



Open My Heart:

Living Jewish Prayer with Rabbi Jonathan Slater

Rabbi Amy Eilberg

JONATHAN:

Shalom. This is rabbi Jonathan Slater, and welcome to “Open My Heart: Living Jewish prayer”, a Prayer Project Podcast of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. Together, we will investigate how personal prayer, in its many forms, is an important part of Jewish spirituality. Each Monday and Friday, we will offer a different practice, led by a different person, all praying from the heart. Today, we're blessed to have with us Rabbi Amy Eilberg, who is a teacher, a colleague, and a friend. Hi Amy, I'm really happy to have you here today. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

AMY:

Well, I'm a conservative rabbi. I've been a rabbi for 35 years, which is amazing, and I've known you Jonathan for most of those. I was in the first rabbinic cohort of the IJS, and just love and honor IJS for its teachings and its impact on my life. And it's really one of my primary spiritual communities. So it's really, really a delight to be part of this.

JONATHAN:

We're thrilled to have you here with us today, Amy. I really appreciate it. And I'm really excited to be part of your practice. So I'm going to turn things over to you now, and thank you for sharing your prayer with us.

AMY:

So what I'd like to share with you is basically a love, a Metta practice, loving kindness practice, which has been my primary daily meditation/prayer practice before my formal davenning. I've been doing Metta for 30 years and it's been my primary sitting practice for, I don't know many, many of those years. This is how I'll do it today. It's basically Metta practice, but I use as the sacred phrases, the wishes of wellbeing, the *Birkat Kohanim*, the blessing given by the Kohanim, by the priests to the Israelite community. And that we use these words; they've become very, very beloved and Jewish liturgy. And

many parents bless their children with these precious words every Friday night. So I'm going to use those words, you know, *Y'varekhekh Hashem V'yishmerekh*/ יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ, may God bless you and protect you from harm and, and so on , as the primary sacred phrases for the well-wishing in the Metta practice. So we begin. I begin by checking my posture just to be sure I'm sitting in a position that's fairly alert as well as relaxed, which helps my concentration. I listen for a moment to sound in the room. When I'm lucky, I hear birds singing outside. And I bring my attention to my breath, to help me ground in my body and bring myself fully to this moment.

And I begin, as Metta/loving kindness practice always does, by offering prayers of blessings, of well-wishing and wellbeing, first to myself – on the assumption that it's hard for me to have what to give to other people until I've filled up. And also as our teacher, Sylvia says, my heart is really the only one, It's the only heart that I can really have direct impact on. So I begin directing these prayers toward myself. *Y'varkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekh*, יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ, may God bless you and protect you from harm. *Ya'er Hashem Panav Elayikh V'yechunekh*, יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֵּךְ, may God's radiant face shine on you, and grace your way. *Yisa Hashem Panav Elayikh v'yasem Lakh Shalom*, יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֵׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם, may God raise God's face to encounter you and give you peace. *Y'varkhekh Adonai V'yishmerekh; Ya'er Hashem Panav Elayikh V'yechunekh; Yisa Hashem Panav Elayikh v'yasem Lakh Shalom*. May God bless you and protect you. May God's light illuminate your face. May God lift God's face to meet you and give you peace. *Y'varkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekh; Ya'er Hashem Panav Elayikh V'yechunekh; Yisa Hashem Panav Elayikh v'yasem Lakh Shalom*. Protection. Light, and grace. Meeting and peace. May you be safe. May you be strong and well. May you be happy. May you be at peace.

And I continue to recite those phrases to myself and watch as my breath gets a little deeper. I'm beginning to have this sensation that often get with Metta. I don't know how to explain it, but it sort of feels like there's a vertical passageway moving through my body and it's opening and deepening; maybe like a, an anchor dropping down through my being. And also opening me into this very familiar groove of giving and receiving blessings so much so that I can, I can almost feel love beginning to grow in my heart.

Y'varkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekh; Ya'er Hashem Panav Elayikh V'yechunekh; Yisa Hashem Panav Elayikh v'yasem Lakh Shalom.



Some days I spend my whole sitting period offering those blessings to myself, usually because I feel that I need them in order to settle. And in order to have a chance to feel the impact, the resonance, the reverberations of the prayers and the blessings in my own heart. Sometimes if I feel like the Metta has been flowing, then I choose another person to whom I direct the same phrases. I think of a person who's very beloved to me, and who at this moment, in this moment, the love that we share feels simple and not complicated. Today, for whatever reason, I feel moved to offer these blessings to my husband. So I'll have to conjugate the Hebrew a little differently to offer the blessings to him in masculine form. *Y'vaerkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekha*. May God bless you and protect you from harm. *Ya'er Hashem Panav Elekha V'yechuneka*. May the radiance of God's face aluminate your face and your way. *Yisa Hashem Panav Eleikha v'yasem Lekha Shalom*. May the divine rise to greet you and give you peace. *Y'vaerkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekha*. *Ya'er Hashem Panav Elekha V'yechuneka Yisa Hashem Panav Eleikha v'yasem Lekha Shalom*. May God bless you and protect you from harm. May God radiate God's light to you and grace your way. May God rise up to greet you and grant you peace.

Y'vaerkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekha. *Ya'er Hashem Panav Elekha V'yechuneka*. *Yisa Hashem Panav Eleikha v'yasem Lekha Shalom*. May you be safe. May you be strong and well. May you be happy and may you be at peace.

Sometimes I might stop just here. Maybe that's enough, offering those wishes and prayers to myself; invoking, praying for God's protection and blessing for me, and then to my beloved. But today, skipping over some of the categories of people in the formal Metta practice. I'm aware of so much suffering in the world. I want to just take a brief moment and call to mind ... everyone. Everyone who's suffering. Who's frightened. Who's angry. Who's grieving. And just use these sacred words as a way of asking God to bless all of those people. All of us, in this difficult time.

Y'vaerkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekha, *יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ*. May God bless you and protect you from harm. *Ya'er Hashem Panav Elekha V'yechuneka*, *יָאֵר ה' פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ*. May God's light shine upon you and grace your way. *Yisa Hashem Panav Eleikha v'yasem Lekha Shalom*, *יִשָּׂא ה' פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם*. May God greet you and, as if face to face, grant you peace. *Y'vaerkhekh Hashem V'yishmerekha*. *Ya'er Hashem Panav Elekha V'yechuneka*. *Yisa Hashem Panav Eleikha v'yasem Lekha Shalom*. May you be safe and protected from harm. May God's light shine upon you, and give him ease and grace. *Yisa Hashem Panav Eleikha v'yasem Lekha Shalom*. May God meet you, and may we meet each other with love and care. May God give to all of us peace.



Thank you so much for joining me in my practice and blessings to all of you.

JONATHAN:

That was Rabbi Amy Eilberg leading us in their personal prayer practice, which was so inspiring, and for which we are grateful.

We hope that you found this practice meaningful. You can use the recording as support if you choose to engage in the practice yourself, and we encourage you to do so. First, use the practice as offered in this episode, following the instructions given. You may wish to practice with the presenter several times to get a feel for the practice yourself. Over time, you will likely find your own inspiration and take the practice in new directions, which will be great for you and for the Jewish people. Together we can shift the paradigm around prayer from going to services, to prayer, a spiritual practice.

We are grateful to Judith Silver for giving us permission to use her song “Open” at the start of our show. You can find it and more of her music at judithsilver.com. We are also grateful to Elana Arian for giving us permission to use her song “Ken Yehi Ratzon” as our closing. you can learn more about Elana’s music at elanaarian.com. For more information about “Open My Heart” and the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, please visit us at jewishspirituality.org. Shalom, until next time. We pray, you remain healthy and safe.

