at the development of dance movement therapy in Israel*

In Israel, dance therapy has also developed gradually, partially under the influence of Chace's students, who arrived from the USA, and teachers who traveled to the USA for advanced studies. In 1961 Noga Arel, who was trained by Chace, immigrated to Israel and began working as a dance movement therapist with autistic children at the Eitanim Psychiatric Hospital, in Jerusalem. Chace came to Israel in 1964, on the initiative of the Department of Music Education at the Ministry of Education, sponsored by the Ministry of Health and the Rubin Academy of Music, and held a professional course in Kfar-Shaul and Talbieh Hospital. This was her only journey outside the borders of the United States (Sandel, Chaiklin & Lohn, 1993, pp 44-69). In 1980 Mara Capy and Sharon Chaiklin arrived from the USA, sponsored by Antioch University, in order to open a one-year program for training dance movement therapists

at the University of Haifa. The program was attended by dance teachers, some of them Cohen's students, who had already been working in therapy, however they lacked formal training. Since then, additional training programs have been established.

The Israeli Association of Creative & Expressive Therapies (I.C.E.T)<sup>3</sup> was established in 1971. The therapeutic concept of the organization was inspired and affected by work methods accepted in the USA and Europe. The I.C.E.T has acted and is acting to anchor the profession and its status among the other therapeutic professions in Israel. The institutionalization of the profession is of great importance. Recognition of the profession entails the recognition of the contribution made by the field and of qualities within the field. The Association enables the establishment of criteria and academic, professional and ethical codes. It provides the therapists with a membership framework and imparts them with increasingly growing professional experience and knowledge – for the benefit of the patients.

Cohen, who was a talented dancer and an Israel prize laureate for 2010, acted in Israel as a pioneer in developing dance as a means enabling healing, and in 1992 she received the title of honorary member of I.C.E.T. for her work and contribution to the field.

### *The personal history of Yardena Cohen and its effect on her professional development*

"I was born at sea, I was born on the mountain, I was born under an ancient olive tree, on dark brown soil" (Cohen 1976, p.11). Cohen, a sixth generation Israeli on her father's side and a descendent of 13 generations of rabbis originating from Vilna on her mother's side, was deeply rooted and connected to the land and all the people of the country, regardless of their place of origin, religion or ethnic background. She felt connected to Nature and was inspired by it.

Since childhood she was attentive to herself and to her dreams, and it seems that movement was her first language. "I was used to observing the law of repetitive movements in Nature, movements which were generated out of self-defense... and the struggle for existence... I began comparing movements, walks... I found myself imitating the animals... lengthening my neck like a bird, arching my back like my cat... the white seagulls were also among my first choreography teachers..." (Cohen, 1976, p. 116).

The urge for movement and dance led her in 1929 to Vienna, where she studied at Gertrud Bodenwieser's school of dance and with one of the Wiesenthal sisters, who taught rhythmic according to the theory of Emile Jacques Dalcroze<sup>4</sup> (ibid, 32). "I fell into the world of western dance. I let

new sounds and colors penetrate my dormant worlds and awaken them". However, she sensed that she had not yet found herself: "The real I of genuine rhythm and sound was still dormant" (ibid). She went to study in Dresden, where two big dance schools were located: the school of Mary Wigman, one of the pioneers of expressive dance and that of Gret Palucca, Wigman's student.

Wigman, who was a colleague and student of Laban, encouraged expressive dance and improvisation, which were aimed towards the development of a personal style (Levy, 1988. p.5). Among her students were Espenak and Whitehouse (Levy, 1988 :pp. 51, 61). Some of Wigman's work principles were manifested in Yardena's studio, among them: dancing or walking barefoot in order to establish the connection with the ground; simple exercises such as natural walking, dancing without mirrors so that the movement would be experienced from within rather than finding the ideal position. The dancers in the classroom were quasi 'mirrors', meaning they reflected the dancer. Wigman admitted students of all kinds, not only dancers, and her goal was to enrich the individual in general, physically and mentally (Newhall, 2009 pp. 135, 136, 140).

Cohen was indeed exposed to the various arts and mainly to the world of sounds and dance, which moved her and enriched her mind, but she felt foreign and lonely and missed the soil of the Land of Israel. She found out that her teachers also perceived her as a foreigner: during the performance of the great Indian dancer Uday Shankar she heard Mary Wigman say to Palucca: "This is your Palestinian; that is where she belongs, among us this girl is a foreigner. She has come from a different world which she must return to," (Cohen, 1976, p. 33). When she told Uday about it he said to her, "Learn, absorb everything, every foreign letter and movement will bring you back to your origins, and when you return you will discover yourself and your soul" (ibid).

Cohen returned to Haifa and worked as a gymnastics and dance teacher at the *Mizrachi* girls' school, and already expressed her equalitarian worldview. At the same time she continued her search for melodies that would express her, which she had already begun in Vienna. "Despite all my efforts I felt that I was lacking something essential, primordial, as if within the flames of my dance there was a faded, extinguished spot. I did not stop looking for the sound that would ignite within me the latent unknown. Today I truly know that then I was not yet 'myself'. There was a creature of oriental breath and rhythm, yet captive in the western culture" (Cohen, 1976, p. 46). Having discovered the intensity of the drum, the cymbals and the violin, and after getting acquainted with the Oudh (Cohen, p. 48), which is one of the most ancient instruments with a sounding board of the stringed instrument family, she began establishing her own personal way as a dancer and

a teacher. She opened the dance studio in Haifa in 1960, and since then hundreds of students from diverse communities and cultures studied with her.

### *Yardena Cohen's work and therapeutic principles*

Yardena did not define herself as a therapist, but her work was therapeutic, generating change and healing those who came to her. She had a unique way about her, fostered by her personality and by what she had studied and had been exposed to at her father's house and during the time of her dance studies. Professor Shmuel Nagler said about her in 1976 when she published her book, "Few could cultivate the therapeutic nature of dance to have such an intense effect as she does". Yardena paved the way for movement therapists by the way she taught her dance lessons, however she did not conceptualize her approach or write it as a theory. I retrieved the milestones of her work, which we find as dance movement therapy principles in Israel, from her autobiographic book "The Drum and the Sea" (1976), and from the interview I held with her in 1966.

Professor Nagler, Dr. Viki Bental and Ze'ev Glick (Eshel, 1991, p. 65) referred children to her for whom verbal treatment was not suitable; children with behavior disorders, learning or communication difficulties, and children whose emotional suffering had somatic manifestations. Generally dancing with her was an adjunct therapy to the main mental care, and sometimes she had to cope with the lack of recognition of her profession, and to explain or defend it. She recounted the story, for example, of a boy, from one of the Kibbutzim in the area, who used to come to dance at her studio. One day she received a letter from the Kibbutz secretariat, demanding her to send him away and not to allow him to dance until she received an explicit instruction from the doctor treating him (Cohen, 1976, p.138). Cohen worked in cooperation with psychologists, but also fought for her own opinions and for what she identified as the children's needs. In this case she thought it would be right to bring the boy closer and allow him to dance. And that is what happened. The boy grew up and developed and ultimately became a dancer and a choreographer.

In another case, a psychologist tried to prevent a girl under her care from dancing the 'doll dance' she had prepared at Yardena's studio, arguing that the dance would cause her over-excitement and hysteria. Yardena thought that it was very important that the girl should tell the doll's story and dance "because only through the emotional release and sense of letting go within the body and the mind comes calmness and sublimation, and the dance becomes a small creation and a public asset" (ibid, 140).

Cohen rightly sensed that one may only gain a true impression of the power of dance and its beneficial effect when one actually experiences it, and wrote, "It would be

better if all the psychologists and the various researchers of the human mind would also try to dance, so that they could experience in their own bodies the intense expression of passions and creativity" (ibid). She strove to explain her work methods and to deepen the awareness of the professional community to the great importance of the dance that heals us. To this end she lectured to various audiences (Cohen in an interview with Barkai, 1996, p. 96). Currently, in many professional conferences there are various workshops engaging dance movement therapy, which enable the effect of this profession to be experienced. This has a tremendous importance since many people and many emotional therapeutic professions are detached from the body.

As the training process developed, became more professional and gained recognition, its professional status as a therapeutic means gradually changed. Nowadays dance movement therapy can be the sole or the main therapy.

### *Milestones in the work of Yardena Cohen*

#### *Movement is an innate natural instinct*

"The instinct of movement is innate in every moving creature... even for a child the initial means of expression is movement. Basically each and every child, whether they are as clumsy as a bear or as light as a feather, talented or not, is entitled to, and should, dance and move" (Cohen, 1976, p. 114). Shahar-Levy (2004, p. 17) writes in a similar spirit about movement as an innate instinct, "Motility is an innate instinct and a source of sensual and functional pleasure: the urge to move, giving vent to emotions, exploring and trying to discover, to grow, to become closer and get further away". Cohen believed that an individual should get well acquainted with his or her body, but she also believed that it was possible to express oneself through the body, even if it was not perfect, complete or polished. Cohen aspired to improve the physical movement expression and the awareness of each of its aspects: the posture, the breathing, the sound, the weight, the flow of the movement as well as time and space.

#### *Working with the body affects the mind*

Cohen taught a leg movement which would help the dancer to become grounded, as a source of power. In her studio people danced barefoot and practiced simple walking. There was also a lot of pelvis movement, which Yardena perceived as liberating: "The pelvis work originates from oriental dances, and my oriental technique is a combination of the pelvis and other body parts" (Cohen in Barkai, 1996, p. 96). She encouraged Expressive Dance. The dancers began the topic they wanted to express by improvisation, and the dance gradually received its final structure.

#### *"Adoption" and integration*

Cohen kept the name "dance lessons" and did not call

Her work "therapy". The children who were referred to her were integrated into the regular groups, and in this way her approach was similar to that of Marian Chace, who believed that one should see the healthy parts in an individual, work with them and build up from them. Yardena believed that the "special" child would develop by spending time with ordinary children, and they too would gain from his/her presence. Every new member joining the group was "adopted" by an old member, who facilitated his or her acclimatization in the group; generally the adopting person was "one of the rehabilitants" (Cohen, 1976, p.136).

#### *Building a safe environment for the child and creating a therapeutic alliance*

Cohen believed that a safe environment should be created where the child could develop and therein the "therapeutic alliance" could be built. The term relates to the relationship established between the therapist and the patient, enabling the latter to feel understood and included, evoking their ability to change. The relationship of trust that she created with the people who came to the studio allowed psychological work at a profound level. She used to say: "I'm dropping you into the sea... but with me you will not drown, I will protect you, you will slowly learn how to swim ..." her work was extensively guided by her creativity and her intuition. This was an "educated intuition" based on her experience and knowledge which had been acquired and became available to suit individual needs (Shahar-Levy, 2004).

Yardena's work with children was basically therapeutic and educational, with an emphasis on attentiveness and acceptance without criticism. She built a safe space, wherein each child could express him or her-self. The healing dance brought benefit via the relationship with her and the rest of the group members. The clear and consistent boundaries Yardena had introduced contributed to the feeling of a safe environment.

#### *Boundaries as creating a safe space*

In her lessons Yardena was meticulous about concentration; self-discipline; meeting schedules; showing respect for others and for the art and about understanding the role of the audience. Whatever was experienced and studied in the studio was valuable also in the educational and inter-personal aspect. She regarded the children who did not observe the rules as testing the boundaries rather than as disturbing the lesson. She was attentive and treated the children with respect, understanding and empathy. She admitted, if necessary, that she had made a mistake and asked for forgiveness (Cohen, 1976, p. 149). Yardena handled complex issues professionally and with much sensitivity. For example she induced a girl, who was suspected of stealing, to speak, helping her confess, and recruited the mother and the psychologist in favor of the process (Ibid, pp. 141-142).

#### *Expression of every emotion and content*

In Cohen's work emotional expression in dance, development of spontaneity, creativity and the use of imagination and metaphors were prominent. When dancing, movements were sometimes initiated from the outside, for example when practicing a walk or a movement of the arm, and sometimes from the inside, from the subconscious. Yardena encouraged and enabled the children to express each and every emotion, whether it was pain, sorrow, happiness or anger. As someone who had been connected to her dreams since her childhood, she knew that dreams held significant internal authentic content. She encouraged the children to recount their dreams and express them through dance. Sometimes she asked them to write down a scary dream and then dance it. The children sensed that they were understood and respected. It was possible to talk about and dance any subject, without fear of criticism, and learn that others too, including Yardena, were scared, and that there was no reason to be ashamed.

Cohen used biblical stories or folktales to encourage expression of blocked issues. By using biblical characters she raised a variety of problems and challenges existing in life such as love, hatred, war and bereavement. She regarded death as providing rhythm to life (Cohen in Barkai, 1988, p. 93). Because she worked from the direction of health and strength, she suggested topics and stories which included joyful, pleasant and beautiful experiences. Today stories are used in drama-therapy and in bibliotherapy, and also, where necessary, in additional therapeutic practices such as in the Jungian approach, which sees an expression of deep layers of the soul in myths and folktales.

Cohen enabled expression of passions, impulses, aggression and emotional release in a constructive and empowering way. In a period, in which the manifestation of aggression was very unconventional, she allowed a wildly raging girl to express her despair and disappointment in dance; to roll like a wild wind and dance tempestuously. She provided the girl, who had been composed and frozen, with a whip and appropriate music which enabled her to dance and express the destructiveness and rage that were imprisoned within her. Over time, through the dance, her behavior changed and developed and her dance also became calmer while becoming open and free. Furthermore, dancing with Yardena allowed the dancers "to turn impulses into a creation of art", meaning to connect to their strengths and express themselves. In the next example, one can see how she harnessed the power of the group to processing the emotion of fear.

#### *The power of the group*

One of the girls told the group about a nightmare. Cohen asked, "Who among you has ever had a very frightening dream?" Since the children found it hard to share with

their friends, Cohen said, 'I have nightmares to this very day'. After that other children also dared tell the group about their nightmares, and later on dance "their own nightmares fervently to the sound of drums and music' (Cohen, 1976, p.143).

Cohen believed in the power of the group, in the help and encouragement that can be attained from it, and said that the joint work of ordinary children together with those referred to her because of difficulties contributed to a much faster and more thorough solution, through the encouragement and the help existing in a group that works together (Cohen, in Barkai, p. 94).

The discourse in the group took the children out of their solitude and enabled them to develop skills of relating to others. Sometimes the group empowers, reflects or echoes an emotion. Yarden argued, "Mourning, crying and the desire to lament one's lot is latent in each child", and sometimes children feel the need for the group to lament over them (Cohen, 1976, p. 147).

Sometimes she integrated young girls into a group of teachers from her studio. Similar to what is currently seen in drama-therapy, one of the girls imposed the role of beneficent mothers on the participating adults according to her own needs (ibid, p.139).

Within the group there was room for any individual, and the emphasis in her work was on personal expression and creativity. The topics for the dance were according to the child's choice, out of his or her inner world. The children could dance what they had prepared in advance or improvise. Any child who wanted received a stage and the others watched him or her, because Yarden acknowledged each child's need to be seen, and be in the center.

Nevertheless, Cohen did not pressure the children to perform. Attentiveness to the children's needs was more important than any principle. Passive observation was also an important and significant part of learning. She spoke about the importance of the process and explained to the parents that children also learnt through observation, and that patience was required for their attempts to reach personal expression so that dance would generate change (ibid, p. 137).

#### *To be visible – reflection and testimony*

Cohen taught her students to be quiet and empathic observers. She knew and also taught how to see and look for "the truth latent even in the clumsiest movements" and do so without criticism. In the studio the children kept silent for several moments after the dance had ended, and then related to the positive things they had seen in the dance. She was not quick to comment about mistakes and expressed tenderly suggestions for improvement (ibid, p. 137).

Acceptance without judgment allows a patient's work and growth. Today, in therapy we try to reduce constant self-criticism, which disturbs the individual's self expression or prevents him or her from taking action in reality. Mirrors inlaid on dance school walls reinforce criticism. Cohen spoke about reflection in mirrors as a cursory view surveying only the external movements, an external look of staring eyes "which do not reflect any expression or experience which is transferred from the eyes of the mind outwardly" (ibid, pp. 127-128). With Cohen, the other person's eyes were a sympathetic mirror, which enabled concentration and convergence within the mind.

Cohen believed that children should be given the experience of an empathic mirror in order to validate their movement and give recognition and reinforcement to what they experience within it. For this purpose she initiated mirroring experiences. For example, children of one group moved and looked at the "mirrors", who were the children of another group who were watching and imitating their movements (Cohen, pp. 128-129). Many experiences of positive and accepted visibility were enabled by dancing in couples – one person moves while the other witnesses, or the child dances in the center and everybody witnesses his or her movements. In this way she taught alertness to the movement experience and developed the capability of kinesthetic empathy<sup>5</sup>. Returning the movement to the dancing person is also a reflection, a mirror, as well as recognition and validation.

#### *Movement with closed eyes*

Cohen directed towards the development of introspection to a great extent. A personal ordeal helped her to understand the contribution that movement with closed eyes made to the deepening of internal mental work and to finding authentic natural movement. One morning in 1946 she lost her sight, and even the very harsh treatments she received did not help her. Her doctors advised her to stop dancing, but she felt that this was not in her best interests. "I felt deep inside me, in my body and soul– that I would never stop dancing". She asked for the advice of a well-known psychologist in New York, who told her to do what she had always been doing, "to dance and dance without stopping for a moment even with closed eyes". Slowly, with the passion of dance her sight returned (Cohen, in Barkai 1996, p.93). She attributed her temporary blindness to great pressures and maybe to a shock she was unaware of.

After her sight had returned, she worked with her students on the exercise of the person with closed eyes... "searching and feeling their way through the space, coming into contact with and touching somebody else who is also wandering in the room. This contact and connection granted confidence and courage" (ibid). This exercise was considered a great innovation at the time, but now it is a fairly common exercise in many movement fields, as

well as in "Authentic Movement"<sup>6</sup>. Eliminating the sense of sight creates a different awareness of oneself and of the environment, and sharpens the use of the other senses. It allows introspection and reflection. Sometimes the sense of the muscles and the movements are more noticeable with closed eyes, however fear or discomfort may also appear.

### *Live music*

Music affects our body and mind. "It may evoke memories, images and associations. It may stimulate thoughts and also change them". Music organizes and focuses (Amir, 2005, p.15). Cohen searched for the right music for her and for her dances, and music also played a significant role in her studio. Musicians accompanied her performances and her lessons. In the studio, musicians matched the music to each child according to his or her condition and according to his or her dance. According to Cohen, the musicians played for the child "according to the child's perception and not according to their own approach and perception" (ibid, p.137). Thus the melody was a reflection, an echo and an empathic accompaniment, the positive affect of which was way beyond words.

"There is an immense primary force of ancient powers in the rhythms of drums in all tribes and nations" (Cohen in Barkai, 1966, p.92). She spoke about the magical power of the drum and its tremendous effect, "It awakens and resurrects primordial secrets, latent within the diaphragm" (Cohen, 1976, p. 136). Sometimes she herself played the drums or the gongs. The drum relates to rhythm, "which is the most basic element in all types of music" and it organizes and provides energy (Amir, 2005, p.17). The rhythm relates to the earliest sound the baby hears – the mother's heartbeats.

### *Building reinforcement resources, and finding the uniqueness*

The learning experience with Cohen helped children grow and become stronger thanks to the direct relationship she created with them; the possibility to express themselves and the creative path that was opened before them. Cohen found that giving children a role increased their self-esteem, and therefore she gave her students roles such as the adoption of a new child. She allowed each child to assume the role of the teacher for a few minutes. In this way the children learnt about their ability to take responsibility, to discover and express new aspects of themselves. This also developed their social perception and their sense of belonging.

Her approach and the therapeutic principles that she formulated, such as respect, privacy and the verbal or pictorial expression of physical experience, are still important milestones today. Each one of the children had a secret notebook called "The Dance and Movement language". In this notebook the children wrote their thoughts about the

dance and described what they had studied, what they had thought, which topic they had chosen to engage in. Writing in the notebook was part of processing the matters which had arisen in the meetings and enabled Cohen to monitor the children's emotional state.

Each child could select a character out of a story or a fairytale, which he or she identified with. Each child danced the character they had chosen thus turning it into a resource of strength in difficult moments of daily life. Cohen describes with much sensitivity the boy, Nitzan, who while he gained a lot from dancing in the studio, still had difficulties outside. As an animal lover he developed and adopted the character of the Gnu (wildebeest) as a companion and a source of strength in a way that helped him cope also during his difficult hours at school (Cohen, 1976, p.146).

Being so deeply connected to herself and her personality, Cohen encouraged each child to express their uniqueness through the dance they presented; in their personal notebook; by choosing their own matching music; through encouraging them to look inwardly and more. She encouraged each and every child to choose the topic of their own dance, assuming that this way they would better express themselves and their world. She did not demonstrate the movements and did not ask the students to move like her but rather encouraged each one to find their own movements. Those of Cohen's students who with time began to work teaching movement to children with special needs and as movement therapists, did not become her duplicates. Each one found her own special personal style.

### *Breathing*

Breathing was a fundamental term in Cohen's educational therapeutic work, "the words 'breath and soul' can be heard wafting within me" (Cohen in Barkai, 1966, p. 95-96). [The words 'breath and soul' have the same root in Hebrew] "Yardena asked us to put our hands on our diaphragm and only to breathe, while listening to the accompanying drum, because breathing too is a movement... obviously later the movement burst out and was transferred into space" (Arnon in Eshel, 1991, p. 64).

Nowadays breathing is addressed in every movement or dance lesson. Concentrating and observing breathing bring us closer to ourselves, to the present moment, and to encountering our emotions. Being aware of our breathing reminds us of our existence in the present, and evokes our alertness to what is happening here and now, as in the mindfulness approach of Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994). We can also change our breathing rate, like in Yoga for example. Breathing is both the work and that which connects between the exterior and the interior: we inhale the air, which comes in from the outside and exhale it from the inside out. Cohen found the balance between the interior

of Marian Chace. The Marian Chace Memorial Fund of the American Dance Therapy Association Columbia, Maryland.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Yardena recounted that her friend, the poet Nathan Yonatan, saw the chapter name "The Recovering Dance" in her book that was about to be published, and asked her "Yardena, is your dance sick?" and explained that something had to be added to the name. Together with the poet Zelda, Yardena's friend, they chose the name "The Dance that Heals Us". (Cohen in Barkai 1996, pp. 96-97).

<sup>2</sup> I witnessed her work methods when I worked as her trainee in 1966.

<sup>3</sup> The I.C.E.T. currently federates divisions of art, dance movement, music, psychodrama, drama-therapy and bibliotherapy.

<sup>4</sup> Emil Jaques Dalcroze 1865-1950, pedagogue and musician, developer of a unique musical education system, emphasizes various aspects of the dancer's personality, and the combination of dance and music.

<sup>5</sup> Kinesthetic Empathy is the therapist's ability to accept, understand and give back to the patient the senses that his movement evokes and the interaction that is created. Kinesthetic Empathy is a form of knowledge and com-

munication which can have many expressions, physical as well as verbal (Chaiklin and Wengrower 2009, pp. 43, 48, 132, 163).

<sup>6</sup> Whitehouse is one of the founders of the "Authentic Movement" model, which searches for a movement which is derived from a person's internality. Whitehouse taught creative dance and underwent Jungian analysis which affected her work and her understanding that movements stem either from the conscious or the subconscious. The "Authentic Movement" is carried out with closed eyes, without any music, in the presence of a witness, a therapist or a group peer. Several components of Yardena's work exist in "Authentic Movement" among them: work with closed eyes and search for the individual's unique natural movement stemming from within themselves.

<sup>7</sup> From the song "There are flowers" (Nathan Yonatan, 1974, p.18)

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the connection to the earth and the place, the powerful music, played by sensitive musicians guided by Cohen, the invitation to search and express personal truth – all these together directed her "to dance myself in a way that changed my emotional coping with loss and bereavement".

Among her personal dances were: "I want to say something" – in which she danced what she could not express in words, and "His tears turned into stone, and his stones cried flowers"<sup>7</sup> – which expressed her coping at the cemetery and its significance in her life.

Dancing with Cohen had a special therapeutic significance for Dina. Yardena brought her back to life, in the fullest sense of the word. And indeed, Dina understood that this was the profession she wanted to engage in, and she graduated the training program for dance movement therapist at the Kibbutzim Seminar in Tel-Aviv.

Cohen's message to the therapists was: to search, to love, to find and to believe. "Dance was a medicament in all ancient tribes, which tried in various ways, by the thunder of drums and through dancing to heal man of all his agonies and pains. In fact, we did not discover anything new, these things have always existed. We have restored the powers of dance and the drum to their place, to their healing designation. To all the dance movement therapists: Never give up on any problem – whether small or big, in the human body and soul search, love, find and believe" (Cohen in Barkai, 1966, p.97).

### Summary

Yardena Cohen was a dancer, creative artist, teacher of educational dance and a therapist in her soul. She was a colorful non-conformist, intensive, energetic, emotional and sensual woman and her language was no less rich and picturesque than her dances.

Her work and her original approach brought relief to many people. She can be regarded as a source of inspiration and a "mother", next to the "Great Mothers" of the field of dance movement therapy, and her work in the approach of "the dance that heals us" is a unique contribution to the profession. As we have seen, her own uniqueness and that of her approach were expressed in her own personal creativity and in the creativity she developed so well in others she worked with; in the way she integrated educational and therapeutic dance; in her ability for acceptance and in her warm and direct human relationships. With the help of all of these she instilled confidence and trust in the people who came to dance in her studio, evoking creativity, authenticity, rich and diversified expression which enabled processes of change, healing and growth in everyone according to their needs.

Cohen worked from an approach which believed in the

individual, in their strength and creativity and in dance as evoking healing. Many of the characteristics of her work are currently the principles of Dance Movement Therapy. She might therefore be considered a pioneer of dance movement therapy in Israel.

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and the exterior, and taught her students to look inwardly and express outwardly. "I impart my students primarily with the sense of depth. They learn how to concentrate inwardly..." (ibid, p. 113).

#### *The latent physical memory*

"The visible body tells the latent story of the soul" (Shahar-Levy, 2004, p.13). We often say that the "body remembers" (Federman, 2001) however, sometimes this is a latent memory, whether it is about an experience which occurred before the development of the language, or a suppressed traumatic experience. Cohen was aware that dance enabled the expression and processing of that which has no words or memory. For example, she told the story of Orah, who danced the "trap" dance, in which she tried to crawl out of the maze and the thickets and to run for her life. Orah could not explain how she reached this topic, and it only became clear later that she had been involved in a road accident in her childhood. The dance enabled her to reconstitute the experience and process it over and over again until a change occurred (ibid, p. 143). In dancing and in bodily expression there is a healing process. The possibility of raising subconscious matters, which cause emotional and physical barriers, and bringing them to consciousness within the framework of a relationship, is the essence of dance movement therapy.

#### *Experiencing Dance with Yardena: A Child's Personal Perspective*

Cohen's work was humane, unique and very professional. The intensive and healing experience of dancing under her guidance loses substance when trying to describe it in professional words and terms. A girl, who danced with Cohen, wrote in her notebook: "In my opinion dancing is necessary for any person. If he is sad or he wants to reveal his pain to someone but does not know how and he also does not want it, he can express it in dancing – and it happens to me, I know, that when I begin dancing I forget everything... even if I did something bad or good, and even if I have a secret from my mother and I am afraid to tell her. Therefore, a person that does not have the ability to dance – there is nothing that can liberate him, and then he is closed, as if imprisoned, and then he is really miserable" (ibid, pp. 151-152).

#### *Points of comparison between the work of Chace and Cohen's work*

Both Chace and Cohen included patients as well as dancers in their dance groups, although at a later stage Chace worked only with psychiatric patients. Both created a beneficent relation which also enabled those who were not dancers to join the dance. Both followed the principle of linking up with the healthy part in a person. They emphasized dance as a means of communication and of non-verbal expression, which encourages healing

processes and which has the power to connect and bring people closer. They also emphasized the importance of the rhythm accompanying us in the movement. Both used symbols, metaphors and movements from daily life.

One of the ways in which they differed was in the use of musical accompaniment. Whereas in Cohen's studio live music was played, Chace played music out of a large record collection, which included music from various cultures and trends. She matched the music to the population of the patients, to the atmosphere and energy in the room. One of the important principles in her work was, "I accept and want to be with you where you are" (Bernstein, 1982, p.5), and playing music was one expression of this principle. Much of Chace's work was carried out in a circle. She moved with the patients and mirrored their movements in a manner that we currently call Kinesthetic Empathy (see note 5), whereas Cohen moved sparingly in front of her students and expressed her empathy with her eyes observing the movements, with gestures and by verbal expressions.

#### *Description of a personal process*

It is important to point out: not only children and youth found healing in Cohen's studio. She also accompanied adults who had experienced traumas, or had coped with barrenness, bereavement and mourning. The Six Day War and later on the Yom Kippur War caused much pain and grief, which were manifested also in the loss and despair which young women brought into the studio. Following is a description of a process that one of her students underwent. It is a description of a voyage of change from the experience of death back to life. Dina (a fictitious name) was nineteen, two years after the Yom Kippur War, in which she and her family experienced a heavy bereavement. Ostensibly, Dina functioned in all areas: she completed her studies, joined the army and even continued dancing. However, she felt that something within her was dead. Tzofiya Naharin, who had been her dance teacher for many years, recommended her to dance at Yardena Cohen's studio.

Cohen took her under her wing and was "like water for a thirsty person in the desert" for her. She invited her to participate in all the dance groups at the studio, and suggested that Dina would help her to teach in one of the young girls' groups. As mentioned earlier, this was one of the principles of her approach: assisting others reinforces and empowers.

There, among the dance groups, Dina began getting back into contact with her own deep emotional layers. With the encouragement and support of Yardena Cohen, in the atmosphere of embracing warmth which Yardena induced so amazingly, Dina succeeded in expressing what she could not express elsewhere and in any other way. The warm up when working on the body and the soul,