Ep #17: Writing as Spiritual Practice

Full Episode Transcript

Presented by

Hebrew College

Ep #17: Writing as Spiritual Practice

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Welcome to *Speaking Torah*. I'm your host, Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal, spiritual leader of Temple Beth Shalom in Melrose, Massachusetts and 2019 graduate of Hebrew College. In this podcast, Jewish leaders from around the world read essays from Hebrew College faculty, alumni, and students about how Torah can help us navigate the most pressing issues of our time. Together, we explore the ways Torah could help us approach the world with creativity, healing, and hope.

This week, we are pleased to share poetry written by Hebrew College President Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld and her students in her *tefillah* or prayer group, focused on creative writing.

Each year, the students choose from groups that range from traditional liturgical practices to creative outdoor movement minyans and davening by writing groups, like the one led by Rabbi Sharon."

In this case, it is both the writing and the reading of poetry that allows for a deeply creative connection to The Divine. The poems are based on liturgy, combining ancient voices with our own, resulting in a truly timeless prayer.

Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld is President of Hebrew College and former Dean of the Rabbinical School. Emmanuel Cantor and Chaim Spaulding are students in Hebrew College's Rabbinical School.

Read more about our speakers on the *Speaking Torah* webpage at hebrewcollege.edu/podcast.

Sharon's first poem is inspired from Psalm 27:8 and is called Devotion. Now, here's Sharon reading her poem.

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Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: So, the first poem is called Devotion. The liturgical text that I was responding to when I wrote this is from Psalm 27. It's a special Psalm that we read throughout Elul and the High Holiday Season. And the particular verse that I was focused on was verse eight,

which says,“To you, my heart says, seek my face. Oh Lord, I seek Your face.”

And you’ll hear in the poem that part of what I’m picking up on in responding to that verse is the ambiguity of the language. It’s not quite clear whether it’s God speaking to the heart, or the heart speaking to God, or both.

Devotion.

Earlier this week

a prominent American Jewish leader said to me:

We must be absolutely clear.

Do you or do you not believe

That God gave the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai?

(I couldn’t help but hear:

Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?)

I thought back to a panel in Jerusalem in the winter of 1988

When someone demanded an answer to the same question.

My friend Daniel said:

Well, it depends what you mean by God

And it depends what you mean by Gave.

It depends what you mean by Moses

And it depends what you mean by Sinai.

But yes.

We all laughed

But I knew he was serious

Not only about “it depends what you mean”

But about yes.

Is my heart speaking to You?

Are you speaking to my heart?

Am I seeking You?

Are you seeking Me?

I don’t need to know

In order to say

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: I understand you presented the Psalms verse you read as the prompt to your tefillah group. I love that you write in response to the prompts along with your students. How did this particular poem emerge for you?

Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: For me, the act of writing poetry is largely an act of slowing down long enough to notice what I’m feeling. And then, to move a level deeper and to pay attention to the feeling beneath that first feeling and then the feeling beneath that.

And so, when we sat down to write in response to that Psalm, I was carrying with me this experience that I had had earlier in the week that had been sort of continuing to bother me. And I think that’s one of the things that’s so wonderful about this practice we’re engaged in in the tefillah group.

It's essentially where the words of the liturgy meet our lives and land in our hearts in complicated ways. And so, the poem emerged from that meeting place, of the words of the prayer, the words of the Psalm, and this experience that I had just had.

And I love – I think one of the things that's so important to me both about poetry in general and about prayer is that they both make space for the complexities of the human, the heart. They are both places of layered presence and places where there's a lot of room for paradox.

And so, there's something about the paradox that's at the heart of that Psalm, that verse from the Psalm in particular that is very important to my spiritual life, sort of being willing to live with those questions.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: So, you're saying poetry allows you a lot of room for paradox. Did the process of writing this poem help you answer your questions? How else can poetry and prayer interact? It seems like they can be in dialogue sometimes.

Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: For me, there's something about the interacting with the language. I'm a language lover. And so, it's a little bit different from the stillness and spaciousness of just silent meditation. For me, there's something about responding to the wondrousness of the language of our liturgy and textual tradition that cracks things open for me in a different kind of way.

Some of it – and this goes to part of why I started doing this tefillah group, and I've done it in many different forms over the years, but I think for many people, including many of us in the Rabbinical School faculty and the students alike, or certainly the students with whom I've done this exploration over the years, the language of the prayers themselves can open things up in the best of circumstances.

There's a way in which that meeting of whatever we are with the language of the traditional liturgy sort of allows us to not just notice what we're feeling, but to open up to feelings that we might not have accessed otherwise, feelings that we might not have had otherwise.

But sometimes, the language feels like a barrier. Sometimes, it feels like you come up against certain language that's in the liturgy and you feel like you've just sort of hit a brick wall, or it just falls flat.

And so, that's the other thing that I think this tefillah group has been a place to explore that, to ask, okay, we're working with a certain prayer, what's happening when I meet that prayer? Where am I coming up against a barrier? And let's explore that. But let's explore what's getting in the way.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: I remember from when I was a student at Hebrew College that there was an emphasis on helping ordination students cultivate their relationship to spiritual practice. This writing tefillah group is such a creative way to work on that.

Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: One of the things that's very important to us to work on with students and for ourselves is our relationship to prayer. What are we doing when we're praying? And this really flows even more deeply from the conviction that for rabbis and cantors to accompany people in their spiritual lives, they need to also be attending to their own spiritual lives.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: And I know the school's different student and faculty-led tefillah groups offer that exploration, whether it's in a tefillah group doing traditional prayer, a group doing movement as prayer, a group praying in the woods, or in this case, doing creative writing.

All of these different ways of saying, "Look, we're all cultivating our own spiritual practice, our own prayer practice, our own relationship with God and there are 1000 different ways to that."

The name of the group comes from the short little verse before the beginning of the Amidah, which says, "Oh God, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your glory.

So, we use that line from just before the Amidah, just sort of an intention right before the Amidah prayer, "Oh Lord, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your glory," as a way of saying that our own act of writing, our own

act of opening our lips, our own act of finding words in response to the liturgy can also enhance our experience of prayer and our relationship with the divine.

So, over the years, we've really done this as a reflection group and we had a group that really did that very intensively last year. And then, as this fall semester approached, we decided we wanted to experiment with a new thing, which was to meet as a group during the morning prayer block.

So, now we meet at 8AM on Tuesday mornings and we wanted to experiment with how this process of writing and sharing our reflections could feel itself like an act of prayer. It's also allowed us to reflect on what is prayer and what's the difference between poetry and prayer.

I think, one of the things I would describe as the difference is that, while I experience prayer also as a process, a moment of reflection and self-reflection, it is in a devotional posture.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Tell us a little bit about the next poem you're going to read.

Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: This is based on the Asher Yatzar prayer, which is actually a prayer that is part of the daily morning liturgy. It's also the prayer that one traditionally recites after using the bathroom. [Sharon recites *Asher Yatzar* in Hebrew]

"Blessed are you Adoni, our God, sovereign of the universe who has created the human being in wisdom and created within us holes and hollows, channels, and passageways. It is known and revealed before your throne of glory that if one of them should open or one of them should become obstructed, it would be impossible to endure and to stand before you. Blessed are you, Adoni, who heals all flesh and works wonders."

So, this poem, I called Even One Hour. And that is taken from the words of the prayer where it says, it is revealed and known before your throne of glory that if one of them, if one of these holes or passageways were to be

torn open or obstructed, we would not be able to stand before you for even one hour.

Arise,

and give thanks

For the holes and hollows

in your own body

That make living possible

That make standing possible

Before You.

Consider,

though it is uncomfortable,

the blood, water, and waste

the spit, salt, and tears

Everything that flows

In you

through you

from you.

And imagine,

just when you think

you've understood,

what would happen

if one unseen opening

inside you

were to close

or to come apart

Then say these words:

Afilu sha'ah achat

It would be impossible to stand before You

For even one hour.

In the morning,

we walked along the ocean bluffs

with my mother

as she recited her private psalms:

'I just can't get over the mountains here.'

'Oh, I so want a dog.'

'This doesn't look familiar at all.'

'Look at that adorable child.'

Everything is harder now

But she is determined

And so she doesn't notice until it's too late

That her knees are buckling.

'I am disgusted with my legs,'

She says --

As they give way

And she bends

closer and closer to the ground

Baruch atah Adonai

Blessed are You

Who heals us all and works wonders.

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Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Now, we'll hear from Sharon's students, Emmanuel Cantor and Chaim Spaulding. Emmanuel, tell us about the prompt Sharon provided you for your poem.

Emmanuel Cantor: Thank you so much, first of all, for having me on. I've been a true fan of the podcast since before I was a rabbinical student here at Hebrew College. So, it's really special. It's very special to be a part of this.

The poem that I wrote comes from a challenge week where Sharon invited us to reflect on not one, but two prayers. The first prayer that I wrote is known as Asher Yatzar, which is a gratitude blessing shared after being able to go to the bathroom. And so, this Asher Yatzar prayer is very private. It's very intimate. It's very personal, given the setting.

The second prayer Sharon invited us to consider was Psalm 148, which is a traditional part of the daily morning liturgy. And the Psalm speaks to the expansive beauty of nature. So, it's got it all. It mentions sun, moon, stars, fire, hail, trees, animals. You name it, it's there. And Psalm – it's about the vastness of the universe and the infiniteness of the cosmos and how this inspires in us a wonder for The Divine.

And the key verse from that Psalm that encapsulates this vastness is perhaps Halleluhu Shimei HaShamayim. One of the key versus from this

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Psalm that Sharon pointed out for us was this line, Halleluhu Shimei HaShamayim. “Praise be to the highest of heavens. Perhaps beyond, as far as the eye can see.”

So, Sharon invited us that week to consider, where might these two prayers meet? Where might the intimacy, the privacy of the bathroom Asher Yatzar meet the vastness of nature and the cosmos and Halleluhu Shmei HaShamyim?

So, two scenes came to mind when I thought about Sharon’s invitation and the poem records these two scenes from my personal life. And they lie at the heart, again, of Asher Yatzar, the really personal intimacy of our bodies, and Shimei HaShamayim, the vastness of the environment, specifically in my life, the overarching reality of climate change.

The first half of the poem paints the scene in which I first learned how to say the Asher Yatzar prayer, the prayer on going to the bathroom, and thanks to a flushless urinal, which the poem describes in some detail, the act of going to the bathroom and saying this Asher Yatzar blessing from the outset felt very tied to awareness of the environment, of water scarcity and the land of Israel, which is where this memory is rooted, and the massive scale of all that implies.

The second half of the poem speaks to a slow transition that’s happening in my relationship with my dad, as both he and I are getting older, I’m beginning to lovingly worry about him and his wellness and his health, just as he as a parent has lovingly worried about me and my health for years.

And while my dad is working on global climate-change issues, so t couldn’t get more Shimei HaShamayim, it couldn’t get more about the vastness of the universe and our role in it, I’m trying to get him to drink more water. I’m really focused on his Asher Yatzar, the health and wellness of his individual body. And the poem sits in these two memories.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: And now we’ll hear Emmanuel read his poem, Asher Yatzar/ Shimei HaShamayim.

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Emmanuel Cantor: I remember when the yeshiva installed a flushless urinal in the broom closet.

And an asher yaatzar sign was tacked to the entrance.

I took the opportunity to learn the blessing.

Then devote it to memory.

I drank so much that year,

Relishing extra practices to say the prayer,

And triumphant that no flush water was wasted.

My dad seems to hydrate with coffee.

When I visit we engage in Oedipal struggles.

Each morning I fill up a water bottle,

And silently place it next to him.

Later he tells me that water bottles are a millennial thing.

My dad's devoted his late career,

To climate-related financial disclosures,

Hoping to curb global CO2.

Halleluhu shimei hashamayim.

Yet I—a millennial—am worried about kidney stones.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Chaim, what was the prompt for your poem?

Chaim Spaulding: So, this piece, I wrote in the group last year. Every week last year, we were given a different image of God in the liturgy that we were

responding to. So, for one prayer, it would be God is the one who loves, God is the one who redeems, God is this or that.

And I wrote this poem in the week before Passover and so the image that we were given was God as the one who frees the enslaved. And just as a word of context, before I read the poem, I was thinking about Passover imagery. I was thinking a lot about exodus imagery and narrative.

And also last semester, I happened to be studying Shmuel Aleph, the book of I Samuel. And I had all of that imagery in my head too. And I was trying to weave all of these different images and symbols and resonances together and I was trying to hold onto everything that felt alive for me in the Jewish calendar and then also in this story that we were engaging really deeply with in class, and then also in some personal journeys that I was going on. I was trying to bring all of that into conversation.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Now, let's listen to Chaim read their poem.

Chaim Spaulding: This poem is called Middot, which means dimensions.

Here is a map of a narrow place:

choices are permanent, and there is a finite supply of them.

The walls of water on each side are built out of the edges of

other people's fields of vision. No air gets through.

In this place you are wrong, and you can never trust yourself

to be anything else.

It is hard work, to remember to be free.

Each day you must sit in the narrow place

until you can gather the small poor stalks of wheat that grow around you

out of what used to be an ocean floor. Hold them in your palm,

these few dry seeds. They don’t look like much, but they speak.

One says: allow for the possibility that the evil voices that rush down upon you

and try to lash you into a different shape

might instead rush around you, like strong winds,

and dissipate into

the largeness

of the air.

One says: allow for the possibility that you are wise enough to recognize

1. aliveness when you experience it in your own body and

2. love when good people give it to you.

You do not need much, to be free. You need only choose those two things, over and over,

and hold them in your palms like tiny seeds, and shelter them

from the strong winds, and whisper to them,

True, true, true.

Maybe spaciousness will come from walking into the water up to your jaw.

Maybe spaciousness will come from someone who sits at the floor of your pain

and makes music for you.

Maybe spaciousness will come from a small quiet place.

You will have to live most of your life

before you are old enough to know how to do it.

That does not mean you should wait to make choices.

Every evening you must choose which seeds to plant for the morning—

a human-sized choice.

After all, you can only gather one day's worth of bread

tomorrow. Sometimes two.

Every seed has its infinite angel whispering along with you,

True,

true,

true.

Emmanuel Cantor: Chaim, I often have an image in my mind when listening to your poetry, and specifically this one, which is the very classic image of an iceberg, in the sense that usually we see 10% of the surface and 90% submerged. But when I listen to your poetry, I feel as though you've taken the 10% of the words we say out loud or in group settings and you've shown us some of what's going on for you internally, for which it's such a gift to be present for.

I want to go back to the top of the iceberg and I'm curious if you want to share what your Seder was like this year and how it felt to say any words that felt like symbols of some of these feelings and experiences? Whether they were in every generation, each person should see themselves, if they've gone out of Egypt or being answered with expanse when calling out from a narrow place. When you find yourself saying those short lines in Hebrew or English, how does it feel after having explored and shared what's going on underneath?

Chaim Spaulding: I was leading a meal with a group of friends in Somerville and we were eating outside because of COVID. And so, we started in a

local park and we were picnicking and we ended up on someone's porch. And it was really an experience of watching the sunset and moving from light into darkness and feeling the evening winds come up and blow all of our plates away from us and there was some chaos.

Yeah, and I think I remember having a real feeling of calm during the Seder and a feeling of expansiveness and I think it felt very tangible to be out in this giant field under a very large sky, even in the middle of the city, and to be with people that I loved, and to be doing something really meaningful and beautiful with them, and to be feeding them and to be fed by them.

I do think I got this sense at Passover of a real feeling of freedom and a real feeling of peace and acceptance and feeling that my freedom came from a sense of smallness in a really beautiful and enormous world.

And I think that was a bit of what I was tapping into with this poem and that it was really – it's something to sit in the beit midrash and write it, and then it's something to be outside and look up at the sky and feel it.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Tell me about being in this particular tefillah group, where you not only write reflections on the prayers but are moving towards writing as an act of prayer.

Emmanuel Cantor: I had truly never written a line of poetry before joining this tefillah group, not even a last-minute acrostic poem, birthday card for a family member. So, I really feel like I'm standing on the shoulders of all the Hebrew College students and faculty who are much more experienced writers and poets, while also being so incredibly inviting and encouraging.

And it's really just in the culture here, this creativity and this invitation to write, as being modeled by my teachers and classmates. So, I've just come to this tefillah group, in part given how it's really in the water here.

I feel really lucky to have grown up in a family and community where Jewish prayer tefillah was really in the water. My school had prayer twice a day, sometimes three times a day depending on the time of year and when it would get dark out.

And what that meant is, I was invited to say some of these prayers that we've reflected on in the writing group thousands of times, maybe tens of thousands of times.

So, when I think about a tefillah, a prayer like Shimei, like Asher Yatzar, which you say upon completing going to the bathroom, on the one hand, it feels like it's everywhere in my life. I've said it in so many different places. I've said it in the company of so many different people.

And so, the act of being asked to sit down and write a poem about these prayers, Shimei, Asher Yatzar, and the like, helped me really uncover some very specific memories and moments about these words that feel like they're everywhere. And I get to ask myself, who are the people that are most important to you when you think of this prayer? What are the places? What are the memories? What are the stories? And I find that these prayers that are sometimes everywhere in my life actually have very, very specific homes as well.

Chaim Spaulding: I joined this group last year when it as a tefillah reflection group, when I was davening in other spaces during the week. And then, once a week on Wednesday, we would get a prompt in advance. I would go home. I would think about what the prompt was bringing up. I would write something and then we'd come in and share it.

And this year, it's been a very different experience, to walk into the beit midrash, into our davening space and to sit down with my tallis on and to have sort of that auspicious hour of time at the beginning of the day when I'm used to praying and to say, "Alright, this is writing time. This is the time when I'm going to create something."

And I think it's – I've surprised myself every week in finding that I have something to write every time, that there's something about having a consistent practice, showing up at a particular time, being in a minyan, being in that space and having my brain sort of attuned to the quality of the light and the fact that this is the morning and this is Shachrit, that always

something comes out of me, something comes loose in me and I'm able to write in that moment.

Which is very, I think, similar to me, to experiences that I have with prayer when I'm davening on a regular basis. I often think, I'm going to show up and I'm going to be tired and I just woke up and I'm going to kind of roll into this space and I don't know if anything's going to happen.

But then having that consistent practice, having the community around me, it does open something up and I really value writing. Writing has been a big part of my life for many, many years. And it feels intuitive and important to me to take writing as seriously as prayer and to understand that writing also is a discipline in my life that brings me close to God, and to treat it accordingly and to be in community with other people who are going through the same thing.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Why write poetry instead of prose or creating a new translation of a prayer?

Chaim Spaulding: I've been writing my whole life and poetry is not usually the genre that I work in. It's not the thing that feels like it comes most naturally to me. And I think the reason why poetry feels so intuitive to me in this particular group, in this space, is because I think I relate to prayer as poetry.

And so, it makes sense for me to relate to poetry as prayer also in the sense that the words of the liturgy that we are saying every morning are beautiful on the level of meaning, but they're also beautiful on the level of form, on the level of playfulness with sound and texture and how the words feel in your mouth and the rhythm that they come out in.

These are all poetic qualities and because in prayer, we're engaging with words on the level of meaning and on the level of sound and on the level of rhythm and all of these different ways, there's some kind of slipperiness of meaning.

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Prayer is never quite just saying the thing that it's trying to say. It's never just conveying information. It's always conveying meaning by dancing around it, by building up layers around it. And I feel like this is what poetry does too.

And so, when I'm writing poetry that's linked to prayer somehow, I feel like I'm trying to understand the prayer. I'm trying to get new meaning out of it. But I'm not trying to overanalyze or dissect or break down prayer into something that is prosaic. I'm trying to preserve the mystery of it in the many layers.

My experience as a rabbinical student has largely been, over the past year-and-a-half that I am taking in, I am absorbing so much, not passively, but the sort of flow of creativity and knowledge and insight and wisdom is very much from others, from the outside into me, which is the work of a student, is to be a sponge in a lot of ways and to absorb, to take in as much as possible.

And it feels really, really powerful for me to have an opportunity to then send something in the opposite direction, to produce something, to create something that I am putting out into the world that is a response, that is in dialogue with what I'm taking in and writing is my favorite way to do that.

Emmanuel, one thing I was thinking about when I was listening to your poem and I was thinking about the poem that I chose to share, I think when I started out in this group and even at the point at which I wrote this particular poem, I was really focused on the liturgy as the starting point and I was really playing with images, I was playing with metaphors and symbolism and I think something that I've been really inspired by, listening to your poetry over the course of the past year or so is the way that you really just seem to start with just an honest true story about your life.

You start with something real that's happened to you and you just tell it. And it always ends with a gut punch. It always just gets to me and it's unadorned and it's real. And I just then can't stop thinking about it afterwards.

And that's something that I've been trying to emulate. I think my style in writing has shifted just from listening to you and other people in the group and I find myself much more often starting with trying to just describe a concrete experience that I'm having before I see what that brings up in terms of prayer.

But I'm really curious to know if you think of yourself as starting with life and then making a connection to prayer, if you start in your process by meditating on the prayer and see what images from your life come up, what that interplay feels like for you as you're writing and if you're making some deliberate choices around that?

Emmanuel Cantor: I'm definitely starting with the prayer. But while you, Chaim, have mentioned paying such careful attention to the words and the poetry and the subtle, nuanced details of the letters and the rhythm, I have to admit that I take a lot of things for granted. And it's the Shimei and it's Asher Yatzar and it's the Amidah and I've rattled it off before and I'll rattle it off again.

And I do start with the prayer, the act of uncovering is saying, okay, where does this prayer really come up in my life? I say it in all these different circumstances, but what is the memory? Who is the other person? What is the time where, like, that is when I said the Shimei, that is when I thought about Asher Yatzar.

I remember feeling a little self-conscious about this pattern that was showing up in my poetry that I think each of my pieces was very much reflecting on the fancy German word is the sitz im leben, the life setting of these prayers and maybe less about the more localized themes within the prayers themselves.

And I sent Sharon my poem one week as we do every week. But this week, I included a little note saying I just am noticing a pattern that I am gravitating towards reflecting on the social settings, these tefilot, these prayers take place, and not the direct metaphors or language of the tefillah themselves. And I don't know what to make of it.

And Sharon responded via email, “I’m intrigued by the distinction you’re making. I’m not sure I see one between what these prayers literally mean and where they hit us most deeply in our lives.” And I’ve tried to hold onto that continuity since that conversation.

Chaim Spaulding: That’s beautiful, Emmanuel, and it’s helping me to realize something that I hadn’t fully realized for myself about what this practice has been doing for me, which is that I didn’t grow up saying a lot of these prayers very regularly and many of them I don’t have memories attached to beyond the past year because I’m just encountering them now, in some ways for the first time, many of them.

And so, I often am finding myself writing about when I’m starting with a life experience or memory, I find myself starting a lot of prayers with, you know, “Yesterday this happened. Last night this happened, and now I’m praying this.”

And it feels really special to me to think that the memories that I am going to have that are attached to these prayers in the future, you know, 50 years from now when I’m davening the Amidah, when I’m calling out the Shimei, the memories that I’m going to have that are attached to them are the Hebrew College beit midrash and this group and davening with you and davening with everyone else and learning from Sharon.

And as I am writing, I am building many of these memories and these associations for the first time. And I’m grateful for that and I’m also grateful that you helped me just kind of notice that that’s part of what’s happening for me in this group.

Emmanuel Cantor: That’s so special to hear, Chaim. And I almost tear up imagining us sitting 50 years from now looking back at our memories in the Hebrew College beit midrash.

I think there’s an important flipside to what you’re saying about the difference between growing up with some of these prayers and interacting with them for the first time.

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For me, part of what I am struggling with in a productive sense is wrote learning. And I think a lot about the saying I have heard, attributed to Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, which is the authors of the Siddur, the prayer book did such a good job at preservation.

It's truly an incredible historical feat that many of these prayers are 2000 years old and we have them today. However, in the act of preservation, you might freeze-dry something, proverbially, such that it can last for an enormous amount of time, but you have to take out the liquid.

And so, our act of making these prayers come alive again after the powerful experience that the original authors wanted to preserve throughout the generations is we need to figure out a way to pour some hot water in the prayers.

And having people like yourself come to these prayers and practices anew is the hot water that we need to make it come alive. So, it's such an essential part for me, in addition to writing, which is really a new practice for me. They're both wonderfully piping hot mugs of hot water onto a freeze-dried prayer. So, thank you for that.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Sharon, I'd love to come back to you for one last word about the amazing creativity coming out of this group and the rabbinical students in general.

Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: Hebrew College is attracting to the rabbinical school a really disproportionate and exciting number of talented artists and writers and musicians, people who are really engaged in the creative life of the spirit and have an enormous amount of talent.

And I've been reflecting on why that is actually. I think it's an interesting question because it feels like it's just happened organically. I think it has something to do with the way in which the school is really – the ethos of the school is this blend of literacy and creativity.

And so, students know that they're both being invited into a deep literacy, that if they come they'll be working on developing this deep literacy and ability to work from inside the language of the traditional sources.

And for people who are artists and writers in particular, to be invited into that and to be invited to bring their own creative voices to that process, I think, is a very exciting and compelling combination.

Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal: Thank you for joining us for this episode of *Speaking Torah*. We want to thank Emily Hoadley for our logo and Hebrew College Rabbinical Student and composer Jackson Mercer for our theme music Esa Einai. To learn more about Hebrew College, please visit hebrewcollege.edu/podcast and remember to subscribe, like, and rate *Speaking Torah* wherever you listen to podcasts.

We'll leave you this week with L'cha Dodi, performed by Hebrew College grad Canotr Kevin Margolius and the Touro Synagogue's house band, The Panorama Jazz Band. Visit our website for information about the Synagogue's 30th anniversary Jazz Fest Shabbat on April 28th, or to listen to the album on Spotify. I'm your host Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal. Thank you for joining us on *Speaking Torah*.