

The Mnemonics of the Heart: Marinating in the Stories of Scripture
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I am somewhat the fish out of water at this symposium as I am not a scholar, but a storyteller. Specifically, I am a *biblical* storyteller. Operationalized, this means that I make my living at telling the stories of the Old and New Testaments in performances that are very close to the words of the text in which they have been traditioned in English translation.

Most people have no inkling what this means until they have experienced it. A few thousand years of hearing scriptures as ink on paper has rendered audiences, both within the church (where most of my work is done) and without the church, to regard these texts as dusty, dull and dead. When, as a Presbyterian parish minister, I first “told” the passion narrative from Mark’s gospel in a worship service 24 years ago, the congregation greeted me enthusiastically after the service, pumping my hand with excitement and saying, “That was great! I have never heard anything like that! Where did you get that script?!”

For me the difficulty of communicating what exactly biblical storytelling is constitutes more than intellectual exercise; it is as well a formidable marketing challenge as well. I define biblical storytelling as

a spiritual discipline which entails the lively interpretation, expression and animation of a narrative text of the Old or New Testaments which has first been deeply internalized and is then remembranced, embodied, breathed and voiced by a teller/performer as a sacred event in community with an audience/congregation.

But a definition is not nearly so helpful as a demonstration. And so I often begin my biblical storytelling workshops with an experiential segment, first standing behind a lectern and *reading* to the participants a story from one of the gospels and then stepping out from behind the lectern and *telling* them that same story virtually word-for-word, in each instance asking them to monitor their vital signs, to observe what is going on inside them: their reactions, thoughts, feelings, attentiveness, inner states, blood pressure, pulse---to get a snapshot of their interior responses to the reading and the then the telling of the story. I am careful to read aloud deliberately in a manner that is, I think, typical of the way in which scripture is read aloud in worship---not utterly devoid of variation, but with the kind of minimalist expression that is often the normative “carrier signal” for most out loud delivery of print text in our culture. After the reading, following a few moments silent reflection to re-collect the data of the inner experience, I tell the story, asking the listeners again to monitor the data. Then we debrief the experience. Inevitably, the participants make the following observations:

- 1) The telling is more lively, more “life-like” than the reading.
- 2) The initial reaction of many to the reading is: Oh, I already know this, after which they check out.
- 3) The effort required to pay attention to the reading contrasts sharply

with the virtual impossibility of not being attentive to the telling.

4) The telling seems to reach out and grab the listeners, engaging them at the level of the affective; listeners report that the communication is about feelings, characters and events. The reading, however, is as being about *ideas*.

5) The physical act of the reading, which I undertake from behind the lectern, hides virtually everything except my talking head—a further indication that the communication is about ideas lifted off the page by the reader's optical scanner, converted to sound in the reader's central processing unit, and broadcast across space to the listeners' auditory receivers to be downloaded into their central procession units for them to *think* about. When I step out into the performance space before the audience, my body becomes an instrument for the communicative act. Storytelling is an embodied event; everything about the reading attempts to render it disembodied (or at least to create the *illusion* of disembodiment, as though vocalization does not entail the movement of the gut, the rush of vapor from the lung sacks, the slapping of mucus membranes, etc.).

6) The reading “sounds like” print, reflective of the sameness of each page, the neat alignment of the justified margins, the square cut corners, the plodding of word after inky word. But the telling follows the a different rhythmic grammar: the variable pulse of life.

7) Although the reading requires about half the time of the telling, the felt time of the reading is *longer* than the felt time of the telling as the communicative act of storytelling creates its own sense of “story time.”

8) Stepping out from behind the lectern, making unbroken eye contact with the audience, and being “unprotected” by the book (which in the act of reading functions as both barrier and shield) results in an intimacy and immediacy that is lacking in the reading. This reality entails a certain vulnerability both for teller and audience as the only thing that comes between them is the air that vibrates with sound.)

9) The telling feels interactive, the reading monological.

10) The reading feels like a rendering of an account of events that happened a long, long time ago in a faraway place (“there” and “then”). The telling, on the other hand, seems to “happen,” unfolding before the audience's very eyes and ears in the present moment (“here” and “now”), an experience that is often summed up in the response: I felt that I was *there*.

What I want to bring to this forum is the fruit of nearly a quarter century's experience as a practitioner of biblical storytelling. That I am not a scholar may, I hope, excuse the highly speculative nature of my research and the considerable gaps that it displays. This research has been more experiential and anecdotal than rigorous and academic, more practical than theoretical. Perhaps I will have served my purpose merely to posing the questions of a dilettante to those who *do* have the expertise, the tools and the time to conduct the proper research while I am busy at the task of making a living by performing.

In my “how-to” biblical storytelling workshops I teach a method for learning the biblical stories by heart, a method which I only semi-facetiously call “The Spiritual/Synaesthetic/Multiple Intelligences Approach,” or somewhat *yet more* facetiously, “St. Ignatius meets Stanislavsky.” I suggest that *learning the stories by heart* is a different process from memorizing. I go so far as to suggest avoidance of the “M-word” altogether, not only because of its emotionally charged negative connotations, but that terminology does not adequately describe the whole-person process of learning by heart that I want to commend, a process which I sometimes describe in shorthand as “marinating in the story.” Most western, contemporary thinking considers memorization as an activity which happens in the head. Memorizing proceeds in linear fashion, bit by bit, in sequence. The end result is often a “spiel,” a rote string of words resembling that old fashioned string of Christmas lights, which, when one bulb burns out, the whole string is rendered powerless. The memorizer using this process learns the text in such a way that a breakdown, a forgotten word or phrase, results in a virtual paralysis. A rote-learned recitation of this type can entail a process that is essentially auditory (words as sounds) or one that is primarily visual (committing the ink-on-the-page words to memory) or perhaps a combination of the two with one being dominant. Learning by heart, however, involves the whole person. As in Hebrew anatomy and physiology, the heart was a metaphor for the whole person—the place at the center of the person where thinking, feeling and deciding intersected, so learning by heart suggests the engagement of the whole self with the text. The text takes up residence in the center of the learner and is not merely “stored” in the head. The heart in Hebrew thinking was the seat of memory, and that heart was known to God.

Popular contemporary imagination follows the lead of science in identifying memory as cerebral and locating it in the head as a function of the brain. But I believe that memory is more anatomically diffuse than this. Indeed, the head-memory metaphor is severely limiting and can even constitute a virtual impediment to the process of learning by heart—a process, I believe, was at the core of the Israelite spiritual discipline of “keeping the words.” I suggest that rather than memorize the words of a biblical story, a teller needs to be *steeped* in them, saturated with them, marinated in them much in the way in which chess champion, Bruce Pandolfini, marinated in the “texts” of past chess games to achieve a winning sense of the game. Determined to improve on his natural talent for the game, Pandolfini bought a two-volume set (in Russian) of the 500 games played by Soviet chess master Mikhail Botvinnik. He spent a year studying these games, and then decided to commit to memory sixty games, move for move. He said:

If I lost a position in my mind, which was quite common at first, I started again from the first move. To remember the moves I would create a story line that tied all the logic of the game together... And then you develop an intuitive sense of how to handle similar positions, and your moves flow naturally. (Hoffman, p. 67)

Something like this “intuitive sense” that Pandolfini describes—albeit in the fashion of one who has been “brain washed” (!) to conceive of the locus of memory as the head—is what happens when we have rehearsed the story “inside.” This is, I think, something like what Ignatius was up to in his *Exercitia Spiritualis* (hence the tongue-in-cheek reference to him in my caricature of my method). But even more importantly, I suspect that such a process may well be like the one by

means of which Jesus of Nazareth was educated.

Of course, we cannot know much for sure about Jesus' education. The best information we have about pedagogy in the Galilee comes from about 100 years after the period of Jesus' residency there—the latter time as in the diaspora generally characterized by a proliferation of the institution known as the *bet sefer*. But to retroject the *bet sefer* into the Galilee of the first third of the first century of the common era would be a serious anachronism. We may only speculate about the childhood education of Jesus on the basis of circumstantial evidence and guesswork. I once heard Ken Bailey muse that Jesus' aptitude must have been recognized early on, perhaps as early as age four, and that he might well have been assigned to study with the *haburim* in Nazareth. This instruction likely would have entailed a method of recitation, response and repetition—telling and retelling the oral torah and traditions known in the “folk narrative” of the Galileans. It is precisely about this methodology, lost in the mists of history, that I want to speculate further.

If there is any historical residue Luke's account of the boy Jesus in the Jerusalem temple, we must note that the story reports that “all those who heard him were surprised at his intelligence and his answers” (Luke 2:47). The CEV translates *te sunesei* as “how much he knew.” What Jesus knew, he knew by heart. Heart learning is the often overlooked first corollary of the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6, the so-called “greatest commandment”: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (6:4-5). Following the *shema* come five rather urgent suggestions concerning how this love of God is to be perpetuated generation after generation. In my experience—and I do this little quiz frequently in my workshops—many people remember #5: “Write these things on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (6:9); we might call this “publicize.” Some remember #4: “Bind them as a sign on your hand and as an emblem on your forehead” (6:8), in other words, wear them like jewelry; we might call this “symbolize” (though I can barely resist the alternative, “accessorize.”). Many will also remember #3: “Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (6:7b); we might call that “theologize.” And nearly everyone can remember #2: “Recite them to your children” (6:7a)—“catechize.” But *nearly no one* can recall the corollary that occupies the #1 slot following immediately upon the *shema*: “Keep these words that I am commanding you today *in your heart*” (6:6)—“internalize.” I suspect that this metaphor reveals a fundamental understanding of ancient Israel in their experience of and relationship with the text, a veritable window into an appreciation of Hebrew spirituality: *that the primary repository of the tradition is the memory of the heart*—both the heart of the individual and the collective heart, i.e., “memory,” of the community.

Heart learning is different from head learning. It is not merely “memorizing,” but creating *deep* memory as Daniel Goleman observes:

The emotional/rational dichotomy approximates the folk distinction between “heart” and “head”; knowing something is right “in your heart” is a different order of conviction somehow, a deeper kind of certainty than thinking so with your rational mind. There is a steady gradient in the ratio of

rational-to-emotional control over the mind; the more intense the feeling, the more dominant the emotional mind becomes and the more ineffectual the rational. (p. 8f)

Of course, what Deuteronomy means by “heart” and what Goleman intends are two different things. Nonetheless, although the heart is not primarily an organ of *feeling* in the ancient scheme of things, its function *does* include feeling as well as thinking. What we experience deeply emotionally, we tend to remember. Aquinas observed that a learner “should apply interest and emotional energy to the things [s/]he wants to remember: because the more deeply something is impressed upon the soul, the less does it drop out of the soul” (Summa Theologica II-II, q. 49, a. 1, ad 2). One technique of Greco-Roman antiquity to ensure the lodging of content deep in students’ memory (a method which modern sensibilities find utterly repugnant) was literally to beat the memory into them so that the emotion of the pain would serve as the hook for the memory’s retrieval.

But is the requirement of Deuteronomy 6:6 “merely” a figure of speech, or did the commandment to learn by heart allude to commonly known methodology for the internalization of the texts. Does this reference give us any clue as to a technique for “keeping the words” in a culture that was essentially oral? We tend to regard this corollary as a quaint figure of speech. But that may be because we who have mastered the technologies of literacy can hardly conceive of living and learning in an oral/aural world.

My grandmother once told me that remembered when her childhood house was wired with electricity. I asked her what that was like, imagining that lighting the house must have seemed and almost magical transformation. She thought for a moment and then said, “My recollection is that my world suddenly became dark.”

I said, “What?! Explain that to me, Grandma!”

She answered, “Well, before we got electricity, we had gas, and Pappa would go around at dusk and light all the gas lights in the house, so that the whole house was *filled* with light. But when the electricity came, and each room had its own incandescent bulb hanging by a wire, Pappa made us turn out the light (in those days one did literally “turn” out the light) when we left the room. So my whole world became dark.

So much for my preconceptions about the advent miracle of electric lights! And so much, too, about the retrojections that we as literate people (people who have mastered the technologies of literary) cast upon pre-literate, oral culture. Most of what we have thought about these cultures is not only wrong, but 180 degrees from right! We have come to equate literacy with learning and, conversely, illiteracy with ignorance and stupidity. This shows in the common use of the phrase “computer illiterate,” i.e., “computer stupid.” In fact, throughout much of antiquity the wisest sages (Homer, for example) could not read or write a word. All knowledge was communicated orally, and the measure of one’s academic achievement, so to say, was how much one had stored in the memory—or, I would argue as it relates to the scriptures, how much was carried in the heart.

The history of human communications cultures may be divided into four very unequal and overlapping segments: oral (from prehistoric times until well beyond the middle ages), then

literate---first chirographic (from about 3000 B.C. to well into the Renaissance), then print (from Gutenberg to the present)---and now electronic/digital (from the early 20th Century to the present). Some have labeled these successive communications cultures as pre-literate, literate, print-literate and post-literate (ironically betraying a certain chauvinism as regards literacy). Each of these cultures entailed different ways of thinking and different systems of pedagogy.

We note that Jesus of Nazareth appeared on the historical scene in the midst of a culture which was semi-literate, but fundamentally oral. Some could read, but most did not as there was precious little to be read. As Richard Horsley (Hearing the Whole Story) has observed about the politics of literacy in Galilee of the first century of the Common Era, the Gospel of Mark pits Jesus and his non-literate entourage against the literate “machine” of the temple system, which is in oppressive cahoots, as it were, with the Roman occupiers—for all of whom literacy is a technology of subjugation, a tool of oppression. We think of Jesus’ scathing indictment of the scribes who will “receive greater condemnation” because they use their technological skill to “devour widow’s houses” (Mark 12:38-40). It is even within the realm of possibility (albeit unlikely) that Jesus never mastered literacy skills whatsoever. As John P. Meier notes, “...in an oral culture one could theoretically be an effective teacher...without engaging in reading or writing. So the question remains: Was Jesus literate or illiterate?” (p. 268)

Furthermore, all of what was read in antiquity was read aloud, usually in public. The very physical act and common understanding of the process reading, as Susan Niditch (Oral World and Written Word) has convincingly argued, was quite different from what we, as people who live in world of books—50,000 of them newly brought to print each year in this country alone!—think of as “reading” two millennia later. The two communication systems, oral and literate, interacted with each other, sometimes in symbiosis, sometimes in tension and often even in conflict with one another. The oral communication of sacred “texts” (a word which originally denoted its oral performance and only later came to mean ink on paper) was generally considered to be superior to the written version, in part because the living voice renders the communication an experience of vitality. As Robert Pattison notes in On Literacy, Papias, Bishop of Heiropolis, circa 130 C.E. sought to find those still living who had had some acquaintance with the first disciples, because, he said, “I did not suppose that what I got from books would help me as much as the living, surviving voice” (p. 71). The oral tradition was considered not only more vital and expressive, but more durable, trustworthy and accurate as well. After all, a written text could be secretly amended or edited “out of earshot” of the community. One can almost imagine a hypothetical parent of this transitional time exclaiming, “These kids and their books today! When I was a kid, you had to know something! What is the world coming to if you look everything up in a book?”

An echo of this preferential attitude toward the oral may be found in the dialogue between Jesus and the Devil in Luke’s account of the temptation in the wilderness. Jesus counters the first two temptations (to turn stone into bread and to worship the Devil for personal gain) by responding, “It is written...” (*gegraptai*). The Devil then puts him on the peak of the temple wall and invites Jesus to throw himself down, because, the Devil says, “It is *written* (emphasis mine), ‘God will give his angels charge of you to protect you...’ But Jesus counters with, “It is *said* (*eiretai*)...” In other words, “it is *said*” trumps “it is *written*.”

As recently as 1976 Robert Cootes could write in that year’s supplemental volume to the

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible:

Although some parts of the OT may have preserved genuinely oral compositions, biblical literature seems for the most part to belong to a transitional stage during which there developed an interplay among oral tradition, MS tradition, and memory. It is precisely this intermediate stage that is at present least understood (p. 916)

And it is still largely not understood thirty years later. But progress is being made, and I am grateful that this study is being undertaken in my lifetime, study that is turning biblical studies on its ear—or perhaps *to* its ear. I have been graced by a long-standing friendship with my mentor and colleague, Thomas Boomershine, co-founder of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, an organization which I now serve as Executive Director. The mission of NOBS is to encourage the learning and telling of biblical stories. My reading of the work Boomershine, Walter Ong, Werner Kelber, William Graham, Richard Horsley, Jonathan Draper, Susan Niditch, and others has led me to conceive of the written narrative texts of the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and even the Revelation to John as something like the “fossil record” of a lively storytelling tradition. I have come to the conclusion that much of biblical studies since the time of Enlightenment has been like paleontology—not that there is anything wrong with the study of dead bones! After all, much can be learned from a critical analysis of the fossil record, but there is a distinct difference between the experience of seeing a reconstruction of a velociraptor from bones and wire on the one hand and being caught in a room with the living, breathing beast on the other! Much of what gets lost in translation, or in the reduction to bones, if you will, is what belongs to the *performance* of the texts. It is what Papias sought to experience: “the living, breathing voice” produced by a moving, animated body and conveyed in gesture and facial expression, in demeanor and tone of voice, in attitude and stance and ambiance and effect and “presence.” These are the aspects of the story that are to be found in the “white fire” of the page around the “black fire” of the ink. The art of communication was fundamental to all learning in antiquity. Just so the study of rhetoric occupied a central place in education in Greco-Roman antiquity it was the study of rhetoric.

The study of rhetoric had five sub-specialties known as “canons”: invention (*inventio*, *heurisis*), arrangement (*dispositio*, *taxis*), style (*elocutio*, *lexis*), memory (*memoria*, *mneme*), and delivery (*actio*, *hypokrisis*). In recent years the fourth canon, memory, has been restored to its former place of honor and prominence as several studies have branded as flawed the usual explanations for its disappearance from the canons. Ironically, no less a champion of the rediscovery of rhetoric for modernity than Edward J. Corbett echoed and perpetuated the widely-held “urban legend” of the demise of *memoria* in his book Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student:

The fourth part of rhetoric was *memoria* (Greek, *mneme*) concerned with the memorizing of speeches. Of all the five parts of rhetoric, *memoria* was the one that received the least attention in the rhetoric books. The reason

for the neglect of this aspect of rhetoric is probably that not much can be said, in a theoretical way, about the process of memorizing; and after rhetoric came to be concerned mainly with written discourse, there was no further need to deal with memorizing . . . There will be no consideration in this book of this aspect of rhetoric. (p. 38)

But *memoria* was more than the simple retention of material in the memory. It was the unifying principle the communicative act. It was widely understood that memory is not only retentive, inventive as well.

One question for further discussion/research is: To what extent was this canon of classical rhetoric “in the water,” so to say, in Palestine generally and in the time of Jesus of Nazareth specifically? Did the proximity of Sepphoris to Nazareth have any bearing on the education of Jesus? Could rhetoric have been taught for half a millennium in and around Palestine without its having seeped into the ground water of Jewish/Galilean consciousness? Would not frequent encounters with the public performance of texts in the Greco-Roman world—even those encounters experienced by a subjugated culture determined to keep itself apart from all things Greek or (later) Roman—not have been influential in the way that MTV is influential today in Iran or the way that knowledge is common in our culture of certain contemporary television show titles and characters and plot lines even among those (myself included) who do not *watch* these shows? More specifically, did the techniques of spacial/visual memory attributed to Simonides of Ceos (c. 500 B.C.E.) by Cicero find their way into the storytelling tradition of post-exilic Judaism? And more generally yet, can we not infer, knowing what we know about the process of storytelling, that what audiences experienced in the performance of their sacred texts was not disembodied sounds, but lively, animated portrayals that elicited visualizations and unfolded in “storytelling geography”?

I think we tend to conceive of the practice of the performance of sacred texts in antiquity as a kind of droning, mechanical, rote drudgery, the almost mindless repetition of sounds. But I wonder if this may not be an anachronistic retrojection based in our experience of what more recently (in historical terms) became normative once the texts got fixed into rigid Gutenbergian columns. Gil Bartholomew cites Amos Wilder to the effect that:

In ancient time....oral speech...was less inhibited than today. It is suggestive that in teaching the rabbis besides using cantillation also used ‘didactic facial expression,’ as well as ‘gestures and bodily movements to impart dramatic shape to the doctrinal material. (The quotations are citations from Gerhardsson’s Memory and Manuscript, p. 168.) (p. 92)

The old Edison cylinder phonograph recordings were played by a process that was the mirror image of how they were made. The performers would sing or speak into a large cone, at the small end of which a needle would vibrate, writing a pattern of squiggles in soft wax. When the wax was hardened, the recording needle became the playing needle and “microphone” cone became an amplifying “speaker.” I wonder if perhaps we can work our way back from the literary

record to find clues as to the live performance of the texts and back farther yet to the process by which those stories were learned by heart. David Reinking commenting on the work of Walter Ong as it relates to biblical stories notes:

These biblical passages obviously are written records, but they come from an orally constituted sensibility and tradition. They are not felt as thing-like, but as reconstitutions of events in time. Orally presented sequences are always occurrences in time, impossible to 'examine', because they are not presented visually but rather are utterances which are heard. In a primary oral culture or a culture with heavy oral residue, even genealogies are not 'lists' of data but rather 'memory of songs sung' (<http://www.coe.uga.edu/reading/faculty/dreinking/ONG.html>).

My own singing performance of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 has led me to a performance-generated understanding of how the story must have been told and how it was learned. It is a story of purpose and structure—the kind of tripartite narrative structure that is almost universal, the sort that we encounter in the story of Goldilocks and Three Bears. It is a story built around the allusions to the women—a shorthand “wink-wink, nod-nod” that recalls the stories of Tamar’s tricking her father-in-law into impregnating her, Rahab’s the prostitute’s hospitality to Israel’s spies, the foreigner Ruth’s insinuation of her Moabite identity into the bloodline, and the mysterious way in which God worked through David’s adultery with “the wife of Uriah” to put into context the present situation of Mary’s inexplicable pregnancy. It is a story built around the numerology of 14 (twice the holy number, seven). It is a story choreographed around the three epochal divisions, the last one being the audience’s opportunity to join in as they “get it,” shouting with the delight of discovery, “Fourteen generations!”

Similarly, my own experience with the story of Elijah and Elisha (II Kings 2.1ff) has led me to believe that what we have in the performance of this story is a bit of comic relief at the very serious plot juncture of Elijah’s being taken up. (The stories of the Hebrew Scriptures often turn to humor at moments of high seriousness, e.g., the arguing of Moses with God at the burning bush, the laughter of Sarah as the Lord visits, Abraham’s negotiating with God over Sodom, the entire story of Jonah.) The story has that Goldilockan structure, repeating into familiarity patterns that the audience will quickly discern. What the “fossil record” of the ink text is not good at revealing is the tongue-in-cheek. When Elisha requests a double portion of his mentor’s spirit, Elijah avers as how this is a difficult thing, that it can only happen “if you see me as I am taken up.” The sense is, I believe, “I don’t *know* (tongue-in-cheek); this is only possible if you happen to be around when I am taken away from you!” The story has established before this that Elisha *has* followed Elijah like a little shadow from Gilead to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho and from Jericho across the Jordan. He’s stuck to his mentor like glue! *Of course* he’ll be around!

The techniques of learning the story by heart, I am suggesting, may well have been more involved, entailing more of a whole-person methodology than what we are accustomed to thinking of. I wonder if Jesus of Nazareth, who, for all the titles ascribed to him in the New Testament, is perhaps best described by the one that is missing, “itinerant storyteller,” used

something like this method to learn the stories he told. The record preserved in the memory of the gospels makes little reference to his having told “biblical stories,” although there are mentions of his allusions to such. No doubt many of his stories/parables were given repeat performances as he wandered from village to village in the Galilee. Could his technique and that of others like him have entailed just such a process that may have included elements of

- the use of some form of scripting or written mnemonic
- observing the verbal threads (repeated words or phrases)
- marking assonances, consonances and onomatopoeia
- awareness of structural patterns (particularly “threeness”)
- engaging in semantic mapping
- undertaking visualization (the technique taught by Simonides of “placement”)
- establishing story geography (placement of events/characters/objects in an imaginary three-dimensional space)
- using muscle memory/choreography
- employing emotional memory and character memory
- being attentive to the musicality (rhythm, pitch, tonality, cantillation)
- cultivating synaesthesia (taking note of smells, tastes, sounds, sights, textures)
- borrowing mnemonics (chiasmus, alphabets, numerologicals)
- and practicing repetition.

When I finally get around to writing practical guide to using this “spiritual/synaesthetic/multiple intelligences” approach to learning the stories of scripture my book biblical storytelling, I have in mind to title a key chapter, “Biblical Storytelling as a Bodily Function.” Learning the stories by heart entails a recognition that more than the head is involved in the process. Nor is the deep learning of the texts merely a matter of learning words. As Gene Rooney in his handbook *Metaphors for Metamorphosis* writes:

Story is much more than words. It is even more than a mental construct. It is also muscle patterns and a complex set of tensions and movements. When you have different perspectives about yourself and about the world, they affect your thinking, of course, but they also affect the way you feel and move. Your feelings respond to message from your brain just as your brain responds to messages from your body.... Physiology, psychology and spirituality not only interact, they are intricately interconnected.... Each major mental and emotional state has corresponding postures as well as thought patterns.... Thus your Story is told not only in what you believe and say, but also in how you move and stand. To fully affect change in one’s Story, then, one must not only change the Story’s verbal content, the change must also be integrated into behavior. (pp. 12-13)

Livo and Reitz as well in their standard handbook for storytelling performance observe that what they call “paralinguistic elements...are an intrinsic part of story content and form a dimension of the

definition of (oral) “story” (p. 119). These descriptions of what transpires in the telling of a story call to mind Howard Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences. Gardner enumerates eight “intelligences”—all of them, it seems to me, finding resonance with elements of the practice of learning and telling biblical stories that I have described:

- linguistic intelligence (words)
- logical-mathematical intelligence (numbers/logic)
- spatial intelligence (pictures)
- musical intelligence (music)
- intrapersonal intelligence (self-reflection)
- bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (physical experience)
- interpersonal intelligence (social experience)
- naturalist intelligence (experience in the natural world).

This method differs from memorizing in the usual sense of the term in that it is not concerned initially with having the words exactly. This process begins with the whole, with the gestalt, gradually circling in on the words of the text to clothe the memory in the words of the tradition. The Network of Biblical Storytellers sets a standard of 95% content accuracy and 75% verbal accuracy to allow for the kind of fluidity that storytelling (vs. recitation of memorized text) represents—a method akin to that commended by St. John Chrysostom for families to teach the stories of the scriptures to their children and perhaps not far from that used by Jesus of Nazareth himself:

When a child really knows the story, wait a few days, and then one evening say to him, “Tell me the story of the two brothers.” And if he begins to tell you about Cain and Abel, stop him and say, “No, I don’t mean that one, I mean the one about the other two brothers, the ones whose father gave them a blessing.” Then remind him of a few important details without mentioning the brothers’ names. When he has told you the whole story properly, go on to the next part (Inan. glor., 19f).

This is how one “gets into” the story. Those who engage regularly in story performance know, too, the condition in which athletes, artists and virtuosos are said to perform at peak, a condition which Daniel Goleman calls “flow” and of which he writes:

Flow is a state of self-forgetfulness, the opposite of rumination and worry: instead of being lost in nervous preoccupation, people in flow are so absorbed in the task at hand that they lose all self-consciousness.... Paradoxically, people in flow exhibit a masterly control of what they are doing, their responses perfectly attuned to the changing demands of the task. Although people perform at their peak when they are in flow, they are unconcerned with how they are doing, with thoughts of success or failure the sheer pleasure of the act itself is what motivates them. (p. 91)

The paradox of taking the story into one's deepest places is the performer then finds him/herself in the story. Performance that employs deep memory is a kind of unselfconscious forgetfulness. This kind of knowing forgetfulness lies behind my use of the term "remembranced" in the definition of biblical storytelling I offered at the beginning of this essay. It is more than remembering; it is participation in the memory. It is, if you will, a spiritual mnemonics of the heart.

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