

TO JUMP FOR JOY:  
THE RITES OF DANCE ACCORDING TO R. NAHMAN OF BRATZLAV

Michael Fishbane

What happens when we dance? What really happens when the Omaha Indians circle a ritual pole, the Wanyamwezi pitch in ecstasy, or the Basques perform their fox dance? What happens in these patterns of movement, these convoluted leaps and revolutions? Can one really dance the corn out of ground or ensure the rhythms of heaven? It depends on whom you ask. Euripides and Lucian of old had their theories; and modern anthropologists don't lack for answers either, when they divine in dance encoded dramas of class and crisis, emotional release, or rites of transformation. Philosophers naturally propose their own perspectives about form and motion, and physiologists feel the pulse of altered states of consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Everything has its place, and there is no doubt that these viewpoints help explain aspects of living behavior—or even their representation in art and textual tradition. Take for example the teaching of Rabbi Moshe Hayyirn Ephraim of Sudilkov (ca. 1737-1800), which builds on a parable learned from his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov. In a comment on the biblical verse "And all the nation saw the sounds" (Exodus 20:18), found in the context of the Sinai theophany the master seeks to explain this apparent oxymoron. An analogy is offered of a musician who played with great sweetness upon his instrument, to the degree that all who heard his sounds drew close and leaped in joy—all that is except a deaf person who was present and called such behavior utter folly. This image is compared to Sinai, we learn, when God appeared before the nation in a great light, and the assembled people perceived the joy of the heavenly hosts, who jumped for joy, enthralled with the sweet light of the Torah and its sounds. In their own lower spiritual state, the people only saw this joy; but since they were also blessed with some wisdom, they pressed forward to try and hear—that is to hear the sounds of Torah and bask in its holy light.<sup>2</sup>

Never mind that there is a striking discordance between the parable and its application, insofar as the deaf man in the former stands aloof, in incomprehensive mockery, while in the latter the people first perceive a limited, visual truth, and desire a deeper (aural) understanding. This difference, I think, suggests that the parable was formulated independently of the biblical verse and its interpretation. In fact, we may infer that the Baal Shem's parable was originally intended to ridicule the opponents of early Hasidism (the Mitnaggedim), who aggressively criticized their counterparts ecstatic movements in prayer.<sup>3</sup> The Hasidic counterthrust here is that such rebuke was devoid of religious insight. The biblical citation put in the deaf man's mouth ("What can joy achieve?"; Ecclesiastes 2:2) underscores this jibe—for through it the rebukers are made to condemn themselves as spiritually deaf, able to perceive only the external aspects of religious expression. On the other hand, the mythic moment at Sinai is reenacted in Hasidic rite whenever the faithful seek to rise towards the light of transcendence as it appears in the course of prayer and study. The movements of dance thus express a desire for divinity. The Mitnaggedim resisted these forms as folly, and in so doing dramatized their antagonism and difference. Little wonder that Hasidim called these Others "enemies," and their own Inner-circle "our fellowship of peace" ('anshei shelomeinu).

But let us press further, and hear the afterlife of our parable, as it was taught by Rabbi Nahman ben Simhah of Bratzlav (1772-1810), the nephew of Rabbi Moshe Hayyim and great-grandson of the Baal Shem himself. In his mouth, the teaching was radically transformed. Come and hear.

"Concerning joy (simhah), consider this parable: Sometimes when people are rejoicing and dancing, they grab a person from outside (the circle)—one who is sad (be-`atzvut) and depressed—and press him against his will into the circle (mahol) of dancers (meraqqedim), and force him to rejoice with them. So it is with joy: for when a person is happy, his depression and sufferings stand off to the side. But the higher level is to strive and pursue that very depression, and bring it into joy... For (indeed:) there are (types of) sorrow and woe that are (manifestations of) the (demonic) Other Side, and do not want to

be bearers of holiness; hence they flee from joy, and one must force them into (the sphere of) holiness—namely, joy—against their will...."<sup>4</sup>

This revision of the parable is remarkable—for in it the social and nomistic aspects of the earlier versions have been thoroughly psychologized.<sup>5</sup> The double circle of dancers (whether the holy troupe vs. the scoffer, or the angelic ensemble vis-à-vis the people of Israel) is now the dramatic representation of a psychic division, an inner-splitting whereby the joyous celebrant temporarily cuts himself off from depressive deadness. Significantly, Rabbi Nahman affirms this momentary revitalization and does not reduce it to religious observance. That is not to deny or demote the joyous observance of the commandments. Indeed, Nahman repeatedly stressed that: 'iqqar ha-simhah min ha-mitzvot ("the essence of joy arises through the commandments")<sup>6</sup>—a principle which derives ultimately from the Talmud (b. Shabbat 30b) and its Zoharic reformulation (Vayehi, I. 216a).<sup>7</sup> It is rather that he was also aware that (religious) joy may be regenerated from the most natural and seemingly frivolous of acts (ve-'afilu be-milei de-shetuta).<sup>8</sup> Hence simple dance—when in the service of religious ends, and not purely private passions (hitlahavut ha-yetzer)—may induce a catalytic catharsis and lead to a higher healing. But this requires the celebrant to direct the energies so elicited toward the divisive and depressive dimensions of the self. Accordingly, the master instructs his hearers to work for psychic wholeness—urging a psychological activism that pursues the agents of one's depression in all their guises, and transforms them through the agency of joy.

Dance is thus both the arch-act and arch-metaphor for this cathartic process. In another, related teaching, Rabbi Nahman goes on to stress how depression is an illness, a hola'at, when the cords of joy are snapped and one is put in a bad temper, so to speak.<sup>9</sup> The antidote (refu'ah) is the joy of dance, or malol, whose swirl draws the heavenly Shekhinah down to the earthly realm, to alight upon the sick soul (holeh) in healing union. This process gives a mystical-messianic application to the rabbinic teaching cited by Nahman: "In the future the Holy One,

blessed be He, will be at the head of every ill person (holeh), for the righteous ones (tzaddiqim) in the future."<sup>10</sup>

For struck by the two central nouns holeh and tzaddiqim, the sick and the healthy, Nahman depicts a ritual process whereby dance (mahol) transforms the depressed person (hola'at) into a saint (tzaddiq) through its power to engender joy and a conjunction with the heavenly realm. Indeed, Nahman's substitution of the feminine epithet Shekhinah for the masculine Holy One not only hints at the mystical valence of this Union—whereby the supernal masculine and feminine gradations of God (namely, of Yesod, also called Tzaddiq; and Malkhut, also called Shekhinah) are unified. It also points to the psychosomatic process whereby the individual is regenerated into a whole and healthy being. At once, the dancer is both male and female: a whirling circle and its axis of rotation; the engendering foundation and the orbit of Eros. Given the language of Nahman's exegesis (playing on hola'at and mahol), and the fact that he elsewhere recites the dictum that God will himself be a mahol (dance) for the righteous in the future,<sup>11</sup> I would suggest that the whole hermeneutic is based on a calculated mishearing. To his Yiddishized ear, the word mahol was perceived as mohol, that is, as having the overtone of spiritual healing and forgiveness (mehilah).<sup>12</sup> Nahman concretized this (dialectal) convergence, deeming it a linguistic sign of supernal and spiritual truth. From this perspective, dance is a deep transformational grammar.

\* \* \*

The full messianic aspect of Rabbi Nahman's teaching may be approximated in stages. As a first step, let us mention his treatment of Isaiah 35: 10—a verse which functions as biblical proof-text for several instructions. Speaking to the nation in exile, the prophet had said: "The redeemed of the Lord will return (yeshuvun): they shall come rejoicing to Zion, with eternal joy on their head (simhat `olam `al rosham); they shall attain (yasigu) gladness and joy, while sorrow

and despair flee." Nahman reads this promise psychologically, and gives it a more activist character. For him, joy is not simply received by divine grace, but aggressively pursued; for with the arousal of joy the forces of sadness flee (borehim), and must therefore be forcibly seized (vitpesu)—in order that the self may be integrated and perfected as a true "chariot of holiness."<sup>13</sup> This is clearly a complex and paradoxical doctrine, whereby personal redemption requires the self to absorb (and not just neutralize) negative energies. The deeper mythic dimension is indicated by Nahman's designation of despair as the demonic Other Side.<sup>14</sup>

In Rabbi Nahman's worldview, which derives ultimately from features in the Zohar as mediated through Lurianic belief and practice, the Other Side (or Sitra Ahra) has its root as negative "judgments" (dinim) in the divine attribute of Understanding (Binah).<sup>15</sup> In the conception of the supernal hierarchy imagined as a cosmic Anthropos, this gradation corresponds to the heart (lev). From here the deposits of dinim descend through the thighs and feet of the Divine Body (the gradations of Netzah and Hod), and become lodged in the lowest extremities, the heel(s).<sup>16</sup> Significantly, Nahman says that the means to force these negative extrusions (hitzonim) "to flee" (le-havriah) the lower Corpus is to "draw down" (mamshikh) Joy from (its source in) the inner-root of Understanding. This theurgical "action" (pe'ulah) is effected on earth through a psychosomatic activation of energy (hitlahavut) which results in the movements of dance (riqqudin).<sup>17</sup> Indeed the arousal of human feet in holy (divinely directed) dance releases the fluids of Joy from the heavenly Heart; and as they course through the divine Body and its earthly image, the demonic deposits are leached and purified. Thus are the thighs (birkayim), for example, transformed into a blessing (berakhah) and a birthright (bekhorah).<sup>18</sup>

The patriarch Jacob exemplifies this supernatural process. For though he was born holding on to the "heel" ('aqev) of his brother Esau, and, indeed, has that very fact inscribed in his own name (Ya'akov), the hidden reality is that his name is a complex multiple of the divine Name Elohim, which symbolizes the Powers of Judgment, and through that identity he perceived

that the source of these Powers is in Binah, whose essence is Joy.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, says Nahman, when Jacob perceived that the Thighs of the divine hierarchy (Netzah and Hod) were invaded by destructive Judgment, he went to their Source, his father Isaac (who symbolizes True Power), and brought him wine to drink (Genesis 27:25)—knowing that "Wine makes the heart of man rejoice" (Psalm 104:15). That is, through his mystical understanding that wine connotes the spiritual stimulus which opens the heart of the Divine Anthropos (the "Man") to the blessed energy of Joy, Jacob brought wine to his earthly father, so that he, Isaac, might rejoice and infuse him with supernal bounty.<sup>20</sup> In this way, both upper and lower worlds were blessed.

On another occasion, Jacob effects this therapy on the Cosmic Corpus with his own body—for Rabbi Nahman interprets the phrase "And Jacob raised (va-yissa) his legs" (lit., set forth; Genesis 29: 1) to indicate the truth of dance, whereby one's bodily movements may (with the right intention) "draw down" (le-hamshikh) Joy from the inner-recesses of the divine heart to the lower limbs.<sup>21</sup> This interfusion of energy elicits the manifestation of the most hidden Mother and Bride (Binah), and thus activates a mystical marriage within Divinity itself.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, when Jacob married (nasa) Leah (who symbolizes this Feminine gradation) he created another conjunction of the corresponding hierarchies in heaven. This mystical moment was celebrated by the dancers at Jacob's marriage feast, according to Nahman's theosophical interpretation of an ancient midrash.<sup>23</sup> And it may also be induced through joyous dance at any Jewish wedding.

\* \* \*

Dance is thus a deep process of human and divine transformation, whereby the gravity of human sin and depression, and their grave divine consequences are suspended—at least momentarily, as one jumps in and through the joy which animates the whole body. Indeed, in Rabbi Nahman's view, human sin and depression secrete negative judgments through the blood of the body, and these coagulate, like embolisms, in the lower extremities, preventing the proper

circuit of blood to the heart, which is the source of healthy life and joy.<sup>24</sup> This results in corresponding blockages in the arteries or "channels" of the divine Corpus, and these can only be thinned or "sweetened" through the human process of self-judgment, whereby the individual "judges himself" and corrects his behavior in the light of the Torah and its teachings. Then the weight of sin is released and one is blessed with the lightness of dance—which is the pulse of joy, down to one's heel ('eqev). Rabbi Nahman found this truth encoded in the biblical verse, "And it shall be if ('eqev) you heed these judgments (mishpatim) and observe them carefully" (Deuteronomy 7:12). For he interprets it to mean that if one enacts self-judgment (and its corresponding behavioral corrections) one will merit the fullness of joy throughout one's body.<sup>25</sup>

These ideas have roots in rabbinic lore. On the one hand an ancient midrash taught a deep homology between the 613 divine commandments and the human body, to the effect that the 248 positive commandments of Scripture correspond to the same sum of bodily parts (even as the 365 negative commandments correspond to the number of arteries and to the days of the solar year).<sup>26</sup> One implication is that ritual performance has anthropic and cosmic dimensions—such that the positive and negative duties fulfill the human self as a whole, while the latter ones also preserve the natural order. Add to this the midrashic teaching that fulfillment of the commandments "adds strength" to the divine, while sins diminish or "weaken" its power, and the mythic ground of rabbinic ritual comes into view, against the background of a heavenly Anthropos.<sup>27</sup> What one does has effects—above and below. In this light, the old midrash on Deuteronomy 7:12, which interpreted the phrase "if ('eqev) you heed the commandments" as an exhortation to guard lest even a minor commandment lie hidden under one's heel ('aqev), has rich mythic possibilities—since even those sins may debilitate man and God alike.<sup>28</sup>

The theosophic worldview appropriated by Rabbi Nahman had long since maximized the mythic potential of such speculation. For from the period of the Zohar itself, in the 13th century, the divine Anthropos was the ultimate beneficiary of the various commandments which were

enacted by the human being (with all his mind, body, and means). One need merely recall the pertinent passages in the Zohar itself, where "the commandments of the Torah are all connected with the supernal, holy King;"<sup>29</sup> or in many works of the Middle Ages, such as Sefer Ha-Rimmon, by Moshe de Leon,<sup>30</sup> or the commentary on the commandments (Sefer Ta`amei Ha-Mitzvot) attributed to Rabbi Yitzhaq ibn Farhi to prove the point<sup>31</sup>—and of course from there throughout the whole Lurianic corpus and its derivatives.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the theosophical notion that precipitates of evil from human sin lodge in the heels of the Cosmic Anthropos is also found in Castillian sources and their Safadic intensifications. R. Isaac Luria and R. Hayyim Vital provide numerous ways to participate in the mythical drama of divine purification—and gave special attention to the flaws of the feet.

Rabbi Nahman absorbed these teachings and reformulated them in light of his psychosomatic theories of joy.<sup>33</sup> As he says, when one sins with any given limb or organ, and breaks any one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, a "defect" (or pegam) is caused to the Torah and the sinner, such that the joy inherent in God's word is blocked and the human being is not only cut-off from its holy energy but left with the depressive deadness of a wholly natural being.<sup>34</sup> For "The commands of the Lord are upright, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:9); and how can these agents of divine vitality act on the heart if they are not absorbed through the limbs which perform the commandments with joyful intent?<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, each and every commandment has an inherent structure of joy, and one must activate that joy in its proper manner—the hands, say, through gift-giving or holding the Lulav and Etrog correctly; the mouth, through pure prayer and honest speech; and of course the sexual organs, through the holiness of matrimonial union and procreation. The feet or legs also have their ideal functions, such as walking on the Sabbath, going on a pilgrimage, or dancing before the Bride—both divine and human.<sup>36</sup>

The full activation of the entire body in holy actions is thus a therapeutic of total joy, whereby the currents of divine energy enliven and integrate the human being in all 613 parts. No wonder that Nahman says that

"Joy (simhah) is a total structure (qomah shelemah), comprised of 248 limbs and 365 arteries, and therefore when one rejoices or dances, he must be certain that he activates (ya`avor) the entirety of joy, from head to heel; for sometimes joy is only in the feet, or only in the heart, or only in the head, as alluded to by the verse, "and eternal joy on their head" (Isaiah 35:10). But the essence of joy is that one activate the entirety of joy; that is, through the whole structure that joy comprises. And for that one needs many mitzvot: for the root of the points of the mitzvot are in [the gradation of] joy; and "the commands of the Lord rejoice the heart" (Psalm 19:9); and every one of the 613 commandments has a specific limb [in the structure of joy]—each one according to its type."<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, he concludes, if one sins in any way one causes a defect in the entire bodily structure (qomah), and this must be "repaired and rebuilt" (le-taqqen u-livnot) through confession and the proper actions.

All this is clear enough. But to fully grasp Rabbi Nahman's theology of dance we must, I think, penetrate the micro- and macro-systems which the human body mediates. Let me begin with the latter, since in the previous citation there was reference to the qomah which must be maintained or rebuilt. In my view, this nomenclature points beyond the human body to the Cosmic Qomah—the full structure of the Heavenly Anthropos whose limbs and arteries contain in their hidden depth the roots of the divine commandments which the human qomah may activate through joyful performance of the halakhic duties associated with them. Other indications support this claim—among them the repeated emphasis in Nahman's sermons and prayers that "feet" are the divine gradations of Netzah and Hod (Eternity and Glory), and that their elevation in holy joy may purify these two pillars of truth and "bring" them to their "holy Source (above)."<sup>38</sup>

At the other pole is the micro-structure of dance, which is, in fact, the deep structure of each and every commandment. For Rabbi Nahman not only identifies the core of each mitzvah with joy, as discussed earlier, but, precisely because each commandment replicates the anthropomorphic structure (or qomah) of the whole,<sup>39</sup> understands the lower or imperfect level of each commandment as its "feet."<sup>40</sup> Thus he teaches that all "the lower levels which are called 'feet'" (ha-madregot ha-tahtonot ha-mekhunut raglayim)—like evil speech, or money, or barrenness—may be elevated through the holy actions requisite for their transformation. Indeed, even faith ('emunah) has forms called "feet" that may be re-established upon a firm foundation.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, since joy rises through the raised feet of dance, the perfect performance of a mitzvah is an elevation of its base levels (the 'feet') to their divine or holy root. Confession, and charity, and kindness to one's wife may heal the preceding defects—even as simplicity and humility may raise up faith when it falls through pride or cleverness. Such ritual rectifications are dance-like in their dynamism, filling the structure (or qomah) of each commandment with a joyous energy. In turn, their perfected performance repair and perfect the limbs which perform them, and so, correspondingly, is perfection effected upon the Qomah on High. Thus from the micro- to the macro-levels the mitzvot have messianic potential—and dance is their catalyst.

Let me conclude this point with reference to a third genre in the Bratzlav corpus, (alongside the Teachings and Prayers)—the Tales, and in particular the story of the "Seven Beggars." The multifaceted messianic message of this narrative is well-known, and, since early times, commentators have also not failed to note that the appearance of the seventh beggar "without feet" (vos on fees) on the seventh day of the wedding celebration symbolizes the seventh and final gradation of the divine hierarchy, whose perfection, so necessary for all higher unifications, is clearly marred. Indeed, Rabbi Nahman himself explicitly indicates the truncated messianic potential of this image when he says that the tale of the crippled beggar will only be heard in messianic times, shoyn nit herrn biz moshiah vet kumn. What I would add here is the fact that the "beggar without feet" is preceded by six other messengers who have apparent

defects in their eyes, ears, mouth, neck, back, and hands, respectively. That is, each of the beggars is associated with specific parts of the body, and these altogether symbolize the anthropomorphic structure of the divine hierarchy that may be perfected when humans purify their limbs through holy deeds and commandments. For Nahman, this is the messianic core of this last of 13 mayses (or tales), which clearly alludes to the supernal cosmic structure.<sup>42</sup>

\* \* \*

Rabbi Nahman's suggestion that the messianic truth cannot now be heard (shoyn nit herrn) reminds us of the high state of hearing alluded to in the teaching of Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Ephraim, with which we began. As depicted, the people at Sinai only saw the dancing angels—as the earthly animation of God's voice. They themselves did not yet merit the higher level of actually hearing it. Nahman, who so profoundly personalized the parable of dance in that earlier teaching, also has a remarkable instruction concerning hearing itself.

Rabbi Nahman says that one must work hard and persistently to enter the holiness of joy, which is of the nature of the deepest affirmation of God's truth in deed and hearing. Hence when the people of Israel at Sinai said na'aseh ve-nishma' ("Let us do and hear;" Exodus 24:7) they entered into a blissful moment of transcendence, when myriads of angels crowned each and every one with both the manifest or exoteric meaning of Torah, the level of na'aseh (doing), but also with its hidden or esoteric truth, called nishma' (hearing). Thus through the performance of the commandments, in their exoteric aspect, the Jew will be enveloped by their mystical aura, and drawn to their secret sound in his heart. Here transpires the highest level of divine worship, a mystical "service of the heart" whereby the natural self is totally annihilated through attachment to the Infinite bittul u-devekut la-'ein sof.<sup>43</sup>

Now this highest of all levels is not attained without great spiritual work, whose very dialectic is itself of the nature of na'aseh ve-nishma'. That is, there is at every "level" of this world, and "in every world," a dynamic process of moving from na'aseh (doing) to nishma' (hearing) in continual progressions and spirals—for each attainment of nishma' is but a level of na'aseh for the ongoing quest.<sup>44</sup> The true adept must thus struggle with ceaseless honesty and perseverance, since deceptions and demands are repeated at every level with ever greater subtlety. And yet Rabbi Nahman gives hope that eventually one may attain the "beginning of (the) divine emanation" where, for the first time, the seeking soul will perceive the torat ha-Shem be-'emet, "the Divine Torah in (its essential) truth." That is, it is only at this consummate rung of na'aseh where one realizes that all previous perceptions of God's Torah were metaphorical and derivative (mush'al), owing to the representational nature of human consciousness. Beyond this, there is nothing more to say. For when one passes over to the level of nishma' in this dyad, "he merits to be utterly absorbed into the Infinite Divine, (wherein) truly his Torah is the actual Torah of God, and his prayer the actual prayer of God" (ukhishe-zokheh le-hikkalel be-'ein sof, 'azai torato torat ha-Shem mamash, u-tefillato tefillat ha-Shem mamash).<sup>45</sup>

Rabbi Nahman believed that his teachings and reproof, which functioned as the "feet" of his generation, might heal the soul of those who listen, and raise them to ever higher levels of faith.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, he believed that his stories had the power to catalyze his followers to the very heights of ecstasy—to give them, in one moment, the ultimate bliss of God. Or as he said, in what may be the most astonishing word of an astonishing master: "The world has not yet tasted me at all; for if they were to hear but one torah that I say with its (proper) melody and dance, they would all attain complete spiritual annihilation (hayu betellim be-viytul gamur)"—zey zolln mikh herrn eyn toyroh mit dem nign un mit eyn tanz, vollt di ganze velt oys gegangen (the whole world would 'expire')."<sup>47</sup>

With this I conclude, and, in doing so, complete a cycle of answers to my initial question of what may happen when we dance. For Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, as interpreted here, the structure of dance activates a series of homologies that coordinate the human world of action and the divine worlds of blessing. Indeed, through dance, the de-vitalized natural self absorbs transcendental powers which, in turn, energize the supernal Being vitiated by human sin. But in closing we have learned more: even the very teachings of the master, like those discussed here, have each an ideal configuration or conjunction of content, sound, and movement. When these are perfectly realized—as a verbal torah (teaching) performed with its requisite and unique dance-like gestures (or energy)—the hearer may be seized in one fell swoop by transcendental ecstasy. How much more so the speaker himself? It is thus hardly surprising (though no less startling) to learn that, immediately after Rabbi Nahman spoke his word on "the dance of instruction," he turned to his disciple and scribe, Rabbi Noson, and asked: Vos hob ikh gezokt ("What did I [just] say")?<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Michael Fishbane

Nathan Cummings Professor of Jewish Studies

The University of Chicago

Dr. Michael Fishbane is Nathan Cummings Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Chicago where he is also Chair of the Committee on Judaic Studies. Professor Fishbane is author or editor of 12 books and over 150 articles and reviews in scholarly journals and encyclopedias. Among his books are Text and Texture: Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel: Garments of Torah; and The Kiss of God: Spiritual Death and Dying in Judaism. He is the editor-in-chief of the ongoing Jewish Publication Society Bible Commentary and is presently completing a commentary on the Haftarot. Recipient of many scholarly awards, Fishbane has

been a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University. His books have twice won the National Jewish Book Award. He is an elected member of the American Academy of Jewish Research. Before coming to Chicago, Dr. Fishbane taught for 20 years at Brandeis University. He has also been a visiting Professor at Harvard, Stanford and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

---

<sup>1</sup> Of the extensive literature, one may still read with profit the phenomenological reflections of G. Van der Leeuw; Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art (Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), Part I; the study by J. L. Hanna, To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), and the collection Society and the Dance (ed. P. Spencer; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), provide cross-cultural discussions and bibliographies.

<sup>2</sup> Degel Mahaneh Ephraim, parashat Yitro. The dance of the angels is an old motif; for present purposes, cf. the interpretations of Canticles 7:1 (in connection with Jacob's departure from Laban and the theophany at the Sea) in Song of Songs Rabba VII. 1. Maimonides applied this tradition to the theophany at Sinai in his Epistle to Yemen; see his midrash in the edition of A. S. Halkin (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952) 32-33. The reenactment of Sinai through mystic study, and with it the manifestation of dancing angels (as a wedding party rejoicing before the groom) is found in yer. Hagiga II. 1, 77a (ad fin.) in connection with R. Eleazar b. Arakh (cf. the tradition about R. Joshua in b. Hagiga 14b).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), Chapter 5, and the sources cited. Significantly, though the Baal Shem died in 1760 and thus began his teaching years earlier, the first polemic only appeared in 1772, entitled Zamir 'Aritzim ve-Harvot Tzurim. This work has been reprinted in M. Wilensky, Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970) 1.27-69. On this matter, see Z. Gries, Sefer, Sofer, ve-Sippur be-Reshit ha-Hasidut (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992), 17f, 69.

<sup>4</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, 2.23.

<sup>5</sup> Observed by A. Green, Tormented Master. The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav (1979; p.b., Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1992) 141f.

<sup>6</sup> Liqqutei 'Ezot, Mo'adei Ha-Shem, I; and cf. Liqqutei Moharan, I, 81 and II, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Significantly, as regards R. Nahman's thought, the Zoharic version introduces atzvut ("depression") as the counterpoint to simhah as one of the psychological-moral traits that will inhibit the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This element stands at the head of R. Elijah de Vidas' subsequent discussion on religious joy in his great compendium Reshith Hokhmah, Part II (Sha'ar Ha-'Ahavah), Chapter 10 see I). I have discussed de Vidas' teaching and other matters in my essay "The Inwardness of Joy in Jewish Spirituality," published in In Pursuit of Happiness, (ed. L. Rouner; Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 71-88.

---

<sup>8</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, II, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Yer. Megillah II.4 reads rosh holah (lit., "head of the dance troupe"). Midrash Vayiqra' Rabba 11.9 (M. Margulies, ed. [Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1962] 1.240-41, reads rosh hola', with a prooftext from Psalm 48:14 (rosh heylab); see further, Midrash Soher Tov (S. Buber, ed. [Vilna, 1891]) ad 1oc.

<sup>11</sup> b. Ta'anit 31a (this ends the tractate on a messianic theme; cf. also the end of chapter 1, which also concludes with a promise to the righteous). This source is cited again in Liqqutei Moharan, I, 65 (ad fin.).

<sup>12</sup> This seems to me the most plausible interpretation, though I have since found the following comment on the phrase meholat ha-mahanayirn ("the dance of the camps") in Canticles 7:1; "we sin and He forgives (mohel) us" (Yalqut Shimoni, Canticles, No. 992, ad loc.). For another remarkable and most revealing pun, Nahman is reported to have said "concerning the art of song and rhetoric, called in their (viz., the German) language 'Poesie'—that this is only for one who could perform 'Poesie' i.e., 'Feh Sie' (in Yiddish). His comment is glossed to mean that only one who could 'despise it' (sexuality) could attain to true song. See Sefer Yemei Moharanat, 36, and the discussion of M. Piekartz, Hasidut Bratzlav (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik; 1972), 1945. For the role of sexuality in the thought of R. Nahman, the idea of abstinence for the theosophical reparation of the sins of Sabbatean license and the recitation (of Psalms) known as the Tiqqun Ha-Kelali) see the important analysis of Y. Liebes, "Ha-Tiqqun Ha-Kelali shel R. Nahman Mi-Bratzlav ve-yahas le-Shabta'ut," now printed as Ch. 11 of his Sod Ha-'Ernunah Ha-Shabta'it (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1995) 238-61, 429-47 (Liebes also notes the foregoing pun on p. 445 n. 125).

<sup>13</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, II, 23; for other uses of this verse, see ibid., I, 22.9. The aggressive will required for integrating the forces of sadness is marked by Nahman's language: in II, 24 he says one "must force (le-hakhriah) them into (the domain of) holiness;" and this temerity is also called `azut de-qedushah (I, 22.9).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 11, 23.

<sup>15</sup> The Zoharic source quoted by Nahman in Liqqutei Moharan I, 41 says binah dinim mit`arin minah ("The judgments arise from Binah;" Vay-iqra', 11. 10b). Biblical proof is adduced from Proverbs 8: 14.

<sup>16</sup> This is outlined in Liqqutei Moharan I, 41, where thighs, feet, and heels are brought into correspondence, in accordance with Lurianic teaching (in 'Etz Hayyim, adduced at the beginning of Nahman's discourse). Cf. the comment of R. Moshe Cordovero, Pardes Rimmonim, 23, raglayim, "Malkhut is called 'feet' in the mystery of the lowest aspect (of the supernal realm) that is clotted with the shells."

<sup>17</sup> The redemptive power of dance was already enunciated (albeit in different terms) by Rabbi Nahman's great-grandfather, the Baal Shem. See Keter Shem Tov, no. 179, 23a (regarding holy dancing before a bride).

<sup>18</sup> See Liqqutei Moharan I, 41.

---

<sup>19</sup> The sum `a-q-b is 172 + 10 for the initial yod = 182, which is twice the numerical value of Elohim. For this gematria, see already 'Etz Hayyim, I (Heikhal 5, Sha'ar 22, Pereq 2); and among Hasidic sources, see the comments of R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef, parashat Noah (Warsaw: 1881), 16d.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See Ibid., I, 32; also I, 10.6, where the same technical terms appear.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> It is stated in Genesis 29:25 that only in the morning, after the nuptials (v. 23), did Jacob realize that the woman "is (hiy') Leah." Midrash Genesis Rabba 70.19 (Theodor-Albeck ed., [Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965] 1.818) interprets this phrase as the recitation of the celebrants who cheered "Yea (hey) Leah." Nahman understood the cheer as the letter he', and as a sign to Jacob that Leah is he' (the 5th letter); that is, she is binah and lev, which are also the 5 alephs in the divine Name 'eheyeh, and which form the healing source of din (judgment; and there follows a whole further series of numerical equivalents which are 5 times d-y-n), and so the purification of the upper female (Leah) for the lower realms. See Liqqutei Moharan, I, 32. For the relationship between din, blood, and the purification of the feminine, see ibid. I, 169 and 22.11.

<sup>24</sup> See Liqqutei Moharan, I, 169, especially. These "messengers of judgment" are called "runners" in the Zohar (I, 43) and "feet" in Nahman's corpus. R. Nahman also believed it to be well-established medical wisdom that the feet provide healing to the lungs (see I, 277).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> See b. Makkot 22b (R. Simlai); and in Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, pisqa 12. 1, B. Mandelbaum, ed. (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1963) 1.203 (R. Judah b. Rabbi Simon).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pisqa 25. 1; Mandelbaum edition, 2.380. And see the discussion of M. Idel, Kabbalah. New Perspectives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 157-60.

<sup>28</sup> Midrash Tanhuma, parashat 'Egev, 1. The homily refers to the sum of 613 commandments, and mythicizes the metaphorical cargo of Psalm 49:6. Cf. further the microcosmic theme in 'Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Chapter 31, version A (S. Z. Schechter, ed. [3rd ed.; New York: P. Feldheim Inc., 1967] 91-92; corresponding to "the angel of death in the cosmos is the angel of death in (each) person—this being the person's heels."

<sup>29</sup> See Zohar II. 85b (the passage continues: "some with the King's head, some with the body, some with the King's hands, and some with his feet— and none go beyond the body"); III. 136b (Idra Rabba); Tiqqunei ha-Zohar, Tiqqun 21, 60a, and 70, 130a-132a. Reciprocally, sins diminish the divine Body or block its channels; cf. Zohar I. 67a; 85b; II. 162b, 165b; III. 297a-b.

<sup>30</sup> See the edition of E. Wolfson, The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses De Leon's Sefer Ha-Rimmon (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1988). Over 100 commandments are discussed by De Leon.

<sup>31</sup> See A. Altmann, Kirjath Sepher 40 (1964/65) 256-76, 405-12.

---

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Sha`ar Ha-Mitzvot, by Rabbi Hayyim Vital (Jerusalem 1872); and Metzudat David, by Rabbi David ben Shelomoh ibn Abi Zimra (Zolkiew, 1862).

<sup>33</sup> For this theosophy in the context of "walking," see the valuable discussion (with earlier references) by E. Wolfson, "Walking as a Sacred Duty: Theological Transformation of Social Reality in Early Hasidism," Along the Path. Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), Chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, I, 178; cf. II, 81. The idea derives from the Zohar, where it is frequently remarked how sin blocks the channels of the divine realm; cf. I. 67a and III. 297a-b.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1, 178.

<sup>36</sup> See Liqqutei Moharan, I, 80 and 277.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Liqqutei Moharan, I, 24.3; I, 81 specifically says that "feet (ha-raglayim) are Netzah and Hod," and goes on to identify them with the gradation of Prophet(s) (naviy'). An interpretation of Psalm 90: 12, "and bring us (naviy') a heart of wisdom" is adduced to indicate how these supernal gradations may be brought (viz., elevated) through dance to the heart of the sefirotic structure. Liqqutei Tefillot, X, ad fin., speaks of raising the legs through dance to their supernal source.

<sup>39</sup> See especially Liqqutei Moharan, I, 277, "Every mitzvah is a complete qomah;" and II, 39, where Nahman speaks of "the form of the limbs (tavnit ha-'evarim.) and the building and structure (qomah) and image, etc. of each and every thing" (kol davar ve-davar). The notion has its roots in the Zohar, where it is taught that each mitzvah contains all 613 commandments and replicates the anthropomorphic structure of the divine hierarchy; cf. Zohar III.228b (Ra'aya' Meheymna'), kol rmitzvah 'ihiy sheqila' le-taryag.

<sup>40</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, II, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, I, 22.11; cf. 10.6. Torah and prayer also have "feet"; See ibid., I, 75.

<sup>42</sup> The number 13 may refer to the 10 gradations plus the 3 pure lights above them; and also to the 13 petaled rose, which stands for the 13 attributes of mercy which emerge from Binah for the benefit of the Assembly of Israel (viz., they flow down to surround and protect Malkhut). According to Zohar I. 1a, this rose or lily is the "cup of salvation(s)"—a clear messianic allusion. The 13 petals are linked there to the 13 "words" or references to the divine Name Elohim in Genesis 1:1-2: 1.

<sup>43</sup> Liqqutei Moharan, I, 22.9.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 22.10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. See also the uses of the verb klal in I.52; and cf. the discussion of M. Idel, "Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism," in Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue (ed. M. Idel and B. McGinn; New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1989) 45. For the term in other Hasidic circles, see ibid., 42-47; and my discussion in The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1994), 119 and 150 n. 67.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., end. According to Zohar II 117b-118a (Ra'aya' Meheymna'), the righteous are "like the limbs of the Shekhinah;" and cf. Tiqqunei Zohar, Tiqqun 70, 130b.

---

<sup>47</sup> See Hayyei Moharan, no. 340, for the Hebrew and Yiddish versions. By the Yiddish expression oys gegangen, Rabbi Nahman means a mystical "death" of expiry of the soul: viz., an annihilation of self-consciousness. The idiom also appears in the Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut ("Tract on Ecstasy") by Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch (1773-1827), a contemporary of Rabbi Nahman. Near the end of section 4 of the Kuntres, Rabbi Dov Ber speaks of an "ecstasy of the whole essence" (hitpa'alut kol ha-`atzmiyut) in which one is so completely transported that nothing remains of him and he is without any self-consciousness. A Yiddish gloss immediately follows referring to "the very deep absorption of the whole of the soul to the extent that he leaves (or: dies to any sense of) the vessels of his mind or heart (er kan oys gehn fun di keli ha-moah vaha-lev)." See in the edition of Sefer Liqqutei Bei'urim (Jerusalem, 1974) 55. For Rabbi Dov Ber's mystical experience in the context of Jewish spirituality, see my Kiss of God. Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1994), chapter 3, especially pp. 117-20.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., end.