

AVODAH DANCE ENSEMBLE Newsletter

September 2004 - Tishri 5765

JOANNE CELEBRATES RETIREMENT AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

After over thirty years of guiding Avodah as Artistic Director, JoAnne decided it was time for a change in her life. She and her husband Murray have retired, sold their home in New Jersey and will be spending the summers in Steamboat Springs, Colorado and the winters in Green Valley, Arizona. They are enjoying their new life very much. JoAnne will continue to play an active role on Avodah's Board, mentoring Avodah's new Artistic Director Julie Gayer, and supervising Avodah's program in women's correctional institutions.

On February 29th former dancers, current dancers, board members, and artistic collaborators were invited to an open house to mark the transition. They were asked to bring a favorite memory (or to send in a memory). Among those in attendance were Loretta Abbott, Mirako Ando, Kate Ashby, Newman Taylor Baker, Beatrice Bogorad, Cantor Ida Rae Cahana with her triplet daughters and son, Te Perez, Cheryl Clark, Renee Cook, Candice Franklin, Kathleen Hahn, Elizabeth McPherson, Regina Ress, Carl Solomon, Claire Willey, and Beth Millstein Wish with her son and daughter. Memories were received from around the world: Deborah Hanna - Italy; Christopher Hemmens - Germany; Jessica Sehested and David Finko - Philadelphia; Rabbi Susan Freeman, Deborah Marcus and Nanette Joslyn - California; Aida Wasser-

stein - Wilmington; Kezia Gleckman Hayman and Rabbi Ronald Milstein - Long Island; Katie Haltiwanger - Minnesota; Carla Norwood Armstrong and Roberta Behrendt - Florida; Dr. Walter Jacobs - Pittsburgh; and Rabbi Norman Cohen, Cantor Meredith Stone, Mana Hashimoto, Amichai Lau Lavie, and Becca Vargus - New York.

JULIE GAYER -- NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF LITURGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Julie brings an outstanding background to Avodah. She grew up in New Jersey studying dance as a child and teen. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Rutgers University, she pursued intensive study in modern dance and choreography with Helen Barrow (Merce Cunningham), Karen Steele (Lar Lubovitch), KT Niehoff, Anne Stackhouse, and the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Julie has performed and choreographed professionally in both concert settings and unconventional venues, including art galleries, parks, weddings, senior centers, and schools. While studying yoga and Bharata Natyam in India, she was invited to perform at sacred ceremonies. Julie toured through Western Europe, California, Hawaii, and Washington sharing her unique style called "Yoga Dance" in performances and workshops. Julie co-founded Breaking Ground Dance Theater in Seattle and is a performer and choreographer for Koa Blue Dance Theater in Maui. She toured the Hawaiian Islands for Dance Quake, a Hawaii State Dance Festival, and performed with Na Lei Kaumaka O Uka, a Hula dance troupe. Currently, she is a teaching artist in New York City's public schools and joined Avodah's faculty for our recent Colorado workshop.

Julie attended Jewish Day School until fourth grade, had a Bat Mitzvah and was confirmed. She is eager to continue exploring her roots through Avodah.

Julie is creating new repertory for Friday night services around the themes of 1) Candle- lighting/candle sticks, 2) Mikvah and multicultural interpretations of water, and 3) a poem by Charlotte Zolotow called "Enemies" from The Big Book for Peace. Julie plans to include several pieces that JoAnne choreographed in the company's repertory. Among the pieces to be restaged by Avodah former dancer and current board member Kezia Gleckman Hayman are M'Chamocho and Hallelu.

Dance as a tool in conflict resolution is also one of Julie's key interests, and she is exploring how this might relate to Biblical text. Plans for this year include developing workshops for school children on conflict resolution as well as a performance piece.

WELCOME TO NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Aida Wasserstein has been an Avodah fan for a number of years, attending workshops and opening doors for Avodah in Wilmington, DE. A Family Court Judge she has made connections for Avodah at the Dolores J. Baylor Women's Correctional Facility and introduced Avodah to Pacem en Terris, who has been finding funding for Avodah's work at Baylor. **Libbie Mathes** has been co-leading the Colorado workshops with JoAnne for three summers. A teacher of Yoga, well versed in Jewish text and education, she lives in Steamboat Springs, CO.

DISABILITY AWARENESS PROGRAM AT JPMORGAN CHASE

Avodah ventured into new territory last October. With JoAnne Tucker as Director, Kezia Gleckman Hayman as Associate Director and Newman Taylor Baker as Composer in Resident and three Avodah dancers -- Kathleen Hahn, Natrea Blake and Kerri Thoma -- Avodah designed a 45-minute program for Disability Awareness Month that would also recognize the qualities of a good leader. In planning the program, they felt it was essential to recruit for the

ensemble a dancer with a disability, so they could learn from her insight and creativity throughout the process, and so they could help the audience achieve a level of comfort through appreciation that a "person with a disability" is simply a "person," with both disability and ability.

Avodah was thus joined by Mana Hashimoto, an outstanding dancer who lost her vision 5 years ago and is completely blind. Mana's space awareness is remarkable, and with ingenuity she has devised a system of taping string to the floor to mark necessary reference points (such as squarely front). Most striking is Mana's masterful skill and grace in "watching" movement by feeling someone else perform it. By gently placing her hands on a moving dancer (usually standing behind the dancer), she is able to determine closely the positions and movement qualities of the model's arms, torso, hips, legs, etc. Mana taught Avodah, and the JPMorgan Chase audience, much about innovative problem solving and teamwork, and clearly demonstrated the richness of learning through openness to others. With her lack of "vision" as we usually define it, Mana taught us all to see more clearly.

The lecture demonstration began by showing how Mana became part of the ensemble by first "feeling" the movement of each individual dancer. In this way she became familiar with the movement style and quality of each of her colleagues, developed improvisations with them and learned set choreography from them. The program proceeded with improvisations and short choreographed pieces to illustrate various attributes of leadership, such as nurturing a positive attitude, communicating constructively, delivering results, working successfully with colleagues and conveying a commitment to integrity and respect. Our final presentation was a brief, simple excerpt of choreography inspired by the idea of opening one's heart, a principle we believe is equally important for both disability awareness and excellent leadership.

The program was performed at JPMorgan Chase's lower Manhattan headquarter and video-conferenced to two sites, Boston

and Tempe. It was introduced by the chairperson of JPMorgan Chase's "AccessAbility" Network, who had also provided Avodah with valuable suggestions during our planning stage. This program is an example of our mission to "celebrate the humanity of work: diversity, creativity, integrity and teamwork."

Anyone with a corporate contact interested in a customized program by Avodah should contact [email Julie Gayer](mailto:Julie.Gayer@avodah.org).

PROGRAMS IN WOMEN'S PRISONS EXPAND

This year, in addition to the one-week residency in March at York Correctional Institution, Avodah began an on going program there. A dance workshop is now held twice a month, with Avodah providing a guest teacher once a month and YCI teacher Joyce Williams meeting with inmates the other time. Joe Lea, Avodah board member and educational staff member at YCI, and Avodah dancers, Connie Procopio and Amy Osgood, presented an overview of Avodah work at the Regional Correctional Education Association Conference.

Avodah also held a week-long residence, followed by a once a month workshop for three months led by Jessica Sehested, at Dolores J. Baylor Correctional Institution in New Castle, DE.

FROM JULIE GAYER

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR FOR LITURGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

"When I left Hawaii, I had a vision of returning to the East Coast and synthesizing my dance experience with a renewed interest in understanding my Jewish roots. On my way back, while teaching in Seattle, I met someone who had an apartment available in New York! I left Seattle with a key to this apartment in hand, and I knew it was "b'Shert" that I would stay in New York. Soon after, I met JoAnne and Avodah, and I sensed that Avodah would be a home

for me. I am so thankful to be working with Avodah as Artistic Director of liturgical and educational programs. JoAnne has been an amazing mentor, guiding me through the "ins and outs" of this diversified and very creative position.

This year, we are creating programming that seeks to fulfill our mission of deepening personal identity while also building community. Our programs have cross-cultural, interfaith, and inter-generational elements as well as a specific focus on the needs of women and children. I look forward to meeting you, and I hope to see you at one of these programs in the upcoming season!"

PROGRAMS AVAILABLE FOR BOOKING 2004 - 2005

Mayim Workshops and Residencies Avodah is creating workshops and residencies focusing on the theme of feminine empowerment and the healing qualities of water. Using movement, text, and percussion, participants will be guided through improvisation and choreography from Avodah's repertory. This project is particularly appropriate for:

- 1) an intergenerational grouping of women from different stages of development including teenagers, adults, and seniors, and
- 2) women exploring healing.

Avodah is currently working on a proposal to expand the Mayim project by integrating dance, yoga, and percussion for women affected with cancer.

Character Education and Conflict Resolution through Movement

Residencies for school children in grades K-5.

Especially recommended for high needs school districts.

These programs use dance, yoga and other forms of movement to encourage self-esteem and tolerance, as well as provide support for children dealing with bullying and teasing. Children will learn movement techniques that help them understand personal

and shared space, develop an awareness of how to detect and harness "hyper" energy, and identify and express feelings through movement. Students will create a short performance based on personal stories and stories included in the program as well as observe an Avodah Dance Ensemble performance piece about conflict resolution.

Shabbat Services, Interfaith Services, Workshops, Concerts, and Jewish Holiday Programs in Liturgical and Educational Settings

In addition to concert performing, Avodah has a long tradition of integrating dance into Shabbat services. This year we keep this tradition alive with several dance pieces: 1) **L'hadlik Ner**, a dance about candle-lighting and candlesticks, 2) **M'Chamocho**, inspired by Biblical mention of Miriam and women celebrating after the parting of the Red Sea, 3) **Hallelu**, based on Psalm 150, 4) **Without Walls**, an interfaith piece based on a poem, and 5) **Shalom Rav**, a simple piece inviting congregants to participate from their seats. Avodah also leads "Dance Midrash" sessions, a creative way of understanding text through movement explorations.

Avodah is always open to developing programming that complements the themes an organization or group is studying. Please contact me to discuss your questions and interests, email; jewelzkg@yahoo.com

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

October 31, 2004

Lishmah Conference

10 E. 66th Street; Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning
1-866-2LISHMA www.lishmah.org

The Lishmah Conference is a one-day event focused on "traditional and non-traditional Jewish learning." Avodah will present a workshop, (10:35 AM - 12:00 PM), led by Julie Gayer and Kezia Gleckman Hayman (Avodah performer and teacher since 1987). An experiential workshop in which participants are guided to explore text through movement, this session will focus on the theme of struggle, including the application (through movement) of elements of conflict resolution. No dance experience is required.

January 6, 2005, 6:30 PM

Mayim: An evening of dance performance & lecture with Guest Speaker Rabbi Norman Cohen

Hebrew Union College, 1 West 4th Street (between Mercer and Broadway), NYC

Call: (212)-477-1368 or (808)-298-1709; Jewelzkg@yahoo.com; www.avodahdance.org

This program is inspired by The Mikvah Project, with photography by Janice Rubin and text by Leah Lax. The evening will include choreography by Julie Gayer related to Mikvah and multicultural interpretations of water, as well as M'Chamocho and Hallelu, choreographed by JoAnne Tucker and re-staged by Kezia Gleckman Hayman. Rabbi Norman Cohen will speak about the symbolism of water in the Jewish tradition. This promises to be an exciting event.

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