My Dance of Life: Teshuvah

Sarah Meyer-Waldo

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MY DANCE OF LIFE: TESHUVAH

by

Sarah Meyer-Waldo

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Mechanical Engineering)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2022

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ABSTRACT

This project resulted in a book of poetry divided into three sections. Each section is accompanied by a video of original choreographic work; each choreographic work is set to one of the original poems from each section. The question proposed for this project is, how can I act on my insights, reflections, and thoughts as I move through life, in order to engage more fully with my own mental/conscious experience?

Therefore, the purpose of this project is to explore how utilizing poetry and dance to engage with my mental landscape might be a means to catharsis, for full self-expression and acceptance, and self-discovery. One of the art forms utilized, which I have significant experience in, is dance, and the other one which I am a novice at is creative writing. Writing makes the thoughts and internal experiences concrete by externalizing them. Dance brings these reflections back into myself through embodiment. The creative and choreographic process involves returning to the words and the movement again and again. This constant creative and physical engagement with the written insights, reflections, and thoughts that I have as I go through life helps me to integrate them into my being so that they are an active part of me, both consciously and subconsciously, influencing how I move about the world.

The integration of all three written sections progresses from a sense of brokenness, grief and loss to one of hope, self-love, and being grounded in oneself. This reflects the pattern of the Jewish calendar. During the Jewish spiritual new year, Rosh Hashanah, Jews practice *teshuvah*, or repentance. However, *teshuvah* can also be translated to “turning towards oneself.” Each section of this project turns towards myself, from beginning to end, and the three parts of the project as a whole do the same.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to my advisor, Samantha C. Jones, for guiding me through the artistic, reflective, and thesis writing process, and to my thesis committee members, Sonja K. Birthisel, Kathleen Ellis, Ann Ross, and Jennie Woodard, for helping me along the way. I would like to thank Deborah Workman and Lorry Fleming for helping me with revisions, Elizabeth Drucker and Laren Lynn for their additional choreographic advice, and most importantly, for my mother, for guiding me in life to be the person reflected in this work. And to everyone who shared a conversation and has encouraged my vulnerability and art – this project would not exist, and this experience would not have been so deep and fruitful, without you.
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READING POEMS ABOUT ANOTHER’S “YOU”

MY MOM WAS ALONE

TO RECOGNIZE CREATION AND YOU

THE SNOW FELL STRAIGHT TODAY - BEAR WITNESS

HOW IT HAPPENED TO ME

PASSIVITY - GOODBYE

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DISQUISITION

Discussion

When I experience personal hardship, there are two effective ways I have been able to help myself through it: journaling and immersing myself alone in nature. Because of this, I have found myself coming in and out of a regular journaling practice, however I have not written much poetry. I had my own appreciation of poetry, but I had yet to find my own relationship to the art form.

In the summer of 2019, after my first year of college, I was in the beginning of two major changes in my life: that of exploring and connecting with my Jewish heritage, and also of freeing myself of what was ultimately a five-year intimate relationship. This was the first summer that I lived alone, away from friends and family, working as a technical intern at the pulp mill, ND Paper in Old Town. This space was both exceptionally lonely and wonderfully freeing, in retrospect. It gave me the mental, emotional, and social space that I needed to discover what my own heart and soul was trying to tell me.

While the social space lent itself to a lot of self-discovering and forced me to begin facing a lot of hard feelings that I had yet to admit to myself, the social space was also quite painful. To remedy this, I began attending Kabbalat Shabbat services every Friday night at Congregation Beth El in Bangor (CBE) in order to get my weekly dose of “socializing.” Although the other congregants were my parents’ age or older, and I was shy and reserved, being around those kind people was exactly what I needed to end my week and begin to heal. My other activities that summer consisted of reading, biking,
dancing, and journaling. As I began to explore my Jewish heritage and to experience both this social space and the pain that began to surface, my ability to articulate what I was experiencing in my journaling practice began to change. I struggled to write in the same sentence structure that I was used to. The concrete and blunt nature of a dialogue-styled writing was too much for me, as I began to face the pain that I had long been suppressing.

As I began to open up to my faith and community, I experienced the sensations of both a “waking up,” and that of a “jumbled fog” with regard to what I now know was an emotionally manipulative relationship with a romantic partner. When I was in the midst of a distressing situation, my brain would struggle to keep up. In arguments, my brain would get so foggy and saturated with emotion that it would go blank, and I would forget what the subject matter was, leaving nothing but the feeling of distress inside. What I was not able to reflect in words to someone else about a disagreement or some other distressing situation that I had just experienced, I would not be able to remember the following day; I would only remember the “story” I had told to someone else, and not my memory of the event.

This uncanny sensation of “waking up” has often been compared to coming in and out of disassociation. As defined by the American Psychiatric Association,

“Dissociation is a disconnection between a person’s thoughts, memories, feelings, actions or sense of who he or she is.”¹ I would experience a period of two or three days at a time when I would feel as though I had “woken up,” -- suddenly present in myself and aware

of what was happening to me. I was shocked at the manipulative behaviors I had allowed to go on around me, and of ways that I allowed my significant other to treat me, such as gaslighting, belittling my successes, and controlling my friendships and time. Why was I not aware of this until now? Why wasn’t I doing anything about it? I would then “fall back asleep” (into the fog) and be unaware I was ever even awake, allowing the disrespectful behavior to continue around me. Weeks later, I would wake up again and be shocked at the memory of waking up previously, and then seemingly ‘forgetting’ and going back to allowing distressing behavior to continue around and towards me.

This cycle went on for months. The summer of living alone and away from the toxic relationship, when I was at least physically separated from the abusive situation to which I had continuously been subjected, the painful emotions started to come up and stay long enough for me to begin to process them and change my inner dialogue – I began to stay awake. It was, however, a long and hard process to face the emotions that arose; articulating them even to myself was a challenging process. My journaling practice began to morph from one that was very descriptive and scientific to one that was more creative and exploratory. My journaling practice started to become one of writing poetry as a more direct expression of what I was going through.

The following semester I enrolled in a Dance Composition class. For an assignment to “choreograph words,” I created a dance to a poem I wrote about my mom that I titled, “What My Mom Has Taught Me.”² The poem accounted for numerous pieces of advice and things that my mom said to me over the years. I wrote this poem specifically for the choreographic assignment spontaneously on the day that it was due.

² As found in Appendix A.
Sharing this dance with my class was one of the most nerve-wracking pieces that I have ever performed. I had been performing since elementary school, but nothing that reflected my personal experience or narrative on this level. I am beyond grateful that my peers and instructor were supportive of my vulnerability. They loved the work and encouraged me to continue the piece, and to audition it for the Fall Dance Showcase. Their feedback and encouragement won me over, and I expanded the piece from a solo to that of ten dancers. I taught the dance to my peers, and together we performed it in the Fall Dance Showcase at the end of the semester. At the end of the choreographic and performance process three months after I had initially started the piece, I found myself living and integrating the lessons shared in the poem much more freely than I had been prior to the experience. I felt the words become a stronger presence in my consciousness, which drew from deep in my subconscious to guide my actions. The process of choreographing the words by listening to them over and over, and then embodying the words in movement helped me integrate these words into my life. Of course, I did write the words, I had always known them. However, I did not truly feel myself living them until after I embodied them in this choreographic and artistic process, a key part of which was sharing these very personal expressions with others.

A year later, in the Fall of 2020, I began to explore what I wanted to pursue for my Honors thesis. By this time I had freed myself from the five year relationship that had been causing me pain, and had experienced another love and another heartbreak. I was only beginning to heal from the first heartbreak. By that time I was heavily involved with Jewish life, having taken a course in modern Hebrew and then teaching in the religious school at CBE. I was then in my second year as Hillel president and was on the Board of
Directors at CBE. I began participating in Jewish programming across and outside of the state of Maine, as well as exploring ways of creating my own Jewish rituals and meditation practices.

My exploration of thesis possibilities coincided with the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. I had not taken a dance class or even stepped foot in a dance studio for the first seven months after the initial shutdown, and I was feeling both disconnected from my body, and intimidated by the thought of returning to the dance floor because of how my body had changed. Both of my parents were in the beginnings of new relationships since their divorce, and I had a less than ideal living situation while classes remained remote. It was a time of change and challenge.

Throughout this time, my journaling practice remained one of poetry. In my search for Honors Thesis directions, I knew that I wanted to do something outside of my mechanical engineering major; something that stimulated a different part of my brain and creative being. In reflecting on my experience of creating and sharing my choreographic work, and my current poetry-journaling practice, I settled on the idea of combining my previous choreographic experience with the new writings that I was actively creating.

The experience of choreographing “What My Mom Has Taught Me” is what inspired me to embark on this creative process. My intention was to integrate the compartmentalized parts of my identity and my life, by using various art forms and the creative process to engage my whole mental landscape.
Purpose

In this project, I wanted to explore how utilizing poetry and dance to engage with my mental landscape might be a means to catharsis, for full self-expression and acceptance, and self-discovery. I’ve found that art, such as writing reflective poetry and embodying my experiences in dance, helps me to break old habits of disregard and compartmentalization of self. Artmaking brings out my suppressed inner experience and facilitates engagement instead of suppression.

In my experience, modern society encourages and enforces compartmentalization. As a spiritual artistic woman in the engineering and STEM field, I often feel obliged to omit and disregard parts of myself in various environments, such as work, school, STEM, and other male-dominated places. However, I am not a series of adjacent identities, but in fact a single being with a single identity that holds multiple facets at all times. As an artist, I have taken a deeply personal approach in an attempt to repair the fractures and grow in ways that escape rational methods. This project, with its particular interplay of art forms, seeks to reintegrate the experience of fracture and dissociation that has plagued my sense of self, as well as contemporary culture at large.
Methodology

The creative project presented in this paper started as a free flow of writing and movement explorations, inspired by a free-flow journaling practice. With the practice of ritualistic ‘brain dump’ writing, I derived the subjects of my poetry and dances. This free-flow process was not linear. Sometimes the initial step was a journal entry, but other times it came out as poetry, or as movement, dance, and embodiment of feeling.

Both writing and dance were in conversation with one another throughout this process; my journaling-poetry and dance practice occurred in parallel to one another. In the dance studio, I moved into an embodiment practice, with or without music, based on how I was feeling that day. It was improvisational and brought me into my body, helping me become present. As both a meditative and grounding practice, the improvisational expressive dance was a way to engage with the thoughts and feelings that I did not yet have words for – a way to repair the fractures of my internal experience by fighting against disassociation and suppression despite the absence of articulation. It brought my consciousness closer to my emotional experience in preparation for discovering how to articulate it. In this way, dance sometimes preceded poetry, and writing was a response to what welled up in me during my embodiment practice. From the poems I created, I then responded to the words again with another iteration of movement, this time in the form of choreographic work. The oscillation between the artistic modalities that I engaged in added depth to the work and to the overall experience, reintegrating and reconnecting my language, my emotions, and my body.

I periodically shared my themes for writings and dances with others, and the resulting conversations often inspired further works, reflections, and revisions. These
reflective conversations augmented my overall experience of exploring my own
philosophy and gathering my fractured pieces. I read different styles of poetry to inspire
my work, and revised my writings with feedback from friends, family, and mentors who
had experience with poetry.

My project was relatively insular from academic critique towards my art media
until it was completed. This was partly COVID-induced, and partly intentional to allow
for focusing on the process and the experience instead of on the product. I was
consuming poetic and choreographic work as I created my own, and had brief
consultations with trusted mentors with experience in the poetic or choreographic fields,
but largely I created independently and presented my work for further review once I was
finished, and then for more thorough review once my entire work had been curated. This
was intentional to center the project around my experience instead of on the creative
“products.”

After I created a large pool of works, I landed on three main choreographic
pieces, each named after the poem they are set to: “I Found My Faith,” “There is Always
More than This,” and “I Am A River.” Based on shared themes I divided the written
works into three sections, each paired with one of the three choreographic works. I
organized the works to illustrate the growth that I personally experienced throughout this
process, as well as the cyclical nature of that growth. By identifying the thematic
differences between each section, I explored water images and Hebrew phrases to
represent each section. The pairing of an image and a phrase represented the pairing of
poetry and dance that is the work itself, conveying both my relationship to the natural
world (particularly bodies of water), and to my Jewish tradition.
My final creative work exists in two forms: a book of poetry organized into three sections with still images from the choreographic works, and a website that acts as an interactive manuscript, holding the full videos of each dance along with digital copies of the poems. The structure of the website mirrors the manuscript, with a table of contents and separate page for each piece. As one can turn a page in the printed manuscript to see the next poem, one can navigate to the next poem or dance on the following linked webpage.

In curating the work to share with an audience, it was most important to me to portray the overall shift in my mental landscape and the cycle of turning towards myself, again and again – illustrating that the journey of healing was and is not linear. The final curated work is included in Appendix A.

In order to emphasize the cyclical and continuous nature of my experience, multiple pieces that illustrated large, climactic shifts and moments of repairing fractures were not included in the final work. These climactic pieces were often very specific to a certain experience, such as relationship abuse, a decision to be vulnerable in poetry, and parental relationships. The subject of these poems would have distracted from the thematic building of each section because of the intensity of the piece and the weight of the topic and would have seemed out of place in the overall work. Ultimately, these pieces became an integral part of the process just as the free-flow improvisational embodiment practice was necessary and significant, even though neither of these are included in the final product. The poems that were crucial to the process but omitted in the final product are included (in order of date) in Appendix B of this document, and
video clips of the improvisational embodiment practice is included on the website in the Appendix page, linked under the Home page tab.

My decision to present my choreographic work in video form, as opposed to a live performance, was due to the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic. This creative project began in Fall 2020, not even a year since the first U.S COVID-induced shutdown. With performances being canceled and cases rising and falling and rising again, it was unclear if a performance would even be possible by the time the project was completed. To avoid dealing with last minute logistical changes, I decided in the beginning to stick with a video presentation, so that regardless of fluctuations in pandemic restrictions, the performance would happen as planned.

However, the pandemic still affected this plan. Originally, I had arranged for two photographers from L.D Creative Studios to record my final videos of each dance. Fortunately, I was able to coordinate a day where I was able to record at the Collins Center for the Arts (CCA) stage on the University of Maine campus. This was an exciting opportunity and one that was only possible due to a myriad of perfectly aligned conditions, and not something that would have easily been rescheduled. The night before I was set to record on the CCA stage, I got word from my videographers that they had a COVID-19 exposure and were experiencing symptoms, and that they would not be able to come record. Since I only had one day to work on the CCA stage, I went ahead on my own, recording on a Fogler Library reserved camcorder and an iPhone, both placed on tripods. I hit the play button, started the audio, and got into view. My first few takes were set with the cameras placed in the audience, looking at the stage as one would a traditional show.
After reviewing these takes, however, I found that the camera would not focus on me from such a distance and with the stage lights. I was nothing but a glowing silhouette of light. While I tried to troubleshoot this a few times, I was not successful. I found that in order to get the cameras to focus on me, they had to be closer to me, and in order to maintain a clear view, I needed the tripods on stage with me. Due to the size of the stage, in order to have enough space within the camera’s view to complete my dance, I had to shoot my video from the side of the stage, instead of front and center. In an attempt to avoid revealing all of the backstage objects, signs, and safety lights, I positioned the cameras on the corner of the front-stage, angled diagonally across the length of the stage.

I then proceeded to perform my dances at an angle on the stage, trying my best to face the cameras straight on, as if they were the audience. Due to the dark lighting and the angle, it was difficult to know when I was directly facing the camera or not, unlike the usual stage in which performers can easily orient themselves to face front. This resulted in some non-ideal placement. For example, in my final performance of “I Am A River”, the beginning movements that crescendo and decrescendo before the recitation of the poem begins, are intended to face directly front. However I was slightly angled in the video recording.

Given the circumstances, I believe that I did my best with the time and resources that I had. The intent of the videos is to showcase my choreography that was used to embody my poems, and I believe that the recordings do exactly that. The background is almost completely black to avoid background distractions from the dancing, the audio is clear while maintaining the sound of my body moving throughout the space, and the stage provided an almost ideal dancing surface. While the pandemic did end up affecting
my project, I was still successful in presenting my work. Because my process was reflective of my life and my mental/emotional landscape, it is only fitting that the product itself is also reflective of the complexities of lived experience.
Artist Statement

The title of my series is *My Dance of Life: Teshuvah – to turn towards one’s self.*

The progression of all three sections flows from a sense of brokenness, grief, and loss, to hope, self-love, and being grounded in oneself and in the world around them. Each section has a similar progression, but there is further increase in this development from one section to the next. This is the pattern of the Jewish calendar. During the Jewish spiritual new year, *Rosh Hashanah,* Jews practice *teshuvah,* or “repentance.” However, *teshuvah* can also be translated to, “to re/turn to ourselves.” Each section turns towards myself, from beginning to end. And the three parts together do the same. Together, they are a constant spiral upward, just as life is not linear, the progression from a dark and narrow place in the beginning of the creative work is not linear to the ultimate sense of stability and love.

Each section improves, and each section starts back again from a place of pain, but together they gradually ascend higher and higher to a place of grounding love and connection. Each section and the work as a whole always progresses, or turns, towards self-love, faith, hope, and gratitude.

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5 This “spiral upward” is expressed in my poem “Mom’s correction: reframing into spirals,” as included in Appendix B. As the title suggests, this was a new perspective offered by my mother. Similar changes in perspective and growth of mindset occurred throughout this project as I engaged my mental landscape through the creative process and through conversations with friends and family to whom I shared my reflections with along the way.
Section 1: *Hineini - Here I Am*

The image of this section is a waterfall (Figures 1 and 2). A waterfall takes the power and ripples hidden beneath the smooth surface of the water and makes them visible in a big, crashing, often overwhelming gush.

Just as in the cartoons, sometimes we barely can tell that the crashing fall is coming until we’re practically in it. That is how this section, and the greater story I am sharing, began. There were hints here and there that it was approaching – “it” being a journey of self-growth, of self-discovery, of healing – but I didn’t really know it was coming until I was already beginning to fall, and there was no turning back or stopping the flow.

The first poem in this section is titled “I Found My Faith,” which speaks about my experience of being very disconnected from myself. Starting with this poem is like the shocking moment when the character suddenly realizes they’re at the top of the waterfall, like being thrown into the deep end. This poem is about my experience in the summer of 2019 when I was living alone and away from friends and family for the first time and had begun to attend Kabbalat Shabbat services weekly for the first time as well. Every Friday night, the Rabbi – Rabbi Darah Lerner – would invite us to take a moment, get comfortable in our seats, and sit in silence with ourselves as a resting arrival at the end of the work week. This was painful. I found that it hurt to sit with myself in silence, and each week I would be on the verge of tears in less than a minute’s time trying to sit silently with my own existence. It was this experience and the realizations that followed

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^6 Appendix A.
Figure 1: Video still from “I Found My Faith”, in Section 1: “Hineini: Here I Am.”
Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 2: A small waterfall near Farmington, ME. 
Photo courtesy of the artist.
that inspired the poem. Putting this poem first illustrates where I am coming from for the rest of the works presented. “I Found My Faith” talks about the awareness I had, when I woke up and saw the waterfall, that I needed to let my life fall and crash, to not clog the flow of what was welling up for me in those moments of silence, as I began my journey of healing and listening to my own self.7

To go down a waterfall is to fall, but it also offers some weightlessness. Another metaphor is as follows: They say that if someone is getting into a car crash, they should relax so that their joints aren’t locked on impact. They will have a better chance at avoiding injury if they aren’t tense. In this waterfall experience of my life, I needed to let things fall, I needed to relax and let go. I needed to find some weightlessness as I fell down the waterfall. This period of growth and redirection in my life was often overwhelming, often felt like a loss, losing the knowledge of the smooth water surface of before - even if it was polluted. To lift some weight off of my shoulders, and to relax into the unknown chaos, I found myself turning more and more to my Jewish heritage. I hadn’t been religious previously in my life but engaging with the tradition and being more observant became a significant source of comfort and strength for me during this time. The meat of this section focuses on this relationship to faith and the Divine, to the unknown and letting go, and how I found support and comfort there as I fell down the waterfall.

At the end, a waterfall crashes. It is loud, and often will spray anyone nearby with the crashing water – with the feeling of being sprayed with water and the distinct, potentially deafening, sound, it’s hard to miss it. The section culminates with two poems,
“Where I Found My Love”, and “Here I Am”, which expresses a strong declaration of presence and purpose. Compared to the first writing in this section, we are brought from a painful awareness of the need to let go and surrender to the change that was to come, to a strong and sure love and dedication to the self; from being lost and crumbling, to standing tall and being present as one is.

The Hebrew assigned to this section is Hineini - Here I Am. The term Hineini is found throughout Jewish texts and prayers. In the Torah, God calls out to Moses from the burning bush, to tell him that he must lead the Jews out of slavery. Moses, who is presented as not skilled with words or traditional leadership skills, responds to God's call with, Hineini, I Am Here. In liturgy it is not just an expression of location, but also of spirit. “I am prepared to reflect on who I am, what’s important to me,”. It is the first step of teshuvah (the overarching title of this series), translated to “repentance” or, alternatively, “to re/turn to ourselves.” To show up to declare, “Here I am.” Just as Moses was not prepared with words or leadership skills for the task set before him, so am I unprepared with a lack of experience or education around poetry. Despite the imperfections, I am showing up with what I have and who I am. As I mentioned, this section deals greatly with faith; I am learning what my relationship to the Divine is for the first time in my life, and I am beginning the work of repentance, of returning to myself, by showing up. I am showing up to reflect on who I am and what is important to me, particularly coming from a perspective devoid of any prior formal spirituality and

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8 Appendix A.
10 Barenblat, Rabbi Rachel. *The Shabbat of Return*. 18
lacking any strong notion or connection to self. This section is the beginning of me being able to say “Hineini, Here I Am.”

Section 2: La’merkhav - to (the wide open) space

This section is represented by the ocean, with waves crashing and splashing water up into the air (Figures 3 and 4). One can’t always tell when the wave is going to crash, or if it’ll be large enough to splash them. In a similar way, a lot of the pieces in this section were emotional experiences and realizations that hit me unexpectedly during this creative process. I was coming to be in touch with my own emotions, I was removed from a negative relationship, and distanced from disappointments of my upbringing. Having that space led to these things that I wasn’t expecting to crash into my consciousness like a metaphorical ocean wave.

If someone is surprised by an ocean splash, chances are at first they are startled, perhaps negatively. But then (granted it is a warm summer day) the water is refreshing and the splash is beautiful, and the experience changes to one of excitement at the sight. This section has the same progression, from the painful things that came out of me, scared and unexpected, to the hopeful energy I was able to return to, just as an ocean wave splashing beautiful water droplets into the sunlit air.
Figure 3: Video still from “There Is Always More Than This”, from Section 2: “La’merkhav - to (the wide open) space.”
Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 4: Ocean wave crashing at Reid State Park, ME, Julie Meyer, 2019.
The expanse of *La’merkhav* is one of the unknown, and one that offers hope and comfort to the one calling from a place of constriction and starkness.\(^{11}\) This is the thematic development of this section; constriction, and smallness, to a hopeful expansion and positive outlook towards the unknown. Many of the poems in the first half of this section are expressing feelings of narrowness, and work towards an understanding that “this will pass,” that there is more, there is the expansiveness to find comfort in. The end of this section brings one out of the dark narrow place illustrated in the beginning of the section, into a feeling of hopefulness at the unknown, of excitement and a return to joy and light.

**Section 3: Tikkun olam - repair the world**

This section is illustrated by a well of water (Figure 5 and 6), sustaining and providing, which is part of the imagery used in the poem “I Am A River.” It culminates thematically in a sense of being healed, moved on from the pain of previous sections, of finding that internal sustenance and foundation, my own well, to support myself. It reflects a new perspective on life as compared to the loneliness of previous sections, speaking on community and interconnectedness. “I Am A River” talks about the importance and influence of the spaces and situations we find and put ourselves in, and

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\(^{11}\) The Hebrew for this section is *la’merkhav* - to (the wide open) space. *La* means “to the,” and *merkhav* is “space.” *Merkhav* comes from Psalm 118:5-6, often titled *min hameitzar* or “from a narrow place.” The psalm translates to “From the Narrow place I called out to God who answered me with the Divine Expanse.”

Figure 5: Video Still from “I Am A River” from Section 3: “Tikkun Olam - repair the world.”

Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 6: A small body of water with prosperous flora, representing a nourishing well. Photo courtesy of the artist.
how we also affect the world around us in turn. A theme of this section is just that: how we affect and are affected by the world around us. The poems in this section tell of things I have learned from other people’s words and actions, as well as the natural world around me. Some poems reflect conversations I have had and how those conversations have changed my perspective. Most of the poems here deal with searching and finding a sense of stability: even if the writing expresses a painful experience, there is always this sense of hope and an awareness of ‘the expanse’ realized in the previous section. The poems at the end of this final section express a profound sense of comfort and stability along with an understanding of connection to others, in contrast to the previous sections which have themes of being lost, of longing, and of strikingly painful experiences. This is the well, which provides long-term sustenance.

The Hebrew associated with this section is *tikkun olam*, meaning “repairing the world,” which is a core Jewish value.\(^\text{12}\) It is paired with a quote from the Talmud, “Whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved the entire world.”\(^\text{13}\) Putting these two ideas together, just as saving a single life is like saving the entire world, repairing the world can be repairing a single life. This section illustrates repairing my own life. Responding to the instability reflected in the first poem *I Am A River*, where I illustrated an experience of being pulled and also polluted by the world around me, *tikkun olam* cultivates self-grown stability, eventually arriving at a place where those I surround myself with support me.

\(^\text{13}\) “Sanhedrin 4:5.” *Talmud*. Galilee, 500 C.E.
Repairing ourselves is the first step to repairing the world, not only because a life is a world but because we influence and guide other lives around us. This section shows things I have learned from the world and the people around me that were key to my journey of cultivating self-love, and of finding my place in the world and in relation to others with love, joy and gratitude.
Literature Review

This creative project in its essence is a reflective practice used for personal growth from life’s experiences through the creative process. Because of this, the literature used to contextualize the work comes from artists and philosophers, spiritual texts and psychological works. I will first discuss artists that influenced my choice of using a combination of artistic media, poetry and dance, transitioning into a discussion of artists who influenced and informed how I approached the poetry writing process. After this I will discuss works that serve as sources for my religious and spiritual identity that are shared throughout my work, followed by philosophical and psychological works that contextualize the process I undertook for this project.

Frida Kahlo exemplifies utilizing art for emotional expression, creating art freely regardless of purpose, and being completed by art. This is shown in her paintings Henry Ford Hospital which is about her experience with a miscarriage in Detroit, and The Broken Column that reflects her physical and resulting emotional pain stemming from a spinal cord injury she experienced as a young woman (Figures 7 and 8). Frida Kahlo is quoted to have said both “painting completed my life” and “I paint because I need to, and I paint whatever passes through my head without any other consideration.”14 Frida Kahlo served as inspiration for my free-flow creative project in terms of process and purpose – that of unfiltered personal expression.

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Figure 7: *Henry Ford Hospital*, Oil on canvas 30.5 x 38 cm, Frida Kahlo, 1932
Figure 8: The Broken Column, Oil on canvas mounted on masonite 17 x 13 cm, Frida Kahlo, 1944
In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* William Blake writes about his own personal philosophy that resists the differentiation of good and bad. The work is multifaceted, utilizing both writing, calligraphy, painting, and printmaking. He made multiple copies all created (printed, painted, calligraphed) by hand, as exemplified by the three cover images shown in the bottom of the following screenshot from the William Blake Archive’s webpage (Figure 9). Dispersed throughout the written words are embellishments, as shown in the top three images of Figure 9; for example, the first page discusses angels, and drawings of human figures can be seen within the embellishments surrounding the text. Every copy of his work was handmade, with slight differences in the colors and images he used to embellish the text and print-work, as shown in Figure 9. Blake returned to his work again and again in this process of creating multiple copies by hand, similarly to how my project returns to my own words repetitively through the embodiment of dance and rehearsing the choreography for the respective poem. Blake does not fit into any one category, be it religious or philosophical genres or artistic mediums. His multifaceted, personal work serves as an influence on my own project that is also deeply personal, involves my own personal philosophy and experience, and utilizes multiple art forms in conversation with one another.

In the summer of 2021, Cove Street Arts Gallery in Portland Maine hosted an exhibit called *Things Seemed to Be Breaking* by Stuart Kestenbaum and Susan Webster. Webster is a visual artist and her partner Kestenbaum is a poet, who at that time was the

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Figure 9: Editions of pages from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, relief and white-line etching with hand coloring ranging from 16.6 x 11.0 cm. and 13.6 x 9.8 cm, William Blake, 1790
poet laureate of Maine and had just published a book of blackout poetry, after which the exhibit was titled.\textsuperscript{16}

Part of the exhibit was Kestenbaum’s blackout poetry series, which arose from a workshop exercise to “create a piece of writing by placing a template over a page from an old discarded paperback book, isolating phrases and words.”\textsuperscript{17} Kestenbaum was then inspired to add his own stamped words above and below the page (Figure 10). The stamped text surrounding the blackout poem adds a depth of meaning and texture to the piece that the blackout poem would not have on its own. Just as Kestenbaum extends the meaning of his blackout poems by framing them with stamped text, I have extended the meaning of my choreographed poems by framing them with silent movement.

Kestenbaum has reflected on his work;

This body of work has given me a way to create visual objects. Blacking out the majority of the text creates a redacted look… where the expected and unexpected can meet in a few words and become something else. Each piece is its own meditation. The words that remain and the words that are spoken back. The space in between.\textsuperscript{18}

The blackout poetry series turns poetry into visual objects, similar to how my choreography gives shape to my own words. “The space in between” the displayed words and the blacked-out lines is important – it creates a pause as the reader searches for the end of the line, not knowing what comes next; “The expected and unexpected can meet,”

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Figure 10: Mourners Kaddish, 14” x 10”, Stuart Kestenbaum, 2021
explained Kestenbaum. The space gives emphasis to different words that in a traditional sentence structure would not be present in the printed poem. This is an exaggerated visual representation of the power of line and stanza breaks in traditional presentations of poetic works. In Figure 10 for example, the space between “my grief” and “lives,” gives emphasis and meaning to the word “lives.” The use/effect of space and stillness is present in my choreographic work – where Kestenbaum used the visual representation to emphasize different parts of his poems, I used my second medium of dance to bring attention to different lines and meanings.

Another component of this exhibit was Kestenbaum and Webster’s collaborative work, represented by a series of multimedia paintings displaying words and images interlaced with each other, as exemplified in their piece, Entrance (Figure 11). It was difficult to discern which came first; sometimes the words were perceived first, and other times they appeared only secondary to the flowing images surrounding them. Just as the space in Kestenbaum’s blackout poems accentuated different meanings, so too do Webster’s images and Kestenbaum’s words add meaning to each other; together there is an added depth. Sometimes the meaning is in parallel, and sometimes one medium sheds light on a meaning not initially understood by the words alone. In Entrance, Webster’s images show a series of wilting and blooming flora emerging from a square section that appears to contain a dense root system. The word “entrance” would not be the first word to come to my mind. But together, the pairing makes me think of life cycles, and the old adage that when one door opens, another one closes. Life and death, blooming and
Figure 11: Entrance, Susan Webster and Stuart Kestenbaum, 2017.
wilting, are both beginnings, or entrances, into something new; a root system is an entrance into life, a connection between water, soil, and organism; thinking about the child’s curiosity and joy, a field of wildflowers or a tangle of roots can feel like entering another world, territory beyond the common human experience.

Thus, each piece is a “partnership between image and word,” as the two artists describe it. Webster and Kestenbaum explain that sometimes Webster would begin with an image that Kestenbaum would respond to with words, and then Webster would respond again with more images. Other times this process of responding would begin with Kestenbaum offering a series of words. They wrote, “we respond to one another’s work intuitively and both of us bring to the work elements that combine hope, loss, joy, and memory.” While I was the sole creator of my poems and choreographic work, the two mediums were in conversation with one another throughout my process. Similarly to how the interaction between Kestenbaum and Webster’s individual art mediums responded to each other and expanded on the meaning of the pieces, I used my second medium of dance to expand on the meaning of my poems. Furthermore, dance was not only a product that presented expanded meaning but was a way for me to process the thoughts and feelings I was experiencing, to discover for myself a new and deeper understanding. My experience with poetry and dance was a circle for which the two art forms would foster both new insights and inspiration for new work.

I was introduced to Stuart Kestenbaum while attending Shabbat services at my synagogue, Congregation Beth El in Bangor, Maine. The Rabbi had used Kestenbaum’s

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19 Lehr, Kelley et al. “Things Seemed to Be Breaking, Stuart Kestenbaum & Susan Webster, About the Show.”
20 Ibid.
poetry, as well as another poet’s, Alden Solovy, during services. It was the introduction to Kestenbaum’s poetry that drew me to the exhibit at Cove Street Arts. But in addition to Kestenbaum’s exhibit with Susan Webster, Kestenbaum and Solovy’s poetry were an inspiration to me for using poetry as prayer, for integrating allusions and direct references to my tradition’s texts into my poetry.

The two poets’ spiritual and Jewish influences show up differently in their poems; Solovy’s are more obvious, with poems such as First Coffee, which directly includes the opening lines of the traditional prayer called Modeh Ani, and then changes the ending of the traditional prayer to reflect the new meaning of his poem.21 The prayer and the poem begin with “I give thanks to you, living and everlasting God.”22 When the traditional prayer ends with gratitude for waking up in the morning, Solovy changes this in his poem to give thanks for his morning coffee. He riffs off of the traditional prayer for the two verses of his poem in Hebrew as well as with both the English translations and transliterations. For the reader who recognizes the traditional prayer, this does two things; it adds a sense of sincerity and reverence to the new poem, as well as creates a new relationship to the traditional prayer by building off of the old words with new, relatable meaning, applying it to Solovy’s (and the readers) own life. This double impact of quoting the traditional text influenced me to do the same.

In Kestenbaum’s poetry, Jewish influences appear more as a flavor and less explicitly, occasionally referencing a Jewish tradition such as in the poem “Tashlich…”23

This poem references the Jewish tradition of Tashlich by name, the ceremonial casting away of mis-steps by casting seeds and stones into moving water, but the poem itself is less specific, talking of the weight of the day being washed away by the water, and structured not like a traditional prayer or blessing. Many of Kestenbaum’s poems are titled as different prayers, such as in his publications titled Prayers and Run-on Sentences and Only Now. However, most often his prayer poems are not obviously prayer, but only hint at it for those familiar with traditional prayers. One such example is “Prayer for Mistakes” which closes with the following words: “always the beginning that is; whispering to you; with love and pity; whispering for you to almost hear.” Because I am familiar with the Jewish prayer, the Shema, which calls on people to listen, to hear, I hear hints of the Shema in Kestenbaum’s poem. Without this background knowledge the poem is still beautiful and insightful, but for those who do know, it adds a comforting sense of familiarity in ways that lend the poem, and others like it, well to being added into religious services and appreciated in other spiritual contexts. Both Kestenbaum and Solovy’s use of religious texts, implicitly and explicitly, were inspiration and guides for incorporating my own spirituality into my poetic works.

In my poem, “I Found My Faith”, I took inspiration from both Kestenbaum and Solovy in referencing the before mentioned Jewish prayer, the Shema. Similarly to Solovy I quote the prayer itself with the first two words, and then continue with my own word play on the text. I close with offering my translation for the Hebrew with the words “Listen… let grow your world in harmony with this living, everlasting sea.” This both hints at the Shema as well as the prayer titled Modeh Ani that can be translated to say “I

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give thanks to you, living and everlasting God.”25 Instead of God, I use “sea” which comes from my understanding of the Divine through Jewish mysticism; this is the sea of pure consciousness as taught by UMI and as described in the *Sefer Yetzirah* as the sea of the Divine.26 These themes that I pull from the Jewish tradition are shared throughout my poetry both explicitly and implicitly, such as in my poem titled “Connecting with Another” where I utilize words and feelings that for me, connect with the tradition, but for someone who is unfamiliar, still stands well alone.27 In my pieces such as “To recognize creation and you,” I directly incorporate the text of traditional blessings similarly to Solovy.28

Mary Oliver’s poetry regularly draws inspiration from the natural world, and her work is often insightful. There are two poems that serve as great examples; “I Go Down to the Shore”, published in her collection of poetry *A Thousand Mornings*, poses a question to the sea – the sea responds with being the sea.29 Similarly, in her poem “Roses” from her book *Felicity*, another question about existence is posed to a field of roses; they respond with the line “we are just now entirely busy being roses”.30 Oliver’s poetry is an inspiration for two reasons: utilizing metaphors and imagery of the natural world in poetry, and for the philosophy of learning from the natural world about existence and time. While the voice of the poem was looking for guidance, experiencing pain or questioning how things are, both the river and the sea were used to give the

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25 Sofer, Raquel. *Modeh Ani - Gratitude and Faithfulness (Lower Level)*.
27 Included in Appendix A.
28 Ibid.
knowledge of existence – that time keeps going and all one can do is continue to be oneself, to continue to exist, and let time take care of the rest. This was both inspiration for my writing as well as for the content and philosophies shared in my poetry.

Alice Walker’s poetry collection titled *Her Blue Body, Everything We Knew*, references people and relationships from her own life, and experiences or moments she has shared with them; this offers an intimate view into her life and personal relationships. The anthology includes her previously published collections as well as newly published poems, all written between 1965 (when she began writing what would become her first publication of poetry while she was in East Africa) and 1990; the relationships and interactions she shares with us in her poems span across these 25 years. Some poems explicitly include the names of others, such as “Johann” and “Be Nobody’s Darling” whose dedicatee is named, while others are left un-named but clearly labeled such as “My Husband Says” and “Medicine” that speaks of a grandmother figure. In my own poetry I was initially hesitant to share poems about intimate experiences, where other people could recognize themselves or be recognized by others; Alice Walker’s vulnerability was very meaningful to me, and thus became my role model in being vulnerable with my audience by sharing my own interactions and moments.

I read Walker’s collection early on during my process. Her poetry and the experiences and interactions she shared were comforts and guides for my own understanding of the world and life. This showed me that the impact of vulnerability can be more important than the comfort of playing it safe through omission. I didn’t want to

32 Ibid. 126, 193, 255, 133.
hide myself because of the possibility of making the tiniest impact on someone who would read my experiences, just as I read Walker's.\textsuperscript{33} It was a key moment in my decision to write pieces about personal moments and interactions with other people. As inspired by Walker, I wrote several poems that are included in my final product which recount specific people and shared moments or conversations.\textsuperscript{34}

I read Bria Lamonica’s disquisition initially as an example for a creative project manuscript and Honors College disquisition. Her work serves as an example of how a disquisition is structured, the content expected, as well as how to put together a creative work. However, I found that in addition to the technical example it serves, her disquisition and creative work inspired my own writings, which ended up being significant in my experience through this project. Her topic was contemporary feminist poetry, and she wrote,

Many feminists throughout the twentieth and twenty-first-centuries have used [poetry] as an outlet for their voices to be heard… Sexual oppression and harassment are issues increasingly addressed in literature, the media, and in other forms of expression. Women have been forced to live in the shadows throughout history, and it is time that their stories are heard. The power of words cannot be understated, and with the help of poetry women can continue to make great change and break the silence… As women, we need to talk about the things that no one wants to talk about. We need to find the strength to share what has been kept hidden away in our diaries or locked up in a cage inside our ribs. It is time that justice is served and women are being heard, seen, represented, and cared for.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} This pivotal moment and the inspiration I gained from Alice Walker is expressed in my poem, “Reading Poems About Another’s “You”,” which is included in Appendix B for the importance it had on my experience of this project. The poem was omitted from the final curated work for the dichotomy it would have created, as explained on page 9.

\textsuperscript{34} Found in Appendix B

Lamonica’s poetry and the dialogue she presented empowered me to add my own voice to the female poets of history, to share what had been “locked up in a cage” inside my own ribs by writing on my own experiences with sexual oppression and harassment.

Inspiration from Lamonica resulted in my poem, “How it Happened to Me”\textsuperscript{36}. It was the first time I had ever written about my experience with sexual relationship-abuse. As I had shared all of the themes for my poems and dances along the way with trusted friends and family, so too did I share this piece as well; it was the first time I had shared this experience. I found it harder to read aloud than I had expected. When I wrote it, I wrote it at once. It poured out of me and once it was out, it was done. I did not edit it, and I did not read it again until I read it aloud to share with my friends. My voice came out rough and almost monotone, and I was aware of nothing but my own lungs and my own voice. Creating and sharing this piece was crucial to the intention of this project; to mend the fractures felt within myself, to fight against emotional suppression and dissociation that I had experienced in the past, arguably greatly caused by my experience with relationship abuse. It brought this experience of abuse to the forefront, articulated for the first time. I had barely given any previous thought or time to processing the experience until I wrote this poem. But once I did, I could not get the memories out of my head for months. The words of my own poem repeated again and again in my mind, even though I did not read the poem again after sharing it with my friends (it sat in my folder for months before I returned to it while curating my work). Writing and facing the source of this poem led me to realize old patterns and responses that I had carried with me from the trauma, and this allowed me to begin mending these wounds to ultimately reclaim my body for myself and

\textsuperscript{36} Included in Appendix B.
as a sensual being. The poem was a key part of my own healing and being able to enjoy sexual intimacy for the first time since. This poem did not make it into my final curated work; its heavy topic and intense delivery stood out from the other poems included. The goal of the curation was to illustrate the cyclical process of returning closer and closer to myself, and the overall growth and shift in mindset that I experienced; this poem would have served as a distraction to the overall work just as the words of the poem kept returning to my mind as time went on. While the poem is not included in the work, it was important to the process and to fulfilling the intention of the project; the poem is included in Appendix B.

The Tao Te Ching, a poetic text, is the basis for Taoist thought. It discusses what it calls the Tao, which is an all permeating, unknowable existence. It states that if someone thinks they completely know or understand the Tao, they are missing something— they must live with the unknown of it. Taoist thought talks about surrender to the unknown and going with the flow of existence. The following lines about contention and success, as translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo, are where I find this idea in the Tao Te Ching.

Only do not contend; and you will not go wrong.
Do not contend; and therefore no one under heaven; can contend with them [the sage].
Trying to control the world? I see you won’t succeed.
Sometimes becoming low wins; sometimes staying low wins.37

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Do not contend, and a person will not go wrong; others will not be able to contend with you. In this way, control does not succeed because it invites contention. Sometimes laying low, not contending, not fighting, not controlling, is how someone wins.

I took this philosophy as a way to approach the creative process. Similarly to how Frida Kahlo created whatever came to mind, with no other considerations, I applied the Taoist philosophy of “do not contend” to my methodology. I was intentional about creating art to anything that came to mind, working to sit and engage with my thoughts and emotions instead of dismissing or suppressing the difficult thoughts and feelings that arose.

The Tao Te Ching also talks about empty, expansive space being the essence of existence.

Yet Heaven and Earth; And all the space between; Are like bellows: Empty but inexhaustible, Always producing more. Windows and doors are cut to make a room. The rooms use comes from emptiness.38

Everything, Heaven and Earth and all in between, are instances of an inexhaustible emptiness. It is this emptiness that contains value (use), that contains life and meaning and substance. At the same time, it is unknowable:

TAO endures without a name… no one under heaven can master it. Look – you won’t see it; Listen – you won’t hear it; Use it – you will never use it up. Those who grasp, lose.39

These lines, for me, mean the following: The Divine is infinite and everlasting. No one can ever know the Divine, because to define it is to lose something. A person cannot see

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38 Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching. Sections 5 and 11.
39 Ibid. Sections 32, 35 and 29.
or hear it, but a person can use it forever. If someone tries to know it all, they are inevitably missing out/missing something.

This philosophy is also very similar to Jewish mysticism, known as *Kabbalah*, which has increasingly shaped my own Jewish theology. Psalm 118:5 also quotes this philosophy of expansiveness: “From the Narrow place I called out to God who answered me with the Divine Expanse?” The idea of this inexhaustible, unknowable expanse is a central theme in my creative work, and the *Tao Te Ching* itself is explicitly referenced in my poem “Poetry in Silences.”

Kabbalism, or Jewish mysticism, holds the idea that the Divine is infinite, distanced from humanity, and present in every being. I learned about Kabbalistic thought from meditation sessions taught by the Unifying Meditation Institute (UMI). The idea stands that one can reach for and pull the Divine towards themselves. Kabbalah also presents this idea of holy or Divine sparks being scattered across existence. Every time someone performs a mitzvot, or good deed, they gather some of these shattered sparks back together, which works towards “repairing the world” - a Jewish value called *tikkun olam*. The *Sefer Yetzirah* is the textual source of the Kabbalistic meditation practice taught by UMI, that is often introduced with the metaphor of a well; in meditation a person is digging down into their own well of consciousness, one that reaches towards this removed Divine, and at the bottom of this well is “pure consciousness.” As one digs down, they uncover and dig through ‘clippot’ or boxes of judgments that keep us from reaching pure consciousness. This idea of uncovering and bubbling up of things in

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41 UnifyingMeditation.org. *Unifying Meditation Institute.*
42 Ibid.
our subconsciousness that are holding us back reflects the nature of my free-flowing creative process during this project. The Kabbalistic themes discussed above have influenced the ideas and writings in my work. The metaphor of the well comes up literally in my poem “I Am A River,” and the idea of an infinite Divine source is reflected in my poem “There Is Always More Than This.”

An article titled “Creating dances to transform inner states: A choreographic model in Dance/Movement Therapy” by H. K. Victoria outlines a number of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) terms and benefits. Victoria defines DMT as follows:

“[DMT] is based on the assumption that there exists a fundamental link between body and mind, and maintains that we heal psychological pain through expressing a full realization of our inner life through movement and dance.”

The paper references several DMT practitioners, such as Alma Hawkins and Trudi Schoop, who utilized a form of choreography in their models. It discusses how choreography and performance as part of dance music therapy can be done through the psychological processes of “externalization, transformation, and re-internalization.”

Victoria defines externalization as follows:

The projection of one’s inner state into the therapeutic environment. This inner state can include emotions, inner narratives, body sensations, images, and metaphors represented through movement and symbolism.

The two key pieces to this externalization are the projections and the movement metaphors. “Projection serves to represent the inner state externally for the purpose of gaining insight about its qualities” and “movement metaphor is the communication of

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43 My curated poems are found in Appendix A
45 Ibid. 168
46 Ibid. 169.
one’s inner state through embodied movement symbolism.”

The second section of the choreographic-DMT process is “transformation”; this refers to the transformation of the clients’ relationship and understanding of their own experiences and narratives, as addressed in the therapy experience. By externalizing their inner-states the client both articulates/shares the inner-state and witnesses it themselves; the new perspective and the act of sharing can help the “unconscious psychological material [to become] conscious.”

The final phase of the choreo-DMT process Victoria outlined was “re-internalization.” This phase occurs throughout the entire processes as the client integrates the new conscious awareness by incorporating fragmented parts of experience back into the self… wherein the choreo-client is able to understand, normalize, and accept parts of herself that may have been previously unknown or unwanted.

Learning about DMT and different therapeutic concepts has led me to think about my creative practice of choreographing to my own written work as a mode of self-therapy.

Art and Fear: Observations On the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking, by David Bayles and Ted Orland, talks about the creative process and the artists identity in relation to the art-world and the modern-world, and how those elements of being an artist can contend with one another, preventing an artist from finding and creating their own work. The book talks about embracing the creative process over conforming with the demands of the art- and modern-world, and other seemingly non-rational approaches to art making that often times allow the artist to be more impactful and meaningful in their art and

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48 Ibid. 170.
49 Ibid. 170.
artmaking experience; the premise of the book is how the artist can discover their own work.

In the first chapter, the authors state that “becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself,”⁵⁰—expanding upon this idea, one could conclude that practicing art means practicing self-acceptance, and that creating art (especially your own true art) can help the artist work towards accepting themselves. Artmaking facilitates this self-acceptance as described by the authors.

Artmaking… grants access to worlds you may otherwise never fully engage… making art allows, indeed guarantees, that you declare yourself. Art is contact… As your art develops, conceptual relationships increasingly define the shape and structure of the world you see.⁵¹

In making myself, my emotions and experiences and perspectives the subject of my art, I am then integrating my conceptual relationships into my life. I am increasing how my ideas define the shape and structure of my own behavior and my relationship to the world around me. Art is contact, with your humanity and with your subject; as my subject was my mental landscape, art was my contact with my mental landscape that allowed me to get to know it.

The authors continue that “to all viewers but yourself, what matters is the product: the finished artwork. To you, and you alone, what matters is the process: the experience of shaping that artwork,”⁵²—this reflected my methodology, focusing not on the product but on the process as a means for self-acceptance and self-realization. As “artmaking gives substance to your sense of self,”⁵³ all the works I created in this process helped me

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⁵¹ Ibid. 108-109.
⁵² Ibid. 5.
⁵³ Ibid. 13.
to discover and build my unified sense of self. As written, “lessons every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential.”54 This is why I have included in Appendix B a plethora of work that I created during this process that did not end up in the final curated product; each piece that I created along the way was a vital step that got me to where I am now.

*Art and Fear* discusses the importance of allowing for imperfection in artmaking as a way to allow for imperfections in the artist, and how critiquing art, although important, can also be harmful to the artist and their relationship to their art and their subject matter. As the authors write, “to demand perfection is to deny your… humanity… humanity is the ultimate source of your work… such imperfections… are your guides [to growth].”55 Therefore, to allow for the artist’s humanity and for their imperfections to come out in their work, instead of preventing their work;

> What is sometimes needed is simply an insulating period, a gap of pure time between the making of your art, and the time when you share it… in short, a chance [for the art] to be understood better by the maker. Then [the reactions of others] is less threatening.56

When an artist has the time to be settled with their own work, to create and discover their own relationship to it, then they are grounded enough to accept the feedback of others without it determining or damaging their own relationship to the work and in extension, to themselves. I applied this understanding to my methodology of remaining fairly insular from academic review until after my work was created, to allow myself to focus on the experience and let my own relationship to my work develop on its own accord.

55 Ibid. 30-31.
56 Ibid. 40.
The authors of *Art and Fear* give some insight into the impact of working with an art form that I am not academically experienced in. Choosing a medium I am un-trained in allowed me to move more freely in experiencing and away from technique and perfection that often pushes my work as a dancer. As the authors explain,

“the pursuit of technical excellence is [not] wrong, exactly, but simply that making it the primary goal puts the cart before the horse… art made primarily to display technical virtuosity is often beautiful… and vacant.”

Technical problems are easy because they allow the artist to avoid themselves, and to avoid making anything new; “art that deals with ideas is more interesting than art that deals with technique.” By engaging with an art form that was free of technical influences brought by training and mastery of technique, I was able to move closer and engage more fully with my subject matter as a human being with an innate inclination to create art and engage with the subject.

Along with offering insight into artmaking, speaking on the artist’s relationship to their own art and to themselves, *Art and Fear* also offered insight about finishing work. The authors wrote, “the pen has run dry… you’ve come full circle.” I felt this in my project; it went on so long from creating my choreographic works to performing and recording them, that they felt stale when I finally did; I knew my work so well that I could no longer exist *in* it, because I *was* it already. It was so much a part of me, that my mind was free to wander independently while I performed my pieces. At first, I felt like this was a bad thing, and I was frustrated – but reflecting on this book made me realize that it was evidence of my success; by recentering the process instead of the product, this

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58 Ibid. 95-97.
59 Ibid. 10.
was the exact result I wanted – full integration of my work back into myself. As the authors put it, this moment of stagnation with what an artist has already created only tells the artist that it is time to “begin cultivating the next new idea.”

My work there was done.

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Critical Analysis

The analysis of my creative work is broken up into two sections. The former talks about the relationship between poetry and dance, and how that added meaning to my work and to my experience of artmaking. The ladder section talks about my methodology for this project and how this shaped my mental landscape and served as a way to practice the habits I wanted to cultivate in my responses to emotional experiences.

Interaction of Artforms and Self

In creating my choreographic works, I presented my poems in an un-traditional manner. I wanted to emphasize my words and add deeper meaning to certain moments in the poem within the dance.

To maintain the emphasis of different sections of my poems when spoken along with the choreographic movements, the pronunciation and recitation was important; but more than this, I used my movements to add another dimension to the phrasing, incorporating both physical and audible pauses. This is particularly evident in my choreographic work, “There is Always More Than This,” in which there is an extended pause, both auditorily and physically, after the line “listening for the very first time” (Figure 12). This leads up to the sung Hebrew lines that allude to the Shema, a central prayer in Jewish liturgy. Having this transition extended implies the importance and the gravity of the Shema and the following lines. Not only does it illustrate the importance by adding this emphasis, but the pause reflects the message of the lines: listen. The moment of silence after the flow of words and movement at first appears as though the piece is ending, but then as the pause extends the viewer perceives that there is more, and a sense of anticipation
Figure 12: Video still from “I Found My Faith”, just before the audio says “Shema, Israel.”
Photo courtesy of the artist.
builds. The viewer, and myself as dancer, is more attentive to the audio and movements after this extended pause; the pause helps to center, allowing those attuned to really listen to the following lines that then call upon one to do exactly that – to listen.

Along with aligning pauses between the poem and the movements, meaning was also added by including choreography before and after the poem begins. My poem, “There is Always More Than This”, talks about an expansiveness beyond self, others, and society, but the movements add another meaning. The line “there is always more than this” is repeated; the first movement starts with hands on my heart, and on “this” are opened up to the world around me. This is the expected meaning – there is more than what I am experiencing. The second repetition had the opposite movements, ending with hands closing on the heart – this gives the interpretation of more than myself and my emotions. The poem closes with “there is the expanse” as my arms are spread wide and my gaze is pointed up and out (Figure 13). This is as expected; “the expanse” is beyond. But then my arms and gaze begin to shift slowly until they are directed forward, from which point they begin to move inward towards my own heart center (Figure 14), and ultimately running along my chest with another ‘opening-out’ movement; this gives a previously unperceived meaning – the expanse is also within me (Figure 15). In this way, my choreographic work gave new meaning to my piece that the poem alone did not convey.

In my piece, “I Am A River”, the poem was preceded by a crescendo and decrescendo of flowing movement, similarly to how Stuart Kestenbaum framed his blackout poetry series with stamped letters. The beginning section of my choreography pulls the viewer in and sweeps them away with the trance of the movement, as if they too
Figure 13: Video Still from “There is Always More Than This”, in final pose immediately after the audio ends. Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 14: Video Still from “There is Always More Than This”, mid movement before final choreographic pose.
Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 15: Video still from “There is Always More Than This,” final pose of choreography.
Photo courtesy of the artist.
are being swept into the river of the work. This gives the viewer a pseudo experience of what is being described by the poem itself, of being swept away by the people and things surrounding oneself (Figure 16). By encouraging the viewer to experience this themselves before offering the poem, it gives the viewer emotional and experiential context to understand the poem, even if the viewer does not relate to the poem in their own life.

Along with adding meaning to the viewer, this crescendo and decrescendo of embodying a river added meaning to my experience with the poem. As the dancer, I let myself get deep into the movement; but the decrescendo is key. I return to my initial position, as I am, still and solid (Figure 17). This is a metaphor for my own power. I may get swept away in the rivers around me, as articulated in the poem, but I also have the power to pull myself out of those rivers if only I can gain the self-awareness to do so. The poem illustrates this realization, and the introductory movement embodies this; it is as if the preliminary movements say “now that I have this awareness and sense-of-self has returned, let me explain” – and the dance-poem continues.

I added meaning to my work through the contrast between the qualities of movements and speech. In “I Found my Faith”, there is a stark difference between the flowing and graceful movements found in most of the piece and the section describing “stacked boxes on concrete.” My recitation puts emphasis on the hard “c” sounds and my movements are choppy, linear, and almost robotic, paired with an audible stomping that cuts into the spoken word (Figure 18). The contrast in movement quality and the contrast in recitation puts emphasis on the lifeless and challenging experience being described in
Figure 16: Video still from “I Am A River” of the crescendo of preliminary movement. Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 17: Video still from “I Am A River”, of the decrescendo of preliminary movement right before the audio begins.
Photo courtesy of the artist.
Figure 18: Video stills (a) - (g) in consecutive order of "box" shapes from “I Found My Faith”.
Photo courtesy of the artist.
this section of the poem. While this allows the viewer to perceive this emphasis, it also allows myself as dancer to embody this contrast. In reliving through embodied movement the constriction of “stacked boxes on concrete” and this depthless life I found myself living, the flowing movements offer a physical relief and joy as I return to them, just as the poem expresses the realized need to reroute my life in order to cultivate the stability and happiness I was lacking. This physical embodiment of the experience emphasized for myself the gravity of the moment I am sharing in the poem. And this emphasis is important; it is said that we must remember and learn from History as a society, and so too must we remember and learn from our own past experiences in order to prevent our own painful histories from repeating themselves.

Creative Process as a Practice for Life

The methodology for this creative project was designed to support the reintegration of the fractured parts of my identity, and to break the habitual emotional suppression and disassociation I was experiencing. My methodology mimics the Jewish spiritual new year, where every year Jews practice teshuvah, turning and returning to what is good, what is healthy, what is centered in love, turning and returning to themselves. In this way my creative process, as an act of teshuvah, was practice for how I wanted to engage with my mental and emotional experience in my day-to-day life.

The encouragement to incorporate my Jewish and spiritual identity was important in my intention to reintegrate the experience of fracture that dominated my experience and sense of self.\(^6\) I had often experienced pain and discomfort in having to disregard and

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\(^6\) As written in *Art and Fear*, part of becoming an artist is self-acceptance. Bayles and Orland. *Art and Fear*. 3.
hide the spiritual aspect of my identity in technical and scientific spaces. My Jewish identity was already important to me, but I often felt ashamed and embarrassed by it when in scientific environments that required me to disregard and cover up this part of me. By allowing my spiritual identity to be fully present in my creative work I was able to more fully accept that part of me, to cultivate a sense of pride and confidence in who I am – all aspects included. While there are still situations where it is beneficial or necessary to omit these parts of myself, I no longer feel it coming from a sense of embarrassment – I am proud of who I am and feel comfortable owning my identity, should it be appropriate or necessary to come up. For example, I have been able to confidently advocate for my religious needs, such as notifying professors and supervisors when I will be participating in a Jewish observance or Holiday that requires some work or class accommodation to be made. No longer am I notifying others of these needs while feeling ashamed but notifying others with a sense of self-worth and the belief that it is my right to be my full self, regardless of how that might inconvenience others.

The methodology for this process of engaging with and embodying various personal reflections as a means to further integrate them into my thoughts and actions, can be seen as a sort of therapy process when considering how mental states can be affected/healed through physical expression.⁶² Seeing my creative process as a form of therapy means that the argument that performance – allowing someone to bear witness to our embodied emotions and experiences – is part of the healing process.⁶³ This directly applies to the success of my creative project process and enforces the need to share my work. This

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⁶³ Ibid. 170.
concept of allowing others to bear witness also made its way into the ideas I wrote about in my poetry, coming up explicitly in my poem “The snow fell straight today – bear witness.”

I recognized that feedback is one of the most direct ways to learn about one’s own perspective; since my intention was to engage with myself, feedback on my subjects was essential to engaging fully with the pieces of my consciousness that I was bearing witness to and responding to.

Repetitive engagement with one’s own work also aids in this responding; to grow as an artist it is important to be in conversation with your work. Creating my work first in the form of poetry and then expanding and iterating on the idea in the form of dance – giving myself the room to respond authentically by responding in both word and embodiment, I was able to engage in conversation with my own work. This full engagement was necessary for me to respond to the pieces, to gain more insight and understanding as to what they are and what they mean, to learn from them and ultimately from myself, and to take those once fragmented pieces back into myself as an accepted and unified whole. We learn from our work; externalization and looking at our creations in conversation with our work, helps us to learn new things about ourselves and to grow.

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64 Included in Appendix A.
66 Ibid. 20.
67 Ibid. 28
To be in conversation with one’s own work means engaging with the strengths and weaknesses of oneself; to continue making art, an artist must learn how to allow themselves to be their full selves, existing with imperfections.68

The scary thing about creating art is that it externalizes these imperfections for the maker to look at, to face, and forces her to confront them. Feedback and conversation with others is part of this witnessing that is necessary for acceptance and growth, as utilized in the choreographic DMT described in Victoria’s article. In accounting for the purpose of this project, to reintegrate the experience of fracture and dissociation that has continued to plague my own sense of self, I applied the importance of feedback to my subject matters and to my perspectives as expressed in my creative work. I was not looking for feedback on the medium or product, that being poems and choreographic works, but was instead looking for feedback on my emotional experiences and perspectives.

A key example of how this shaped my perspective and helped me to grow is shown in the relationship between my poems “My Mother Was Alone” and “No Man is an Island.”69 The first poem talks about my perception of my Mom expressing being alone when my grandmother died. The second poem discusses a later conversation I had with her about the experience after I had shared the before mentioned poem. She amended my old understanding of the situation; it was not that she was alone, but that she felt as though she was the sole acting adult.

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68 Bayles and Orland. Art and Fear, 9.
69 Included in Appendix B.
This changed my perception of the pain from believing it came from loneliness to understanding that it was actually coming from a lack of support and partnership; this further changed my understanding of what love and happiness require – it is partnership and support that makes those emotional experiences lasting and worthwhile. My poem “No Man is an Island” continues to illustrate an amended perspective of the world that I gained throughout this process of reflective artmaking and sharing my subjects; the poem begins to close with a reflection of my mother declaring that she is not a continent anymore, that she needed to be one before to support my brother and I, but that now not only did we not need that support but she was no longer alone to offer that. This took the initial desire to be my own continent as expressed in “What My Mom Has Taught Me” to a new desire to cultivate relationships and communities that support me. It is not through independence but through partnership and support that one can cultivate true sustainable happiness, love, and satisfaction.

The conversations and feedback I received about the subjects of my work were crucial to growing my understanding of them – taking a step back, this process of feedback and overall methodology utilized in my creative project was important practice for me to apply these philosophies in my daily life. As the intention was to reintegrate fractures of myself, this meant that practicing these philosophies, or practicing my art, on all of my fractured pieces of identity, was important.\textsuperscript{70}

In consideration of the intention to break old habits of suppressed emotions and disassociation, I used the Taoist philosophy of “do not contend” and applied it to my

\textsuperscript{70} This is how Frida Kahlo’s methodology of “painting anything and everything that came to mind” was critical for my own creative process. FridaKahlo.org. \textit{Frida Kahlo Quotes}. 

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internal landscape;\textsuperscript{71} I allowed unfiltered thoughts and feelings to arise in my creative process without fighting or ignoring them. As I journaled, I wrote anything that arose, and so too I wrote poetry about anything and everything. As a reflective practice, a lot of hard emotions and realizations came out during my creative process, but the intention was to let it all flow and come, to not contend with what welled out of me in the creative process, and instead to let it happen. This creative process was practice to become more connected to my own consciousness, to prevent dissociation and emotional suppression.\textsuperscript{72} It was important for me to embody and act on the lesson of contending, and in turn my mother’s advice; as it is written in my poem, “your emotions are valid simply for the fact that you feel them”… \textit{do not contend}.\textsuperscript{73} In applying this philosophy to my creative process, I was able to practice this self-acceptance and self-witnessing. While I knew it was important to honor the thoughts and emotions I experienced, I needed to practice doing exactly that for it to become easier to do, to oppose the previous habit of suppression.

I have observed this change in my emotional experience. For example, I was able to recognize the sensation of resentment and disappointment upon encountering the successes of an ex-boyfriend. I am happy for them with their achievements and want to be moved-on from the relationship, so the old response would have been to suppress the negative emotions I felt. But instead, I honored that they existed, and I shared them; I

\textsuperscript{71} Lao-Tzu, \textit{Tao Te Ching}. 8.
\textsuperscript{72} This philosophy, of not contending with oneself, is shared in the poem “What My Mom has Taught Me”, in the lines “your emotions are valid simply for the fact that you feel them,” (Appendix A). For the fact that my thoughts and feelings came to me in the first place is what made them valid, and made them things not to be argued with but instead experienced, accepted, and processed for what they were.
\textsuperscript{73} Quoted from my poem “What My Mom Has Taught Me”, included in Appendix A.
talked to my mom about it with the simple intention of speaking and externalizing the emotional experience as a way to honor that it existed, as a means to let it go. I was able to admit to myself that the emotion was there, and then to admit to someone else that it was there; this is how my methodology of my creative process, of using the creative process as practice for the way I respond to emotional experiences, has allowed me to shape my mental landscape and responses to support growth and movement, breaking the habit of stagnation that was enabled by my previous suppression of negative emotions that had been causing me to disassociate.
Conclusion

My Dance of Life: Teshuvah was a creative project aimed at reintegrating fractured pieces of my identity. I used the creative process, of dancing and writing poetry, to practice how I wanted to live my life in regards to how I respond to my emotional and mental experience. My Dance of Life used the artistic process to practice what I wanted my mental response to emotional experiences to be. In an attempt to stop the habitual emotional suppression that I was experiencing, this project was a practice of teshuvah, of turning towards myself again and again with the goal of making self- and emotional-acceptance second nature.

By turning towards my mental and emotional landscape in the creative process, I was practicing validating and accepting what I was experiencing instead of ignoring it. The conversations and feedback that I got from others helped me to grow my understanding of my emotional and mental experiences. In sharing my creative project along the way, I was able to practice sharing my mental and emotional experiences with others, which further aided in ending the habit of internal suppression.

I realized that it was not self-stability that I wished to reach, as originally expressed in “What My Mom Has Taught Me,” but it was rather communal-stability and support that I wished to cultivate. I was able to remind myself of the hope that could be found within the unknown, and that patience and time really do heal. The shift seen in my poetry as time went on truly illustrated that.

As expressed in my poetry, I was able to learn from the world around me. I learned from my brother that starting with confidence gives one a head start. I learned

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74 This poem was the inspiration for this project, and is included in the final work in Appendix A.
from my mother that true love is one that exists in partnership with another. I learned that it truly does take a village, and the importance of surrounding ourselves with a good community. I found peace in nature, learning from the natural world that being present was more important and valuable to me than productivity.\textsuperscript{75} I experienced that fixing ourselves is one of the most important steps to helping those around us.\textsuperscript{76} I also recognized that the spaces and the company we allow ourselves to be in is one of the largest influences to our inner dialogue and emotional experience.

Over the course of completing my undergraduate career, I have perceived the greatest amount of internal and emotional growth through this creative project. I have yet to experience another episode of disassociation, and oftentimes feel myself acknowledging, admitting, and sharing emotions within a week’s time of experiencing them – as opposed to ignoring them for as long as I was able to manage. I am proud of who I am, and I have discovered ways to appreciate myself that resulted in a self-love that I have never experienced before, and I feel as though I have curated my own toolbelt for cultivating a sense of peace and comfort within myself.\textsuperscript{77} With this, I feel as though I have achieved the intent of this creative project, which was to reintegrate the experience of fracture and dissociation that has continued to plague my sense of self. I have cultivated tools and mental habits to help ground me through life’s challenges, and through this experience have arrived at a place where I feel aware and connected to my whole self.

\textsuperscript{75} This is illustrated in my poem title, “So much richer is the landscape than cars”, as seen in Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{76} I learned this from how my mother, in centering herself and mending her own life, taught me how to center and mend my own life, too.
\textsuperscript{77} As expressed in my poem, “I Built My Wetlands”, included in Appendix A.
This has been a very personal project, and a very vulnerable one to share. But I am thankful to have had the strength and external encouragement to do so; the act of sharing my project and my process has been key to me being able to bear witness to my own humanity, to my own raw emotions, and to my own imperfections. This project has been integral to cultivating my self-awareness and my self-acceptance. It has served as practice for admitting and facing my emotions, of turning towards myself continuously, as required to create this work. I wish everyone the strength and the support to listen to the wisdom around and within us, and the ability and awareness to act on it.


"Sanhedrin 4:5." Talmud. Galilee, 500 C.E.


APPENDIX A: THE CURATED WORK

The poetry manuscript is included in the following pages. For the full creative work, including videos of the choreographic pieces, please see the website: https://sarahmeyerwaldo.wix.com/honors-thesis
My Dance of Life:  
*Teshuvah* - תְּשׁוּבָה  
to turn towards one’s self
Sections:

Hineini - Here I Am
Waterfall, *crashing*
Dance: *I Found My Faith*

La’merkhav - to the (wide open) space
Ocean Waves, *splashing*
Dance: *There is Always More Than This*

Tikkun Olam - repair the world
A Well, *nourishing*
Dance: *I Am A River*
Table of Poems

Section 1: **Hineini - יִנֵֽנִּה - Here I Am**

I Found My Faith

Why?

Owls I

Returning to Lonely

Goodness does not mean You Have Arrived

Gifts are still mine without you

The Loon

Living Pains

My Rock

If Shekhinah finds me peacefully it is as this

And today was blissful

“The Sunlit Night”

Life is like watching the road

A Friend: My God who giggles at me

You shook me up, I now grow

New start rain drops for pesach

Where I found my love

Here I Am
Section 2: La’merkhav - לארקיע - to the (wide open) space

There is Always More Than This

Impermanence bit me in the ass

I Hate Plastic, Give Me Life

The Could Have Beens

Owls II

Sometimes I lose my appetite for art

Let Go Of Knowing

Sweet bliss of new closeness

I watched the tall grass

Hope is such a powerful, dangerous thing

Poetry In Silences

Scared of Love

Even dust is beautiful
Section 3: Tikkun Olam - repair the world

I Am A River

Wetlands

I would be a tree

Take Off The Fitbit

What My Mom Has Taught Me

The wisdom of 18 year old boys

My Mother is a Poet

I Built My Wetlands

It Takes A Village
Section 1: Hineini

Here I Am
Waterfall, crashing
Choreographic Work:

I Found My Faith

URL:
https://sarahmeyerwaldo.wixsite.com/honors-thesis/choreographic-works/i-found-my-faith
Section 1 Table of Contents:

I Found My Faith
Why?
Owls I
Returning to Lonely
Goodness does not mean You Have Arrived
Gifts are still mine without you
The Loon
Living Pains
My Rock
If Shekhinah finds me peacefully it is as this
And today was blissful
“The Sunlit Night”
Life is like watching the road
A Friend: My God who giggles at me
You shook me up, I now grow
New start rain drops for pesach
Where I found my love
Here I Am
I Found My Faith

I found my faith

While sitting with strangers (over twice my age)

In a warm yellow lit room

In a romper with my work boots off

Crying at existence.

I had not met myself yet.

Deaf to the songs of my soul

Deaf to the music of creation

So long silenced, I began to hear the hum

The rhythms and the melodies

Too rich, too strong, too resonant to bear

In a life not built for such vibrations

And so I cried at existence.

I knew the city I had built had to crumble

To uncover these buried wells.
Something beautiful in man-made horizons

Staggered boxes on concrete

But such infrastructure is only surface deep

   No way to life; debris and dusty hard streets

Let me be an iceberg.

The amazon, the earth.

To rebuild with a root system;

   A sustaining vibrant ecosystem

To become my own continent, as my mother can.

To be in phase with these melodies

The prospects of a beautiful seed

Still I bleed for this demolition

Birthing pains; of my self, born

sometimes things must crumble to make way for the new-

I felt the earthquake coming in that warm yellow lit room

That life would come from the rubble,

So I heard the silence pray

still the pain to decompose,
to grow through - the only way.

While crying at existence
I found my faith
   sitting with strangers (over twice my age)
   In a warm yellow lit room
   In a romper with my work boots off
   Listening, for the very first time

Sh’ma- Israel, sh’ma – sarah, sh’ma l’olam, sh’ma sh’li, hear me, hear all,
Listen
Awe - Yah
Let grow your world in harmony with the vibrations of this living, everlasting sea
– the seed is there within me

Breath

You have begun to meet me.
There was a boy when I was in middle school who would only and always respond “why” to anything that came out of my mouth.
Then it was annoying.
But he had a point.
It took me the first 19 years of my life to start questioning everything I had thought to be the complete truth.
Owls I

As my heart thuds through my chest
The owl whoos into the night, alone.
Will her calls be answered?
Waiting for who, she calls
Does the owl command with her voice?
Or does she wail?
Returning to Lonely

*more mother words*

We go back to
Are attracted to
What we know

Our beings return to what is familiar

Cycles are both healing and confining.
Some we must accept and celebrate
Others we must identify and break

I find loneliness
Often

Freed from a long relationship
Where I felt lonely
In freedom and loss
In crowds and new or known faces
In solitude and in all the slits of life
I find myself falling back
Returning to lonely.
Goodness does not mean You Have Arrived

The end of us showed me
That goodness and happiness does not mean
You have arrived.

Does anyone ever “You’ve finally made it,” and remain?

You are what made me grow out of
The child’s faith in perfection
    in love
    And destiny
to realize are mere fantasies
    (I wear women’s sizes now)
The only reliables are internal and solitary.
    But even these should never be sedentary

Why do we perpetuate dreams? Ended, hopeless, never to be fairytales, are these.

Someone, teach me to not be a dreamer,
    yet retain joy.

I am learning life does not culminate with our desires.
Is there no such thing as arrival?
Gifts are still mine without you

The gifts you granted me
Are still mine
Without you.
The Loon

*Backpacking and camping at Donnel pond public reserved lands*

The loon cries out - voices - my loneliness.

I am missing love.

The loon is lonely like me
Looking for this love.
She wails the wantings
I struggle to voice
   Only 6 miles of forest
   And a solitary tent
   Has brought me to
   Write these pains

Why is admitting to myself
My own truths
So hard?

It takes the earth's strength
To pull it out of me
I wish I could cry
Even the peepers stopped
To grieve my living pains with me
My forest minyan holds me.
Living Pains

Deteriorating
into myself.
Decomposing
into nourishing soil.
I shatter now
but after the rains
I will find myself grown.
My Rock

My rock.
Let the earth take some weight off my shoulders
You are here with me
If I can only take a moment to hear.
I do not have to carry this alone
The purpose of faith
Is to share
To sit
To have some company
through all of this.

My rock
My well
I am reaching
Searching
Calling out.

Hineini -
I am here.
if Shekhinah finds me peacefully, it is as this

A classic

Acoustic
Guitar

Fresh
snow

on
ever
greens

With golden
sunlight,

dancing stillfully
Through this wooden
window frame. Two candles
keep me ample company
The wood stove dances, too
A quiet grace as snowfall

Smelling stacked wood and moxa 
thank you mama
My acoustic guitar ambience:
a sweet silver gift my father
fostered for me.
And today was blissful

And today was blissful
Maybe the bad times aren’t so bad

Taking this broken glass,
And building my mosaic
I smiled at my loneliness;
I found peace and pleasure

This Shabbat.
“When I keep Shabbat, God watches over me”
And God called the Sabbath pleasure.

I am here.
I do not need to arrive.
I am here.
I am always here. Existing.

Baruch ata adonai, ein sof, ein od, elohi. Elohi chai v'kayam. Raba emunatekhah, elohi. 
Blessed are you adonai, without end, no other, my god. My god, alive and existing. Great is your faithfulness, my god.

You have begun to meet me.
“The Sunlit Night”

In response to the film “The Sunlit Night” directed by David Wnendt

Maybe that’s it. Maybe we all need to run away to nowhere to find ourselves. Maybe some of us need to stay there to keep ourselves. Maybe we don’t need to run away to get there. Maybe we just need to open our eyes, and breathe in the world already outside our doors.
Mine smells like pine.
Life is like watching the road
You can choose to watch the fast things
follow the cars with your eyes
and see them clearly
with the landscape blurry and missed.

Or you can choose to explore the landscape
with your eyes
Appreciating what's here with you.
With the cars blurry, there and gone in a flash,
unclear and soon forgotten
as you take in the details
Of earth and sky.

For me, I would not choose the highway.
I prefer backroads any day.
A Spring day in 2020

A Friend: My God who giggles at me

I feel comforted by the image of God watching me and my life like a little comedy story, smiling at the little scenes, the humor of small insignificancies. At least God is watching me, and smiles at my little things. How comforting it is to be seen.
You shook me up, I now grow

You shook me up
    and out rattled pieces I didn’t know were there.

Sometimes we need to be jolted
    so we may ultimately become whole.
New start rain drops for pesach

Rain patter and mourning doves
Mud and wet pine and the sweet smell of spring
At 54 degrees Fahrenheit at 5:04 pm
The evening before Pesach
The silent comfort of what will bloom.
New start.
Do you know how to love yourself yet?

Someone once proclaimed you are “not enough”
The scale has gone up
And you didn’t make the cut

You tried to be kind
But they thought it was attention seeking
You looked for connection
But rejection led to self suppression

Then giving was a one way street
So you can't help but wonder
Was I still “not enough”?

When you look at old photographs
Do you scrunch your nose and scoff?
Hiding her in side-drawers from lovers’ eyes.

I found my love lying naked
With my palm against my lung.
No four point oh, or leading role
Just me, alone, feeling at first unwhole

I found my love dancing in the mirror
Unshaven and off tune
With ginger tea
And dinner for just me

In liturgy
With hesitancy
Sitting and waiting in the folds of me.

Without your (artificially sweetened) love
the one way street was over.
I was left facing the mirror
Looking for a home for my giving.
The fact that we are here
Made me wonder, why not love the gift that materializes me here?

So I found her in nothing
 Wrapped in cold sheets
 Waiting so long for me to love her
 To listen
 To breathe

Naked, with no conditions at all
 Listening to my heartbeat
 I declared
 I am enough.
Here I Am

Here I am.

Let me stand naked before you
   Better yet, before the whole world
   Unreserved
   Unapologetically
   being me.

   Here it is

   Taking up all my space; my space
   bold and vulnerable.

   The world, (and) you,
       will of course do as they please with me

   But at last,
       no hidden wells or treasures
       left to wonder if’s

   For I am an is, here, as this.
Section 2: La’merkhav

לִמְרוּנָב - to the (wide open) space
Ocean Waves, splashing
Choreographic Work:

There Is Always More Than This

URL:  
https://sarahmeyerwaldo.wixsite.com/honors-thesis/choreographic-works/there-is-always-more-than-this
Section 2 Table of Contents:

There is Always More Than This
Impermanence bit me in the ass
I Hate Plastic, Give Me Life
The Could Have Beens
Owls II
Sometimes I lose my appetite for art
Let Go Of Knowing
Sweet bliss of new closeness
I watched the tall grass
Hope is such a powerful, dangerous thing
Poetry In Silences
Scared of Love
Even dust is beautiful
There is Always More than This

An autumn day in 2020

There is more than this.
There is
always
more than this.

High school was hard for me, as it is for many.
I got bogged down.

Coming to college, I found a new perspective.
My understanding of the scope of the world
And of life,
grew.

It was freeing.

There was more to everything
than the
Confining, glum understanding
I had in high school

I discovered the beautiful, uncontainable expanse.

There is always more than this.

More than high school, more than college,
More to
Life
than grades and awards,
than of careers, and romance

More than
you
More than
me
More
than the merely secular
More than here, 
more than there 
More than now, 
more than then.

More than the bad times, 
or of the good 
That comes 
To an end.

There is always more than this.

Impermanence is never ending, 
And so there is always more. 
Such is the way of life.

I find hope and comfort in this.

When things are hard, 
Just wait. 
You cannot know what is to come,

But this hard time 
this too shall pass 
The world isn’t ending, 
Only as you know it to be now

There is always more.

There is 
The expanse.
Impermanence bit me in the ass
But still it remains the only comfort
To heal me from life’s wounds
I hate plastic.
give me life: earth, soil, plant, tree.
give me flesh.

If I am to exist, let me truly feel what that is.
I want to throw out all the
Could have beens
But they always find their way back.

They must be able to smell my disappointment.
Owls II

It's loneliness that wails.
A fierce and stoic grief when you see her, but if you listen,
The Queen of night, don’t be fooled by her sharp talons
She too yearns, heart wailing
Who
Only the blanket of darkness, the unknowable
and thus hopeful
Void,
Offers a strange
comfort.
An Autumn day in 2020

Sometimes I lose my appetite for art

But yours

The song I always love to listen to
The shapes and colors I always enjoy to see
The poem that forever speak to me
That is right and resonant
in every moment

soul-filling

Rav Kook called Yours the fourth level of song
listen, behold, be long-
Permeating
All of time
history herstory my story
here now Time

call this? existence?

Creation
In its rawest form

The only art always in rhythm with my being

The art. Yours. Always for me.
Your art, always.
The only always.
Medicine to cleanse my often cluttered, saturated soul
clear off this cork board. Recenter
with the fourth level
drink in
The only always.

Note to a friend:
If I am ever spiralling,
immerse me here.
Let Go Of Knowing

Without language.
All of the boxes
Cut up and unlabeled –
freedom

Else you are missing something

My faith teaches ambiguity,
And comforts.

To allow for-
To live –
The unknowable;

The expanse - ein sof.
Sweet bliss of new closeness

The sweet bliss and nervousness
Of new closeness
Like sparkling bubbles
That tingle your tongue
And make you burp
With each new little hesitant sip
The dashing sparks of stars through silhouetted forest.
I watched the tall grass

Driving around
To welcome in the hours of the new day
I watched the tall grass
Sway next to the road
With the white reflection of your headlights
And I forgot where my tongue was going with this
A Spring-Summer day in 2021

**Hope is Such a Powerful, Dangerous Thing**

*on being vulnerable*

Hope is the medicine for waiting:
  powerful and dangerous.

I am feeling better, more stable
  after given hope.

Will I shatter like glass? Or harden like steel?

How I dread in hopeful ecstasy.
Poetry In Silences

There is poetry in the silences, too.
In the parts of life that pass by
On autopilot, from task
to repeated task.

But even this silence sings

For it is not the metal
That makes the bell ring
But the empty space
That fills it

Now is a phase of empty space
In my waxing and waning moon cycle

It is Adar, a time of change, a shift
Of new beginnings.
I am preparing my soils for the coming growing season
Listening to the world’s hum.
And he asked me to promise to let someone in.
My mother said on survival:
Go out, and love.

Scared of Love
Even dust is beautiful

Even dust
Is beautiful
Glittering in sunlight
Released from stagnation

jump
“Whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved the entire world”

(Talmud. Sanhedrin 4:5)
Choreographic Work:

I Am A River

URL:
https://sarahmeyerwaldo.wixsite.com/honors-thesis/choreographic-works/i-am-a-river
Section 3 Table of Contents:

I Am A River

Wetlands

I would be a tree

Take Off The Fitbit

What My Mom Has Taught Me

The wisdom of 18 year old boys

My Mother is a Poet

I Built My Wetlands

It Takes A Village
An Autumn Day in 2020

I Am A River

I am a River
And so
are you.

The whole world
all everything
flows
with its own current
around

Some rivers cross, diverge,
can get clogged, polluted
or refresh, cleanse, carry, clear
provide: nutrients, flowing
growing.

I am a River,
but I am also
a well
And blackberry brambles

The rivers around me get
snagged on my boughs
wash over me, fill me
drown me, become me
dominate my current
and dilute my chemistry.

I must be careful where
I plant my watershed
To find the rivers that
do not dominate
but amplify my own

So that my river and
my well may dance
together,
freely sharing the stage
of my conscience,
in harmony with all
that flows - turn around into with -
with me.

I am a River
And so
are you.

Be careful what your
current carries.
For you water the
world around you.

Tell me,
what grows on
your shores?
I am missing my wetlands.
There is flood and there is not; drought? No. Mudslides and oversaturation.
Soggy shoes and unsteady steps. Breathing, but not deeply - too wet to root.

If I had wetlands
The heavy rains would not break me down so easily
Each storm recovered from – a process, steadily in its own time
Their waters would be filtered, flushed out, would lend to growth.
And the event of heavy rain would be healed from,
Moved on from.

But I don’t have wetlands,
So every heavy rain is as bad as the last;
builds upon - worsened - by the past
Because last times waters were not processed, only gathered into a reservoir quick
to overfill
again and again and again; floods.

I think, between each rain, that I am better.
Things are healed,
I put my house, my walls, my windows to see the world, my door to let the world in,
I put it all back together.

But the floods come again, and I find
I was not healed from last time,
I just wasn’t cognizant that the door, while functioning, was now a little crooked.
The floods of old were still there, seeping into my foundation;
molding, unstable.
Not sturdy, not strong
Not a place to grow.

I haven’t processed the water,
only endlessly been trying to bottle it up.
At least I see the pattern now.
Bottles aren’t sustainable.
If only I had wetlands.

How do you restore one’s wetlands?
I would be a tree

If I could be anything in the world
I would be a tree
Rooted and forever reaching
Listening to the world
No rushing; timelessness
slow and steady, taking in all around you, being.
I would be
A tree
Take Off The FitBit

*Take the Fitbit off*
he suggested

; let go
be free of time
of measurements

lose some control
constraints

Exist.
What My Mom Has Taught Me

Don’t get all A’s
is one thing my mom has told me.
This means – live, have fun,
and don’t forget, self-care is most important
because you can’t live without yourself.

My mom has told me
that we’ll go dig holes in Mexico
if there are too many holes in my heart
to keep living the way I am now.

My mom has shown me that self comes first,
When she asks to be left alone after work
with Netflix, scrabble, or a book.
Even after I come in wanting to talk
or looking for help.
When she says on the phone,
“I’m going on a date now,
Let’s talk another time”
after I tell her that I got C’s for all my grades today.

When my mom puts herself first,
She’s showing me that I’m allowed to
put myself first too
Even if it upsets others,
Or doesn’t satisfy others needs.
I have the right to choose what’s right for me
Even though I may love and support you
It’s my job to choose for me
Not to please you.

My mom has told me
I don’t owe anyone a conversation.
I don’t owe anyone an explanation.
I don’t even owe myself an explanation.

“Don’t disregard yourself.
Your emotions are valid regardless. They are valid simply for the fact that you feel them,” she says.

My mom has told me that if I ever feel the need to explore drugs, I sure as hell better stick to pot. Or else she’ll never get the chance to kill me.

My mom has told me to just swear as I frick and fudge and shiitake mushroom my way through stress, pain, and each existential crises.

“Just swear,” she said. Don’t hold it in. The earth is strong. Let it help support you.

My mom is strong like the earth. Words do not shake her. She is sturdy and rooted, And doesn’t need nobody to thrive. This badass will flourish, She rules her life. Sayonara to those who try and build walls, you can’t cut through this forest. She is as strong as a mountain and unafraid to leave you – cut those ties She doesn’t ever owe you an explanation.

I am not quite the self-sustaining continent my mom is, but slowly I’m learning how to water my own roots and bloom despite the pavement. Right now, my mom is my superhero; but someday, I’ll be my own.
The wisdom of 18 year old boys

In a theatrical gentleman voice
   My little brother said
      Sarah
      You know what
      No one in the world
      has the answers
         No one
         in the world
      knows what they're doing.

Ah, the wisdom of eighteen year old boys.

   Or is it the twenty-one year olds
      naivety, to believe
      such simple statements?
On second thought, are they simple?

   If I can be sure of one thing
      in this moment

      The world is not black and white
I.

Don’t carry a knife
you will lose.

Stay in your lane

This is not your province
You cannot process this
It is not something you can figure out and know
Get back in your lane

You’re so much better off
For your ability to crumble

Maybe it wasn’t the right decision
Rationality is not certain
all you have is what is
and no windows into ifs
maybe it was not the best choice.

You may always love him
but you will be okay.
it’s your relationship to the pain and to the situation
that will change
but love may always remain.

(Do you still love José then?)

II.

I want you to learn what you need to learn here

I said
The way things in my life are going
Its turning me into a bitch
Who’s closed off to the world

Those are both great skills

My mother responded.

You don’t have to look for friends in people you’d want more from
But I’d like to believe that sometimes if you’ve met a person as sturdy and caring and grown as you They’ll understand like you do And it can be okay to go another way in the end We never know what is to come anyway.

*Throw acorns, see what sprouts* - the new figure said.

*Everyday is a chance to change something*  
If you’re not happy, do something about it.

*Resignation*  
*Is not a powerful moving force*  
*It’s a collapsing force*

*Take a self-defense class*  
III.  
Things take time.

*They may be, but you are never too late for yourself.*  
Know your worth.  
*You're very attentive to yourself, which is good.*  
Decorate your boundaries.

*Ask for help.*

*Love.*

Thank you mama.

IV.

*My mother is a poet*  
And she knows it

But she did not know  
*Her words to me*  
Are poetry  
Or that I would write them down

She did not know  
*That motherhood*  
Is the same as being a writer  
But only to be read by my soul
Who will hold her words
    Forever
And give them meaning
She may never have foreseen.
I Built My Wetlands

I built my wetlands
   In the silence of breathe
   in the hums of letters whispered and whispering
   when I alone wake.
In the sunshine
   Rising with our hearts in worship
   Through the slitted blinds before me
   While I listen remotely to others who gather as this from our own windows
   To sing and chant and say and read
   The same words again today
   That become, these sounds,
   A friend.
   And I thank Adonai for the light of day.
I built my wetlands
   In the prescribed timelessness
   Of back roads with no arrivals
   No wrong turns.
   Turning only with the whim of my heart
       On the compass of routes and roads
       Past green signs of how
       many miles to that town I’ve never touched or smelled before.
In the smell
   Of salt and swamp and pine
   That filled my growing lungs
       But once I could score high marks
       Only filtered through open windows
       And between the front door and the car
       Neglected and waiting
       For its child to wake up and come home.
   I built my wetlands by coming home.
I built my wetlands waking up
   Under branches and stars
   Under 32 degrees Fahrenheit, double bagged
   And filled with the peace of fresh air
   And the freedom of my stubbornness
   That kept me out there, dusk till dawn.
   In the poems that women across the sea of time
Whose words call out to my own
To hold me as I sift through sand
For seeds and soil
I found my wetlands
Singing and dancing
Every day terribly in the mirror
Finding laughter and love
Welling from my own depths.
It Takes A Village

You made a difference to me

There is this story of a boy who walked along the beach, throwing starfish back into the sea. A man comes up to him, and says, “what in the world are you doing? You know there are thousands of starfish on this beach, there is no way you can throw them all back to the sea, there are too many to make a difference”. The boy smiled and explained, “I know”, as he lifted another starfish from the sand and saved him back into the ocean.

To the dancers and guide who so strongly appreciated and supported my vulnerability
    I accredit my courage to share, to you. I would not be here as this without you
    You set my boat to sail.

To the man who helped my mom glow even brighter,
    the first man to recognize me, and declare it back to my ears
    who helped my mom show me what partnership in love is.

To the family who used words I wasn’t ready to wield, who validated before I even knew I needed it.

To the one who helped my positivity grow, who centered kindness and love for all.
    You are forever an inspiration to be the best human I can be.

To the open-mic jammer who said you loved to hear me singing and mistaking.
    (is it not the same as learning? experimenting)

To the family adjacent young woman who is kind in all your impressive glory
    Even in this short time, I look up to you and your grace and persistence.

To the mother who said I didn’t deserve to be treated this way by your baby.

To the TA who applauded my efforts amidst struggle and incompleteness.

To the center that connected, supported, and helped grow my spirituality
    To the friends that showed up, that smiled, and welcomed me
    To the center that celebrated, shared, and invited glee
    I never knew community as sweet as this.

To the spiritual leader who listened, understood, and offered blessing.
To the friend with the mantra
   “This is my world, you’re just living in it”
    You role modeled self-first when I didn’t know how.

To the supervisor who applauded my efforts and drive amidst my insecurities/self-doubt/self-invalidaton
    your stories and appreciation drive me when I waiver.

To the mentor who enthusiastically exaggerated your faith in me.

To the rabbi who guided me through phone and the grape vine.

To the rabbi that said, take for yourself a moment of silent rest.

To the friend who offered the deepest and calmest connection.

To my closest musician who encouraged me to learn guitar.

To the professor who asked, “are you okay?”,
   even though I was not ready to admit the truth.
    Asking was enough.

To the curly girl who complimented my good hair day.

To the mother who says, shows, listens, and learns.

To the grandmother who always loves to welcome.

To the love who called my stretch marks bad ass.

To the advisor who recognized my input of time.

To the preceptor who allowed for my humanity.

To the friend who always shows up.

To the forest that held me as I grew.

To the brother who is always there.

To my first car I wandered in.
To the river, that flowed
When I forgot to.

To all
Who shared
A Conversation
A moment
A blessing
A smile
with me.

You made a difference,
to me.

Thank you.
APPENDIX B: POEMS IMPORTANT TO THE PROCESS

Fabric of My Mind

11/30/2020

The building blocks of me.
String me along.
Journaling,
For me
Something to go back to
Re read, re visit, my mind then
To remember all the pieces
String along
Weave together the fabric of my mind
To craft me
Connect me
Integrate
Putting the puzzle pieces together
Connections

Puzzles with Grandma [Liz]

Ceramic Mask
You are 16 going on 17

- Wish I had met you when I was 17

After I learned to set my own boundaries

Not to sacrifice standards for peace

I think I could’ve taken more care

of me.
He confidently made his first smoothie

A Winter Day in 2020

My brother
Made a fruit oat smoothie
For the first time
confident
And sure

Comfortable, he asked my like.
He shared. He is kind.
It was good
How does one find confidence for new things?
Where does fear of failure, imperfections, come from?
To not do everything well immediately.
Where does that fear come from?
I, It
Has robbed me
The joy of
Living.

But imperfections are beautiful
Silly,
Substance for stories:

I need to practice my imperfect-ing

Have I missed the point?

There, I have again

How beautifully easy being imperfect being now feels

From time to time

Sometimes.

My growth.

His first-time-smoothie confidence

Amazes me.
On being a girl or my own man: A collection

12/22/20, 12/24/20

I.

I lost a good

man

And it broke my heart.

So I grew

one on my

legs.

I didn’t pack my

razor.

I didn’t

realize

how long

I’d be

here.

Heartbreak.

How you

cut

linger

grow

145
II.

I am teaching
Myself
How to stand
Sturdy
Too.

I’ll make a
Man out
Of you
Yet.

Man: strong, sturdy, independent, confident, undaunted, smooth, steady, sure.

III.

I have never wanted to be a man
But when I was little
I did not want to be a girl
Or any other
such embarrassing word.
Reading Poems About Another's “You”

2021

I’ve always shied away from referring
to others in poetry;
they too are free members of this relational
consumer society.

What if they find my art?
Won’t they recognize my memories?
They did help me weave them after all.

Or maybe they won't? Maybe the moment
fell behind the couch
into the dusty crevice
of un-missed coins and stale candy
or was tossed into a shoebox
with other momentarily sentimental souvenirs
of life no longer
lived now,
only to become
so distant and so long untouched
that only long since time has passed
will you open the shoebox as you
clear out your garage,

only to find some stray unmatching

pieces

that appear unfamiliar now

Why are these here? Should have recycled them

long ago, how silly to be storing

such somethings.

So maybe they won't remember my memories.

maybe at most

a familiar feeling

“I get that”

“I know that that's like”

“I've had similar times”

but not connect the two as one

the same taste

but not realize

it is from the same meal, the same plate.

I did cook you dinner once.

But maybe they will remember.

Will they have grown since then?

How has their copy changed, warped, revealed?
Will they recognize, and then
move on back to their lives?
or will it cause a shift
in their paradigm?

(how impactful or significant
am I, to you?
I am not offended if I
am a dusty coin or
forgotten souvenir
seen, tossed, recycled, and forever
forgotten for good
this time.
I honestly find that strangely beautiful.)

Will they reach out?
Will I want them to? Will I respond?
A time machine returning the
sentiment to the souvenir
rather, a souvenir no more; back to this current living
weaving their thread once
more into the fabric of my life.
A regression, or a beautiful pattern?
Fate? Or a mistake? (are mistakes, fate?)
Can I withstand it, either way?

Maybe they’ll never come to find these pieces of me.

Maybe these illustrations will speak to someone

who hasn't seen these scenes before.

So I will serve my memories to you, and not

Hide that I too, as hu-man, wo-man, am inevitably relational towards you.

For is that not what poetry is meant to do, any who?

To share one's self in honesty so that

daughters across the sea or over rivers

times and times away might find

and feel comings of their own birthing pains
to resonate with their awakening souls

“We too have gone through this before”

“From death, springs life,

    and such are there ups and downs”

“May my memories maybe save you

    the sting I felt from

    realizing once long overdue”

No.

I know.
Hear this, but only
experience will teach you.

Still, have this,
maybe it can help hold you
like the earth; soil, as you plant
your pained deceased,
and let grow.
My mom was alone
1/15/21

When Grandma Alice died,
    my mother and I sat
next to her body, and
watched her soul in the clouds
soar up into the blue sunlit sky

Dad was in the lobby; 3 years pre divorce
    and my uncle a state away
and my mom cried;

    I am alone in the world

Yet we smiled as we cried, the two of us, together,
watching Grandma’s soul
soar free, finally

I pray, that I won’t be so alone,
The day when my mom flies free into the sky,
to be a Jorja Smith Goodbye,

    They’re never coming back down
They belong to the stars and the clouds

But I know my mom will live forever with me,

it is because

I love her, you see

And her love and words will always carry me
To recognize creation and you

1/22/21

Barukh ato adonai eloheinu melekh ha olam, oseh ma-aseh v’reishit.

Blessed are you adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, maker of all creation.

Traditionally it may be said that you should only say this blessing once, and only to repeat it if you see something more beautiful; to say only at the most beautiful sight you’ve ever seen.

But I have my own faith,

My own relationship with God, and with the tradition.

I’ve found in my own experience, that being truly recognized by others To be seen, and have that recognition directly verbalized back to you, Even for obvious or known or simple things Can be so profoundly moving in the heart.

So as I appreciate the feeling of being recognized, I try to recognize those around me, too.

To be intentional about directly verbalizing appreciation and understanding. And for me, God is not excluded from that.
All of creation has its own unique majesty,
And is worthy of praise.
Of course, there's always harm in excess.
But when my heart falls into awe and gratitude
For the sight of creation before me,
I want to recognize that.

Brukhah at yah, eloheinu, ruakh ha olam, osah ma-aseh v’reishit.

Amen.
The snow fell straight today - bear witness

1/28/21

In the quiet of the morning, is where I find pieces
of peace and calm - loneliness comes with the quiet of the night.

The snow fell straight today
Like heavy slow-motion rain on a windless day
I wish I could shed my pains
As non-impactfully as these clouds.
Though I guess even in quiet
Clouds coat the earth, and we all bear witness.

To bear witness.

Maybe to shed pain means to let someone
bear witness to it.
How it happened to me

2/14/21

For you;
Always.

For me;
Too soon.

I waited. I delayed. Not yet.

Then.

First.
From you;
Caring.

From me;
Excitement.

Intimacy is sweet.

Consistently.

For you;
Always.

For me;
Not at all.
Then.

For you;

Wanting.

For me;

Not.

But you held delayed against me.

So then.

-

Consistently.

For you;

Always.

For me;

Not at all.

-

Then.

For you;

Wanting.

For me;

Not.

Then.
From you;
asking.

From me;
No.

But you kept asking.

So.
Again.
-
Consistently.
For you;
Always.
For me;
Not at all.
-
Then.
For you;
Wanting.
For me;
Not.

My stomach churned.
I said

No.
Again.
Consistently.

So.
You turned to stone.
You held delayed against me.
I made you wait so.
So.
S
Oh
Long.
Only
To now
Allow you
Mere rarelys.

How shameful.

You let me
Wait

160
Before.
How
Good-
Of you.

I deny
Now.
How
Bad-
Of me.
What will your friends think?

So.
You turned
Not to stone
But from me

Into
Cold quiet daggers
That glared with glazed eyes
That wouldn’t meet mine.
-
Consistently.
For you;
Always.

For me;
Not at all.
Ignoring me.
Because
-
Then.
For you;
Wanting.
For me;
Not.
I was the bad one. Keeping
From you
Caring;
Because i said no.
No meant i didn’t care since i kept
What you waited for for so long
From you now.
And that was
Wrong.
Apparently.
How shameful
Of me.

My stomach churned.
But you kept asking.
So.
Again.
-
Then.
For you;
Wanting.
For me;
Not.

From you;
Asking.
From me;
...

So.
Again.
-
Then.
For you;
Wanting.
For me;
Not.

Again.
-
Consistently.
For you;
Always.
For me;
Not at all.

Then
Again;
…
Then
Again;
…
Then
Again;
easier

Than your

Cold quiet daggers

And

Voice

Coated in thick-

flat oil-spill hate

For me.
Passivity - goodbye

2/2/21

Passivity - goodbye.
I am clearing you out of all my crevices.
You have no place in my vessel, no more.

In clearing you out, I am making room for me.
Taking up all the Sarah space in the world
making my mothers words my living way.
Mom’s correction: re-framing into spirals

3/1/21

Not a regression day
But up
Another rung
In the spiral
That is life’s growth
And movement
Talking to mom this morning

“This was the first death I've experienced where I felt supported. I could be aware and present to my grief. I didn’t have to run things.

I'm not a continent anymore.

In the most beautiful way” said mom


I was right then, about the poem I wrote about when grandma Alice died.

You were alone”

“I had loving connections around me,

But I felt like I was then

The only adult.

I had to be the adult.

But I don't have to be anymore

I became a continent because you and Asa needed a strong foundation to stand.
You don’t need that anymore. You’ve got your own rootedness within yourself.

I am not a continent anymore. No man, is an island” ~my mother, for the first time, happy
Whens: Un Done

2021

There is harm in having parents still dreaming.

A floating survival; waiting for eventually

The child does not learn how to be

Happy at now with the is in the here

Perpetual dreamer, planner of whens;

Never satisfied, never settled

Lost and empty in existence.

I won’t make the same mistake

when I become a parent.

I will learn my present-being first.

A master of now, not when’s

of doing to dones, not laters

To be an example of satisfied existing

I am pained

And I forgive them, their dreams

Because I grew up dreaming with them
It was a wonderful drug to
  survive situational living pains
  But I, too young, grew up
    blind and misled.
  unaware that the coping mechanism
    was addicting,
  and now, trying to live
    it’s own source of troubling,
      grappling pain.

I want to be sober of perpetually dreaming for when’s, un done.
See yourself in others,
But also see others without seeing yourself.
Even when their truth does not mirror your own.

He may see himself in them
But he does not see them.
And that is a loss for you and for them to grieve.
Connecting with another

6/13/21

Connecting with another;
I feel more definitions
And rules slipping away - ‘what is best’?
You are human, and so am I
And here we are, sharing our humanity
And this moment
With
Kindness grace and mercy
Heart mind soul
It is not the container that matters
But the deep, the essence, the
Love thy neighbor
As practice, not merely commandment
The doings, not the words that can
   Misconstrue and separate the oneness
Ein sof - ein od - without end - nothing else - our Divine
what is best is to honor you
honoring me
honoring
life, existence, humanity,
and all that that brings
Honor our sacred distinctions: peace and love shalom v’ahavah

6/25/21

To honor my essence, my blood, my words
To honor yourself, your blood, your words
To honor their being, their blood, their words.

Containers separate and divide
Masking our likeness(es).
But of course we have potential for sameness(es)
We are all in the image of God.

With
Kindness grace and mercy
Heart mind soul
It is not the container that matters
But the deep, the essence, the
Love thy neighbor (and thy self)
As practice, not merely commandment.
We are all capable of this.

May you honor me, may I honor you, honoring
life, existence, humanity,
and all that that brings – messy - with empathy.

(move past these containers)

As I will look for myself in you,

   Across these walls

I will also look for you

   And see you, for you, too,

   In the absence of myself.

With all the unfamiliars to me

That your container holds, in its own beauty.

From you I can expect the same.

Tell me of your words and stories, and I will tell mine.

Dig with me to find our shared Godliness,

And to honor our sacred distinctions.

OSH SHALOM BIMROMAV HU YAASEH SHALOM ALEINU V'AL KOL YISRAEL V'AL KOL YOSHVEI TEVEL V'IMRU AMEN.

May the One who creates peace in the heavens create peace for us, for all who struggle with G-d, and for all beings; and let us say: Amen.

WHAT GOD IS FOR

7/1/21
And I lit a candle

To be my God

Reminder.

You are here with me.

I do not carry this weight alone.
my love history

7/10/21

My first love wasn’t but gave me ‘done with firsts’ (and other things)
and then I struggle with attraction
My second gave me standards and
Taught me timelessness.
Then an app lead me to learn about coffee dates
A kiss came around and showed me check boxes don’t make it
A date came later and I learned I can ignore the calculator but need to listen to my eyes
And remember the checkboxes won’t do
Then a crush came around
And I learned I don’t struggle with attraction
I just need to be attracted to your mind, too
But a DM slid in after and I’m giving him a chance still
Cause while apps give options, texting is exhausting, and checkboxes don’t work anyway
And the crush has me friend zoned
But the crush still gave me favorites
And aren’t favorites just our claiming our right to choose?
AUTHOR’S BIO

Sarah Meyer-Waldo grew up in West Bath Maine with her parents, Julie Meyer and Jonathan Waldo, and her younger brother, Asa. She started participating in musical theater performances at the age of 12, which led her to begin studying ballet at the age of 13 at Elizabeth Drucker’s Ballet School in Topsham, Maine. She has also studied at Ballet Chicago, Thomas School of Dance in Bangor, Maine, and with Miss Annabelle’s Dance Studio in Midcoast Maine. In high school she choreographed musicals for middle and high school aged students and in college taught ballet classes on campus and for upper elementary through college aged students in the greater Bangor area.

Sarah is the great granddaughter of Abraham Moshin, a Jewish refugee who fled the pogroms in Ukraine in 1903. The name Moshin was changed to Meyer at Ellis Island. The family story goes that Moshin came from an orthodox family in Ukraine, but when his father was killed while Moshin was still young, Moshin became an atheist. He left behind three sisters and his mother when he fled to the United States in 1903. Moshin had three sons, Paul, Roger, and Sarah’s maternal grandfather, Allen Meyer.

While raised with a Jewish identity, Sarah was not raised in a religious setting; the descendants of Moshin remained connected to Judaism but disconnected from religion, as he himself was. Unaffiliated and uninvolved with a synagogue growing up, Sarah’s religious Jewish experience consisted of lighting Shabbat candles at home and the occasional family Passover seder. Her religious and spiritual involvement grew when she began her undergraduate career at the University of Maine and became involved in the campus Hillel – the Jewish student organization. During college she has served three years as the Hillel president, as well as two years on the Board of Directors of
Congregation Beth El Bangor (CBE). She has also taught religious school and led services and other spiritual programs at CBE in this time. Her self-grown Jewish spiritual and religious identities have become increasingly important in her life, and have greatly influenced her creative work, *My Dance of Life: Teshuvah*, drawing from feelings and ideas from the tradition.

Sarah will be graduating in May 2022 with a B.S in Mechanical Engineering and a minor in Robotics. After graduation, Sarah will start a full-time job as a Software Engineer at PTC at their Kepware/Portland, ME office. Along with practicing dance and poetry, Sarah has always loved to sing, occasionally paints for fun, and is currently learning how to play guitar. She also enjoys hiking and camping and otherwise spending time outdoors, both in movement and in meditation. She feels most alive while practicing art, immersed in the outdoors, or engaging with her Jewish heritage and community.