

**A Conversation with Poet Dinah Berland.**

*Hours of Devotion: Fanny Neuda's Book of Prayers for Jewish Women*

6pm- May 18th 2026 Berlin, Germany

[dinahland@gmail.com](mailto:dinahland@gmail.com) [www.dinahberlandpoet.wordpress.com](http://www.dinahberlandpoet.wordpress.com)

## **Preface**

In the wake of a polarizing divorce, my first child and only son, Adam, then in his twenties, had disappeared from my life for more than eleven years. Every attempt I had made to contact him had failed. My friends and family provided support and advice, but one editorial client, the author Judith Orloff, M.D., offered the most radical suggestion of all. “There is something you can do,” she said. “You can pray – it works.”

At that time I had been working for about six years as a book editor for the J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles. I was also a published poet and had previously worked as a freelance journalist, contributing regularly to the *Los Angeles Times*, among other newspapers and magazines. But this was not the kind of writing assignment I was used to. What sort of prayer could I possibly compose that would be neither too selfish nor too weak? How could I ever find words strong and loving enough to heal the painful rift between us?

Then one day, as I was browsing in Sam Johnson’s Book Shop around the corner from my house, I noticed a slim, well-worn volume tucked between larger tomes in the Judaica section. The spine was mysteriously blank. Out of curiosity, I plucked it off the shelf and discovered *Hours of Devotion: A Book of Prayers and Meditations for Use of the Daughters of Israel, During Public Service and at Home, for All the Conditions of Woman’s Life, translated by M. Mayer* “from the German *Stunden der Andacht*” (New York, 1866). The author’s name was notably absent.

As I scanned the table of contents – skimming past the morning and evening prayers, prayers for each day of the week, for the Sabbath, the New Moon, and the Jewish holidays – I was captivated by the many prayers written especially for women. There were personal prayers for a bride, for a woman about to give birth, for mothers with grown children, for widows. In addition were special prayers that could be used by men as well as women and by people of any faith – for travel, for patience and strength, for healing, for thanksgiving, and for loss.

Then I saw the title “Prayer for a Mother Whose Child Is Abroad.” I was stunned to discover that someone had actually written a prayer for a woman whose child was absent from her life, a woman like me. As I began to read the heartfelt pleas of a mother asking God to watch over her child when she could not, to “lead him safely over every rock and thorn in his path,” to “grant him strength and calm” – I felt, at last, that someone understood both my pain and my hope. The last lines contained the message I had been seeking:

O Parent of All, hear my fervent prayer  
And bring my child back to me  
At the right time, full of joy and the vigor of life,  
To be the pride and delight of my heart,  
A blessing to all, and pleasing in your sight,  
My God and Sovereign. Amen.

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**Gebet einer Mutter, deren Kind in der Fremde ist | For a Mother Whose Child is Abroad**

<p>„Der Ewige behüte dich vor allem Bösen, er behüte deine Seele.“ (Ps. 121, 7.)</p> <p>In der Fremde, fern vom Elternhause, fern vom Vaterherzen, von Muttertreue und Sorgfalt, lebt mein Kind, und ich, deren süßeste Freude es wäre, über seine Gesundheit zu wachen, jeden seiner Schritte zu hüten, es mit nieversiegender Liebe und Treue zu umgeben — ich bin fern von ihm; es reicht nicht zu ihm mein Blick, und nicht meine Hand, und ich vermag nichts zu thun, als zu dir, mein Gott, zu beten für sein Wohl und Heil. O höre meines Herzens heißes Flehen, nimm mein Kind in deinen allmächtigen Schutz, leite es mit deiner Gnadenhand über jeden Stein und Dorn auf seinem Wege, beglücke es mit jener Anmuth und Lieblichkeit, mit jenem weisen und bescheidenen Benehmen, durch die wir die Herzen der Menschen gewinnen, und darin die Freundlichkeit und das Wohlwollen für uns hervorzaubern, so daß die kalte Fremde zum heimischen Heerde uns wird. Erhalte es an Körper und Geist gesund und lebenskräftig, wende ab von ihm jedes Ungemach und Uebel, alles Schädliche und Verderbliche; halte fern von ihm den mächtigen Reiz der Sünde und hilf ihm überwinden die Versuchungen, die von Außen kommen, wie die Leidenschaften, die im Innern gähren, daß sie nimmer zur Herrschaft über ihn gelangen; daß seine Seele rein und lauter bleibe, in kindlicher Unschuld und Frömmigkeit an dem Edlen und Göttlichen hange, und sein Auge und Antlitz stets ein reiner Spiegel seines makellosen Herzens sei. Verleihe ihm, himmlischer Vater, Kraft und Verstand, Fleiß und Eifer, um seinen Beruf, seine Aufgaben und Obliegenheiten zu erfassen und mit Lust und Liebe zu erfüllen, daß sie ihm zum Heil und Segen gereichen, und es auf die Höhen des Lebens und des Glückes führen. Hilf ihm alle Beschwerneisse und Entbehrnisse überwinden, und gewähre ihm Alles, was sein jetziges und einstiges Wohl zu begründen vermag. Erhöre, Allvater, mein heißes, inbrünstiges Gebet, und führe zur Zeit mir wieder mein Kind zurück, voll Lebenslust und Lebenskraft, zum Stolz und zur Freude meines Herzens, zum frommen Segen der Menschen und zu deinem Wohlgefallen, mein Gott und Herr.</p> <p>Amen</p>	<p>ADONAI will keep you from all evil; God will keep your soul.</p> <p>-PSALM 121:7</p> <p>All-Gracious God-far from his parental home, Far from his mother's care and concern, My child lives in a foreign land, and I, Who would find delight in watching over his health, In guarding his every step,</p> <p>In lavishing my undying love and faithfulness on him, Am separated from him.</p> <p>My eye, my hand, my voice cannot reach him.</p> <p>I can but pray to you, my God, For his welfare and deliverance. O Merciful One, Hear the fervent supplication of my heart: Take my child into your almighty protection,</p> <p>Lead him safely over every rock and thorn in his path. Endow him with such charms and grace, With such prudent and modest deportment, That he will win the hearts of everyone he meets. Procure for him the friendship and benevolence Of his neighbors, and thus turn the foreign land Into a home for him.</p> <p>Preserve the health and vigor of his body and soul, Guard him against all evil, calamity, and danger. Allow his soul to remain pure and clear And cleave in childlike innocence and piety To all that is noble and divine, That his eye and demeanor may ever be A brilliant mirror of his unblemished heart. O God, grant him strength and calm, Energy and perseverance to attend to and fulfill All the tasks he undertakes, that they may be A blessing and a beacon for him And make his life happy and contented. Help him conquer all troubles and obstacles, And grant him all that may assist In his present and future welfare.</p> <p>O Parent of All, hear my fervent prayer And bring my child back to me At the right time, full of joy and the vigor of life, To be the pride and delight of my heart, A blessing to all, and pleasing in your sight, My God and Sovereign. Amen.</p>
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**ON THE NEW MOON**

**לֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ**

*Teach us to number our days,  
Then we shall gain a heart of wisdom.*

—PSALM 90:12

God of life, who regulates the course of time,  
You have divided it into great and small periods,  
Into years, months, and days.  
These passages teach us how time rushes by  
In swift, uninterrupted flight  
And with every onward movement carries us nearer  
To the end of all earthly existence—into eternity—  
And that fleeting time, once gone,  
Will never reverse its course  
Despite all our wishes and ardent desires for its return.  
Therefore we must use it  
As long as we can still call it ours

60 \* HOURS OF DEVOTION

And waste not even the least bit of it—  
Lose no hours by useless deed or practice,  
For you, O God, will on some future day,  
Call us to account for how we spent our lives.

We must carry out our works and complete them  
As time lays them out before us.  
If we contemplate them too much and hesitate,  
Then the stream of time tugs them past us,  
And all that remains are empty hindsight and regret.  
Whatever we begin and undertake,  
Whatever we struggle with and strive for—  
May they be healing and God-pleasing works,  
Expressing our highest convictions on earth,  
Worthy of beings who were made in the image of God.

Therefore, O Heavenly Protector, I pray to you  
For understanding and wisdom that I may use my time  
In ways that are a blessing to me, to my loved ones,  
And to my fellow human beings—  
That I may use every hour, every moment of my life,  
In wise action and effort, in valuable work and study,  
For the ennoblement of my heart, for the preparation  
And cultivation of my soul—for eternity.  
O Compassionate One, who has always  
Guided and shielded me, continue to grant  
Your gracious protection to me and my loved ones.  
May the coming month  
Be a month of peace and joy for us.  
Preserve our health and lives,  
Soften and lighten our grief,  
Increase our pleasure in life,  
Bless the works of our hands,  
And grant us, in the fullness of your grace,  
All that we may need  
And all that may be good for us. Amen.

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**ON MONDAY**

*God said, "Let there be an expanse  
In the midst of the water  
And let it separate water from water." . . .  
God called the expanse "Sky."*

—GENESIS 1:6-8

I look up, my God and Sovereign,  
To the beautiful sky, so full of wonders,  
That you have cast above the earth.  
I gaze up at the vast expanse of blue—  
At the clouded heights from which you speak  
In the solemn, commanding language  
Of thunder and lightning.  
I look up and my gaze rests with awe on these heavens  
That you have clothed so gloriously in wonder.  
Oh, how poor we would have been  
If you hadn't, in your grace, granted us this view!  
What would the earth have been for us—

**DAILY PRAYERS • 23**

How sad, how barren, how joyless,  
If you hadn't given us the sky?  
We cast our dearest hopes into the heavens;  
Our spirits yearn toward its heights.  
Our gaze turns toward it in times of joy and sorrow,  
On good days and on bad. From the heavens  
We draw joy and strength into our hearts.  
Yes, O Holy One, your throne lies  
At the pinnacle of heaven. Your seat rests  
In the distant heights beyond all heights;  
Yet, for all that, you are never far  
From your earthly children.  
Your justice and your compassion  
Reign over the whole world,  
Yet you carry the smallest of your creations  
Close to your heart. You guide them  
With a faithful parental hand.

Preserve for me, Parent of All, an eye forever open  
To the wondrous works of your creation.  
Preserve in me a consciousness forever open to you,  
All-Wise, Almighty, All-Loving Creator  
And Parent of All.  
Preserve in me an open heart  
In which to instill an all-encompassing love—  
A love for you, O God, and for all your creations.  
May strength and courage always dwell in my heart  
Along with the intention and energy  
To practice goodness and to pursue  
All that is life-giving and blessed  
For me, for my loved ones, and for all my neighbors.  
Preserve for me the heaven of this life,  
Pure and untroubled by grief and suffering.  
Enlighten it through the blessed light  
Of your grace and mercy, which you never withhold,  
And draw me into it—me and all my loved ones  
And the great, vast world of humanity. Amen.

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### "At the Sounding of the Shofar"

a prayer from Hours of Devotion by Fanny Neuda  
Translated and compiled by Dinah Berland

Save the people who know the sound of the shofar,  
Who bask in your light, O Adonai,  
In the brilliance of your countenance.  
-Psalm 89:16

How my heart stirs for the shofar's glorious blast.  
Its vibration causes the very sinews of my being to echo.  
Its earnest tones call out to me:  
Mortal child, take courage! Take courage!  
Another year has passed, yet you remain  
Stained with old sins, weighed down  
With past misdeeds and failings. Purify yourself!  
Wash yourself in the waters of innocence.  
Set your transgressions aside.  
Through fervent hours of prayer to God,  
With tears and remorse, shake off your old self.

Enter the threshold of this new year as a new being-  
A new person made in the image of God,  
A child imbued with innocence and a pure heart.  
Enter the new year as a new being-  
Made new in the capacity for all that is good and noble,  
Made new in the firm intention and commitment  
To serve God and to do good for your neighbors,  
Made new in sanctifying intent  
To strive for freedom, truth, and justice.  
As God has spoken:  
Cast away all transgressions  
By which you have transgressed,  
And make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit,  
That you may not perish, O House of Israel.

...  
And again the shofar sounds. In the midst of its call  
The comforting thought comes to me that you, O God,  
Are not only our judge, but also our parent.  
You are not only all-just  
But also all-merciful and all-compassionate.  
You have created and established this awesome day,  
This day of remembrance,  
As an act of divine parental grace.  
You have made it only for our healing and our blessing,  
To call forth the human conscience and awaken it  
From its passive slumber, from its pettiness,  
From the ease of our daily lives and habits-  
To shake us into an awareness of our better selves,  
Our higher purpose on this earth.

### A Traveler's Prayer

*The Lord will preserve your going out  
And your coming home  
From this time forth and for all time.*

—Psalm 121:8

God, my Sovereign, I commend my path to you.  
Wherever I wander, wherever I am,  
I am under the umbrella of your protection –  
Whether I am in my own secure, familiar surroundings,  
Or in a strange and foreign port,  
I do not lose heart and I do not fear,  
For I trust in you.

You who protect the tiny birds in their migration  
And guide them across an unknown sea  
From one hemisphere to another,  
May you also take me – childlike,  
With my pleading heart and longing eye –  
Graciously into your merciful charge.  
May your love smooth my way,  
May you guard me from evil and deceit,  
May you mercifully guide me to my destination,  
And may you stand by me  
To help me accomplish my purpose,  
For the fulfillment and manifestation  
Of my plans and endeavors.

Yet, All-benevolent One, it is not for myself alone  
That I lift my hands toward you.  
In my fervent prayer  
I also entrust to your divine care  
All of my household: my loved ones  
And those close to me who remain behind.  
May you guard them and protect them  
With your parental grace.  
May you turn all harm and dire events,  
All fear and danger, away from them –  
So we may see one another again  
In joy and in good fortune. Amen.

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With this though, a comforting light strikes my soul  
And I offer my prayerful and hopeful heart to you

### Am Sabbath/ On Shabbat

„Unendlich ist des Sabbaths Segen, Wenn wir nur seinen Ruf versteh'n, Nicht träger Ruhe nur zu pflegen, Zur Heiligung ist er auserseh'n.“ (Salomon Maimon.) Mein Gott und Vater! mein Schöpfer und Erhalter! In sechs Tagen hat dein göttlich Wort aus dem Nichts hervorgerufen diese große schöne Welt, und auf den siebenten hast du gelegt deinen Segen und deine Weihe, und ihn gemacht zum Ruhetag für den Menschen. Da feiern denn alle Gewerbe, alle Geschäfte sind beseitigt, und das Lärmen der Werkstätte schweiget in den Gassen, unsere Häuser sind freundlicher geschmückt, unsere Herzen heiterer gestimmt, über Alles ist ausgegossen ein höherer festlicher Glanz. „Es ist Sabbath dem Ewigen zu ehren.“ Doch nicht die eitle, nichtige, werthlose Ruhe des Müßigganges, wobei der Geist verfällt, und sinnliche Gelüste sich unserer bemächtigen, ist des Sabbaths Zweck und Ziel: sondern bloß die Ruhe des Körpers, damit desto besser die Seele ihre Thätigkeit entfalte; die Ruhe des äußern Menschen, damit desto lebhafter der innere Mensch hervortrete und unser besseres Selbst zur Herrschaft und Geltung gelange. Am Sabbath sollen wir den Dienst der Welt verlassen, um uns dem heiligen Dienste Gottes zu weihen, wir sollen niederlegen die Arbeit für unser irdisch Theil, um unserem geistigen, ewigen Heile ganz und ungetheilt zu leben, damit wir nicht untergehen im Strom des weltlichen Treibens, damit unser sittlicher Werth, die höheren Regungen des Herzens uns nicht im Gewühle des Lebens verloren gehen, damit nicht die lärmenden Stimmen von Außen die heiligen, göttlichen Stimmen in uns übertönen und zum Schweigen bringen.

So will ich denn auch, mein Gott und Herr, deinem Gebote folgend, an diesem heiligen Tage mich frommen Beschäftigungen hingeben. Ich will an deinem Gottesworte mein Herz erheben, will vor allem in dem Buche der Bücher, in deiner heiligen Thora lesen, von deinen Wundern und deiner Allmacht, von deiner Weisheit und deiner Huld und Barmherzigkeit, damit ich dich immer inniger erkennen, immer demuthsvoller verehren lerne, damit ich immer mit kindlicher Hingebung dir nachgehe, und dich immer liebe mit ganzem Herzen, mit ganzer Seele und mit ganzem Vermögen.

Ich will die sabbathlichen Stunden dazu verwenden, um das Herz meiner Kinder zu bilden, die Lehren der Tugend und Gottesfurcht in ihre Seele zu prägen, und den Geist der Liebe, des Gottvertrauens und der Gottergebenheit in meiner Umgebung herrschend zu machen nach meinen Kräften.

Doch nicht nur auf die Glieder meines Hauses, auch auf den weiten Kreis meiner Nebenmenschen will ich meine Gedanken richten, will aussuchen unter ihnen den Dürftigen und den Leidenden, dem ich vielleicht mit Rath oder That beistehen kann! So will ich diesen Tag feiern, und „des Sabbaths gedenken, um ihn zu heiligen“ in Wahrheit und Wahrhaftigkeit!

Stärke nur immer, o Gott, meinen Willen dazu, gib mir Weisheit, Kraft und Ausdauer, diesen Willen zu verwirklichen, und gib, daß die sabbathlichen Gefühle, die heute mich beselen, mich begleiten mögen in das Leben der Woche, damit ich auch mitten im Geräusche der Arbeitstage den Adel der Sabbathweihe in der Seele trage, daß mein Herz stets reiner, mein Geist stets vollkommener werde, bis er einst verkündet und vollendet eingetret, zu feiern jene große Sabbathruhe im Jenseits. Amen.

My God and Holy Parent,  
My Creator and Sustainer,  
In six days your divine word called forth  
This entire magnificent world out of nothing,  
And on the seventh day you established  
Your blessing and your sanctification,  
Making it a day of rest for all people.  
On this day all enterprise takes a holiday,  
All creative work is completed,  
And the noise of workshops and factories  
Grows quiet in the streets.  
Our houses are cheerfully adorned,  
And our hearts are uplifted.  
A festive glow brightens our homes.  
*This is the Sabbath, to honor the Source of Being.*  
The purpose and goal of the Sabbath  
Is not to descend into a useless idleness  
In which the spirit sinks  
And we indulge in thoughtless desires;  
The purpose and goal of the Sabbath  
Is to afford relaxation to our bodies  
So our souls might unfurl to their full capacities.  
This is the outer being's rest  
So the inner being may emerge with greater vitality  
And our better selves may reach their fullness and power.  
On the Sabbath we put aside service to the world  
And dedicate ourselves instead  
To the service of God.  
We lay down our work for our earthly portion  
And allow ourselves to live whole, undivided lives  
For our spiritual, eternal redemption –  
So we are not flooded  
By a stream of worldly concerns and struggles,  
So our moral convictions  
And the highest stirrings of our hearts  
Do not get lost amid the demands of our lives,  
So the noisy cries of the outside world  
Do not overwhelm and silence the holy songs within.  
So will I, my God and Sovereign,  
Obey your commandments and turn to  
Spiritual pursuits on this holy day.  
I will elevate my heart through your divine words,  
And before all else I will read from your sacred Torah –  
Of your wonders and your power,  
Of your wisdom, your grace, and your compassion –  
So I may always come to recognize your presence  
And learn to honor you more humbly,  
So I may always follow you with childlike devotion;  
So I may always love you with my whole heart,  
With my whole soul, and with my whole might.  
I will pass the Sabbath hours  
By attending to the development of my children's hearts  
And by imprinting the lessons  
Of virtue and faith within their souls.  
I will let the spirit of love, trust in God, and generosity  
Hold sway in my environment  
To the extent of my own strengths and abilities.  
Yet I will focus my thoughts not only  
On the members of my own household  
But also on the wider circle of my friends and neighbors.  
I will seek out those poor and suffering souls  
Whom I might be able to aid through counsel or deed.  
Thus will I celebrate this day,  
*To remember the Sabbath and keep it holy*  
In truth as well as in practice.  
O God, strengthen my will toward this always.  
Grant me wisdom, strength, and endurance  
To make your will manifest.  
Grant that the feelings and sentiments of the Sabbath  
That stir my soul today  
Accompany me tomorrow  
Through the activities of the week  
So that even amid the busy workday  
I may carry the sense of Sabbath in my soul,  
So my heart may always become purer,  
So my spirit may always become more complete,  
Until it becomes refined and is brought to perfection  
To celebrate its great Sabbath rest in the world to come. Amen