



Open My Heart:

Living Jewish Prayer with Rabbi Jonathan Slater

Rabbi Lavey Derby

JONATHAN:

Today, we're blessed to have with us Rabbi Lavey Derby, who is a teacher, a colleague, and a friend. Hi Lavey, I'm really excited to have you here with us. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

LAVEY:

Well, thank you, Jonathan. It's really such a privilege to be invited to have this conversation with you. I grew up in New York and have lived in the San Francisco Bay area for the past 30 years or so. I was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary and identify as a Jewish Renewal rabbi and teacher. I was in the first IJS cohort, before it was IJS I think, and the first Jewish Mindfulness Meditation Teachers cohort. I also come from a long line of rabbis dating back to the 1550s, and I'm an eighth generation, direct descendant of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, for whom I'm named. The prayer practice I'd like to share with you today is drawn from my sainted ancestor. And since today is also my mother's yahrzeit, I want to dedicate this practice to her memory.

JONATHAN:

Well, may her memory and Rabbi Levi Yitzhak's spirit accompany us now. And I want to thank you for sharing your prayer with us now.

LAVEY:

Well, as a child, I loved to daven, simply reciting the words of tefillah. When I davened, I felt a closeness with the divine, I felt connected in some way. As an adult, I became more intellectually and spiritually sophisticated, and I began to feel that this way of davening was childish. The whole idea of a personal God was no longer theologically viable for me. I was very drawn to the non-dual, panentheistic theology of the Zohar, and that became my theology, my belief system. But I didn't want to let go of my davening

practice. So, I struggled with this for a long time, decades in fact. I came to realize that in meditation, there are moments of silence and stillness, and there exists the possibility of touching *Ayn Sof*, the infinite unbounded oneness. And in very short moments, my “I” melts into the mystery.

But when I pray, knowledge becomes love. And I have the opportunity to address the mystery as the Beloved, as “you” in the most personal of ways, and to express my yearning and my love and my truth. Reb Levi Yitzhak is my model for this. An extraordinary Rebbe, amongst the most beloved of all Hasidic masters, he composed a song, a prayer, called the “*Dudele*”, which is an ecstatic love song to the One addressed as You. And here's some of the *Dudele*:

Ribbono shel olam, he begins, Master of the Universe.

I'll sing a song for you.

You, You, You!

Where will I find You?

Where will I not find You?

Where can I find You?

Where can I not find You?

You, You, You!

Wherever I go, You!

Wherever I stay, You!

Just You, only You, again and again, You.

When something's good, You!

When, God forbid, it's bad – *gevalt!* –

Oy, You, You, You, You. Only you.

So, in this poem, in the song, in this tefilah, Reb Levi Yitzhak is showing us the ecstasy in the glimpsing of the ever-present Presence. And this is what I strive for in prayer. In meditation, I seek stillness; in davening, I seek passion, even ecstasy.

My mother of blessed memory once leaned over to me and shul while I was saying the Amidah and whispered, “I hope you mean it”. As it happens, the Baal Shem Tov taught the exact same thing, related to God's call to Noah: “*bo el hateivah* (בא אל התיבה), enter into the Ark”. The Baal Shem Tov focuses on *teivah* as “word”, as the other meaning of



teivah “word”, and uses this first to offer an instruction for prayer. He says: when you pray or learn Torah, you must enter into each word with your whole body, your whole heart and your whole thought.

So, my prayer practice is simple davening. I sound each word until I come to a word or phrase that captures my attention; that resonates with my feelings of the moment; that begin to vibrate within me. And I try to put my whole self into it again and again, over and over and over again. Because the words and phrases, when I daven, that call to me reflect my own psycho-emotional state, it becomes a way for me to say: “*Rachmana* (Merciful One)! *Tata* (Papa), here I am. This is me. This is my heart”. Davening becomes an act of love and intimacy. And when I'm blessed, my “self”, again, melts away for just a second or two as I lose myself in the words of davening.

So, I'd like to share with you what this is like for me. Because as we have this conversation, it's now time for *Minchah* (the afternoon prayer), I'll daven passages in the Sephardic *siddur* (prayerbook) from which I daven, as a preparation for prayer, and then daven the *Ashrei*.

But first I always begin with a chant of yearning, to open the heart, often using Reb Levi Yitzhak's chant from the *Dudele*.

<i>Ribbono shel olam</i>	Master of the Universe	רבנו של עולם
<i>Avinu shebashamayim</i>	O Divine Parent	אבינו שבשמים
<i>el malei rachamim</i>	God, full of compassion	אל מלא רחמים
<i>tezakeinu sheniyached</i>	help us merit to unify	תזכינו שניחד
<i>et levaveinu umach'voteinu</i>	our hearts and our thoughts	את לבבנו ומחשבותינו
<i>dibbureinu uma'aseinu</i>	our words and deeds	ודברנו ומעשינו



<i>v'khol t'nu'oteinu v'harg'shoteinu</i>	and all our movements and feelings	וכל תנועותינו והרגשותינו,
<i>hayedu'ot lanu ush'einan yedu'ot lanu</i>	those known to us, and those unknown,	הידועות לנו ושאינן ידועות לנו
<i>haniglot v'hanistarot</i>	both revealed and hidden,	הנגלות והנסתרות
<i>shey'hei hakol m'yuchad eilekha</i>	that all should be unified for Your sake	שיהא הכל מיוחד אליך
<i>b'emet uv'tammim</i>	in truth and wholeheartedly,	באמת ובתמים
<i>b'li shum machshavot p'sul chalilah</i>	without any wayward thoughts (O save us!),	בלי שום מחשבת פסול חלילה
<i>v'taher libbeinu v'kad'sheinu</i>	and purify our hearts and sanctify us.	וטהר לבנו וקדשנו
<i>zrok aleinu mayim t'horim</i>	Sprinkle pure water over us	וזרק עלינו מים טהורים
<i>v'tahareinu b'ahavat'kha uv'chemlat'kha</i>	and purify us with Your love and compassion	וטהרנו באהבתך ובחמלתך
<i>v'tita ahavat'kha v'yirat'kha</i>	plant Your love and fear	ותטע אהבתך ויראתך
<i>b'libbeinu biphnim tamid</i>	inside our hearts, constantly,	בלבנו בפנים תמיד
<i>b'li hephsek uv'li shum mechitzah</i>	without cease, without any barrier	בלי הפסק ובלי שום מחיצה
<i>b'khol eit, uv'khol z'man, uv'khol makom</i>	always, at all times, everywhere,	בכל עת ובכל זמן ובכל מקום,



<i>b'lekhteinu uv'shivteini</i>	while walking and sitting,	בלכתנו ובשבתנו
<i>b'shokhbeinu uv'kumeinu</i>	when lying down and when rising	ובשכבנו ובקומנו
<i>Ana avinu shebashamyim</i>	O, please, Divine Parent,	אנא אבינו שבשמים)
<i>tiv'ar tamid ru'ach kodsh'kha bikirbeinu</i>	make Your holy spirit burn in our innards continuously	תבער תמיד רוח קדשך בקרבונו.
<i>hakol l'yached sh'mekha</i>	all so that we might unify Your Name,	הכל ליחד שמך
<i>hagibbor v'hanora</i>	which is great and awesome	הגבור והנורא
<i>V'ana tishm'reinu min hap'niyut v'hagei'ut</i>	And, please, keep us from self-concern and pride,	ואנא ותשמרנו מן הפניות והגאות
<i>umin haka'as v'hakapdanut</i>	from anger and stubbornness,	ומן הכעס והקפדנות
<i>v'ha'atzvut v'harekhilut</i>	from sadness and tale-bearing,	והעצבות והרכילות
<i>v'sha'ar middot ra'ot</i>	and all other negative qualities,	ושאר מדות רעות
<i>umikkol davar hamaphsid avodat'kha</i>	and all that might prevent us from Your service,	ומכל דבר המפסיד עבודתך
<i>hak'doshah v'hataharah hachavivah aleinu</i>	which is holy, pure and beloved of us.	הקדושה והטהורה החביבה עלינו,
<i>v'tashpi'ah ru'ach kodsh'kha aleinu</i>	Cause Your holy spirit to pour out over us	ותשפיע רוח קדשך עלינו



<i>shenih'yeh d'veikim bakh</i>	that we might cleave to You.	שנהיה דבקים בך.
<i>v'tismach v'tit'pa'er banu</i>	Rejoice and take pride in us	ותשמח ותתפאר בנו
<i>v'na'aseh p'ri l'malah</i>	that we might grow fruit above	ונעשה פרי למעלה
<i>v'shoresh l'matah.</i>	and roots below	ושרש למטה

<i>L'shem yichud kudsha b'rikh hu ush'khintei</i>	For the unification of the blessed Holy One and Shekhinah	לְשֵׁם יְחִיד קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא וְשְׁכִינְתָּיה
<i>b'dechilu u'rechimu, u'rechimu ud'echilu</i>	With fear and love, and love and fear,	בְּדַחֲלֵלוּ וּרְחִימוּ, וּרְחִימוּ וְדַחֲלֵלוּ
<i>l'yachda shem ot Yod b'ot Heh</i>	to unify the Name of the letter Yod with the letter Heh	לְיַחַדָּא שְׁם אוֹת יוֹד בְּאוֹת ה'
<i>v'shem ot Vav b'ot Heh</i>	and the Name of the letter Vav with the letter Heh	וְשֵׁם אוֹת וָו בְּאוֹת ה'
<i>b'yichuda sh'lim</i>	in a complete unity	בְּיַחְוּדָא שְׁלִים
<i>b'shem kol yisrael</i>	and in the name of all Israel.	בְּשֵׁם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל.
<i>l'akma shekhinta mei'aphra</i>	To raise up Shekhinah from the dust	לְאַקְמָא שְׁכִינְתָּא מִמַּעְפְּרָא
<i>l'ilu'i shekhinat uzeinu</i>	for the ascent of Shekhinah, who is our strength.	לְעֲלוּי שְׁכִינַת עוֹזֵינוּ.
<i>Hinei ani ba l'hitpallel t'philat minchah</i>	I come, now, to pray the afternoon prayer (<i>minchah</i>)	הִנֵּה אֲנִי בָּא לְהִתְפַּלֵּל תְּפִלַּת מִנְחָה,
<i>shetikken yitzchak avinu alav hashalom</i>	which was established by	שְׁתִּקֵּן יִצְחָק אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם,



	Isaac, our ancestor (peace be on him),	
<i>im kol hamitzvot hakelulot bah</i>	with all of the mitzvot attendant to it,	עם כל המצוות הכלולות בה,
<i>l'takken et shorshah b'makom elyon</i>	thus affixing its roots in a supernal place	לתקן את שרשה במקום עליון,
<i>la'asot nachat ru'ach b'emet l'yotzreinu</i>	and to bring ease of spirit to the One who formed us,	לעשות נחת רוח באמת ליוצרנו
<i>v'la'asot r'tzon bor'einu</i>	and fulfill the will of our Creator.	ולעשות רצון בוראנו.
<i>viy'hi no'am adonai eloheinu aleinu</i>	May the pleasantness of the Lord, our God, be upon us.	יהי נעם אדני אלהינו עלינו.
<i>uma'asei yadeinu kon'nah aleinu</i>	May we establish the work of our hands.	ומעשה ידינו כוננה עלינו.
<i>uma'asei yadeinu kon'neihu</i>	And, in that manner may all our work be established.	ומעשה ידינו כוננהו:

<i>Ashrei yoshvei veitekha Od yehallelukha. Selah.</i>	Happy are those who dwell in Your house, they will continually praise You, selah	אשרי יושבי ביתך, עוד !הללוך סלה
<i>Ashrei ha'am shekakha lo Ashrei ha'am Sh'Adonai Elohav.</i>	Happy the people for whom this is so, happy the people whose God is ADONAI.	אשרי העם שככה לו, אשרי העם שיי אלהיו.



<i>T'hillah L'David. Aromimkha Adonai hamelekh Va'avarkha shimkha l'olam va'ed</i>	I will exalt You, my Sovereign God, and I will bless Your Name forever and ever.	תְהִלָּה לְדָוִד, אֲרוֹמְמָךְ אֱלֹהֵי הַמְּלָכָה, וְאֶבְרַכְךָ שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
<i>B'khol yom avarkhekha Va'ahallelah shimkha l'olam va'ed</i>	Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your Name forever and ever.	בְּכֹל יוֹם אֶבְרַכְךָ, וְאֶהְלֵלְךָ שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.
<i>Gadol Adonai um'hullal m'od V'lig'dulato ein cheker</i>	praised, and God's greatness is unfathomable.	גָּדוֹל יי וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד, וְלִגְדֻלְתּוֹ אֵין חֶקֶר
<i>Dor l'dor y'shabach ma'asekha Ug'vurotekha yagidu</i>	One generation shall praise Your works to the next, and they shall tell of Your mighty deeds.	דוֹר לְדוֹר יִשְׁבַּח מַעֲשֵׂיךָ, וְגִבּוֹרֹתֶיךָ יִגִּידוּ
<i>Hadar k'vod hodekha V'niphl'otekha asichah</i>	The splendid glory of Your majesty and tales of Your wondrous deeds will inform my discourse.	הַדָּר כְּבוֹד הַזֶּה, וְדִבְרֵי נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה.
<i>V'ezuz nor'otekha yomeru Ug'dolat'kha asap'prenah</i>	Others will speak of Your awesome deeds, and I will tell of Your great goodness.	וְעִזּוּז נִרְאוֹתֶיךָ יֹאמְרוּ, וְגִדְלֹתֶךָ אֲסַפְּרֶנָּה.
<i>Zekher rav tuv'kha yabi'u V'tzidkat'kha y'ranenu</i>	The record of Your great goodness they will recite, and they will sing exultantly of Your righteousness.	זְכוֹר רַב טוֹבָךָ יִבְיְעוּ, וְצִדְקוֹתֶיךָ יִרְנְנוּ.



<i>Chanun v'rachum Adonai Erekh apayim ug'dal chased</i>	THE BOUNDLESS ONE is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.	חַנוּן וְרַחוּם יי, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְגָדֵל חַסְדּוֹ
<i>Tov Adonai lakok V'rachamav al kol ma'asav</i>	THE ETERNAL is good to all, and Your compassion encompasses all Your works.	טוֹב יי לְכֹל, וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו
<i>Yodukha Adonai kol ma'asekha Va'chasidekha y'varkhukhah</i>	All Your works will thank You, ADONAI, and Your devoted ones will bless You.	יִדְוֶךָ יי כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ, וְחַסִּידֶיךָ יְבָרְכֶיךָ
<i>K'vod malkhut'kha yomeru Ug'vurat'kha y'dabberu</i>	They will proclaim Your majestic glory, and they will speak of Your might –	כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתְךָ יֹאמְרוּ, וְגִבּוֹרְתְךָ יְדַבְּרוּ.
<i>L'hodi'a livnei ha'adam g'vurotav Ukh'vod hadar malkhuto</i>	To reveal Your mighty deeds to humankind, and the glorious splendor of Your rule.	לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם גְּבוּרָתְךָ, וְכְבוֹד הַדָּר מַלְכוּתוֹ
<i>Malkhut'kha malkhut kol olamim Umemshalt'kha b'khol dor vador</i>	. You are sovereign over all time and space, and Your dominion is for all generations.	מַלְכוּתְךָ מַלְכוּת כָּל עוֹלָמִים, וּמְמַשְׁלֶתְךָ בְּכָל דֹר וָדֹר
<i>Somekh Adonai l'khol hanophlim V'zokeph l'khol hak'phuphim</i>	THE COMPASSIONATE ONE supports all who fall, and straightens all who are bent.	סוֹמֵךְ יי לְכָל הַנִּפְּלִים, וְזוֹקֵף לְכָל הַכְּפוּפִים



<i>Einei khol eilekha y'sabbeiru V'atah notein lahem et okhlam b'ito</i>	The eyes of all look to You with hope, and You give them their food in its proper time.	עֵינֵי כָל אֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁבְּרוּ, וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן לָהֶם אֶת אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ
<i>Pote'ach et yadekha Umasbi'a l'khol chai ratzon</i>	You open Your hand, and You favorably satisfy every living thing.	פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת יָדְךָ, וּמְשַׁבֵּיעַ לְכָל חַי רָצוֹן.
<i>Taddik Adonai b'khol d'rakhav V'chasid b'khol ma'asav</i>	Righteous is THE WISE ONE along every path, and kind in every deed.	צְדִיק יי בְּכָל דְרָכָיו, וְחָסִיד בְּכָל מַעֲשָׂיו
<i>Karov Adonai l'khol kor'av L'khol asher yik'r'uhu v'emet</i>	ADONAI is near to all who call, to all who call upon THE HOLY ONE in truth.	קָרוֹב יי לְכָל קוֹרְאֵיו, לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרְאוּהוּ בְאֱמֶת
<i>R'tzon y'rei'av ya'aseh V'et shav'atam yishma v'yoshi'emm</i>	You fulfill the desire of those who revere You, and You hear their cry, granting safety of spirit.	רָצוֹן יִרְאִיו יַעֲשֶׂה, וְאֶת שׁוֹעֲתָם יִשְׁמַע וְיוֹשִׁיעֵם
<i>Shomer Adonai et kol ohavav V'et kol har'sha'im yashmid</i>	THE FAITHFUL ONE guards all who love God, and all wickedness You will destroy.	שׁוֹמֵר יי אֶת כָּל אֹהֲבָיו, וְאֶת כָּל הַרְשָׁעִים יִשְׁמִיד
<i>T'hillat Adonai y'dabber pi</i>	My mouth will speak praise of ADONAI,	תְּהִלַּת יי יְדַבֵּר פִּי,
<i>V'gam libbi, v'gam naphshi, v'gam ruchi v'gam nishmati</i>	As well as my heart, my body-soul, my spirit, and my soul	וְגַם לְבִי וְגַם נַפְשִׁי וְגַם רוּחִי וְגַם נִשְׁמָתִי



<i>Vi'yvarekh kol basar shem kodsho l'olam va'ed</i>	and all flesh will bless Your holy Name forever and ever –	וַיְבָרֵךְ כָּל בָּשָׂר שֵׁם קֹדֶשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
<i>Va'anachnu n'varekh Yah Mei'atah v'ad olam Halleluyah.</i>	And we will bless God, from this time to eternity: Halleluyah!	וַאֲנַחְנוּ נְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה, מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם, הַלְלוּיָהּ.
<i>Tikkon t'phillati k'toret l'phanekha</i>	May my prayer be like an offering of incense before You	תִּכּוֹן תְּפִלָּתִי קִטְרֶת לְפָנֶיךָ
<i>Masa't kappai minchat arev</i>	What I bear in my hands a pleasant gift.	מִשָּׂאת כַּפֵּי מִנְחַת עֶרֶב:
<i>Hakshiva l'kol vav'l malki veilohai</i>	Hear the cry of my prayer, my Sovereign and my God	הַקְשִׁיבָה לְקוֹל שׁוֹעִי מֶלְכִי וְיֹאֵלֵהִי
<i>Ki eilekha etpallel</i>	As I pray to You.	כִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶתְפַּלֵּל:

And when I am through with the davening, I spend a few minutes in silence, and I quiet myself down. And I conclude by chanting a chant that grounds me. Today: “*Ayn od milvado*, אין עוד מלבדו, There is nothing but God”, to bring me back to the Oneness. I have spoken, now, to my Beloved, to come back now to the Oneness.

Ayn od milvado Hashem hu ha'elohim

אין עוד מלבדו מלבדו ה' הוא האֱלֹהִים

Ayn od milvado Yah hu ha'elohim

אין עוד מלבדו הוא האֱלֹהִים יְיָ

There is nothing but God.



JONATHAN:

That was Rabbi Lavey Derby sharing their personal prayer practice, which was so inspiring, and for which we are grateful.

Before we leave today, I'd like to share a few announcements. One is that we're going to take three episodes off for Passover. So, anticipate that there will be no podcast on Friday, March 26th, Monday, March 29th or Friday, April 2nd.

We'll be back on April 5th and we'll begin a series of special presentations. We're going to be meeting with three authors, all dealing with aspects of prayer. We're going to be meeting with Alden Solovy, a poet and liturgist, who's come out with a new book called "This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine With Poetry and Prayer". We're going to meet with Rabbi Amy Grossblatt Pessah, who's come out with a book called "Parenting on a Prayer: Ancient Jewish Secrets for Raising Modern Children". And in the same vein, we're going to meet with Dasee Berkowitz, who wrote "Becoming a Soulful Parent: A Path to the Wisdom Within". We'll talk about their books, and then on Fridays, they're going to offer their own personal prayer practices.

Finally, I'd like to just thank you all for being part of this experiment that we've undertaken at the Institute for Jewish spirituality, and let you know that we really have had some success. You have all downloaded over 10,000 episodes of this program. It's reached significant heights in spiritual programming around the world, and many of you have actually subscribed to it, which is really quite gratifying, and I hope it continues to be meaningful to you. So thank you for being with us and we'll look forward to seeing you after Pesach on April 5th.

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 to safe.

