



Unfurling to the Dawn: Meditations on Distinction and the In-Between Space

We are grateful to Arielle Korman, executive director of Ammud: The Jews of Color Torah Academy for providing this resource.

Ammud: The Jews of Color Torah Academy is a Jewish educational space for Jews of Color, by Jews of Color. It is a reality that most people in our community do not inhabit such a space on a day-to-day basis, and truths come out in this space that may not in other spaces. When we land in these spaces, we begin by schmoozing, eating (when we can be together in person), and settling in. We say a blessing over Torah study to mark the transitional moment.



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Introduction

In this source sheet, I explore the holiness of crossing from realm to realm, from state to state. Find someone to read along with you, or join me on your own in this meditation on dawn, distinction, and crossing over. You can jump around, focus on individual questions, or explore the whole thing; follow your energy and what moves you.

—Arielle Korman, Executive Director of Ammud: The Jews of Color Torah Academy



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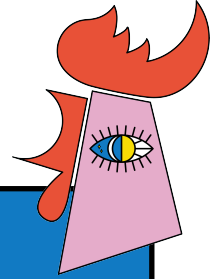
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1

Blessed are You, Hashem
our G-d, who gave the
rooster the understanding
to distinguish between day
and night.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לַשֶּׁכֶּרִי
בִּינָה לַהֲבָחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין
לַיְלָה:



Questions:

- How does the rooster mark transitional time?
- Why do we thank G-d for specifically giving the rooster the knowledge of the distinction between day and night?

2

*Solomon ibn Gabirol, the 11th-century Andalusian poet
and philosopher, wrote this piyut (devotional poem):*

Dawn — I seek you, my rock
and my fortress

I unfurl before you my
Shacharit and my *Arvit**

Before your greatness I
stand in my fear

For your eye sees all the
thoughts of my heart.

What is it that my heart
and tongue are capable of
doing? What is the
strength of this spirit within
me?

Here — this human's song
will be good to you.

I thank you, while the spirit
of G-d is still within me.

(English Translation- Arielle Korman)

**these refer to Shacharit and Arvit
prayers, but could also mean "my
dawn" and "my evening"*

שַׁחַר אֲבִקְשָׁה,
צוּרִי וּמִשְׁגְּבִי
אֶעֱרֹךְ לִפְנֶיךָ
שַׁחְרִי וְגַם עֶרְבִי

לִפְנֵי גְדֻלָּתְךָ
אֶעֱמֵד וְאֶבְהֵל
כִּי עֵינֶיךָ תִּרְאֶה
כָּל מַחְשְׁבוֹת לִבִּי

מֵה זֶה אֲשֶׁר יוֹכֵל
הַלֵּב וְהַלְשׁוֹן
לַעֲשׂוֹת וּמֵה כֹחַ
רוּחִי בְּתוֹךְ קִרְבִּי

הִנֵּה לְךָ תִּיטֵב
זְמַרְתִּי אֲנוֹשׁ עַל כֵּן
אוֹדֶךָ בְּעוֹד תִּהְיֶה
נִשְׁמַת אֱלֹהִים בִּי

Questions:

- Is ibn Gvirol singing to the dawn or to G-d? Why might the speaker find G-d in the dawn?
- How is the speaker responding to the dawn?
- How does the image of unfurling one's prayers toward the dawn sit in your body?
- What humbles you, and what can you unfurl before that greatness?



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3

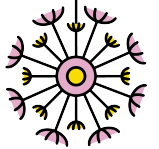
Genesis 1:6-8

6) G-d said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." (7) G-d made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. (8) G-d called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי
מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם: (ז) וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־הָרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת
לָרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן:
(ח) וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב
וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי:

Questions:

- What is the purpose of the "expanse," the firmament (רקיע)? Why does G-d create a large expanse to distinguish the two waters?
- How does this boundary compare to or differ from other kinds of borders?



4

Watch this video including Yavilah McCoy's speech at the 2019 Women's March.



Questions:

- Where does McCoy reference Jewish time?
- How does McCoy use the image of dawn to introduce a new reality? How does this compare to other references to dawn in this source sheet?



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The way from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Copake, New York, was long. I took a car from my college to the Charlotte Douglas International Airport, a plane to New York City, a train from the city to Hudson, and then a cab ride through a gray-skied, muted expanse of upstate New York.

The cab ride took longer than expected; the driver was from the area and spent time pointing out local ponds and mountains to us, and told me and my mother every detail of how he caught and prepared a snapping turtle fish for a massive fish fry to which all people, especially the hungry, were invited. We took winding paths as trees whooshed past us and entered the land of story, almost able to smell the sizzling oil, batter, and fresh fish, and hear a roomful of laughter. When we finally arrived at Camp Eisenberg, we still had to drive down a long, narrow road before the sight of young children of color running in white clothing indicated we had arrived.

The first JOC affinity space I ever attended was the Jewish Multiracial Network family retreat. Reality took on a hazy, surreal quality there. I met Jewish elders who treated me automatically as a Jew. No “where are you from,” no “are you Jewish,” no “how come you look so exotic.” I sat at tables and asked questions about Torah and watched elders argue and laugh into the night about its words and messages. I felt possibility abounding. I began to feel myself relax in ways I had never dreamed of that transformative weekend in the woods, something sparked within me.

The long journey, the in-between state of travel, getting lost in story and winding country roads. All these prepared me to enter an altered space, to accept it as reality with less of a shock, to honor the distinction and mark a holy transition.

—Arielle Korman, Executive Director of Ammud: The Jews of Color Torah Academy

Questions:

- Are there moments in your life you can think of where you were exposed to a new kind of reality? What did the transition into that reality look like or feel like?
- How can you move from space to space with intention? From work life to a support group or therapy, from a religious space to a dance party?
- How does Judaism teach us to mark transitional time?

Final Questions:

- Why does Judaism include so many references to distinction and the transition/space between?
- Where could you use more distinction in your life?
- What different realities are you seeking? How can you make the transition?
- What would it look like to see this moment in history as the dawn?

