



Dance as Therapy: A Jewish Perspective

**Miriam Roskin Berger with Joanna Gewertz Harris,
Marsha Perlmutter Kalina and Johanna Climenko**

Berger in 1958, in a dance therapy session at
Manhattan Psychiatric Center III, photo by Alan Haas

This article touches on some elements discussed at the Dance Therapy Panel at Arizona State University during the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” conference in October 2018. Dr. Miriam Roskin Berger was the Chair and author of this summary, and the panelists were Marsha Perlmutter Kalina, Ph.D, Johanna Climenko, LCSW, and Joanna Gewertz Harris, Ph.D.

Growth of Dance Therapy in the United States

There were three sources for the growth of the discipline of dance therapy in the United States in the 20th century. The first was the influence of humanistic psychology with its emphasis on the importance of the individual. The second source was the establishment in the 1930s of modern dance departments in several colleges in America. The early dance educators were the first to recognize that the study of dance somehow went beyond technical, intellectual and choreographic achievements... that dance and movement influenced emotional states and development. The third source, surprisingly, was World War II. The return of so many veterans with what was then called shell shock demanded treatment modalities that were suited to group work. Methods such as individual psychoanalysis were not economically or psychologically appropriate. In the United States, dance therapy initially developed differently on the East and the West coasts. In the East, the crucial pioneer was Marian Chace, who had been a member of the Denishawn Company. Chace studied with the social and interactional psychiatrist, Harry Stack Sullivan, and her work was based on group interaction, rhythm, synchrony, and musical expression. On the West coast, the psychological theories of Carl Jung had the most influence, and pioneer Mary Whitehouse developed a distinctly different style where the work was more individual, on a one to one basis.

The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was created in 1965. Authorized governmental job lines were established in many states; ADTA standards for Registration, and now Certification, were developed and approved. Dance/movement therapists can now be licensed in several states in the USA. And we have a close alliance with the counseling profession; dance/movement therapists can become National Certified Counselors. Academic programs on the graduate level were established in universities, and now there are programs for doctoral study. Alternate Route training has been developed for those in other disciplines.

Dance Therapy Throughout the World... And in Israel

Initially an American phenomenon, dance/movement therapy is now a global force including dance/movement therapy practice in every country in Europe (including northern Europe's Scandinavian countries and Eastern Europe) and Russia, in Israel and Egypt, in Mexico and South America, in India, in Australia and New Zealand, in the Far East in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and now in China. International dance/movement therapy associations have been created, and standards for practice are being developed that reflect the specific issues and needs of each region. American dance/movement therapists have been part of this global expansion through their teaching in other countries, and through the work in their home countries of international students who have received their training in the United States. But there have been extraordinary pioneers in every part of the world who have developed dance/

movement therapy reflective of their cultural identity, and whose concepts are now being shared with their American colleagues.

Israel has, in fact, been a nation leading in dance therapy and I believe it now has the most dance therapists per capita of any country in the world. There have been many Israeli pioneer dance therapists; among them Yael Barkai, Dalia Razin, and Yarden Cohen. Marian Chace visited Israel to train students in the 1960s. Now there are several Master's and training programs throughout Israel led by renowned dance therapists such as Dita Federman and Hilda Wengrower.

In the United States the first pioneers, in addition to the Americans Marian Chace and Mary Whitehouse, were non-Jewish Europeans who escaped the Nazis, but the majority of first generation dance therapists had Jewish backgrounds. One of these Jewish first generation American pioneers is Amelie Straus Maslansky, who escaped Germany as a child.¹

The Jewish Heritage of Dance Therapy Pioneers

Marsha P. Kalina, a psychologist and dance therapist, conducted a study of many of the first-generation American Jewish dance therapists in an attempt to discover what aspects of their Jewish heritage might have influenced their choice of dance therapy as a profession and the paths they took in developing the field. This study was the essential framework for the content of the panel. Even though none of the early pioneers had made a conscious connection between their Jewish background and dance therapy, Kalina reported clear reflections, in their individual and collective histories, of the influence of Jewish spiritual and secular principles. What evolved was an exploration of themes such as humanitarianism, *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world), the courage of being a pioneer and questioning authority, and the role of critical thinking and intellectual analysis as an important element in developing new paradigms for treatment.

The life of one first generation dance therapist, Johanna Climenko, gives us this reflection through specific details and experience. She spoke of her *besbert* (Yiddish: באַשערט meaning destiny) relationship to the profession of dance therapy.

I grew up in an entirely secular Jewish family, with a central identity and powerful ethos of what it means to be Jewish. 'We are all responsible for our fellow man/woman, and for making this world a better, and more just place.' That was indeed the 'religion' of my family...

There were two potent streams in my maternal Ashkenazi family: the very spiritually Jewish, and the very secular. My great grandfather, Hirsch Cohen, was the head Rabbi of Montreal, hence the head Rabbi of Canada, since almost all the Jews in Canada then lived in Montreal. I remember Grandpa Cohen as a loving and tender man, with a beautiful presence and a snowy white beard. I remember climbing onto his lap and asking 'if he was Santa Claus?' when I was about 2, and his tender, amused response. In retrospect, I think that this gave me permission to experience being Jewish in the most all-embracing way: it was about inclusive love and acceptance.

My other grandfather, Hyman Climenko, was a major neurologist, Chief of Neurology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. He was also a social and political activist. The American Chapter of the Arbeiter's Bund (Workmen's Circle) was founded in his Lower East Side doctor's office. My grandmother Rosie... was also an early feminist. So this is the

backdrop of my history...I think that the intersection of Jewish values, social and political activism, and immersion in the arts seem to be the through-line in almost all of our experiences from the generation of 'elders' in our varied work in dance.

Dance and the Roles of Jewish Women

Joanna Harris is also a first generation therapist. She shared her perspective on the evolution of dance therapy in relation to dance and the roles of Jewish women:

The Torah texts place 'Jewishness' in the contexts of the basic teachings. Jewish history also embraces aspects of the 'healing' professions and Jewish involvement in medicine, midwifery, and psychology.

Proverbs 31:10-31 "Eshet Hayil" is a well-known prayer that is offered in praise of women every Friday night at the Shabbat ceremony. Although most of the text cites the Jewish woman's skill in the support of her husband and her household, two lines make reference to her 'reaching out to the poor' and 'her hands to the needy.' These references have challenged Jewish women to be active in social projects, inspiring the organization called "Hadassah", other charities and philanthropic contributions.

In 1996, I wrote an article for the journal Judaism citing the work of the early modern dancers, Helen (Becker) Tamiris, Anna Sokolow and Sophie Maslow:

Their work was fostered by NY settlement houses, particularly the Henry Street Settlement House... Jewish communities have continually banded together in support of social, artistic, and political movements. New York City's 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association [now called the 92Y] sponsored performances and classes during years when there was little or no support for developing modern dance. (Elsewhere in this issue see McPherson and Tucker's article about Helen Tamiris). These women were involved with social and political action as well as representing their heritage. Sophie told me, 'First we went to the socialist bookstore, then to classes with Martha Graham.'

It is also important to note the work of the New Dance Group that provided inexpensive classes for children and adults and whose motto was 'Dance is a weapon in the class struggle'. These political gestures helped to foster a certain liberation for young women in the '30's and '40's whose families were primarily immigrants to America from the early 20th century and whose prospects for social or artistic activities were limited both by contemporary conditions of the time but also the 'image' of the traditional Jewish woman.

According to the traditional Jewish woman's 'body image', she was to be modest in all public and private relationships to her body. Dancing on the stage was considered lewd by the orthodox community. The early modern dancers and their many students in schools, studios and colleges helped to revise this attitude. Success in public performance liberated Jewish women to perform and use Jewish themes in their work.

The dance therapy profession, especially in New York City, owed much to the energy that characterized these Jewish postwar activities in dance, and the work of the early Jewish innovators of the American Dance Therapy Association. There are many. Support came from New York City hospitals where dance therapy was fostered, especially at Bronx Psychiatric Center.

My personal history as a dance therapist in California began when

I was invited, through contacts at Mills College, where I had earned the MA in dance, to 'do something for the children' at Langley-Porter Psychiatric Institute, the mental hospital of University of California San Francisco. Since childhood autism at that point was defined as the result of limited understanding of 'schizophrenic-genic' mothers, the children were in strait jackets since they kicked and bit. As theory changed and I was successful in recruiting staff to assist, we were able to bring dance activities to the groups. These programs were continued at Napa State Hospital for several years to include teen-agers as well as some adult groups.



Photo courtesy of Judy Hurvitz taken at Temple Micah in Washington, D.C. during a workshop led by Liz Lerman whom we also thank.

As education and training was necessary to assist the professional growth in this clinical work, I established a Creative Arts Therapy program in 1975 at Lone Mountain College. ...I was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Great Britain in 1979 and was able to help establish the British Dance Therapy Association, demonstrate the value of dance activities in schools and hospitals, and teach many workshops in the UK and in other European countries. For the most part, I was accepted, though I can still hear some German voices asking, "Du bist Juden?" [You're Jewish?].

Since mental hospitals were closed in California in the '60s and later, dance therapy practice became more and more private in the face of

the 'growth' movement and other California experiments in 'human potential'. My own work continues with older adults who experience both physical and psychological limitations but enjoy dance/movement and improvisation. The 'Jewish' challenge to bring dance to the community is still an important dimension of my life and work and to the direction, *Tikkun Olam*, a concept defined by acts of kindness performed to perfect or repair the world.²

The Mission of Dance Therapy

This "Jewish" challenge and vision is still clearly apparent in the art of dance therapy development throughout the world, and has its roots in the experience and work of many of its early Jewish pioneers. From the original dance therapy focus on work with severely disturbed psychiatric patients, the scope has now expanded to include special education, developmental disabilities, family therapy, eating disorders, substance abuse, geriatric populations, trauma, victims of war, violence prevention, aid in natural disasters, child prostitution, business venues, physical disability, medical conditions, and community building, all in an effort to heal the world or fulfill our mandate for *Tikkun Olam*.

Notes

¹Maslansky's niece is the renowned Israeli choreographer Noa Wertheim, the co-creator of the distinguished dance company Vertigo.

²See also Harris's article "Tenement to Theater: American Jewish Women Dance Pioneers, Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow," *Judaism* 45, 3 (Summer 1996) NY: The American Jewish Congress Publications.

Dr. Miriam Roskin Berger, member of Jean Erdman Theatre of Dance in the 1960s. Past President and charter member of the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA). Director of the Dance Education Program at NYU 1993-2002. Now Director of the Dance Therapy Program, 92Y Harkness Dance Center and the Dance Movement Training (DMT) program at the National Centre for Dance Therapy, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal. Past Director, Creative Arts Therapies Dept. Bronx Psychiatric Center; past Chair of the National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies and former co-editor *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. She has created dance therapy programs in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Sweden, and has taught in France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Korea, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain and Taiwan. Recipient: Charles Kellogg Award in Arts and Letters from Bard College in 2009; ADTA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007; 2005 inducted into the Dance Library of Israel Hall of Fame, Beit Ariella Municipal Library, Tel Aviv. mb33@nyu.edu

Johanna Climenko, licensed clinical social worker (LCSW- R), pioneer in DMT since 1968, has worked clinically with the range of populations served by DMT, and taught and consulted extensively in and out of academic settings, in the U.S. and the Netherlands. She trained with both Marian Chace and Irmgard Bartenieff, and other first generation DMT and Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) pioneers. Since 1986, having trained with Dr. Bernard Rosenblum, she has added Reichian Character Analytic Therapy to her private

practice work, developing the combined modality of DMT and RT and LMA. Currently her focus is on the complementarity of DMT, LMA, and RT in private practice and in training and consulting other mental health professionals and students in individual and organizational contexts for self-care, assessment, and replenishment. She is the director of the 'Center For Reichian Energetic Therapy' where this combined modality is used for individual, couple and group therapy, as well as training and consultation. jclimenko@gmail.com

Joanna Gewertz Harris, Ph.D., dance teacher, historian, reviewer and lecturer. She taught dance and theater at University of California Berkeley, UCSC, Cal State Hayward and Sonoma. Contributor to scholarly journals and books, including *Margaret H'Doubler: the legacy of America's Dance Education Pioneer*, and *Legacy in Dance Education; Essays and Interviews on Values, Practices, and People*. On the initial editorial board of the *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. Authored seminal article in the realm of dance and Jewish Studies, "From Tenement to Theater: Jewish Women as Dance Pioneers: Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow," *Judaism* 45,3 (1996). Author *Beyond Isadora; Bay Area Dancing 1915-1965*. As a dance therapist, worked with autistic children at Langely-Porter (SF), Napa State Hospital and Bay Area centers; established the Creative Arts Therapy training program at Lone Mountain College and Antioch West; awarded Fulbright Fellowship in UK; helped form the British Dance Therapy Association; taught in Germany, Greece, Taiwan; private practice in Berkeley, CA. joannaharris@lmi.net

Marsha Perlmutter Kalina, Ph.D., Board Certified Dance/Movement therapist. Licensed in New York State as a creative arts therapist and psychologist, specializing in health psychology. She has practiced as a dance/movement therapist since 1974 and has worked with various patient populations including the elderly, the medically ill, and those in in-patient psychiatric treatment and a substance abuse and alcoholism rehabilitation program. Has trained therapists and run private groups using the form of Authentic Movement, based on her study with Janet Adler, Ph.D and Zoe Avstreich, Ph.D. As a child of survivors of the Holocaust, Marsha's Jewish roots are deep. She has close ties to her parents' surviving relatives, most of whom live in Israel, where she has lived and visited many times. She also has studied Israeli folk dance, is part of a *chavura* and currently is on the Board of Trustees of her synagogue. At present, she lives and maintains a private practice on Long Island, NY, using both verbal and non-verbal treatment disciplines. marshapk@optonline.net