

Elohai Neshamah

Berachot 60b

אֱלֹהֵי, נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא. אַתָּה בְּרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יִצְרַתָּהּ, אַתָּה נִפְחָתָהּ
בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי, וְאַתָּה עֲתִיד לְטַלְּהָ מִמֶּנִּי, וּלְהַחְזִירָהּ בִּי לְעֲתִיד
לְבוֹא. כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי, מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, רַבּוֹן
כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים, אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, הַמַּחְזִיר נְשָׁמוֹת לְפָגְרִים מֵתִים.

Elohai n'shamah shenatata bi t'horah hi.

My God, the soul You have given me is pure.

Atah v'rataH, For You created it, *atah y'tzartaH*, You formed it,
atah n'fachaH bi, and You made it live within me [breathed it into me].

v'atah m'shamraH b'kirbi, You watch over / preserve it within me,

v'atah atid lit'laH mimeni ul'hachaziraH bi leatid lavo.

and/but one day, You will take it from me and restore it in the time to come.

Kol z'man shah-n'shamah b'kirbi As long as the soul is within me,
modeh/modah ani l'fanecha I will give thanks to Your face/presence

Adonai elohai veilohei avotai,

My Lord God of Gods of the generations before me,

she'atah hu ribbon kol ha-ma'asim, to You who are the power of good deeds,

mosheil b'chol ha-b'riot, the Ruler of all creatures,

adon kol ha-n'shamot. the Master Craftsman of every soul.

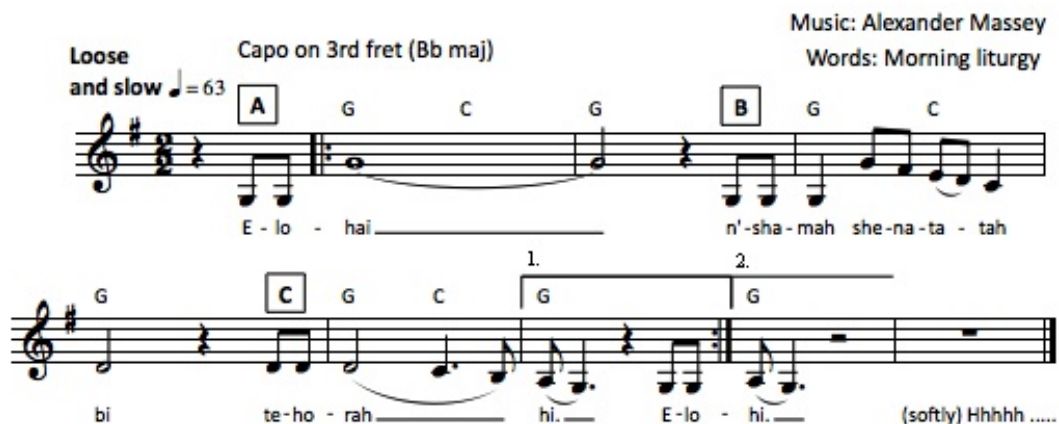
Baruch atah Adonai, ha-machazir n'shamot ha-meitim.

Blessed are You God, giving souls to the dead / who restores souls to dead corpses'.

Elohai N'shamah

3 part round

Loose and slow $\text{♩} = 63$ Capo on 3rd fret (Bb maj) Music: Alexander Massey Words: Morning liturgy



E - lo - hai _____ n' - sha - mah she - na - ta - tah

1. 2.

bi te - ho - rah _____ hi. _____ E - lo - hi. _____ (softly) Hhhhh

1. The breath of God

“Then the Lord God formed man [*adam*] of the dust of the ground [*adamah*], and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*nishmat chayim*] of life; and man became a living soul [*nefesh chayah*].” (Gen. 2:7)

What is a ‘living soul’ [*nefesh chayah*]? Torah tells us that it is made of what is seen, and what is unseen – of *adamah* ‘earth’ and *n'shamah* ‘the breath of God’.

2. The three breaths

Note: these are inspired by - **Joseph, A.S. (1996) The sound of the soul: discovering the power of your voice**, Health Communications Inc., Florida

- a) Place a hand on your chest (and, if you like, the other on your belly). Take a "it's great to be alive!" breath.
- b) Exhale. Relax. Place your hands on the sides of your rib cage. Allow yourself to respond to this thought: "Allow a silent breath."

Notice how your feelings - physical and emotional - change with each new type of breath. Our feelings influence our breathing, and our breathing also influences how we feel.

- c) Dropping your hands to your sides, allow a third breath: "I allow a deep down breath into and out of all of myself." Feel it flow to all parts of yourself. Feel yourself being breathed. You don't have to 'do' anything - just notice yourself breathing.

Allow several of the third kind of breath. On each exhalation, allow a relaxed sigh through a 'hah'. Don't push the sound; simply notice what emerges when you allow this very deep, relaxing breath.

If you notice tensions or blocks, don't fight them or try to change anything. Just notice, and think 'Ah, so that's going on', and continue to breathe.

Return to these three breaths as often as you like - they can be very centring.

3. New breath, new start

- "The rabbis taught that sleep was one sixtieth part of death (Berachot 57b), and that our souls are restored to us in the morning when we wake up. The act of breathing is evidence of life, and the Hebrew text actually dramatizes this. In five of the opening sentences the verb ends with the letter *hey* with a dot in it, a so-called *mappik hey*. This indicates that the usually silent letter is to be sounded as we breathe out. Thus we hear the breath being restored to us as we return to the tasks of the new day. A renewed soul offers us the possibility of a new beginning at every stage of our life, whatever has happened to us in the past." (*Siddur Ha-T'fillot*, Movement for Reform Judaism, UK, p.163)
- "Reb Goldie Milgram writes: 'We pray with the awareness that any *shmutz* that gets onto our soul is of our own doing, that each day can be lived from the place of a refreshed pure white page in the Torah of our lives.' <...> [T]hat's a pretty radical notion. The *Elohai neshamah* blessing asserts that I am not broken. I may stray from the path; I may blind myself to blessing; I may close my eyes to the All, Who permeates creation; but these are my mistakes, and I can fix them. <...> No matter how I miss the mark in my daily undertakings, every morning I begin again clean." Barenblatt, Rachel - http://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2005/05/elohai_neshama.html
- "Yesterday and tomorrow are man's downfall. Today you may be aroused towards God. Don't let yourself become discouraged because of what may have

happened yesterday or what may happen tomorrow.” Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, Sichot Haran #288

- “See that you make your days very long. With every new day and moment, make sure that your time is longer, fuller and richer with added holiness. You must continually extend your days, filling them with greater holiness and purity. This is the secret of long life. ... Every hour of the day, see that you extend and enrich that hour by filling it with extra holiness. Do the same every day of your life. Let each day be filled with more holiness than the day before. You will then be blessed with length of days.” Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, Likutey Moharan I, 60

4. What is a soul?

I love that the word ‘soul’ exists, but we cannot define it, and etymologists cannot trace where it came from ... What associations do we have with the word? Here are some English words to think about and feel into:

- Soul, soulful, soulless; spirit, inspired, spirited, aspire, expire; life, alive, life-force, lively; essence, essential; consciousness; intelligence, wisdom; person; conscience; wisdom; compassion; eternity

In the Torah, there are three words that are often translated as ‘soul’: *n’shamah* (related to breath), *ruach* (also related to breath, and wind), and *nefesh*. Much has been written about what they might mean, and they are not always clearly differentiated:

- "for the life-force [*nefesh*] of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11)
- “My spirit [*ruach*] shall not abide in man for ever; for he also is flesh.” (Gen. 6:3) And the dust returns to the ground, as it was, and the spirit [*ruach*] returns to God who gave it. (Eccl. 12:7)
- “It is the spirit [*ruach*] in people, and the breath [*nishmat*] of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.” (Job 32:8)
- “Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed [*nishmat*] into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [*nefesh*].” (Gen. 2:7) Onkelos, the translator of the Torah from the original Hebrew into Aramaic, translates the word 'living' as 'speaking' [*m’mal’la*]; his version: "And man became a speaking spirit [*ruach*]."
- “The breath (*neshamah*) first leaves His [God’s] lips, travels as a wind (*ruach*) and finally comes to rest (*nefesh*) in the vessel [the person].” Description by Rabbi Isaac Luria, key 16th century teacher of the mystical teachings of Kabbalah. **Kaplan, Aryeh (1992) Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. 2**, Maznaim Publishing
- “The lamp [*ner*] of the Lord is the soul [*n’shamah*] of a person, searching all the deepest recesses of the innermost parts [*vaten*].” (Prov. 20:27) *Vaten* ‘belly’ was considered the seat of the mental faculties, also a womb ie where new life is first formed, and by extension, the innermost part of anything. While this verse is not easy to interpret, it does suggest that whatever it is we call ‘soul’ is both connection with and emanation from What / Who continually creates and sustains us.

5. The daughter of the king

(Frاند, Yissocher, 2004, An Offer You Can't Refuse: And Other Essays on the Art of Living, ArtScroll, Mesorah Publications, p.34)

“The *sefarim* (books on Jewish thought) refer to the *n’shamah* as the *bat melech*, the daughter of the King, and that is indeed what it is. It is, as it were, a part of the Almighty Himself, a glimmer of His essence. ... It is His daughter, His baby. You ask people to describe their most precious asset, and you will get all sorts of answers. Some people will mention their homes. Others may mention their investment portfolios. Yet others, who have a bit more insight, might speak of their families, their health, their talents, skills and faculties. But all these answers are wrong, totally and completely wrong. Your most precious asset is your *n’shamah*. There is no other *n’shamah* in the universe that is quite like your *n’shamah*. The Almighty has placed it in your case, and it is your responsibility ... to do everything in [y]our power to protect and preserve it.”

6. Extra soul

“For Resh Lakish said: Man is given enlarged [lit. ‘extra’] soul [*neshamah yeterah*] on the eve of the Sabbath, but at the termination of the Sabbath it is taken away from him, as it is said, He ceased from work and rested [*shavat vayinafash*] (Ex. 31:17) that is to say, ‘Once the rest had ceased, woe! that soul is gone.’” (Ta’anit 27b; also Beitza 16a)

R. Lakish created this teaching by creatively reframing the phrase *shavat vayinafash*. First, he interpreted *shavat* as ‘ceasing’ to observe the Sabbath. Second, he divided the word *vayinafash* into two words: *vav-yud* ‘woe’ and *nun-peh-shin*, ‘soul’. There is a common misunderstanding of this teaching. Many read *n’shamah yeterah* as meaning ‘an extra soul’, when in fact it means ‘extra (ie additional) soul’; in other words, our soul is strengthened through the period of Shabbat rest and joy.

7. Each soul has a unique purpose

(Weisz, Noson ‘Sticks and Stones’, Parshat Metzora - www.aish.com)

“As souls we are in a limitless world. Each one of us was sent to the world to accomplish something unique and given the means and the equipment to do it. Our bodies are the suits that we wear in order to be able to function in this physical world. Clothes never define the man. None of us is in competition with each other; it is impossible for anyone to get hold of anything that was written for someone else. There is nothing to be gained from anyone else’s failure. On the contrary, one of the elements of my own mission is to assist anyone I possibly can to be successful at his.”

8. Lame and blind in the king’s orchard (Sanhedrin 91a-b)

“Antoninus said to Rabbi: ‘The body and the soul can both free themselves [exempt each other] from judgment. How so? The body can plead: ‘The soul has sinned, [the proof being] that from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave [and am not capable of doing anything].’ Whilst the soul can say: ‘The body has sinned, [the proof being] that from the day I departed from it I fly about in the air like a bird [and am not capable of sinning].’ Rabbi replied, ‘I will tell you a parable. To what may this be compared? To a human king who owned a beautiful orchard that contained splendid figs. Now, he appointed two guards there, one lame and the other blind. [One day] the lame one said to the blind one, ‘I see beautiful figs in the

orchard. Come and take me on your shoulders, so that we may get and eat some.' So the lame one rode on the blind one, got some fruits and they ate them. Some time after, the owner of the orchard came and inquired of them, 'Where are those beautiful figs?' The lame one replied, 'Do I have legs to walk with?' The blind one said, 'Do I have I eyes to see with?' What did the owner do? He placed the lame upon the blind and judged them together. So will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, [re]place it in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, 'He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people' (Ps 50:4): He shall call to the heavens from above - this refers to the soul; and to the earth, that he may judge his people - to the body."

9. Five qualities of the soul (Berachot 10a)

"To whom did David refer in these five verses beginning with 'Bless the Lord, O my soul [*barchi nafshi*]?' ["and all that is within me bless His holy name" Ps 103:1] He was alluding only to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to the soul [*n'shamah*]. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole world, so the soul fills the body. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, sees, but is not seen, so the soul sees but is not itself seen. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, feeds the whole world, so the soul feeds the whole body. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is pure, so the soul is pure. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, abides in the innermost precincts, so the soul abides in the innermost precincts. Let that which has these five qualities come and praise Him who has these five qualities."

10. Every person is precious (Sanhedrin 37a)

"If a person strikes many coins from one mould, they all resemble one another, but the supreme king (lit. 'the king of the kings of the kings'), the Holy One, blessed be He, fashioned every person in the stamp of the first person, and yet not one of them resembles [any other]. Therefore every single person is obliged to say: 'the world was created for my sake'."