



Open My Heart:

Living Jewish Prayer with Rabbi Jonathan Slater

Rabbi Denise Eger

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 welcome back Rabbi Denise Eger, editor of “Mishkan Ga’avah: Where Pride Dwells, A Celebration of LGBTQ Jewish Life and Ritual,” to share her own personal practice with us. Hi Denise, welcome back. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

DENISE:

Thanks Jonathan. Great to be here. I'm a rabbi in the Los Angeles area for more than three decades. I'm the founding rabbi of Congregation Kol-Ami in west Hollywood, California. I had the privilege and honor of serving as the first openly LGBTQ president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which is the international organization of Reform rabbis, from 2015 to 2017 as well.

JONATHAN:

Well, I'm really excited to have you offer your prayer. So, I'm going to turn things over to you, and thank you for sharing your prayer with us now.

DENISE:

I want to share my private prayer practice, and this has been a lifelong private prayer practice. I was blessed with beautiful parents who prayed with me from the time I was an infant. And this has opened my soul up in a way to be open to prayer. And I really want to encourage those of you that are parents to create a prayer practice, not just for

yourself, but with your children. It shaped me and made me become, in part, who I am today.

And that is a prayer before going to bed at night. It became part of our bedtime ritual as a child. I have memories of being a toddler and praying with my family before I went to sleep at night. But I continue to do that to this day.

So as I enter and get into my bed and begin my own decompression from the day, I close my eyes. Not to fall asleep, but to first I think about the day that happened.

And then, the next piece is the thinking about my family circles. And I actually name them aloud. I invite the name of my spouse, the name of my child, the name of my sister and siblings, of my nieces and nephews into my private prayer space.

And then, as I close my eyes, I sing the *Shema* prayer. It is the cornerstone for me of affirmation. It is a cornerstone of connecting the oneness of my spirit with the oneness of our eternal God, and the oneness with our Jewish people worldwide.

And so, I close my eyes after having invited my family into my prayer space and I slowly sing to myself:

Shema Yisrael שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל

Adonai Eloheinu ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Adonai echad ה' אֶחָד

{Hear, O Israel, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* alone}

And every night for as long as I can remember, those were the last words on my lips, the last words in my heart, as I transitioned to sleep.

JONATHAN:

That was Rabbi Denise Eger sharing their personal prayer with us, which was so moving 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 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.

