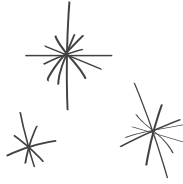


ORAH HI liner notes

aka texts and stories



the walk home niggun

A *niggun*, a wordless melody, can be a sweet companion. This one came to me walking home to my apartment on St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem one Friday night. It kept me company all that Shabbat, returning as a welcome visitor here and there over the next five years. Singing it with others for the first time, in 2022, after many years of isolation, was a *mechayah*, a life-giving moment. It gave this *niggun* new life, too. May we know we are never alone, as we find our way home.

Note: This melody also makes a lovely *barchu*

Sponsored by [Temple Sinai](#) in Dresher, PA. Thank you!



dayenu

I honestly cannot remember when I wrote this melody, or, more to the point, why. There's already a melody for *dayenu*, and if you've started humming one to yourself, that's the one I am referring to. But this prayer-poem has more verses than the three I grew up singing, and it has an intro line that stops me in my tracks every time: *kama ma'alot tovot laMakom aleinu*. How many levels of goodness has the Place bestowed upon us! Five words that are so hard to translate into English. There's the invitation into awareness with "how many," not a question, but a wonder. There's *ma'alot*, ascending levels, higher and higher. *Makom*, "place" as a name for the Divine, in a story that takes us from a constricted place to an expansive wilderness. So simple, so profound, so hard to sing in the "regular" melody! So let's start with this invitation, and ascend up fifteen levels of goodness, of poetry, of family story, together.

Note: We only sang three verses on this recording but it works with all of them. This melody also makes a lovely *lecha dodi*!

אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא עָשָׂה בָּהֶם שְׁפָטִים, דִּינֵנוּ.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ עָשָׂה בָּהֶם שְׁפָטִים, וְלֹא עָשָׂה בְּאֱלֹהֵיהֶם, דִּינֵנוּ.

אֱלוֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת, וְלֹא קָרְבָנוּ לְפָנֵי הַר סִינַי, דַּיְנוּ.

אֱלוֹהֵינוּ קָרְבָנוּ לְפָנֵי הַר סִינַי, וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה. דַּיְנוּ.

ilu hotziyanu mi-mitzrayim, v'lo asah vahem shefatim, dayenu

ilu asah vahem sh'fatim, v'lo asah ve'eloheihem, dayenu

dayenu, dayenu...

ilu natan lanu et hashabbat, v'lo kervanu lifnei har sinai, dayenu

ilu kervanu lifneir har sinai, v'lo natan lanu et hatorah, dayenu

dayenu, dayenu...

How many levels of goodness did The Place bestow upon us!

If g?d had taken us out of Egypt, but not given them judgment,

Dayenu- it would have been enough.

If g?d had given them judgment, but not their gods, Dayenu.

If we had been given Shabbat, but not brought near to Mt. Sinai, Dayenu.

If we had been brought near to Mt. Sinai, but not been given the Torah, Dayenu.

Text from the Haggadah

Sponsored by [Congregation Shearith Israel](#) in Atlanta, GA. Thank you!



shirat nafshi (yedid nefesh)

Shirat Nafshi means "song of my soul." It is the soul-song of the author of the prayer-poem *Yedid Nefesh*, (who might be 16th century mystic Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri, but also might not be) traditionally sung to open Kabbalat Shabbat. We start with a yearning, a love too big to keep inside, calling out to a Holy One that feels so close and so far away. This melody was woven with Susan Glickman, an incredible cantor who I was connected to through the Kesher Shir initiative. The amazing

Rosalie Will founded Keshet Shir to connect Jewish songwriters with cantors to learn together and write new liturgical music. When we were sent off that first day to write, Susan suggested we start at the very beginning. We didn't get much farther than the first line of the second paragraph of *Yedid Nefesh*, which we were studying with fresh eyes. We felt like, in that moment, the prayer-song of the author was ours too, or at least could be a vessel for our yearning for love. May it be a vessel for your yearning, as well (also, peep those g?d-names, they're beyond beautiful).

הַדּוּר, נְאֻה, זֵיו הָעוֹלָם נַפְשִׁי חוֹלֵת אֶהְבְּתֶךָ

hadur, na'eh, siv ha'olam, nafshi cholat ahavatach

Majestic, Beautiful, Radiance of the Universe, my soul is sick for your love.

I am yearning for your love

We are yearning for your love

Written with Susan Glickman

Text from the Friday evening liturgy

Sponsored by our fundrazr community of support. Thank you!



koli ekra (psalm 27)

One of the beauties and challenges of our inherited liturgy is that it is very wordy. There are so many jewels and gems - what can we notice when we soften our gaze and let the words speak to us? This line, this jewel, jumped out at me as I was preparing for a prayer gathering right before the High Holidays. I was called to flip the line on its head. We seek mercy and answers. Our voice calls out. We desire to be heard. Which comes first? Where is the point of origin? What is the hierarchy here? Every time we encounter the liturgy, the experience is different because we are different. Can we use the psalm as a vessel for our own prayers?

Note: *Havayah* is a nickname for g?d flipping around the letters in g?d's "proper" Hebrew name, yud-hey-vav-hey, that keeps the same root (being, was/is/will be) and is able to be vocalized.

שְׁמַע־הוֹיָה קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי

shema havayah. koli ekra. v'choneini. va'aneini.

for answers, for mercy, my voice calls out to the sum-of-all-things

Text from Psalm 27

Sponsored by [Beth Sholom Synagogue](#) in Memphis, TN. Thank you!



I AM OPEN

In the second year of the Covid lockdown, I started a morning chant practice. It was grounding to begin the day on a meditation cushion, looking out the window, crystals and little mementos on a makeshift altar space, singing whatever my heart needed. This chant came from one such morning. A statement of intention, both descriptive and aspirational. How can I be open today? Open to the needs to others, to the needs of my heart? Open to the wonder and pain around me? Open to it all? Makes me want to start a morning chant practice again...

I AM OPEN

Sponsored by our fundraizr community of support. Thank you!



shelter us in place (hashkiveinu)

March, 2020. The time when time stood still. So much confusion, despair, hope. I had just moved, and the circumstances exacerbated an already aching loneliness. I found myself singing a phrase I was hearing in the news: "shelter in place." It felt like a prayer, and became one for me. I sang it to myself in the shower, lying in bed, pacing the hall - not outside as I hadn't figured out how to beat back NC pollen yet. And as the prayer became mine, I realized that, as often happens, there is a spiritual ancestor who prayed a similar prayer that made its way into our liturgy. "Lie us down in peace," prays the ancestor. There is a reason this is part of the evening liturgy. When the sun goes down, and a chill comes to the air, and chaos seems to loom, we are reminded of what remains constant - the sun will set and then rise again, and the stars have their place in the sky. But even after these assurances, we ask for safety. And although shelter-in-place is no longer our reality, there are still too many people in our world who cannot count on being safe. So we keep praying. So I keep praying.

Note: *Yah* is a nickname for g?d utilizing the first two letters in g?d's "proper" name, "yud" and "hey." It is connected with breath, a prescient metaphor for the Divine in the early days of Covid lockdown.

Shelter us in place, shelter us in peace,

Shelter us in love, shelter us in love.

הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשָׁלוֹם

hashkiveinu yah eloheinu. hashkiveinu l'shalom.

Lay us down, Divine Breath, Our Everything, to wholeness/to peace.

Text from the evening liturgy

Sponsored by [B'nai Vail Congregation](#) in Vail, CO. Thank you!



the here havdalah

Havdalah is one of the strangest rituals to do alone. Many times over lockdown, as I lit the candle, I thought, "It's just you and me g?d, do we really need all these pyrotechnics?" Havdalah is ritual immersive theater at its finest, and while it was awkward at first alone, it did give me a sense of freedom. This melody was born from that freedom, an embrace of the pageantry of ritual and a decision to stay for a moment in the liminal space between holy and workday. "Hinei," we begin. Behold, take heed, be here, be here, be here. Here, I am dancing with the fire and the sweet scent and the liquid joy, with my spiritual ancestors and my past, present, and future Jewish sacred family. It's just me in this kitchen, but here, I am far from alone.

And here, it morphed from an acapella stomp-clap situation to a full-on jam with the whole holy crowd. What a blessing, to be here.

הִנֵּה אֵל יִשׁוּעָתִי אֲבֹטָח וְלֹא אֶפְחָד
כִּי עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה ה' וַיְהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה
וּשְׂאֵבֹתָם מֵיָם בְּשִׁשׁוֹן מִמַּעַיְנֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה
לְה' הַיְשׁוּעָה, עַל עַמְּךָ בְּרִכְתְּךָ סֵלָה
ה' צְבָאוֹת עִמָּנוּ

מְשֻׁגָב לָנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב סֵלָה
ה' צְבָאוֹת, אֲשֶׁר־י אָדָם בְּטֹחַ בְּךָ
ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַעֲנֵנוּ כִּי־וּם קָרָאנוּ
לְיְהוָה יְהִי־נוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה
וְשִׂשׂוֹן וִיקָר כֵּן תְּהִיָּה לָנוּ
כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲשֶׁר וּבְשֵׁם ה' אֶקְרָא

hinei el y'shuati, ev'tach v'lo ef'chad
ki ozi v'zimrat yah, adonai vay'hi li li'shua
ushav'tem mayim b'sason, mima'anei ha-y'shua
l'adonai ha-y'shua, al am'cha birchatecha selah
adonai tz'va'ot, imanu
misgav lanu, elohei ya'akov selah
adonai tz'va'ot, ashrei adam boteach bach
adonai hoshiah, hamelech ya'aneinu v'yom koreinu
lay'hudim hay'tah, orah v'simcha
v'sason vikar ken tih'yeh lanu
kos y'shu'ot esah, uv'sheim adonai ekra

here, despite everything, i acknowledge the possibility of redemption. i am confident and unafraid. my strength and the song of the universe will be my saving grace in difficult times. with joy, we will draw water from the deep well of resilience. the capacity for change resides in all things, the capacity for blessing resides in all people. the arc of the universe is with us- all of time and space give us strength. the fountain of hope is with us, and entrusts us with blessing. we call out for help even in this strength, we call out for answers in the darkness. we ask for light, joy, and honor, and draw upon the memory of our ancestors for guidance. we are not alone. the potential of deliverance is a cup overflowing- we raise it high and invoke the source of life.

bruchah at yah shechinah, imoteinu ruach ha'olam
hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol bein or l'choshech
bein yisrael l'amim, bein yom ha'shvi'i l'sheshet y'mei ha'ma'aseh

bruchah at yah shechinah, hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol

we experience your blessing, holy breath and presence, our mother, spirit of the universe,
as the source of distinction, between the holy and the every-day, between light/day and dark/night,
between Israel and all unique peoples, between the seventh day and the six days of creation
we experience your blessing, holy breath and presence, as the
source of distinction between the holy and the every-day

Text from the havdalah liturgy

Co-sponsored by [B'nai Israel Congregation](#) in Rockville, MD & our fundrazr community of support. Thank you!



ORAH HI

Preparing for Pesach in 2022, I stumbled upon the Wikipedia entry for *adir hu*, a prayer-poem traditionally sung at the seder, extolling g?d's many nicknames, dimensions, and attributes, all leading to a repeated imploration for g?d to rebuild g?d's house, speedily and in our days. At the bottom of the entry, I was directed to a feminine g?d-language version of *adir hu* by Rabbi Kohenet Hill Hammer called *orah hi*, "She is Light." What luck! What joy! Where has this been all my life? I read the beautiful words and this melody poured out. I am so grateful to Rabbi Hammer for bringing this beauty into the world, for inspiring us to use all the colors in the g?d-language crayon box, for giving us permission to bring her words to life. Speedily and in our days, may we recognize the whole universe as a Holy House, and each being on earth as worthy of this sacred home.

p.s. It was important for all members of the ensemble to be a part of calling and responding in this track. Any and all genders can benefit from Divine feminine leadership!

Read Rabbi Hammer's reflection on *orah hi* [here](#).

refrain:

orah hi, orah hi,

tivnei veitah bekarov,

bimheira, bimheira,

beyameinu bekarov,
elah b'ni, elah b'ni,
b'ni veiteich bekarov.

binah hi, gilah hi, dimah hi...
hadar hi, vered hi, zerem hi...
chiddush hi, tibur hi, yichud hi...
keseh hi, leidah hi, ma'yan hi...
nechama hi, selichah hi, otzmah hi...
pidyon hi, tzedek hi, kodesh hi...
ra'ya hi, shonah hi, tamah hi...

she is light, she is light.

may she build her house

soon, soon,

speedily and in our days.

g?d, build your house soon-

close to us in time and space.

she is wisdom, she is joy, she is tears.

she is splendor, she is a rose, she is a flowing stream.

she is renewal, she is the center, she is oneness.

she is the full moon, she is birth, she is the fountain-source

she is comfort, she is forgiveness, she is strength.

she is redemption, she is righteousness, she is holiness.

she is a beloved companion, she is always changing, she is complete and perfect.

Text by Rabbi Jill Hammer, inspired by the Haggadah
Sponsored by [Bet Shira Congregation](#) in Miami, FL. Thank you!



keep open the gates

Our liturgy is full of holy *chutzpah*. This is one such case. "Keep open the gates," sings the author of this prayer-poem. "At the time of the closing of the gates." Wait - this moment on Yom Kippur is named *Neilah*, meaning the closing of the gates, and we're asking to... keep the gates open? Another reminder that there is always another chance, that *teshuvah*, repentance, return, when done in good faith and with integrity, is always possible. We just need a little more time. So we ask.

The sun is setting

The gates are closing

The day is through

The sun is setting

The gates are closing

We're here with You

Keep open the gates

Keep open the gates for us

Keep open the gates, at the end of the day

פְּתַח לָנוּ שַׁעַר. בְּעֵת נִגְעִילַת שַׁעַר

P'tach Lanu Sha'ar, B'eit Neilat Sha'ar

Keep open the gates for us, at the hour of the closing of the gates

Text from the High Holiday Machzor

Sponsored by [Park Avenue Synagogue](#) in New York, NY. Thank you!



SHMAX niggun

You might be thinking to yourself, "who or what is a SHMAX?" Many have asked me, feeling embarrassed at a Jewish thing they didn't know. First, I'd love for us to lovingly stomp out the shame around knowing "enough" Jewish things. There are so many things to know! No one knows all the things! Secondly, SHMAX are Shannyn and Max, two dear friends of mine. This *niggun* made itself known at their wedding, and it was such an honor to bring it to life at a morning service in the woods with so many musical friends. Like Shannyn and Max, it is funky, it is fierce, and it brings people together. *L'chaim!*

קול ששון וקול שמחה, קול חתן וקול כלה

kol sason v'kol simcha/ kol chatan v'kol kalah

The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the groom and bride.

We also sing a variety of inclusive alternatives:

kol chatan v'kol chatan- the voice of the groom and the voice of the groom

kol kallah v'kol kallah- the voice of the bride and the voice of the bride

kol reiyah v'kol reiyah- the voice of the loving companion and the loving companion

Text from from Jeremiah 33:11. Used in wedding liturgy.

Sponsored by [Temple Rodeph Shalom](#) in Falls Church, VA. Thank you!