

The Praying Body: The Pedagogy of the Prayer Leader (Re)Considered*

The classic pedagogic approach to teaching future Jewish prayer leaders how to pray is primarily a mimetic process that is not unlike the students' past experience of leading Bar Mitzvah services. They in fact "mimic" the prayers that their clergy lead. This is similar to the actor who wants to "sound like Hamlet" yet does not understand his "own" Hamlet. His unique voice must emerge through complete body awareness and embodiment of the text. Many students learning to become Rabbis or Cantors in the Reform and Conservative Movements of Judaism ask: "How do we both lead prayer and be present as pray-ERS at the same time?" If a person can be coached in the Performing Arts with the teaching philosophy of mind, body, and emotional knowledge; then how does one use a similar concept to become a "coach" of prayer? Through the description of a proposed workshop with student prayer leaders, this paper defines a new language of how to approach sacred texts in order to learn and teach presence.

The exploration connects philosophical approaches to prayer via the Chassidic writings of Martin Buber, and Abraham Joshua Heschel and the work of the Experimental Theatre directors Jerzy Grotowski and Joseph Chaiken and their quest for "presence" in the development of the actor. The process is then related to the work of Richard Schechner's Performance Workshop as well as with Theatre Anthropologist, Eugenio Barba and his theory of Pre-Expressivity. This allows for an essential understanding of what prevents self consciousness of the prayer leader and how to teach one to pre-pray, pray and lead prayer.

* This is a reference of the title taken from Phillip Zarilli's *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*

About the Author

Tamar Havelio, Cantor, (M.S.M., M.A.) serves as Director of Cantorial Studies at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, Israel. She is in her eighth year teaching and leading Prayer Workshops in the Year In Israel (North American and European students) and the Israeli Rabbinic Programs. She also holds an M.A. degree in Performance Studies from New York University where her Master's Project is "Globalization and the Performance of the Sabbath; or the Sabbath in Exile". Tamar is building a new way of teaching prayer called "Trom-T'fillah" or Pre-Prayer in order to change the mimetic way of past and current methods of teaching and learning prayer. With this she is developing a new pedagogy of the prayer leader called, "The Praying Body". She is working under the guidance of Richard Schechner in order to transform his Workshop of the body in time and space into a Praying Body Workshop. Tamar continues to investigate the commercialization of

spirituality and the connection to how a “capitalist gaze” effects how synagogues “sell” a commercial Sabbath and the effect on the prayer leaders and prayer as a product.