

PERFORMANCE OF THE STORY OF RUTH TO PROMOTE HEALING FROM “TOWNSHIP TRAUMA”

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Abstract

Many children in South Africa grow up in townships, where they are exposed to violence, drugs, gangs, and poverty. Difficulties in their home situations result in many of them lacking soft skills that enable a person to thrive (such as self-esteem, self-confidence, and the ability to communicate well). This chronic deprivation is an ongoing trauma which requires intervention to promote healing. Using the arts and sport to provide such intervention has been found to be successful, but theorists posit that drama could have value for social and emotional learning. This study tests that hypothesis: two groups (a group of grade 7 learners and a group of adults from a Bible-study fellowship) participate in a dramatic presentation of the biblical story of Ruth. Over a period of six months, the participants meet weekly (in their respective groups) for an hour to learn the story and find their way of expressing it. Three performances before various audiences are presented.

To highlight emotional issues in the story, a jester is included in the cast, with the role of interrupting the story at appropriate places and asking the audience questions as to the motivations and moods of the characters. This prompts the audience to reflect on their own emotional responses to various difficult situations with which they readily identify. By considering their own viewpoints, and those of others, audience members are stretched in their social and emotional learning. Moreover, it is apparent that, through the drama experience, the actors gain significantly in self-esteem, self-confidence, and their ability to speak in public before an audience (even adult strangers). This article provides a stimulus for using performance of a biblical text to explore options for dealing with traumatic situations.

Keywords: Trauma-healing; Book of Ruth; Performance; Community involvement

Township trauma and arts intervention

Children growing up in South African townships generally experience the negative effects of poverty and violence, and as a result show a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence (Aziz 2017:1-2; Dames 2008:89). Moreover, their ability to communicate well is limited, along with many of the other soft skills which make for success in life (Marsay 2020; SACAP 2017:2019; WERA 2019). Various intervention programmes have been run in the townships, many of them using art forms to promote healing. In Cape Town there are extra-curricular classes in dance and music (e.g., Western Cape Government’s Kickstarter programme, and Jungle Theatre Company, a small group of young learners acting out African folktales). However, there is no programme for the average person living with trauma (learner or adult) to explore performance to express

emotions and to gain communication skills. Thus, this study seeks to provide such an opportunity (basing the practical work on the book of Ruth in the Bible). The intention is also to provoke thought and discussion among audience members (peers and others) to consider issues with which they have emotional difficulty.

Useful theories

Several theories are relevant to help interpret why performance of a story about trauma may help those suffering similar painful situations. The first is that of Judith Herman (1992:155) in which she defines three steps which are important for trauma healing. These steps are, first, the need for the former victim to regain her voice and become an agent (making decisions rather than being acted upon).¹ The second step on the path to healing is for the sufferer to be able to express her pain. And third, she needs to connect with others. These three steps are integral to the use of the story of Ruth in helping those suffering township traumas. First, the participants are helped to identify people in the story who have been in difficult situations and yet have displayed agency, made decisions, and taken control of their lives. By identifying their situations (for example, losing a husband or children), the actors and audience are encouraged to think about how the story characters face their situations, what choices they have, and why they choose to act as they do. Second, through the inclusion of a jester raising questions and giving audience members opportunity to think through and express their pain in such situations, they can give voice to their emotions and so face them. Third, by expressing emotional responses to shared difficulties, those who have suffered (whether it be a death in the family, hunger, being a foreigner, or something else) find others (in the story and in the audience) who have had a similar experience and/or a different response. This “connecting with others” (and learning to understand that other people may have different perspectives) is an important step in bringing healing to those who carry pain.

A second theory which is helpful in this study, is Ambiguity Theory (e.g., Hayes 2016:169; Lee 2015:4-9). This connects to Reception Theory, the main thesis of which is that the meaning of a text results from an interaction of the words spoken and the experience and needs of the audience (Darr 1998:29; Soukup 1997:103-107). Any text has “gaps” or ambiguities, and the hearers (in the case of an oral performance) must make sense of the text, drawing on their own expectations, experience, and cultural understanding (Iser 1974). The book of Ruth is particularly characterised by ambiguities, as the text comprises largely dialogue with little description by the narrator of characters’ moods and motives. Rather, hearers must deduce (from the characters’ actions and words²) the underlying motivations and emotional responses of the characters, and thereby make sense of indeterminacies in the story.

Some gaps in understanding arise from the audience’s lack of comprehension of the bigger context, but some ambiguities are clearly deliberate. For example, the story begins (Rt 1:3) with the death of the three men on whom the women are dependant, but no details are given as to what happened or why. Instead, the audience is left to ponder such questions. Some scholars (e.g., Lee 2015:1, 3; Hubbard 1988:92) argue that this is an

¹ The feminine pronoun is used for readability but is meant to include all sufferers.

² Llaguno (2014:251) notes that a study of the dialogues between characters can give some clues as to underlying relationships between characters.

intentional ploy by the author, to draw in the emotions of the audience as they consider these gaps. However, some ambiguities are unintentional, arising from the use of metaphorical language or a lack of contextual understanding by the audience (Fretheim 2007:51). If the ambiguity is later dis-ambiguated by events in the story, then it was probably unintentional.

Regardless of whether the gap is intentional or not, audience members must fill these gaps, and (in line with Reception Theory) they will draw upon their own experience and cultural understanding to do so. This raises audience members’ own traumas to the surface. Then, through the questions of the jester, audience members are encouraged to extend their ways of thinking to the perspectives suggested by other audience members. By opening their eyes to other viewpoints and possibilities, this approach can contribute to their healing. Furthermore, issues raised in the drama can later be addressed in discussion.

Third, research on soft skills (also called “social and emotional learning”) is useful in highlighting the necessary skills required for people to succeed in school, in their jobs, and in life. These include creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, self-control, self-confidence, empathy, listening skills, public speaking, and self-esteem (Lippman et al. 2015; CASEL 2005). Research also shows that use of the arts (in particular, use of literature and performance) can promote the cultivation of various soft skills (Desai 2014:115-116; CASEL 2005). Throughout the practice sessions, there is opportunity to model these skills to the learners, and to encourage them to cultivate them in their own lives. This study focuses on collaboration, self-confidence, self-esteem, and public speaking.

Using biblical stories for trauma healing

By selecting a biblical story that deals with traumatic events, such as the story of Ruth, and by performing the story before an audience, both actors and audience can identify with the story as it relates to difficult situations that they might have experienced. The story of Ruth, with its lack of emotional details (Linafelt 2010:120), allows the audience to participate and use their imagination (Sakenfeld 2002:168) to find resonance with their own situations. This means that the story becomes “a reflection of each reader’s unique approach to the text” (Walsh 2009:76). Each hearer unconsciously draws conclusions as to the underlying motivation of an action. Linafelt (2010:121) suggests that this is “fruitful”, allowing the hearer to resonate with issues with which they can identify. For example, when Naomi sends her daughter-in-law into a very risky situation (Rt 3:3-4) with apparently no warning, is this the action of a “loving mother-in-law” (as Rt 2:22 suggests) (Hubbard 1988:139)? Or are there “hidden issues” (understandings or responsibilities) concerning the in-law relationship which audience members will perceive? Or, if not, does it nudge the audience into wanting to discuss such behaviour? Indeed, open characterisation allows audience members to discuss important issues and difficult situations that are weighty and yet seldom spoken about.

The story of Ruth is particularly helpful as it addresses various crises: the loss of a spouse/sons (and thus the loss of a protector and provider in a patriarchal society, leaving a vulnerable woman at the mercy of men), hunger, childlessness (therefore no hope for the future), the need to move home, the plight of being a foreigner (and putting up with discrimination), and having to take on any work, albeit menial and backbreaking. These

are situations with which a South African township audience can identify. What is particularly encouraging in this story, is that the negative conditions are reversed and the suffering ends. This holds out enormous hope to those facing severe difficulties.

In the patriarchal Israelite context, women's status (socially and economically) was linked to the men to whom they were related (fathers or husbands). Thus, if a woman was a widow, she was "unable to speak".³ She had no voice, and consequently, if she had no sons to look after her, she was most likely to be consigned "among the poor" (Siquans 2009:446). Indeed, the death of a husband led to radical social upheaval and economic uncertainty and was much feared by all women. As Barmash (2016) notes, "Narratives, like that of the book of Ruth, unveil the disorderly and unpredictable side of life."

Apart from not having the provision and protection of a man, a widow who was also a foreigner, had no legal status.⁴ Nevertheless, the story of Ruth shows that women can be "agents of change" and affect their own survival through their own efforts. This is very empowering for township women in South Africa today. Some examples of agency apparent in the story of Ruth are now examined.

First, there is Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem once she hears that the famine has ended. Her decision is not prompted by direct divine revelation or male counsel, unlike the decision to go to Moab (arranged by her husband). When there were men in the family (her husband or her sons), Naomi was forced to follow the patriarchal pattern. However, when she is relieved of that constraint, she makes her own decisions. Similarly, both Orpah and Ruth (when given the choice) show decisiveness and independence of thinking in deciding whether they want to accompany Naomi or not. All their decisions, different as they are, are attempts by the women to address their difficult situation (Masenya 2004:47-48, 53).

Second, Ruth shows initiative when she requests permission to go out and glean. She notes the system in operation and takes advantage of it, using her own resourcefulness. She refuses to be a "victim" but acts to affect a solution for her benefit and that of her mother-in-law (Van Dyk and Van Dyk 2002:220). When she returns and tells Naomi that she was gleaning in Boaz's field, Naomi realises that he is a relative. Boaz also must realise the family relationship when he is told that the new gleaner had come with Naomi from Moab. Yet it seems that he does nothing about it.⁵ Although Boaz provides food for the women, dramatic action from the women is necessary to bring about a more lasting solution.

Again, Naomi shows agency and comes up with a plan to bring Ruth and Boaz together, privately, in a situation which will force Boaz to respond in some way. This is obviously potentially dangerous, particularly for Ruth. One may wonder why Naomi does not contact the "closer redeemer" instead, but having already seen that Boaz had shown kindness and generosity to Ruth, perhaps that swayed her to follow her chosen course of action. In line with God's bigger plan, it was necessary of course, for the Messiah to come of the ancestry of David, through Boaz. Again, both Naomi and Ruth

³ The word for "widow" in Hebrew comes from a root word which means "unable to speak" (Thurston 1989:9).

⁴ The term used in biblical Hebrew for an alien "designates a legal status and is thus restricted only to men" (Kidd 1999:24).

⁵ The "closer redeemer" also does nothing. (It is possible that he was not aware that his relative had died and that he had a responsibility to the widow.)

play the system, using the law of levirate marriage, sexual attraction, and carefully designed speech. However, they have to use a *patriarchal* system (based on a woman establishing a relationship with a man), as that was all that was available to them. With carefully designed speech, Ruth very cleverly echoes back to Boaz the words he had used to commend her. She says to him, “Spread your wings over your servant” (Rt 3:4) whereas he had commended her for taking refuge “under the wings” of the God of Israel (Rt 2:12). Thus, in essence, Ruth is calling upon Boaz to fulfil God’s purpose and provide the wings she needs.

It is only when she acts in an exceptional way, beyond “the confines of normal activity”, making her “extraordinary appeal with its sexual overtones” (Barmash 2016), that Boaz seems to take seriously his responsibility as a family member of the destitute women. Indeed, faced with the inaction of both Boaz and the nearer-redeemer, the women are forced to act. Naomi’s wiliness and Ruth’s wit and winsome ways bring about a positive result for the women. This is encouraging for contemporary women facing difficult situations and shows that it is possible for them to bring about justice and resolve their dilemma (Barmash 2016).

Although “agency of the women” is a key idea in the story, so too is רַחֲמִים (“loving kindness”).⁶ Both of the women show רַחֲמִים, which are representations of God’s רַחֲמִים, as God orchestrates circumstances for the benefit of the two main women characters. Indeed, God’s רַחֲמִים is invoked in relation to רַחֲמִים that is shown by human beings (Steinmetz 2016:376-382). For example, in Rt 3:1, Naomi takes it upon herself to organise things to facilitate God’s intervention in a way she hopes God will intervene. Similarly, the wish Boaz expresses to Ruth in Rt 2:12 is affected to the degree that Boaz himself is prepared to act (offering refuge to Ruth). That which characters in the book attribute to God, intersects largely with what characters themselves do (Steinmetz 2016:376).

Nevertheless, salvation for the women is not brought about by them passively waiting for God to act, but through their own active agency. This is an important characteristic for audience members to identify and imitate. Ruth is not passive. She does not simply wait for a man to arise and be provider and protector for herself and Naomi. Nor does she actively seek a husband. Rather, she *waits actively*. This leads her to address the urgent need for food, and so she looks for a job. She probably hoped that this would lead to other possibilities of work, for gleaning was physically demanding and temporary (limited to harvest season). But she takes the first step, that which is within her control. This is an important learning from the story: “agency” does not mean we have to be able to see the end from the beginning; it just requires us to look at our circumstances and see what we can do – that could be part of a solution.

Along with this first step, Ruth also demonstrates important character attributes which are key in the story and helpful for trauma-sufferers to consider as they face their own difficulties. For example, there is her strong work ethic, her willingness to do menial work and to finish what she begins (Branch 2012:6),⁷ her prudent lifestyle that establishes a good reputation (among the workers, other men, and the women of the town), her commitment to her new situation (without harking back to her old country

⁶ רַחֲמִים (“loving kindness”) enables Ruth to surmount almost impossible obstacles (Berman 2007:114).

⁷ She works hard all day, gleaning until evening and then threshing the grain. And she continues this hard work until the end of the harvest (Rt 2:17).

and lifestyle⁸), and her endeavour to maintain a good relationship with her mother-in-law.⁹ As part of this last attribute, she is willing to listen to, and heed, the advice of Naomi. These exemplary characteristics could also be highlighted for later discussion by the jester using judicious questions.

Although both Naomi and Ruth show considerable *chutzpah*, it is evident that they are not behaving out of a spirit of human independence (“I did it my way”) but in line with Torah (Steinman 2020:2).¹⁰ Their agency and active waiting intersect with YHWH’s *רָצוּן*, to bring *רָצוּן* to them. Van Wolde (1997:2, 69-71) maintains that Naomi and Ruth are “two industrious women who manipulate a male-dominated society through sexual prowess in order to survive”. I would prefer to say they take advantage of (or create) opportunities in a male-dominated society and they do this through not only “sexual prowess” but also through their wit (as seen in Ruth’s language when interacting with Boaz) and an assertive plan implemented with attention to detail and requiring a response. The women’s agency, practised within the constraints of Torah, opens the door for their salvation.

The value of performing a text

Performance of a story is particularly helpful in raising emotional issues that characters in a story, and people in real life, must deal with. When reading a text, many questions are often not considered, but when there is interaction between characters on stage, they must respond in some way to the behaviour of others. For example, the very brief narration of the death of the three men in the book of Ruth calls for further interrogation, and in performance the characters must show some emotion at that time. Ways of showing grief can be explored, and the vulnerability of women left without a man (in a society where men protected and provided for women) can be discussed.

As noted, the story of Ruth helps raise difficult issues that many people face, and the introduction of the jester encourages the audience to think about the emotional dimensions of the various situations. This is very useful, as the written text itself tells us very little of how the characters feel. But as audience members consider their own responses to questions raised by the jester, and listen to those of others in the audience, they can think of new options for their own situations. For example, when Ruth, a young, vulnerable woman, is required to meet an older, powerful man, in the danger of darkness, certain emotions will come to the fore in different audience members, particularly young women. When the jester asked some grade 7 boys how they thought Ruth felt in that situation, their response was, “Excited!”. Some adult men responded the same. However, when a group of grade 7 girls were asked, their immediate response was, “Scared”. Verbalising their emotions is helpful for audience members to gain insight into how others might perceive the situation, and it is a useful starting point for discussion, helping the young girls to talk about their fears in similar situations.

⁸ Ruth could have boasted to the Bethlehemites about the superior lifestyle in Moab (e.g., their better farming methods and modern metal tools and weapons, as indicated in Jdg 4:3), but she does not (Branch 2012:6).

⁹ The two women are very different, but Ruth quietly and respectfully submits to her mother-in-law (Greenblatt 2006:A66), always honouring her (Lostracco and Wilkerson 1998:1). Although Naomi expresses angry theology and opinions, Ruth does not correct her (Rt 1:13, 22). Instead, her conduct is always shown to be exemplary (Branch 2012:6; cf. Kim and Grant 1997:243).

¹⁰ As a result, the book of Ruth serves as a polemic against the motivations of the characters in the book of Judges.

The fact that audience members will not necessarily fill the gaps in the same way can help all present (actors and audience) to realise there are various ways to respond to a difficult situation which may be helpful to them. This extending of their horizons, and considering other options, is part of their healing. For example, when Naomi appears to ignore (or fail to respond to) Ruth’s extravagant commitment to her (Rt 1:16-17), how do the members of the audience read the characters? Is Naomi’s lack of response indicative that she is annoyed that Ruth insists on going with her? Or is she conscious that her daughter-in-law is from a foreign, enemy tribe, and thus might bring shame upon her?¹¹ Is Ruth disappointed in her mother-in-law’s lack of emotional warmth? The actors themselves must decide how the characters would respond. On stage, it is not possible to avoid showing some sort of reaction, for a lack of emotion shows indifference or implies a comment on the relationship. As audience members talk about their perceptions, often difficult in-law relationships can be openly expressed, and women and girls can have the opportunity to share their perspectives. During the actual performances, there is not time to go into in-depth discussion of these various issues, but the performance could raise points for further discussion later.

Another major benefit of performing a text is that the story acquires the vivacity of 3-D communication, involving all the senses, and engaging the emotions of the audience in an impressing way. Motifs that must be explained in words in a printed story – such as the “calamity motif” in the first verses (Prinsloo 1980:331) or the “abundance motif” when Ruth comes home with food, or when the baby is born – can be vividly displayed through gestures of lament, or exclamations of joy, respectively. The visual as well as the aural impact result in the story being better remembered, and audience members are drawn in to make sense of the text.

Finally, for the actors, performing a story can help them in several ways. By taking on another character, particularly if wearing a costume and using props (which help them to enter the story and become someone else), learners can imagine the emotions of other people. As they must consider how characters experience facing life crises (such as losing a loved one, facing hunger, or being a foreigner), their sensitivity towards others, and capacity for empathy, is enlarged. And when the trauma they are enacting belongs to the character in the story (rather than to them personally at that moment), it gives them distance from their own (possibly similar) trauma to consider alternative responses for the character. These ideas can carry over into their own lives, bringing healing.

Empirical study

The empirical study was conducted in two townships in Cape Town, South Africa, with a group of grade 7 learners from Westlake Primary School and a group of adults from a Bible-study group in Capricorn. Both groups met weekly over a period of about six months, to learn the story, consider the emotions and motivations of the characters at different points, and to practise acting out the various roles. There were only five characters in the final performances: Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, the narrator, and the jester. A dramatic script was prepared based on the text of a modern English translation. As the

¹¹ Rees (nd.) argues that the two Moabite women, being foreigners, will be an embarrassment or economic burden to Naomi. Linafelt (2010:121-122) agrees. Block (2015:632) suggests that Naomi is considering the girls’ future (their non-acceptance in Israel) as well as her own possible shame, and thus encourages them to not accompany her.

book of Ruth is largely dialogue, this was easily done. However, some words were not understood by the actors or were too difficult to pronounce for them, and so slight changes were made.

The initial hope was that the actors would be able to internalise the story and thus act it out from memory, thereby using their own language and cultural nuances. However, this proved too difficult, and in the end, the actors gave a dramatic reading, with some parts (such as Ruth's commitment) memorised. They wore costumes and used props and entered the performances with enthusiasm. Each group first gave a performance before their peers (fellow-learners and the church fellowship group, respectively). Thereafter, a combined cast gave a performance at a local church, consisting mainly of adults (strangers to the performers).

An interesting factor that emerged from the empirical performances was the cultural factor as a result of the actors and audience coming from various communities: performers were mainly from the Cape Coloured¹² and Xhosa communities with one white South African; audiences for the peer performances were from the Cape Coloured and Xhosa communities, whereas the audience in the third performance (in a church service) was predominantly white South African with some audience members from the Cape Coloured and Xhosa communities. The two casts were also very different in age, one being learners of about 13 years, and the other being adults. In the third performance (with a cast including both age-groups, e.g., a "young Ruth" in the first half of the story and an "older Ruth" in the latter part), some interesting variations were noted. For example, the person (a teenage boy) playing the role of Boaz, reacted in a very different way to Ruth sleeping at his feet when Ruth was an adult rather than his peer. In the first case, his response was a quiet and respectful "Who ARE you?" but with the young Ruth, his intonation was more aggressive: "Who are YOU?". Showing respect for age is generally still practised in most African cultures.

Another example of this was apparent in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. The Xhosa way of showing respect is to position oneself physically lower than the elder, and so Ruth (played by a Xhosa schoolgirl) showed respect to Naomi by sitting at her feet, with Naomi on a chair. Also, she addressed Naomi as "Mama", using the typical African way of addressing an older woman (whether she is one's biological mother or not).

Aspects of Cape Coloured musical culture were expressed in the third performance (before the church audience) when a minstrel also formed part of the cast. With his guitar, he sang an opening number, about a narrator bringing a story that the audience must listen to attentively. When Ruth came home to Naomi with food, he broke into a song of praise. Another song of praise followed the birth of the son to Naomi, with the whole audience (led by those from the Cape Coloured community) singing a well-known church chorus of praise. That then flowed into another song and another . . . with the minstrel becoming increasingly animated, and the Coloured members of the audience quickly on their feet, clapping along, followed by the others (taking a cue from their cultural expression).

¹² Some people (e.g., *Infinite Skies*) consider the term "(Cape) Coloured" as derogatory, but others (within the community) do not object (see IOL 2018) and do not accept the proposed use of the non-racial term "Camissa". This paper uses "Coloured" for the sake of clarity but with the hope that this will not be offensive to any readers.

The inclusion of such cultural nuances into the biblical account is also a part of healing for both actors and performers. When people feel that their cultural background is acknowledged and appreciated, they are more likely to be open to new learning and to grow socially and emotionally (Trudell et al. 2019:3, 8, 20; Macy et al. 2003).

Impact of performances on the actors

The grade 7 learners initially performed before their peers, on the school stage, and it was clear that the actors thoroughly enjoyed being on a raised platform, wearing costumes, using props, and assuming other characters. The Bible-study cast initially performed in their regular meeting-room in one of the township houses. Although the space was very limited, the audience (all around “the stage”) were enraptured with seeing their friends acting. As with the learners, being performers seemed to give them a new identity. This was particularly clear when the combined cast performed before the church audience. One of the learners (a boy who was repeating grade 7) said afterwards, “Maybe I can become an actor now!”. After feeling somewhat of a failure (academically), his self-esteem visibly improved as he began to see himself achieving in another role. Moreover, his self-confidence was also significantly strengthened. Before the third performance (with an audience of strange adults), this same boy said, “I’m so nervous”, but afterwards he exclaimed with surprise, “That was wonderful”. He took a significant step in developing his self-confidence and ability to speak in public.

Impact of performances on the audiences

Perhaps the most important outcome of the performances for the audiences is that the performances provoked them to face their own emotions associated with traumatic experiences, and to put such feelings into words. The use of the jester, asking probing questions of audience members, was an easy way to raise issues that audience members also face – such as the daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship, or the fears associated with being a vulnerable woman at the mercy of a man, particularly an older, powerful male.

Another helpful impact on the audience was the opportunity to consider other ways of looking at situations, or different people’s responses to difficult situations. The responses of various people to each question, made it clear that people perceive situations in different ways, and the need for greater tolerance and openness to divergent thinking became apparent.

Moreover, the repeated examples of Ruth’s agency – using her situation wisely, waiting actively for God to open the way as she took the first small step – was an important model for the participants, actors, and audience alike. The fact that the story starts with many difficulties endured by the women, but ends with joy and hope, also encouraged the participants in their own situations.

Conclusion

Performing the biblical story of Ruth benefited the actors and audience by facilitating the three steps towards healing advocated by Herman (1982:155). In addition, the actors (through the months of preparing for the performances before an audience) had the opportunity to cultivate soft skills which would help them in many other situations. Their

communication skills were enhanced (both listening and public speaking) and their self-confidence and self-esteem showed significant improvement.

There are many other narratives in the biblical text which could be used to promote healing. For example, the rape of Tamar has been used helpfully in Contextual Bible Studies (West and Zondi-Mabizela 2004), but could well be adapted to performance, particularly using Augusto Boal's (1993) method, where the performance is stopped at critical moments, and different participants are invited to act the story forward, in a direction they choose (not following that of the biblical text). This provides the possibility for various scenarios to be explored, options as to how someone facing a crisis could respond.

Other issues that could be explored through performing biblical stories are childlessness (perhaps looking at the stories of Sarah and Hannah) or women in vulnerable situations (such as Rahab or Esther). Even small pericopes of text (such as the response of Job's wife in Job 2:9) could be explored through performance to consider the role of a wife in supporting her husband spiritually. Again, the use of role-play, with Boal's model to explore options, could be very fruitful.

In conclusion, the study using Ruth to help two groups in South Africa explore ways of dealing with trauma opens a window to many other possibilities. Given that performance, using the body as well as the mind, engages the person fully and draws in all the senses, learnings from such performances can be life-changing and a helpful step towards healing.

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