



Open My Heart:

Living Jewish Prayer with Rabbi Jonathan Slater

Rabbi Jill Hammer

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 Jill Hammer, who is a colleague and a teacher and a friend. Hi, Jill. I'm so happy to have you with us here today. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

JILL:

Jonathan, it's really lovely to be here. I live in Manhattan. I have grown up in New York state. I am currently the Director of Spiritual Education at the Academy for Jewish Religion. And I'm also the co-founder of the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute, which is a training program in earth based embodied feminist Jewish leadership and spiritual life. And some of my deep Jewish interests are ancient and contemporary Midrash; Jewish mysticism – my most recent book is “Return To The Place” – it's a translation and commentary of Sefer Yetzirah; and ritual and liturgy, the exploration of the creative power of ritual in our generation to address our needs as people living right now, and as a return to a sense of presence and a sense of sacredness in our lives.

Those are some things that I care about. And some of the ways that I interact with those things are through poetry, through leading prayer, through guided meditation, through dream work. These are all sort of tools in my box that I used to meet some of those goals.

And right now, the Kohenet community is meeting online. We have been meeting online since the pandemic on Shabbat, which has been new for our community and really beautiful. And some of the prayers that I'm going to offer today, most of them are versions of the traditional liturgy. Not all of them. Some of them come from biblical texts, like Ecclesiastics. Many of them have been feminized. Some of them are chants people might recognize from other contexts, chants written by Shefa Gold. But all of these have become part of our standard practice; some prayers that we would sometimes or always include. What I'm going to lead is more or less an abridged version of what we might do as a community, and is the kind of thing that I would use to *davven* by myself, to pray by myself, if I were going to be sitting somewhere in Central Park or in my living room, and I wanted to do a morning service for myself. This is something like what it would be like.

JONATHAN:

Well, I'm really excited to be part of your practice, and to feel myself as if I were sitting in Central Park with you. So I'm going to turn things over to you, and thank you for sharing your prayer with us now.

JILL:

[chanting]

אֱלֹהֵי נְשָׁמָה שְׁנַתַּת בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא.

Elohai neshamah shenatat bi tehorah hi

(traditional liturgy; melody Shefa Gold)

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׁכִינָה

Beruchah at Shekhinah...who grounds me
Beruchah at Shekhinah...who reminds me that I know
Beruchah at Shekhinah...who guides me
Beruchah at Shekhinah...who gives me courage to let go

(Ri J. Turner)

[singsong praying]



Beruchah at Shekhinah... for the blooming listeria this morning.

Blessed are you Shekhinah... for the opportunity to create sharing community.

Blessed are you Shekhinah... for my breath this morning.

Blessed are you Shekhinah... for the opportunity to watch my daughter go off to school this morning.

[singing]

Life is born and life moves on
and the earth has held and will hold it all.
The sun rises and the sun sets
and returns again to rise and fall.
The wind turns north and the wind turns south
turning, turning, returning still.
The rivers run from the clouds to the sea
and become the rain, and the sea is never filled.
So the beginning flows to the end
and the end flows on to begin again.
The One at the end is the One who begins
and the breath of breaths is within all things.

(Lyrics: Jill Hammer. Melody: traditional niggun)

[chanting]

אֲשֶׁרִי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵּיתֶיָּה עוֹד יְהַלְלוּהָ סְלָה

ashrei yoshvei veiteha od yehalleluha selah

(Liturgy: Psalms. Melody: Shefa Gold)

[singing]

הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי
הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי בְרִקְיָהּ הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּרִקְיָהּ עֲזָה הַלְלוּהָ



הַלְלוּהָ בְּגְבוּרַתֶיהָ הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ כְּרַב גְּדֻלָּהּ הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּתַקְעַ שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּנִבְל וְכִנּוֹר הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּתוֹף וּמְחוֹל הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּמִנִּים וְעַגְב הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּצִלְצְלֵי שִׁמְע הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּהָ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה הַלְלוּהָ
כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּהָ
כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּהָ
הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי

Halleluyah
Halelu elah bekodshah haleluha birkia uzah
Haleluha bigvuroteha haleluha kerov gudlah
Haleluha beteka shofar haleluha benevel vechinor
Haleluha betof umachol haleluha beminim veugav
Kol haneshamah tehalel yah halleluyah

Praise Elah in Her shrine Halleluyah
Praise Her strength from sea to sky Halleluyah
Praise Her for Her mighty works Halleluyah
Praise the One so generous! Halleluyah
Praise Her with the horn and choir, Halleluyah
Praise Her with the harp and lyre, Halleluyah
Praise Her with the drum and flute, Halleluyah
Praise Her with guitar and lute, Halleluyah
Praise Her playing cymbals sounding, Halleluyah
Praise Her playing cymbals crashing, Halleluyah
May all who breathe keep praising Yah, Halleluyah

(Shoshana Jedwab)

[reciting a prayer]

Beruchah at t'homot avoteinu

Ru'ach ha'olam

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה וְיָמֹת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ

רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם



Yotzeret or uvoreit choshekh יוצרת אור ובוראת חושך

Osah shalom uvoreit et hakol עושה שלום ובוראת את הכל

Praised are You, Depths for our Ancestors
Spirit of all worlds
Who creates of light and forms darkness
Makes peace and creates all things

[chanting]

Holy holy holy holy
Holy is the silence and holy is the sound
Holy is each one of us and holy is the ground

Holy holy holy holy
Holy is the darkness and holy is the light
Holy is the morning and holy is the night

Holy holy holy holy

Kadosh kadosh kadosh kadosh קדוש קדוש קדוש קדוש

Holy

(*Taya Ma Shere*)

[reciting slowly]

Ssshhhh

Mmmm

Aaahhh

Ssshhhh

Mmmm

Aaahhh

Ssshhhh



Mmmm
Aaahhh

Shema Yisrael Shekhinah Eloteinu Shekhinah Achat

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁכִינָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁכִינָה אַחַת

Hear, O Israel, Shekhinah is our God, Shekhinah Alone

[chanting]

Mi chamoha ba'elim shadai מִי כְמוֹהַ בְּאֵלִים שָׁדַי
Mi kamoha hadar bakodesh מִי כְמוֹהַ הַדָּר בְּקֹדֶשׁ
Nor'ah tehilot osah feleh נוֹרְאָה תְהִילַת עֲשָׂה פְלֵא

The river is flowing, flowing and growing,
The river is flowing, back to the sea.

Mother carry me
Your child I will always be,
Mother carry me, back to the sea.

The spirit is flowing, flowing and growing,
The spirit is flowing through you and me.
Shechinah reside in me, your wisdom lives inside of me,
Shechinah reside in me, oh Holy of Holies.

(Taya Mâ Shere, based on a traditional Circle Song; feminized Hebrew added by Jill Hammer)

[chanting]

Mah nora hamakom hazeh מַה נוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
Hamakom hazeh הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
How awesome is this body
How awesome is this place
How awesome is this journey
Through time and space



Mah nora hamakom hazeh

מַה נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

Hamakom hazeh

הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

[chanting]

Shalom

שָׁלוֹם

[singing]

Shekhina thank You for blessing all we do and all we say,
Thank You for blessing this day.

Shekhina thank You for blessing this day 2x
Shekhina thank You for blessing where we go and where we stay,
Thank You for blessing this day.

Shekhina thank You for blessing this day 2x
Shekhina thank You for blessing how we be and how we pray
Shekhina thank You for blessing this day

Thank you for blessing this day
Thank you for blessing this day

(Taya Mâ Shere)

JONATHAN:

That was Jill hammer, leading us in their personal prayer practice, which was so inspiring and for which we are grateful.

You'll find links to the Kohenet program and their offerings as well as to Jill's books on the transcript to this program here:

<https://www.kohenet.com/>

<https://www.kohenet.com/virtual-temple>

<https://www.kohenet.com/book-purchases>

<https://www.amazon.com/The-Hebrew-Priestess-Spiritual-Leadership/dp/1934730467/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Return-Place-Meditation-Mystery-Yetzirah/dp/1934730068/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Jewish-Book-Days-Companion-Seasons/dp/1717249507/>



And, just a special announcement: next week will be the week of Shavuot, and we will not be offering our podcast that week. But afterwards we'll have a few special programs having to do with books and other podcasts related to prayer. And we look forward to offering those to you as the weeks come.

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 practices 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 as 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 that you remain healthy and safe.

