

**Sicha**  
Shabbaton in the Mountains  
August 11-14, 2016 at Wildacres Retreat

Dear Participants,

Welcome to the 2016 Sicha Shabbaton In The Mountains. During our long weekend, I invite you to join in an extended reflection about “Doors, Thresholds, And Thoughtful Jewish Living.”

The door is a richly important element in Jewish religious imagination. The door presides over comings and goings, over transitions. It demarcates the responsibilities and commitments of *in*, on one side, and *out*, on the other side. We should be mindful of how we move from one realm to the next. What do we take with us on our journeys? What do we leave at the door as we go in or out? The mezuzah is a reminder that it is just at the place where *in* and *out* are hinged that we should be most thoughtful.

Teachers open doors for their students; colleagues and fellow travelers and friends open for, and *to*, one another. *Opportunity knocks*, the proverb tells us. *The voice of my beloved knocks*, says The Song of Songs. I knock expectantly: The past that is behind me and future before me meet at the opening door. The doorway is crowded with precedent and with expectation. Elijah, who symbolizes past and future, precedent and expectation, is usually found at the door.

In Jewish law, the door separates the inner Sabbath realm from the outer work-a-day world. It is precisely here, at the door, on the Sabbath, that ancient sages raise the question of how inner Sabbath tranquility opens to the presence of the needy who stand outside. Doors are barriers both for better and for worse. At the open door we might risk vulnerability. But the consequences of the closed door can be ignorance and indifference to a world that is shut out.



Doors of the spirit open to inner, personal life arcing over thresholds of perception, pain, tolerance, and knowledge. Some thresholds prompt us to lock ourselves safely within. At the same time, the Jewish year contains sacred seasons that are well-framed opportunities to open inner doors that tend to remain closed. Study, prayer, and acts of kindness are ways of knocking on doors beyond and within hoping that they will open to inner and wider, deeper and higher worlds.

Doors open to the possibility of joining all the compartments of the world’s house, making the world one space and connecting all inhabitants.

A knock on the door rings hollow without imagining that a *Listening Ear* (Pirke Avot 2:1) makes response possible. Therefore, we knock and the heart quickens as we listen. We are hoping to see something that we have not seen before. According to the poet, Yehuda Amichai, we are not the only ones waiting at the door. He teaches that our frail lives are doors through which God enters the world to learn something previously unknown: *But through the wound in my chest God peeks into the world/ I am the door of his dwelling.*

*Rabbi Steven Sager*

## ... doors have soul

They are the guardians of boundaries, they serve both to divide and connect the psychic topography of the house keeping its imaginations multiple, and each part in direct or indirect relation with every other part. Doors make and mark tension between the diverse elements within the house... the art of the door makes of arriving, departing, and returning a ritual process that assures that the house will not be taken for granted. Clothe your entrance with such images.

(Robert Sardello, Facing the World with Soul: The Reimagination of Modern Life)

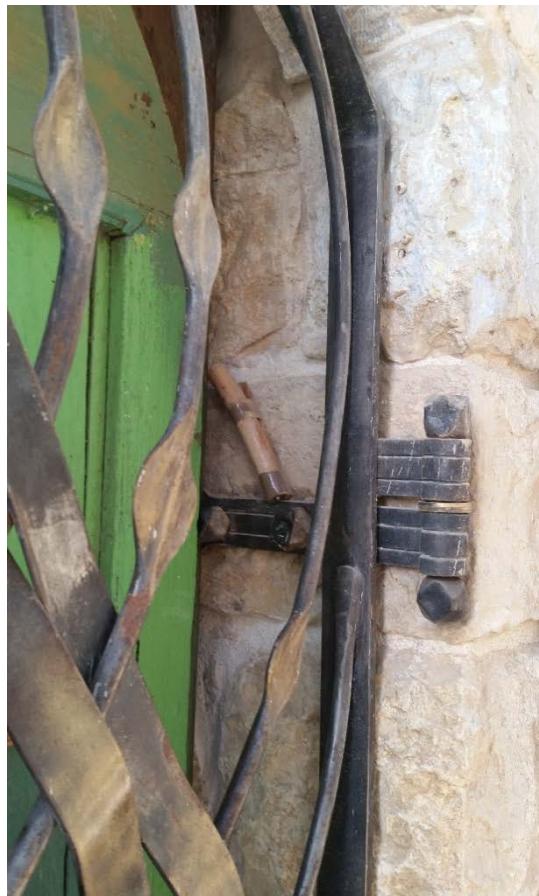


## The Mezuzah And The Meeting of “In” And “Out”

חייב אדם להזכיר במזוזה מפני שהיא חובת הכל תמיד. וכל זמן שייפגש ויצא, יפגע ביחסו השם, שלו הקדוש ברוך הוא, ויזכר אהבתו. ויעור משנותו ומשמעותיו ביהדותו, יידע שאינו דבר העומד לעוזם ולעלמי עולם אלא ידיעת צור העולם. ומיד הוא חוזר לדעתו והולך בדרכיו מישרים. אמרו חכמים הראשונים: כל מי שיש לו תפillin בראשו ובזרעו וציצית בגבו ומזוזה בפתחו- מחזק הוא שלא יחטא, שהרי יש לו מזכירים רבים. והם הנו מלאכים שמאיצילין אותו מלחטא, שנאמר: חונה מלאך השם סבב ליראיו ויחלצם (תהלים לד:ח)

Everyone should be scrupulous about the mezuzah because it is a duty for everyone, all the time. And every time that one enters or leaves, one meets the unification of the name, the name of the blessed Holy One, may He be blessed, and one remembers his love. When one awakens from sleep and from mistakes caused by times' vanities, then one realizes that nothing stands the test of forever other than the knowledge of the Rock of Forever—and immediately one comes to one's senses and continues down honest paths. The early sages have said: anyone who has Tefillin on head and arm, tzitzit on a garment and a mezuzah at the opening is strengthened so as not to sin. For such a one has many reminders. And as for them, they are angels who save him from sinning, as it is written: *The Lord's angel abides around God fearers and rescues them* (Psalm 34:8).

(Maimonides, Laws of The Mezuzah 6:13)

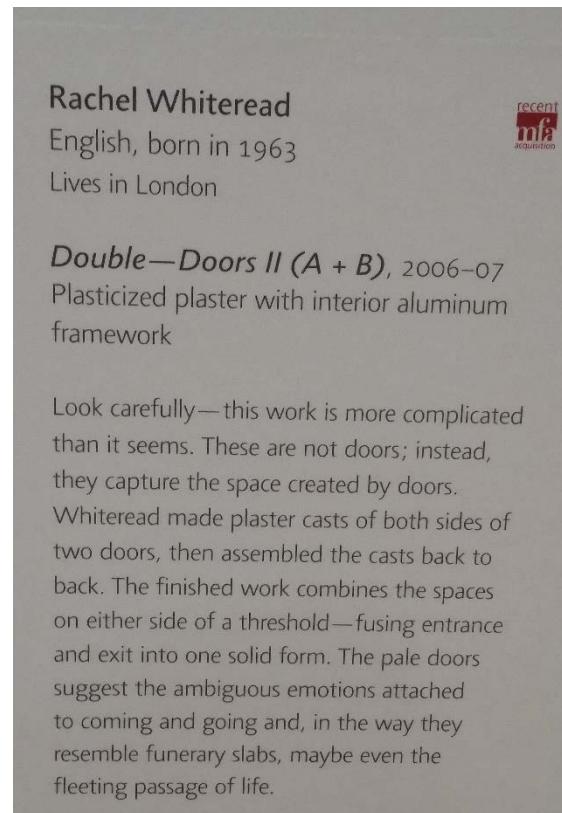


## Mindful Coming And Going

רבי נחוניה בנו מקנה היה מתרפל בקנישתו לבית המדרש וביציאתו תפילה קוצרה. אמרו לו: מה מקום לתפילה זו? אמר להם: בקנישתי אני מתרפל שלא תארע תקלה על ידי, וביציאתי אני נתן הוזיה על חלקי.

Rabbi Nehunyah ben HaKaneh would pray a short prayer when he entered and when he left the bet midrash. They said to him: What is the place of this prayer [in your life]? He said to them: When I enter, I pray that no offense is caused by my action, and when I leave I give thanks for my lot.

(Mishnah Berachot 4:2)



## Be Like A Threshold

רבי אלעזר הכהן אומר: אל תהא כמשקוף העליון, שאין יד בני-אדם יכולה לגעת בה. ולא כאסקפה העליונה שפְּמַבְּלָעָת פְּרַצּוּפּוֹת. ולא כאסקפה האמצעית, שפְּנַגְּפָת הרגלים. אלא הו כאסקפה מתחזונה שהכל דשין בה. וסוף כל הבניון נסתר, והיא במקומה עומדת.

Rabbi Elazar HaKappar said: Do not be like a lintel overhead that no one can reach; neither be like a door beam that injures faces, nor like a raised threshold that bruises feet. Rather, be like a low threshold that everyone crosses easily. In the end, the entire building might disappear, but the threshold will remain in place.

Avot d'Rabbi Natah end of chapter 26



How ironic and fitting that the lintel of Rabbi Eleazar's academy survives! The black basalt lintel with two eagles stretching a ribbon and wreath between them announces: *This is the academy of Rabbi Eleazar HaKappar. Zeh bet midrasho shel rabi Eleazar HaKappar.*

## Generations In The Doorway

וְאֵת כֵּל הַעֲדָה מִקְהָל אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (ויקרא ח:ג) - אמר רבי אלעזר: כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁשִׁים רְבּוֹא וְאֵת אָוּמָר: "אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד"? אֶלְאֶזְהָר זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמִּקְוּמוֹת שְׁחַחְזִיק מוּעֵט אֶת הַמְּרֻבָּה. דְּכֹוֹתָה: "יִקְוּוּ הַמִּים מִפְתָּח הַשְּׁמִים אֶל מִקְוֹם אֶחָד" (בראשית א:ט). בְּנֵה גַּשְׁבָּעָוָלָם אָדָם מִפְנָה כֶּלֶי מְלָא לְתוֹךְ כֶּלֶי רַיְקָוּן, אֲוֹ שְׁפָמָא כֶּלֶי מְלָא? הַעוֹלָם כָּלּוּ מִים בּוּמִים וְאֵת אָוּמָר: "יִקְוּוּ הַמִּים"? אֶלְאֶזְהָר זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמִּקְוּמוֹת שְׁחַחְזִיק מוּעֵט אֶת הַמְּרֻבָּה. דְּכֹוֹתָה: "קְחָוْ לְכָם מְלָא חֲפְנֵיכֶם פִּיכְמִנְחָת בְּשָׂרֶב" (שמות ט:ח). אמר ר' הונא: לֹא דְמֵי הַדִּין דְחַפֵּינוּ לְהַדִּין דְקָמִיא, הַדִּין דְחַפֵּינוּ תְּרִינוּת. דְמֵי דְקָמִיא, אַרְבַּע חֲפְנִינוּ תְּמִנֵּא קָמִצִּין, נִמְצָא חֲפָנוּ שֶׁל מְשָׁה מִחְזְקָת שְׁמִינָה קָמִצִּין? אֶלְאָ מַלְפִּיד שְׁמַקְדּוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מִסְפִּיק וְאַהֲרֹן חַזְפֵּן וּמְשָׁה זָרְקָוּ. וְאֵת אָוּמָר: "זְרַקְוּ מְשָׁה הַשְׁמִינָה" בְּבַת אַחֲתִי! אֶלְאֶזְהָר זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמִּקְוּמוֹת שְׁחַחְזִיק מוּעֵט אֶת הַמְּרֻבָּה.

*Gather the all of the community in the doorway of the Tent of Meeting (Leviticus 8:3). All of Israel numbered six hundred thousand yet you say: Gather all of the community in the doorway of the Tent of Meeting?! Impossible, except that this is one of the places where the little contains the much. Likewise: Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place (Genesis 1:9). Normally, a person spills a full vessel into an empty vessel. Is it possible to spill a full vessel into a full vessel?! The world was entirely water, and yet you say: Let the waters be gathered?! Impossible, except that this is one of the places where the little contains the much. Likewise: [Both of you, Moses and Aaron,] take handfuls [hof'neichem] of soot from the furnace (Exodus 9:8). Rabbi Huna said: A *hofen*-handful is not the same as a *kometz*-handful, a *hofen* being twice as much so that four *hofenim* equals eight *kematzim*. The verse teaches that the Holy One, blessed be he, provided the handfuls that Aaron could hold and that Moses could throw. Yet you say: And Moses threw it (Exodus 9:8)—all in one throw?! Impossible, except that this is one of the places where the little contains the much.*

דְּכֹוֹתָה: "אַזְרֵךְ הַחֲצָר מִאֵה בָּאָמֵה וּרְחֵב חַמְשִׁים בְּחַמְשִׁים" (שמות כז:יח). אמר ר' יוסי בר חלפְתָא: "אַזְרֵךְ הַחֲצָר מִאֵה בָּאָמֵה" וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַזְמִידִים בְּתוֹכָה?! אֶלְאֶזְהָר זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמִּקְוּמוֹת שְׁחַחְזִיק מוּעֵט אֶת הַמְּרֻבָּה. דְּכֹוֹתָה: "וַיַּקְהֵל מְשָׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל פְּנֵי הַסְּלָעָה" (במדבר כ:י). אמר ר' בָּנֵי קָמִין: בְּמַיִן בְּבָרָה חִתָּה, וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַזְמִידִין עַלְיָה?! אֶלְאֶזְהָר זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמִּקְוּמוֹת שְׁחַחְזִיק מוּעֵט אֶת הַמְּרֻבָּה. דְּכֹוֹתָה: "וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָשָׁע אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּשׁוּ הַנֵּה" (יהושע ג:ט). ר' הַינְאָ אמר: זְקָפּוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵי בְּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, וּרְבִי חַמְאָ בְּרִי חַנִּיאָ אמר: שְׁמַנוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵי בְּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, וּרְבָא אמר: צְמַצְמָנוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵי בְּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, הַדָּא הוּא דְכֹתִיב: "וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָשָׁע בְּזֹאת תַּדְעַוּ כִּי אֶל חַי בְּקָרְבָּכֶם" (יהושע ג:י). אמר להם: מִתּוֹךְ שְׁחַחְזִיקוּ אֶתְכֶם שְׁנֵי בְּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, יַדְעַ אֲנִי שְׁשַׁכְּנָתָו בְּיִנְיכֶם. אֲנָ

בַּבְּיַת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ כֹּו, דְּתַגְנִינוּ: עַזְמָדִים צְפּוּפִים וּמְשֻׁפְחוּמִים רֹוחִים. רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בֶּר אַיְבִּיה בְּשָׁם רַבִּי אַחָא אָמַר: רֹוח אַרְבָּע אַמּוֹת בֵּין כָּל אַחֲד וְאַחֲד, אַפְּה לְכָל צָד, שֶׁלֹּא יְהָא אַחֲד מֵהוּ שׁוֹמֵעַ קֹּול חֶבְרוֹן מִתְפָּלֵל. אַפְּלָעַת יָמִין לְבּוֹא כֹּו, שֶׁנְּאָמַר: "בְּעֵת הַהִיא יִקְרָאוּ לִירוֹשָׁלַיִם כְּסָא ה' וְנִקּוּוּ אֶלְיָה כָּל הַגּוֹיִם" (ירמיה ג:יז).

And likewise: *The length of the Tabernacle's court shall be one hundred cubits and the breadth of it shall be fifty cubits throughout* (Exodus 27:18). Rabbi Yosi bar Halafta said: *The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits*, yet all of Israel could stand within it?! Impossible, except that this is one of the places where the little contains the much. And likewise: *Moses and Aaron gathered the community in front of [el p'nei] the rock* (Numbers 20:10). Rabbi Hanin said: That rock was the size of a sieve and yet all of Israel stood upon [al] it?! Impossible, except that this is one of the places where the little contains the much. And likewise: Joshua said to the children of Israel: *Come right here* (Joshua 3:9). Rav Hunah said: He made them stand at attention in between the two poles of the Ark. Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Haninah said: He placed them between the two carrying-poles of the Ark. Rava said: He squeezed them in between the two carrying-poles of the Ark, as it is written: And Joshua said, *By this shall you know that the living God is among you* (Joshua 3:10). Because God has contained you between the two carrying-poles of the Ark I know that the Divine Presence is amongst you. Just so was it in the Temple, as it is taught: *Standing they were crowded and prostrating they had room* (Pirke Avot 5:5) Said Rabbi Shemuel bar Iviah in the name of Rabbi Aha: A space of four cubits surrounded each and every one, a cubit in each direction so that no one would hear his fellow while praying. So will it be in the future, as it is said: *At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord and all of the nations will stream to it* (Jeremiah 3:17).

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן סַלַּק לִמְשָׁאֵל בְּשַׁלְמָה דָּרְבִּי חַנִּינָא וְאַשְׁפַּחַת דָּהּוֹה עַסִּיק בְּהָדִין פְּסֻוקָּא: "בְּעֵת הַהִיא יִקְרָאוּ לִירוֹשָׁלַיִם כְּסָא ה' וְנִקּוּוּ אֶלְיָה כָּל הַגּוֹיִם" (ירמיה ג:יז). אָמַר לוֹ: וּמְחַזְקַת הִיא אַזְתָּנוּ! אָמַר לוֹ: הַמִּקְרָא אֹמֵר: "הַרְחִיבִי מָקוֹם אַחֲלָךְ... כִּי יְמִין וּשְׁמָאל תִּפְרַצְיִי" (ישעיה נד:ב,ג).

Rabbi Yohanan went to pay a visit to Rabbi Haninah and found him engaged in that very verse: *At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord and all of the nations will stream to it*. Rabbi Yohanan said to him: And Jerusalem will contain them all?! Rabbi Haninah replied: There is a verse that says: *Enlarge the site of your tent, expand the place of your dwelling... For you shall spread out to the right and to the left* (Isaiah 54:2,3).

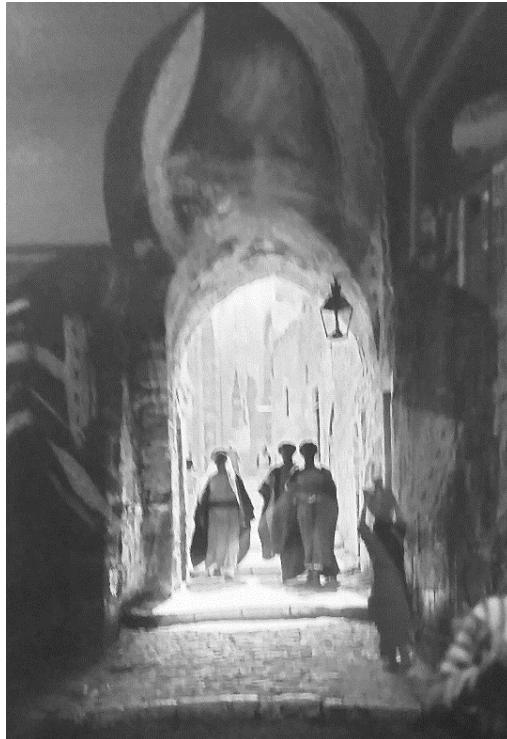
(Leviticus Rabbah 10:9).

## Teacher As Doorway

רבי מאיר אומר: אם למדת מרבית אחד, אל תאמר: ذי. אלא לך אצל חכם ולמד תורה, ואל תאמר: לא אלך אלא למי שהוא קרוב אליו. שנאמר: "אם תבקשנה בקסף ובכטמונים תחפשנה" (משלי ב:ד). וחובבה הוא לאדם שישמש שלשה תלמידי חכמים, כגון רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי עקיבא. שנאמר: "אשרי אדם שומע לי לשקד על דלתתני על דלתתני יום יום, לשמר מזות פתחי" (משלי ח: לד). אל תקרי "דלתתני", אלא "דלתה דלתתני". כי אין לך יודע איזה מהם יתקימו בידך. הנה או זה, או שניהם כאחד טובים, שנאמר: "בבקרزرע את זרעך" (קהלת יא:ו).

Rabbi Meir says: If you have learned from one master, do not say: That's enough. Rather, go to a sage and learn Torah. Do not say: I won't go except to someone who is close by. As it says: *Seek it as you do silver, and search for it as for treasures* (Proverbs 2:4). And it is a person's obligation to seek out three sages like Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiba; as it says: *Happy is the one who listens to me, coming early to my doors each day, watching at my doorposts/mezuzot.* (Proverbs 8:34). Do not take it to mean, *my doors/daltotai*, but rather, *one door that leads to my other my doors/delet-daltotai*. For you do not know which of them might succeed for you. Perhaps this one, or this one; or perhaps one is just as good as the other. As it says: *Sow your seed in the morning and do not hold back your hand in the evening, since you do not know which is going to succeed, the one or the other, or if both are equally good* (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

(Avot d'Rabbi Natan, chapter 3)



## Doors To Prayer And Presence

"אָשָׁרִי אָדָם שׁוֹמֵעַ לִי" (משל*י* ח:לד) - מהו "אָשָׁרִי אָדָם שׁוֹמֵעַ לִי"? אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אָשָׁרִיו לְאָדָם בָּשָׁעָה שְׁשָׁמוּעָתִיו לִי. מהו, "לִשְׁקָד עַל דְּלַתְתִּי" (משל*י* ח:לד)? אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אם הַלְכָתָה לְהַתְפִּילָל בַּתּוֹךְ בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת אֶל תַּעֲמֹד עַל הַפִּתְחָה הַחִיצוֹן לְהַתְפִּילָל שֶׁם אֶלָּא הוּא מִתְפִּוּן לְהַכְּנֶס דֶּלֶת לִפְנֵים מִדֶּלֶת. "לִשְׁקָד עַל דְּלַתְתִּי" אֵין כתיב בָּאוּן אֶלָּא "עַל דְּלַתְתִּי"- שְׁתֵּי דְּלָתוֹת. וְלֹפֶת בָּוּן? שְׁהַקְדּוֹשׁ ברוך הוא מַזְנָה פְּסִיעָוָתִיק וְנוֹתָן לְקָשֶׁר. ומַהוּ "לִשְׁמֹר מִזּוֹזֶת פִּתְחָיִי" (משל*י* ח:לד)? אמר רבי יהוּדָה בר סִימָא: וְכִי יִשְׁמֹזֵה בְּבָתִי בְּנִסּוֹת? אֶלָּא מִהַמְזּוֹזֶה הַזֶּה אִינָה זוּ מִהַפְתָּחָה פֶּה לֹא תְהִא זוּ מִבְתִּי בְּנִסּוֹת וּמִבְתִּי מִדְרָשׁוֹת. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אם תַּעֲשֶׂה בָּוּן דָע שְׁאַתָּה פָּקַד פִּנֵּי שְׁכִינָה. מה כתיב אחריו? "כִּי מִצְאֵי מִצְאָם" (משל*י* ח:לה).

*Happy is the one who listens to me* (Proverbs 8:34)—What is the import of: *Happy is the one who listens to me?* Said the Holy One, blessed be he: A person's happiness comes when all of his listening is with me in mind; when he is *attending at my doors* (Proverbs 8:34). Said the Holy One, blessed be he: If you have gone to pray in the synagogue, do not plan to stand on the outer threshold to pray there. Rather, intend to enter fully, through the inner door. Coming early to my door is not written. Rather, coming early to my doors—two doors. And why is this so? Because the Holy One, blessed be he, counts your footsteps and gives you a reward. And what is the import of [the last part of the verse], *and watching at my doorposts/mezuzot* (Proverbs 8:34)? Rabbi Yehudah bar Sima said: Now is a mezuzah required for synagogues? Rather, just as the mezuzah does not move/zazah from the doorway, so should you not move from the synagogues and the study houses. Said the Holy One, blessed be he: If you act this way, know that you will [be there] to greet the Divine Presence. For what is the verse immediately following? *Indeed, one who finds me, finds life* (Proverbs 8:35).

(Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:2)



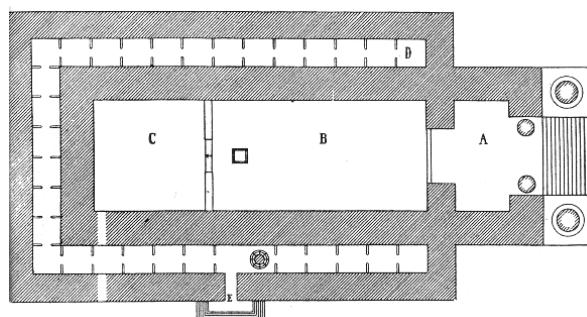
## Doors And Generations

וְאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: בָּשְׁחַיָּינוּ לְזָמִינָה אַצְלַ רַבִּי אָוֹשְׁעָיָה הַיָּינוּ יוֹשְׁבֵין אַרְבָּעָה אַרְבָּעָה בָּאַמָּה. אָמַר רַבִּי: בָּשְׁחַיָּינוּ לְזָמִינָה תּוֹרָה אַצְלַ רַבִּי אַלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמֹועַ הַיָּינוּ יוֹשְׁבֵין שְׁשָׁה שְׁשָׁה בָּאַמָּה. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: רַבִּי אָוֹשְׁעָיָה בָּרַבִּי בְּדוֹרוֹ בָּרַבִּי מַאֲיר בְּדוֹרוֹ. מַה רַבִּי מַאֲיר בְּדוֹרוֹ לֹא יָכֹלוּ חֲבָרִיו לְעַמּוֹד עַל סְזָוָה דָעַתּוֹ, אָף רַבִּי אָוֹשְׁעָיָה לֹא יָכֹלוּ חֲבָרִיו לְעַמּוֹד עַל סְזָוָה דָעַתּוֹ. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: לְבּוֹן שֶׁל רָאשׁוֹנִים כְּפָתָחָו שֶׁל אָוָלִים, וְשֶׁל אַחֲרׁוֹנִים כְּפָתָחָו שֶׁל הַיּוֹלֵד, וְאָנוּ כִּמְלָא נֶקֶב מִחְטָט סִידָקִית. רָאשׁוֹנִים, רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, אַחֲרׁוֹנִים - רַבִּי אַלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמֹועַ. אִיכָּא דָאָמֵרִי: רָאשׁוֹנִים, רַבִּי אַלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמֹועַ, אַחֲרׁוֹנִים - רַבִּי אָוֹשְׁעָיָה בָּרַבִּי.

And Rabbi Yohanan said: When we used to learn Torah with Rabbi Oshaya, four would sit in the space of one cubit. Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] said: when we used to learn Torah with Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamua, six would sit in one cubit. Rabbi Yohanan said: Rabbi Oshaya Be'ribbi in his generation was like Rabbi Meir in his generation. Just as in the generation of Rabbi Meir none of his colleagues could more than stand on the threshold of his knowledge\*, so with Rabbi Oshaya none of his colleagues could more than stand on the threshold of his knowledge. Rabbi Yohanan said: The hearts of the early masters were like the doorway of the Ulam, the entrance hall of the Temple; and of the later masters like the doorway of the Heichal, the main sanctuary. But our hearts are like the eye of a fine needle. Among the ancient masters is Rabbi Akiba, among the later- Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamua. There are some who say: Early masters include Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamua, and later masters include Rabbi Oshayah Be'ribbi.

(Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 53A)

\*More plainly, an idiom meaning, 'could not penetrate to the end of his knowledge.'



1. the **ulam** (vestibule) marked in the diagram above as **A**,
2. the **hekhal** (main sanctuary for worship), later called the Holy Place, **B**,
3. and the **debir**, **C**, (the Holy of Holies) reserved for the High Priest to meet God on Yom Kippur.

## The Door Of The Bet Midrash

Yesterday I was as happy as if the whole world was mine and today I am as sad as one who has lost the whole world. What happened? When I went to enter the bet midrash (study house) I could not find the key.... and I stood in front of the locked door. About seven different things crossed my mind in a single moment; one of them being: the bet midrash still survives and I'm standing outside because I lost the key and I can't go in. What should one do who wants to enter other than break down the door?

But the door is stronger than I am. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't open it. Our forebears who built synagogues and study houses made them with thick walls, with doors that had locks. Once those bet midrash doors were locked, no one without the key could enter...

Ever since the day that I was locked out of the bet midrash, I could not find any place for myself. Before I lost the key, I would go to the market and speak with people; or I would go to the forest and stroll in the fields. But since the key has been lost all of those places feel strange to me. If I go outside, I can't find any peace of mind, nor can I find any tranquility in the hotel. But I will not let melancholy get the better of me. I can find a thousand paths to take. Sometimes just to stroll and sometimes to search for the key. In the end, my feet would become accustomed to the journey. My feet grew accustomed, but my soul never did. My soul became heavy and my feet carried it along only with difficulty.

Every day I examined my room. There was no place that I did not search. I knew that all of my efforts were in vain, but I kept looking, nonetheless. Many times I ran to the bet midrash. Perhaps the Holy One would perform a miracle and open the door before me. I even searched in the mound of torn pages from sacred book in in the courtyard where, as a young man coming early and leaving late, I would hide the key so that if anyone got their before me, he would find the key there...

What is it that kept me from going to the locksmith to get a new key made? I kept circling the study house, inspecting it. Perhaps I would find some breach in the wall and enter. But the old study house was solid on all sides, without any flaw. Our ancestors who built houses for Torah were careful to make them solid on every side.

Again, I thought about the books that remained in our old bet midrash. Only a few out of many were still there. As long as I had the key, I could go in and learn from them; but once the key was lost I could no longer go in and learn. Who would learn from them?

S.Y. Agnon, Oreach Nata Lalun/A Guest For The Night

Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

## Written And Left On The Door

רָאִיתִי בָּרוּחַ בָּעָרֵב קִיזֶּן,  
 רָאִיתִי אֲשֶׁר שְׁכַתְבָה מְלִים  
 עַל נִיר פָּרוֹשׁ עַל דְּלַת עַזְּנַעַלָּה,  
 וְקַפְלָה וְשִׁמְהָ בֵּין דְּלַת לְפָזַזָּה וְהַלְכָה לָהּ.

וְלֹא רָאִיתִי אֶת פְּנִימָה וְלֹא אֶת פְּנֵי הָאִישׁ  
 שִׁיקְרָא אֶת הַכְּתוּב  
 וְלֹא רָאִיתִי אֶת הַמְלִים.

I saw in the street, on a summer evening,  
 I saw a woman who had written words  
 on paper spread on a locked wooden door,  
 then folded and put it between the door and doorpost and went on her way.

I didn't see her face or the face of the one  
 who would read the inscription  
 nor did I see the words.

From a poem by Yehuda Amichai  
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



... **the abrupt edge**, according to the bird books, is “the edge between two types of vegetation... where the advantages of both are the most convenient.”

... The advantage of the edge is that it allows the bird to live in two worlds at once, and the more abrupt the more intense the advantage. From a position of height or secrecy, the bird can spy for danger or prey; it can come and go quickly, like a thief. Where the vegetation is more varied, the shade and cover thicker, the insect life rising, the tanager can sweep down from its treetop, the thrush can fly out from the gloom, and the redwing can sit the fence post all day in the summer sun. The edge is the concept of the doorway, shadow and light, inside and outside, room and warlde’s room, where the density and variety of the plants that love the sun and the open air yield to the darker, greener, cooler interior world, at the margin. It is no surprise, then, that the greatest number of species as well as individuals live at the edge and fly the pathways and corridors and trails at the joining of the juxtaposition. That is where the richness is, the thick, deep vegetable life—a wall of life, where the trees turn to meadows, the meadows to columnar, watchtower trees. A man of sense, coming to a clearing, a great open space, will always wait among the trees, in the doorway, until the coast is clear. (Stanley Plumly, Now That My Father Lies Down Beside Me)



## How Shall We Mark The Door?

In famous movie versions of the Passover story, we watch the people of Israel paint the blood of the Passover offering on their doors as a sign that marks their houses for protection against what will be the last of the plagues. Views watch as the blood is brushed onto the outside of door, its posts and lintel. But this staging of the scene is not a foregone conclusion in the conversations of ancient sages.

Did our ancestors paint the outside of their doors, or was it the inside? Listen to the ancient conversations about how to bring the sacred story to life:

*They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it (Exodus 12:7). This means: put the blood on the inside of the door. Now, you say it means on the inside?! Perhaps it really means put the blood on the outside! But the Torah argues for “inside” when it says: When I see the blood I will pass over you (Exodus 12:13). When I see means the blood that is visible to Me, but not to others—this was the view of Rabbi Ishmael.*

*Rabbi Yonatan agreed that the blood was painted on the inside of the door, but he relied on a different part of the verse quoted by Rabbi Ishmael: Now, you say it means on the inside. But perhaps it really means put the blood on the outside! But Torah argues for “inside” when it says: And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you (Exodus 12:13)—a sign for you, but not for others.*

*Rabbi Isaac says: I continue to say that it means on the outside, so that when they Egyptians see it, they will tremble in their guts! (Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha chapter 6)*

Rabbi Ishmael (2<sup>nd</sup> century) and Rabbi Yonatan (3<sup>rd</sup> century) converse across the generations. Both agree (against the movie makers) that the blood was put on the inside of the door but each has his own reasoning. Is the marking for God’s sake or for Israel’s sake? Rabbi Isaac (3<sup>rd</sup> century) sees the blood as a mark of confrontation and defiance that will be unsettling to the now fearful Egyptians.

It is our turn to enter the conversation and extend it to a new generation.

Sicha web-essay by Rabbi Steven Sager, April 2011

## The Threshold Of Shabbat Generosity

יציאות השבת שתיים שהן ארבע בפנים, ושתיים שהן ארבע בחוץ. כיצד? העני עומד בחוץ ובעל הבית בפנים. פשט העני את ידו לפנים ונטו לתוכה ידו של בעל הבית, או שנטל מתוקה והוציא- העני חיב ובעל הבית פטור. פשט בעל הבית את ידו לחוץ ונטו לתוכה ידו של עני, או שנטל מתוקה והכנס- בעל הבית חיב והעני פטור. פשט העני את ידו לפנים ונטל בעל הבית מתוקה, או שפטו לתוכה והוציא- שניהם פטורים. פשט בעל הבית את ידו לחוץ ונטל העני מתוקה, או שנטו לתוכה והכנס- שניהם פטורים.

On Shabbat, there are two ways of taking out that are really four ways from the perspective of inside, and two that are really four from the perspective of outside. How so?



The poor person stands outside and the homeowner is within. The poor person extends his hand inside and puts something into the hand of the home owner, or he takes something from the hand of the home owner and brings it outside—either way, the poor person has violated the Sabbath and the homeowner is exempt.

The home owner extends his hand out and puts something into the hand of the poor person, or he takes something from the poor person's hand and brings it inside—either way, the home owner is culpable and the poor person is exempt.

The poor person extends his hand inside and the home owner takes something from his hand, or the home owner put something in his hand and the poor person took it outside—both are exempt.

The home owner extended his hand outside and the poor person took something from his hand, or the poor person put something in the home owner's hand and he brought it inside—both are exempt.

## You Open for Him

אַתְּ פַתֵּח לֹ  
 בְּהִיּוֹתְךָ נָמִיךְ מַלְפַתֵּח  
 אַתְּ שְׁאַהוּ עַל כַּתְפֵיכָךְ  
 וְהַרְגִּיעָהוּ "אֶל תִּרְאָ"  
 לְאַתְּ פַתֵּח לֹ, בְּפַתְחִים אֵינוֹ מַרְגֵּל  
 עַד פָּה דָּמָה שַׁהְכֵל פְּטוּתָה  
 מִקְיּוֹת, דָּמָה, עֲבִירִים וְשָׁקוֹפִים כְּמַשְׁבָּשׁ שֶׁל רֹום  
 מִקְיּוֹת, דָּמָה, פְּקוֹחִים כְּמַיְשָׁר סְבָלָנִי, מַפְּהָק  
 מַשְׁקֹוֹף וּמַזּוֹזָה לֹא הַכִּיר לְדַעַת  
 לֹא צִיר וְלֹא דָלָת  
 אַתְּ שְׁאַהוּ לְמַכְּדָךְ צְדִיו בְּמַזּוֹזָה  
 פְּחַת הַמַּשְׁקֹוֹף לְמַרְבֵּין רָאשׁוֹ  
 לְאַתְּ עַל הַסְּרִיף הַגִּיחָה  
 עַד בְּטֵח יְפֵסָעַ, לֹא בְּנִמְלֵט  
 מַבָּעֵד מַפְּפָנוֹ הַדָּלָת.

You open for him  
 when he is too small to open  
 you lift him to your shoulders  
 and soothe him with “don’t be afraid”  
 open for him slowly, he is unaccustomed to openings  
 ‘til now he imagined that everything was open  
 the walls, he imagined, were as open and transparent as the breeze  
 the walls, he imagined, as were as open eyed as a patient plain, yawning  
 he recognized neither lintel nor doorposts  
 neither hinge nor door  
 you lift him so that he rubs his sides against the doorposts  
 so that he bows his head beneath the lintel  
 gently you set him on the threshold  
 so that he is surefooted, not like a refugee  
 standing on the threshold.

Rivka Miriam  
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

## Leaning Against The Door

אֲשֶׁר חִיכָה שְׁמוֹאֵל לְרַב יְהוּדָה דְּתַלִי בַעֲיבָרָא דְּדַשָא וְקָא בְּכִי. אָמַר לֵיה: שִׁינְנָא, מַאי קָא בְּכִיתִ? אָמַר לֵיה: מַי זֹוְתָא מַאי דְּכַתִיב בָּהו בְּרַבְנו, "אֵיה סְפִיר אֵיה שְׁקָל אֵיה סְפִיר אֵת הַמְגַדְלִים" (ישועה לג:יח). "אֵיה סְפִיר"- שְׁחוּ סְפִירִים כָל אָוֹתִיות שְׁבַתּוֹרָה. "אֵיה שְׁקָל"- שְׁחוּ שׂוֹקְלִים קָלִין וְחַמּוֹרִין שְׁבַתּוֹרָה. "אֵיה סְפִיר"- שְׁחוּ סְפִירִים כָל אָוֹתִיות שְׁבַתּוֹרָה. "אֵיה סְפִיר אֵת הַמְגַדְלִים"- שְׁחוּ שְׁלַש מְאוֹת הַלְכֹות בַמְגַדֵל הַפּוֹרָח בָאָוֵר. וְאָמַר רַבִ אָמֵי: תְּלַת מָאָה בָעֵי בָאָו דּוֹאָג וְאַחִיתוֹפֵל בַמְגַדֵל הַפּוֹרָח בָאָוֵר. וְתַנּו: שְׁלַשָה מֶלֶכִים וְאַרְבָעָה חִדּוּשׁוֹת אִין לָהֶם חָלֵק לְעוֹלָם הַבָא, אַנוּ מָה תְּחִנּוּ עַלּו? אָמַר לֵיה: שִׁינְנָא, טִינָא הִיְתָה בְלָבָם. אַחֲר מַאי? זָמֵר יְוֹנָה לֹא פִסְקָמָפּוּמִיה.

Shemuel found Rav Yehuda leaning on the door bolt and crying. He said: O, learned one! Why are you crying? He replied: Is it a small thing that is written concerning the sages: *[Your throat shall murmur in awe:] Where is one who counts? Where is one who weighs? Where is one who counts the towers?* (Isaiah 33:18) *Where is one who counts-* for they used to count all the letters of the Torah. *Where is the one who weighs-* for they used to weigh all of the light and heavy commandments in the Torah. *Where is one who counts the towers-* for they used to repeat 300 laws concerning a tower that flies in the air. Rabbi Ami said: 300 questions did Doeg and Ahitophel, ask about a tower that flies in the air. Yet, it is taught: Three kings and four commoners have no portion in the world to come [among them, Doeg and Ahitophel. Their erudition did not save them.] What [therefore] shall become of us?! Shemuel replied: O, learned one! Those two had a flaw in their hearts [and that's why their Torah knowledge did not save them]. Rav Yehudah replied, but what of [the great sage, Elisha ben Abuyah, who left the tradition and became "The Other,"] Aher? Why did his Torah not save him? [It was because] Greek song never ceased from his mouth. (Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 15B)

דָאַבְיִי שְׁמַעְיָה לְהַהוּא גְּבָרָא דְקָא מַר לְהַהְיָה אַתָּתָא: נְקָדִים וְנִזְיָיל בָאָרְחָא. אָמַר: אַיְזָיל אַפְרְשִׁינָהו מַאֲיסּוֹרָא. אַזְל בְתְרִיבָהו תְּלַתָא פְרָסִי בָאָגְמָא. כִי הוּוּ פְרָשֵׁי מְהֻדָּדִי שְׁמַעְיָהו דְקָא אָמַרִי: אָוֹרְחִין רְחִיקָא וְצְוּוֹתִין בְסִימָא. אָמַר אַבְיִי: אֵי מַאן דְסִגִּי לִי בָהָה- לֹא בָהָה מַצִּי לְאַזְקּוּמִיה נְפִשִּׁיה. אַזְל, תְּלָא נְפִשִּׁיה בַעֲיּוֹרָא דְדַשָא וּמְצִיטָרָא. אַתָא הַהוּא סְבָא, תְּנָא לֵיה: כָל הַגְדוֹלָה מְחַבְּרָו? זָרָו גְדוֹל הַיְמָנוֹ.

Abayye heard a man say to a woman: Let's travel on the road together. He said to himself: I'll follow and keep them from any transgression. He followed after them for three miles across the meadows. He heard them part company by saying: Our way has been long and our company pleasant! Abayye said to himself: If it had been me, I would not have been able to control myself.

Then he went, leaned against the door bolt, and cried. A certain old man came and taught: The greater the sage, the greater the impulse. (Babylonian Talmud Sukkah 52A)

**רַבִּינוֹ אָשְׁפֵחַתָּה לְרַבִּ נַחֲמָן בֶּן יְצָחָק דָּתָלִי וְקָאִי בְּעִירָא דְּדָשָׁא, וְקָא מִיבָּעֵיא לֵיה : "בָּטָל", מַהוּ ? תִּיקְוָן.**

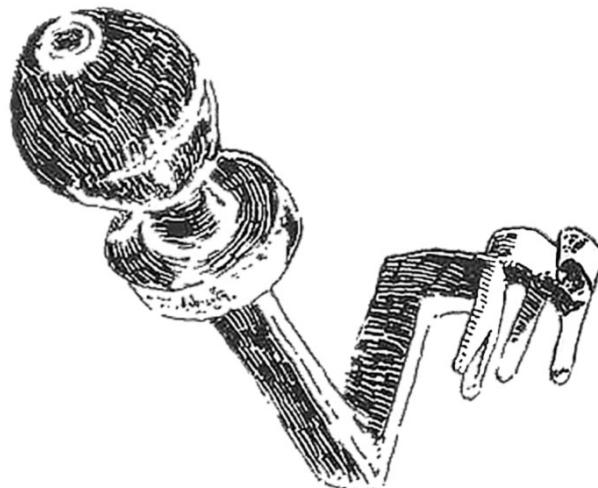
[The case: A man reconsiders the divorce document that he has sent to his wife through an agent. He sends another agent with the message to “nullify.” But what does “nullify” mean absent of any other context? Is the intent to nullify the divorce, or to say that legal document already dispatched needs to be emended but the intent to divorce remains?]

Ravina found Rav Nahman bar Yithak leaning on the door bolt thinking: “Nullify,” What does the word mean when it stands alone? To this, the sages had no answer.

(Babylonian Talmud Gittin 32B)

**רַב שְׁשֵׁת כָּל תְּלַתְּנֵי יוֹמֵין מִהְדָּר לֵיה תְּלָמֹודִיה, וְתַלִּי וְקָאִי בְּעִירָא דְּדָשָׁא וְאָמֵר : חֲדָאי נַפְשָׁאִי ! חֲדָאי נַפְשָׁאִי ! לְךָ תְּנָאֵי ! אַנְנֵי ? וְהָאָמֵר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר : אַלְמַלְאָתָה תּוֹרָה לֹא נִתְקִיְּמָוֹ שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ ? שְׁגָאָמֵר : "אָמַת לֹא בְּרִיתִי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה חֻוקֹת שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ לֹא שְׁמַתִּי" (יְרֵמִיָּה לְגֻכָּה). מַעֲקִירָא בַּי עַבְדִּי אַיְנִישׁ- אַדְעָתָא דְּנַפְשִׁיה קָא עַבְדִּי.**

Every 30 days, Rav Sheshet would review his learning. He would lean against the door bolt and say: Rejoice, O my soul! Rejoice, O my soul! It is for you that I learn Scripture! For you that I learn Talmud! But is it really the case that one learns for oneself? Did not Rabbi Eleazar teach: If not for Torah the heavens and the earth would not survive? As it is said: Have I not surely established my covenant with day and night, with the laws of heaven and earth? (Jeremiah 33:25) At the beginning of learning, one thinks that one learns for self and soul.



(Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 68B)

## Inner Doors And Outer Doors

אמר רבה בר רב הונא: כל אדם שיש בו תורת ואין בו יראת שמים, דומה לגוזבר שמסרו לו מפתחות הפנימיות ומפתחות החיצונית לא מסרו לו. בהי עייל?

Rabba bar Rav Huna said: Anyone who has Torah but has no awe of Heaven is like a treasurer entrusted with the inner keys but not with the outer keys. How will he enter?

מカリ רבי ינאי: חבל על דלית ליה דרף, ותרעה לדרף עביד.

Rabbi Yannai proclaims: Woe to the one who has no courtyard but makes a gate for it, nonetheless!



אמר رب יהודה: לא ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולם אלא כדי שייראו מלפניו, שנאמר: וְהִלְלָה יְמִינָה שִׁירָאו מִלְפָנָיו.

Rav Yehuda said: The Holy One, blessed be he, created his world only so that humans should be in awe of him, as it is said: *[I know that whatever God makes will endure; to it nothing can be added, and from it nothing can be subtracted—] God has made it so that humans will be in awe of him.* (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

(Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31b-32a)

## unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

Whoever degrades another degrades me,  
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me...

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am  
Touch'd from...

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass



## Giving In The Doorway

מִר עַקְבָּא הָהָ עֲנֵיָא בְּשִׁיבּוּתֵיהֶן, דְּמֹהָ רָגֵל כֵּל יוֹמָא דְּשָׂדֵי לִיהְ אַרְבֶּעָה זָוֵזִי בְּצִינּוֹרָא דְּדָשָׂא. יוֹם אַחֲד אָמַר: אִיזַּיל וְאַחֲזִי מְאֹן קָעֵבִיד בֵּי הַהְוָא טִיבּוֹתָא. הַהְוָא יוֹמָא נְגַחָא לִיהְ לְמִר עַקְבָּא לְבֵבִי מְדָרְשָׁא, אַתְּיָא דְּבִּיתָהוּ בְּפָדִיה. בֵּינוֹ דְּמַזְיוֹה דְּקָא מְצַלִּי לִיהְ לְדָשָׂא- נְפָק בְּתְּרִיהָוּ. רְהֹוֹת מְקִמָּה. עִילְיָה לְהַהְוָא אַתְּוָנָא דְּמֹהָ גְּרוֹפָה נֹרָא, הָהָ קָא מִיקְלִיָּוּ פְּרָעִיהָ דְּמָרָעָה עַוְקָּבָא. אַמְרָה לִיהְ: אַנְּא שְׁכִיחַנָּא בְּגַוִּיהָ דְּבִּיתָהוּ, וְמַקְרָבָא אַהֲנִיָּתִי.

There was a poor man in Mar Ukba's neighborhood into whose door socket Mar Ukba used to throw four coins every day. Once, the poor man thought: I'll be ready today and get a look at who does me this kindness. On that day, it happened that Mar Ukba was late at the Bet Midrash and his wife came to meet him. As soon as the poor man heard someone approaching the door, he began to go out. When Mar Ukba and his wife saw that the door was opening, they ran from him,

taking cover in a communal fireplace from which the fire had just been swept. Mar Ukba's feet began to burn on the hot floor and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. His wife said to him: "Put your feet on top of mine." He did so and his feet were insulated from the heat; but his pride was wounded. Were his wife's feet so much tougher than his own? Had a miracle been done for her but not for him? She read the emotions in his face and explained: "I am usually at home and so my gifts are given directly."

(Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b)



## The Poor At The Door

דרבי עקיבא הוויא ליה בְּרִתָּא, אָמַרְיוּ לֵיה בְּלִדְאֵי: הַהוּא יוֹמָא דְּעִילָּה לְבִי גַּנְגָּא, טְרִיק לְהָ חִיּוּא וּמִיתָּא. הַהוּא דְּאִינָא אַמְּילְתָא טוֹבָא. הַהוּא יוֹמָא שְׁקָלְתָא לְמִכְבָּנְתָא, דְּצָתָא בְּגֹזָא, אַתְּרִמְפִּי אִיתִיב בְּעִינֵיהֶ דְּחִיּוּא. לְצִפְרָא בַּי קָא שְׁקָלָא לְהָ. הַהוּא קָא סְרִיך וְאָתֵי חִיּוּא בְּתְרָה. אָמַר לְהָ אָבוֹה: מַאי עֲבָדָתִ? אָמְרָה לֵיה: בְּפִנְגָּא אַתָּא עֲנֵנָא, קָרָא אַבָּא, וְהָוּ טְרִיךְיִ פּוֹלִי עַלְמָא בְּסֻעֻדָּתָא, וְלִיקָּא דְּשִׁמְעֵיהֶ. קָא אַיִּמָּא, שְׁקָלְתָי לְרִסְתָּנָא דִּיקְבִּית לֵי, יְהִבְתִּיה נִיהְלִיה. אָמַר לְהָ: מֵצָה עֲבָדָתִ! נַפְקֵחַ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָּא וְדָרְשָׁ: "וְזִקְקָה תָּאֵיל מִפְנּוֹתִ" (משלי י:ב).

Rabbi Akiba had a daughter of whom the astrologers said to him: The very day that she enters her huppah/wedding canopy a serpent will bite her and she will die. He worried over this constantly. The day of her wedding [as she prepared to go to sleep] she took off a brooch and stuck the brooch pin in the crack of the wall where it happened to pierce the eye of serpent. In the morning, when she drew her brooch out of the wall, the dead serpent trailed out along with it.

Her father said to her: What did you do [that saved you]? She said to him: Last evening a pauper came and called out at the door but everyone was too busy with the feast and no one heard him. I got up, took my portion that you had given me, and I gave it to him. He said to her: You accomplished a mitzvah and for that reason you were saved. Rabbi Akiba then went out and, based upon this experience, expounded the verse: *And charity/tzedakah saves from death* (Proverbs 10:2). (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 156B)

## God In The Doorway

אָמַר רַבִּי אָבִינוּ: חָנֵן הַזֶּה עֹזֶם עַל פִּתְחָה וּמַקְדּוֹשׁ בְּרוֹיךְ הוּא עֹזֶם עַל יָמִינוֹ,  
דְּכַתִּיב: "כִּי יַעֲמֹד לִימִין אָבִיוֹן" (תְּהִלִּים קְט: לָא). אָמַן נִתְחַת לֹז, דַע מֵי שְׁעֹזֶם  
עַל יָמִינוֹ וּנוֹתֵן לְךָ שְׁכָרָה. וְאָמַן לֹא נִתְחַת לֹז, דַע מֵי שְׁעֹזֶם עַל יָמִינוֹ פּוֹרָעַ מִפְּנָךְ  
דְּכַתִּיב: "לְהֹשִׁיעַ מִשְׁפְּטִי נַפְשָׁו" (תְּהִלִּים קְט: לָא).

Rabbi Avin said: A poor person stands at the door and the Holy One, blessed be he, stands at his right, as it is written: *Because he stands at the right hand of the needy* (Psalms 109:31). If you gave him something, understand that the one who stands on his right will give you your reward. And if you did not give him anything, understand that the one who stands on his right will punish you, as it is written further: *[he stands at the right hand of the needy] to save him from those who would condemn him* (Psalm 109:31). (Leviticus Rabbah 34:9)

## Entrance, Door, Latch, And Key

לִמְמֶרֶא דְּבַיִת שַׁעַר מַעֲלִיּוֹתָא הִיא? וְהָא הַהוּא מַסִּידָא דְּמָנוֹא רְגִיל אֶלְיָהוּ דְּהַנוֹּא מִשְׁתְּעִי בְּחַדִּיה, עַבְדֵּ בֵּית שַׁעַר וְתוֹ לֹא מִשְׁתְּעִי בְּחַדִּיה! לֹא קָשִׁיא: הָא מַגְנָוָי, הָא מַבְרָאי. וְאֵי בָּעֵית אַיִמָּא: הָא וְהָא מַבְרָאי, וְלֹא קָשִׁיא. הָא דָאִית לִיהּ דָלַת, הָא דָלַית לִיהּ דָלַת אֵי בָּעֵית אַיִמָּא: הָא וְהָא דָאִית לִיהּ דָלַת, וְלֹא קָשִׁיא. הָא דָאִית לִיהּ פּוֹתְחָת, הָא דָלַית לִיהּ פּוֹתְחָת. אֵי בָּעֵית אַיִמָּא: הָא וְהָא דָאִית לִיהּ פּוֹתְחָת, וְלֹא קָשִׁיא. הָא דְּפּוֹתְחָת דִּיקְיָה מַגְנָוָי, הָא דְּפּוֹתְחָת דִּיקְיָה מַבְרָאי.

A resident of a courtyard community may be compelled by the other residents to contribute to the building of a gate house and a door for the courtyard. This would seem to show that a gate house is an improvement. Yet, how can this be? After all, there was a certain pious man with whom Elijah used to converse regularly until that man built a gate house, after which Elijah did not come to speak with him anymore! In light of this, a gate house could not be an improvement!

There is no contradiction here. A gate house built within the courtyard's perimeter would be an improvement. Such a gate house would make it possible for a poor man to make himself heard within. But because this man built a gate house that protruded from the courtyard, Elijah refused to come anymore. If you like, I can say that in both cases the gate house was built protruding from the courtyard and still there is no difficulty. One would not be an improvement while the other

would be an improvement. In the one case—of which Elijah disapproved—there was a door and in the other there was no door, just a vestibule that allowed entrance into the waiting area from the outside.

Or again we may suppose that in both cases there was a door and still there is no difficulty in determining why Elijah would come or chose not to come. In one case there was a latch and in the other case there was no latch. Or again I may say that in both cases there is a latch and still there is no difficulty because in the one case the latch was inside the door and in the other case it was outside.

(Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra 7B)



## the fact of a doorframe

means there is something to hold  
 onto with both hands  
 while slowly thrusting my forehead against the wood  
 and taking it away  
 one of the oldest motions of suffering...

Now, again, poetry,  
 violent, arcane, common,  
 hewn of the commonest living substance  
 into archway, portal, frame  
 I grasp for you, your bloodstained splinters, your  
 ancient and stubborn poise  
 —as the earth trembles—  
 burning out from the grain.

Adrienne Rich,  
The Fact of a Doorframe



## Beyond The Ruined Door

תניא אמר רבי יוסי: פעם אחת הִיִּתִי מֶלֶךְ בָּדָרֶךְ, וַיַּכְנִסְתִּי לְחוֹרְבָה אֶחָת מְחוֹרְבּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם לְהַתְפִּלָּל. בָּא אֲלֵהוּ זָכָר לְטוֹב וְשָׁמָר לִי עַל הַפְּתַח וְהַמְּתִין לִי עַד שְׁסִיעִימָתִי תְּפִילָתִי. לְאַחֲר שְׁסִיעִימָתִי תְּפִילָתִי אָמַר לִי: בְּנִי, מִפְנֵי מָה נִכְנָסָת לְחוֹרְבָה זוֹ? אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ: לְהַתְפִּלָּל. אָמַר לִי: הִיָּה לְךָ לְהַתְפִּלָּל בָּדָרֶךְ. וְאָמַרְתִּי לוֹ: מִתְיִרְאָה הִיִּתִי שֶׁפָּא יְפִסְיקָה בַּי עֹזֶרֶי דָּרְכִים. וְאָמַר לִי: הִיָּה לְךָ לְהַתְפִּלָּל תְּפִילָה קָצָרָה. בָּאוֹתָה שָׁעָה לְמִזְתִּי מִמְּנָנוּ שֶׁלְשָׁה דָּבָרִים: לְמִזְתִּי שָׁאַיּוֹ נִכְנָסֵי לְחוֹרְבָה, וְלְמִזְתִּי שְׁמַתְפִּלְיָיו בָּדָרֶךְ, וְלְמִזְתִּי שְׁהַמְּתִפְלֵל בָּדָרֶךְ מְתִפְלֵל תְּפִילָה קָצָרָה

Rabbi Yosi said: Once I was traveling and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray. Elijah, always remembered for the good, came and waited for me at the entrance until I had finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer, he said to me: Peace be upon you, my master! I answered: Peace be upon you, my master and my teacher! He said to me: My son, why did you enter this ruin? To pray, I replied. Said Elijah: You should have prayed on the road. I was afraid, said I, lest the passers-by interrupt me. He said to me: You should have prayed a shortened prayer. And so I learned three things from him: I learned that one does not enter a ruin. I learned that one prays on the road, and I learned that one who prays on the road prays a shortened prayer.

וְאָמַר לִי: בְּנִי, מָה קֹול שְׁמַעְתָּ בְּחוֹרְבָה זוֹ? וְאָמַרְתִּי לוֹ: שְׁמַעְתִּי בְּתִיקְוָה וְאָמַרְתָּ: אָוי לְבָנִים שְׁבָעָזָנוֹתֵיכֶם הַחֲרַבְתִּי אֶת בֵּיתִי וְשִׁרְבַּתִּי אֶת הַכִּילִי וְהַגְּלִילִיתִים לְבִיּוֹן הַאוּמּוֹת! וְאָמַר לִי: מִיָּה וְחִי רָאשָׁךְ, לֹא שָׁעָה זוֹ בָּלֶבֶד אָוּמָרָתֶךָ, אֶלָּא בָּכֶל יוֹם וַיּוֹם אָוּמָרָתֶךָ. וְלֹא זוֹ בָּלֶבֶד, אֶלָּא בָּשָׁעָה שִׁישְׁרָאֵל נִכְנָסֵי לְבָתִי כְּנִיסּוֹת וְלִבְבָתִי מִדְרָשׁוֹת וְעוֹנוֹין "יְהִיא שְׁמֵיה הַגָּדוֹל מִבּוֹרָךְ" מִקְדוּשָׁ בְּרִיךְ הוּא מִנְעָנָעָ רָאשׁוֹ וְאָמַר: אָשָׁרִי הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁמַקְלֵסֵין אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ בָּךְ! מָה לוֹ לְאָבֶן שְׁחָגָלָה אֶת בָּנָיו, וְאָוי לְהָם לְבָנִים שָׁגָלוּ מַעַל שְׁוֵילָתָן אֶבֶן

My son, Elijah continued, what sound did you hear in that ruin? I told him: I heard a heavenly voice cooing like a dove and saying: Woe to the children on account of whose sins I destroyed my house and burned my Temple and exiled them among the nations! By your life and breath, said he, it is not only in that moment that she cries so. It's every day, three times a day, that she coos like a dove: *wooo, wooo, woe to the children...*

And not only that, but whenever Israel enters its synagogues and study houses and recites the Kaddish, saying, *Y'hei shemei hagadol m'vorach/May his great name be blessed*, the Blessed Holy One, shakes his head and says: Happy is the king who is thus praised in his house! What a thing for the father who banished his children! Woe to those children who are banished from their father's table!

(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 3A)



## Miracles Behind The Door

וְאֵשָׁה אַחַת מִנְשֵׁי בְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים צָעַקְהָ אֶל־אֱלֹהִישָׁע לְאָמֵר עֲבָדָךְ אִישִׁי מַתְּ וְאַתָּה יְדַעַּת כִּי עֲבָדָךְ הִיא יָרָא אֶת הֵ' וְהַנְּשָׁה בָּא לְקַחְתָּ אֶת שְׁנִי יְלָדִי לֹו לְעָבָדִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְيָה אֶלְיִשְׁעָ מָה אָשָׁה־לְךָ הַגִּידִי לִי מִה־יְשָׁלֵךְ בַּבְּיִת וַתֹּאמֶר אֵין לְשִׁפְחַתְךָ כָּל בַּבְּיִת כִּי אִם־אָסֹזֶךָ שְׁמָנוֹ. וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי שָׁאֵל־לְךָ כָּלִים מִן־הָחִזֵּק מֵאַת כָּל־שָׁכְנִיךְ כָּלִים רַקִּים אֶל־תְּמַעֵּיטִי. וּבָאת וְסַגְרַת אֶת הַדְּלַת בַּעֲדָךְ וּבַעֲדָ-בְּנִיךְ וַיַּצְקַת עַל כָּל־הַכָּלִים הָאֱלָהָה וְהַמְּלָא תְּסִיעִי

A certain woman, the wife of one of the disciples of the prophets, cried out to Elisha: “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know how your servant revered the Lord. And now a creditor is coming to seize my two children as slaves.” Elisha said to her, “What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?” She replied, “Your maid servant has nothing at all in the house, except a jar of oil.” “Go,” he said, “and borrow vessels, outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels, as many as you can. then go in and shut the door behind you and your children, and pour [oil] into all those vessels, removing each one as it is filled.”

וַתָּלֶךְ מֵאַתָּו וַתְּסַגֵּר אֶת הַדְּלַת בַּעֲדָה וּבַעֲדָ-בְּנִיהָ הַסְּמִינִים אֶלְיָה וְהִיא מַזְכַּת. וַיְהִי כִּמְלָאַת הַכָּלִים וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-בְּנָה הַגִּישָׁה אֶלְיָה עוֹד כֶּלֶי וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְיָה אֵין עוֹד כֶּלֶי וַיַּעֲמֹד הַשְּׁמָנוֹ. וַתָּבֹא וַתְּגַדֵּל אֶלְהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי מִכְּרִי אֶת-הַשְּׁמָנוֹ וְשָׁלְמִי אֶת-נְשִׁיךְ וְאַתְּ וְבְנִיךְ תְּחִי בְּנוֹתֶר.

She went away and shut the door behind her and her children. They kept bringing [vessels] to her and she kept pouring. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” He answered her, “there are no more vessels”; and the oil stopped. She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children can live on the rest.”

וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶלְיִשָּׁע אֶל-שָׁוּם וְשָׁם אֵשָׁה גְּדוֹלָה וַתְּמַזְקַ-בּוֹ לְאַכְל-לְחַם וַיְהִי מִדִּי עַבְרוֹ יִסְרָר שְׁמָה לְאַכְל-לְחַם. וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-אֵשָׁה הַנְּהָ-נָא יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הַוָּא עַבְרָר עַלְיָנוֹ תְּמִיד. גַּעַשְׁ-נָא עַלְיִת-קִיר קַטָּה וְגַשִּׁים לֹו שָׁם מַטָּה וְשָׁלָחוּ וּכְסָא וּמִנּוֹרָה וְהִיא בָּבָאוֹ אַלְיָנוֹ יִסּוּר שְׁמָה. וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹא שְׁמָה וַיִּסְרֶר אֶל-הָעַלִיהָ וַיַּשְׁכַּב-שְׁמָה. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גַּחְזִי נָעֲרוֹ קָרָא לְשׁוֹנְמִית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָא-לָהּ וַתְּעִמֵּד לִפְנֵינוֹ. וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֶת-נָא אֶלְיָה הַנְּהָ-חַרְדַּת אַלְיָנוֹ אֶת-כָּל-הַחַרְדָּה הַזֹּאת מִהָּ לְעַשׂוֹת לְךָ הַיָּשָׁלֵךְ-לְךָ אֶל-הַמְּלָךְ אוֹ אֶל-שָׁר הַאֲבָא וַתֹּאמֶר בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אֲנִכִּי יִשְׁבַּת. וַיֹּאמֶר וּמָה לְעַשׂוֹת לְהָ וַיֹּאמֶר גַּמְזִי אֲבָל בָּו אַיְוֹ-לָה וְאֵשָׁה זָקוֹן. וַיֹּאמֶר קָרָא-לָהּ וַיִּקְרָא-לָהּ וַתְּעִמֵּד בְּפִתְחָה. וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַזְעֵד הַזָּה בְּעַת מִיה אַתְּ חַבְקַת בָּו וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-אֱדֹנִי אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-תְּכִזֵּב בְּשִׁפְחָתְךָ.

One day Elisha visited Shunem. A wealthy woman lived there, and she urged him to have a meal; and whenever he passed by, he would stop there for a meal. Once she said to her husband, "I am sure it is a holy man of God who comes this way regularly. Let us make a small enclosed upper chamber and place a bed, a table, a chair, and a lampstand there for him, so that he can stop there whenever he comes to us." One day, he came there; he retired to the upper chamber and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call that Shunammite woman." He called her, and she stood before him. He said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak in your behalf to the king or to the army commander?'" She replied, "I live among my own people." "What then can be done for her?" he asked. "The fact is," said Gehazi, "she has no son, and her husband is old." "Call her," he said. He called her, and she stood in the doorway. And Elisha said, "At this season next year, you will be embracing a son." She replied, "Please, my lord, man of God, do not delude your maid-servant."

וַתַּהַר הָאָשָׁה וַתָּלֶד בָּן לְמִזְעֵד הַזֶּה בָּעֵת אֲשֶׁר-דָּבָר אֶלָּיה אֶלְيָשָׁע. וַיָּגַד הַיּוֹלֶד וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אָבִיו אֶל-הַקּוֹצָרִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אָבִיו רָאשִׁי רָאשִׁי וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הַגָּעֵר שְׁאַהוּ אֶל-אָמוֹן. וַיִּשְׁאַהוּ וַיַּבְיאָהוּ אֶל-אָמוֹן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל-בְּרֵקִיהָ עַד-הַצְּהָרִים וַיָּמָת. וַתַּעַל וַתַּשְׁכַּבְתָּה עַל-מִטָּה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּסְגַּר בְּעֵדוֹ וַתִּצְא. וַתִּקְרַא אֶל-אָשָׁה וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחְנָא לִי אֶחָד מִן-הַגָּעָרִים וְאֶחָת הָאֲתֹנוֹת וְאֶרוֹצָה אֶל אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶשְׁׁוֹבָה. וַיֹּאמֶר מַדְועַת הַזָּכָת אֶלְיוֹ הַיּוֹם לֹא-חֶדֶשׁ וְלֹא שְׁבָת וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלָום.

The woman conceived and bore a son at the same season the following year, as Elisha had assured her. The child grew up. One day, he went out to his father among the reapers. [Suddenly] he cried to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" He said to a servant, "Carry him to his mother." He picked him up and brought him to his mother. And the child sat on her lap until noon; and he died. She took him up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and left him and closed the door. Then she called to her husband: "Please, send me one of the servants and one of the she-asses, so I can hurry to the man of God and back." But he said, "Why are you going to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She answered, It's all right."

וַתִּחְבֹּשׁ הָאֲתֹנוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-גַּעֲרָה נָהָג וְלֹא אֶל-תַּעֲצֵר-לִי לְרַכְבָּכִי אִם-אָמְרָתִי לְךָ. וַיַּפְלַךְ וַיַּבְוֹא אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַר הַכְּרֶמֶל וַיְהִי כְּרָאֹת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶתְּהָ מִנְּגָד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גִּיחֹזִי נָעֵרֹ הַנִּהְרָה הַשׁוֹנְמִית הָלֵז. עַתָּה רֹיז-נָא לְקַרְאָתָה וְאָמַר-לָהּ חַשְׁלָום לְךָ חַשְׁלָום לְאִישׁ חַשְׁלָום לְיִלְדָּךְ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלָום. וַיַּבְוֹא אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַר וַתִּחְזֹק בָּרְגָּלָיו וַיַּגְשֵׁב גִּיחֹזִי לְהַזְּפָה וַיֹּאמֶר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים מְרֻפָּה-לָהּ בַּי-נְפָשָׁה מְרֻה-לָהּ וְהִ הָעֲלִים מִפְּנֵי וְלֹא הָגִיד לִי. וַתֹּאמֶר חַשְׁלָמִי בָּנָו מִאֵת הֵי הַלָּא אָמְרָתִי לֹא תִשְׁלַח אֶתְּנִי.

She had the ass saddled, and said to her servant, “Urge [the beast] on; see that I don’t slow down unless I tell you.” She went on until she came to the man of god on Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her from afar, he said to his servant Gehazi, “There is that Shunammite woman. Go, hurry toward her and ask her, ‘How are you? How is your husband? How is the child?’” “We are well,” she replied. But when she came up to the man of God on the mountain, she clasped his feet. Gehazi stepped forward to push her away; but the man of God said, “Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.” Then she said, “Did I ask my lord for a son? didn’t I say: ‘Don’t mislead me’?”

**וַיֹּאמֶר לְגַיְחָזִי חֲגַר מִתְגִּנֵּךְ וְקַח מִשְׁעַנְתִּי בִּזְדַּח וְלֹךְ כִּי-תִמְצָא אִישׁ לֹא תִבְרְכָנוּ וְכִי-יִבְרְכָה אִישׁ לֹא תִעֲנָנוּ וְשָׁמְתִּי מִשְׁעַנְתִּי עַל-פִּנְצִית הַנָּעָר. וַתֹּאמֶר אֶם חַי-הַיְיִנְפְּשָׁךְ אֶם-אָעַזְבָּךְ וְיַקְם וְלֹךְ אַחֲרֶיךָ.**

He said to Gehazi, “Tie up your skirts, take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him. And place my staff on the face of the boy.” But the boy’s mother said, “As the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you<sup>1</sup>” so he arose and followed her.

**וַיַּחַזֵּי עָבֵר לִפְנֵיהֶן וַיֹּשֶּׁם אֶת-הַמִּשְׁעָנָת עַל-פִּנְצִית הַנָּעָר וְאַיִן קָשַׁב וַיֵּשֶׁב לְקַרְאָתוֹ וַיַּגְדֵּל לוֹ לֵאמֹר לֹא הַקִּיֵּץ הַנָּעָר. וַיָּבֹא אֶל-יִשְׁעָה הַבִּיתָה וְהַגָּה הַנָּעָר מִתְשַׁכֵּב עַל-מִטָּתוֹ. וַיָּבֹא וַיִּסְגַּר הַדֶּלֶת בַּעַד שְׁנֵי הַמִּשְׁעָנָת וַיַּתְפְּלִלְתָּה אֶל-הָהָר. וַיַּעַל וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל-הַיָּלֵד וַיֹּשֶּׁם פִּיו עַל-פִּיו וְעַיִּנֵּיו עַל-עַיִּנֵּיו וְכַפְּיוֹ עַל-כַּפְּיוֹ וַיִּגְהַר עַלְיוֹן וַיִּזְוַרֵּר הַנָּעָר עַד-שְׁבַע פָּעָמִים וַיִּפְקַח הַנָּעָר אֶת-עַיִּנֵּיו. וַיִּקְרַא אֶל-גַּיְחָזִי וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָא אֶל-הַשְׁנִמִּית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרַא אֶלָּיו וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאִי בָּנֶךָ. וַתָּבֹא וַתְּפַל עַל-רְגַלְיוֹ וַתִּשְׁתַּחַז אֶרְצָה וַתִּשְׁאַת-בָּנֶה וַתִּמְצָא.**

Gehazi had gone on before them and had placed the staff on the boy’s face; but there was no sound or response. He turned back to meet him and told him, “The boy has not awakened.” Elisha came into the house, and there was the boy, laid out dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he mounted [the bed] and placed himself over the child. He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands, as he bent over it. And the body of the child became warm. He stepped down, walked once up and down the room, then mounted and bent over him. Thereupon, the boy sneezed seven times, and the boy opened his eyes. [Elisha] called Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite woman,” and he called her. When she came to him, he said, “Pick up your son.” She came and fell at his feet and bowed low to the ground; then she picked up her son and left.

(2 Kings 4:1-37)

**whoever you are:** in the evening step out

of your room, where you know everything:

yours is the last house before the far-off:

whoever you are.

With your eyes, which in their weariness

barely free themselves from the worn-out threshold,

you lift very slowly one black tree

and place it against the sky: slender, alone.

And you have made the world. And it is huge

and like a word which grows ripe in silence.

And as your will seizes on its meaning,

tenderly your eyes let it go...

Rainer Maria Rilke, [The Book of Images](#)



## Elijah And The Messiah At The Entrance

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֹוי אָשַׁכֵּח לְאַלְיָהוּ, דְּהַנוּ קִיּוּמִי אָפָתָחָא דְמַעֲרַתָּא דְרַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי. אָמַר לֵיהּ: אָתִינָא לְעַלְמָא דָאָתֵי? אָמַר לֵיהּ: אִם יַרְצֵחָ אָדוֹן הַזֶּה. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֹוי: שְׁנִים רָאִיתִי וּקוֹל שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁמַעַתִּי. - אָמַר לֵיהּ: אִימָת אָתֵי מֶשֶׁיחַ? - אָמַר לֵיהּ: זִיל שְׁיִלְלָה לְדִיקְהָ. - וַהֲיכָא יִתְּבִּיבָ? אָפָתָחָא דְרוֹמָם. - וּמְאֵי סִימְנִיהָ? - יִתְּבִּיבָ בְּינִי עֲנֵנִי סּוּבְלִי חְלָאִים, וּכְוֹלָן שְׁרוֹ וְאָסִירִי בְּחָד זְמָנָא, אֵיתָהוּ שְׁרֵי חָד וְאָסָר חָד. אָמַר: דְלָמָא מְבָעִנָּא, דְלָא אִיעָכָב. אַזְוֵל לְגַבְיָה, אָמַר לֵיהּ: שְׁלוֹם עַלְיכָ רַבִּי וּמוֹרִי! אָמַר לֵיהּ: שְׁלוֹם עַלְיכָ בֶּן לֹוָא. - אָמַר לֵיהּ: לְאִימָת אָתֵי מֶרְ? - אָמַר לֵיהּ: הַיּוֹם. אַתָּא לְגַבְיָ אַלְיָהוּ. אָמַר לֵיהּ: מְאֵי אָמַר לְךָ? - אָמַר לֵיהּ: שְׁלוֹם עַלְיכָ בֶּן לֹוָא. אָמַר לֵיהּ: אַבְטָחָךְ לְךָ וְלְאָבוֹךְ לְעַלְמָא דָאָתֵי. - אָמַר לֵיהּ: שְׁקוֹרִי קָא שְׁקָרְבִּי, דְאָמַר לֵי "הַיּוֹם אָתִינָא" וְלֹא אַתָּא! אָמַר לֵיהּ: הַכִּי אָמַר לְךָ: "הַיּוֹם אָמַם בְּקוֹלוֹ תִשְׁמַעְ".



Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Elijah while he was standing at the entrance of the cave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. He asked Elijah: Do I have a place in the world to come? Elijah replied: If the master desires it. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said to himself: I saw two but I heard the voice of a third. He asked the prophet: When will the Messiah come? Elijah answered: Go and ask him. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked: Where will I find him? He is sitting at the entrance of Rome. And by what signs will I identify him? He sits among those who suffer with lesions. All of them unwrap and bind up their sores at the same time. But the one who

is the Messiah unties and binds up one at a time, thinking: If I am summoned I will not have to delay. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went to him and said: *Shalom alecha*, my master and teacher. The Messiah replied: *Shalom alecha*, ben Levi. Rabbi Yehoshua asked: When will the master come? He replied: Today. Rabbi Yehoshua returned to Elijah who said to him: What did he say to you? He said to me: Peace be upon you, ben Levi. Elijah explained: With his greeting he has promised both you and your father a place in the world to come. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: But he lied to me by saying: Today I will come; but he has not come. Elijah replied: He was quoting a verse. This is what he said to you: *Today—if you will listen to His voice* (Psalm 95:7).

(Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 98A)

## Teshuvah And The Doorway Of Opportunity

"דְּרַשׁוּ הָיָה בַּהֲמִצָּאוֹ קָרָא הָיָה בְּהִיּוֹתָו קָרוֹב" (ישעיה נה:ו)- אלֹא עִשְׂרַת יְמִינֵיכֶם. שֶׁפַּנְיוֹ יְחִזְקָאֵל אֹמֵר: "בַּתְּתַתֶּם סְפִּים אֶת-סְפִּים וּמְזֻזְתָּם אֶצְלֵי מִזְוִצָּתִי וּמִקְיָרֵי בְּינֵיכֶם..." (יחזקאל מג:ח). חִיּוּ, "קָרָא הָיָה בְּהִיּוֹתָו קָרוֹב". יַעֲזֹב רַשְׁעָתְךָ וְאַיִשׁ אָנוּ מִחְשְׁבָתְךָ וַיַּשְׁבַּת אֶל הַיְמָמָה (ישעיה נה:ז).

*Seek the Lord while he can be found; call to him while he is near* (Isaiah 55:6)- This refers to the ten days of teshuvah during which time he is present among you. For so did Ezekiel say: *When they placed their threshold next to my threshold and their doorposts next to my doorposts with only a wall between me and them...* (Ezekiel 43:8)\*. Therefore, call to him while he is close: Let the wicked give up his ways; the sinful man his plans; Let him turn back to the Lord and he will pardon him (Isaiah 55:7).

(Tanhuma Ha'azinu 4)

\*The south wall of the First Temple enclosure was also the north wall of the royal enclosure; the two communicated by the Gate of the Guard (2 Kings 11:19). –annotation to Ezekiel 43:8 from JPS Tanakh.

## That Place

הַמְּקוֹם הַהְוָא, קָצַת לְמַעַלָּה מַעֲצָם הַבָּרִים  
מִשְׁמָאֵל  
בֹּו לֹא נָגַע אִישׁ וְלֹא יָגַע אִישׁ לְעוֹלָם  
הַמְּקוֹם הַנְּעָלָם, שֶׁאִישׁ עַלְיוֹ יַד לֹא הַנִּימַת  
הַמְּקוֹם שֶׁאִינֵנוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשַׁאֲלָ-

That place, a bit above the latch  
and to the left  
no one has ever touched nor will anyone ever touch it  
the hidden place on which no one has placed a hand  
the place that does not know how to ask-

Rivka Miriam  
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



## Entering Before And Within

אמר רבי יוחנן ממשום רבי יוסי: מניין שהקדשוש ברוך הוא מתפלל? שגא אמר, וubahiotim אל הר קדשי ושמחותים בבית תפילה. 'תפילה' לא נאמר אלא 'תפילה'. מפניו שהקדשוש ברוך הוא מתפלל. מי מצלוי אמר רב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב: יהי רצון מלפני שיכבשו רחמי את בעסוי, ויגלו רחמי על מדותי, ואתנаг עם בני במדת רחמים, ואקנש להם לפנים משורת הדין.

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Yosi: Through what verse of Scripture do we know that the Holy One prays? It is the verse: *And I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them rejoice in the house of my prayer* (Isaiah 56:7). The verse does not say *their prayer*, but *my prayer*. From this verse we know that the Holy One, blessed be he, prays. And what does he pray? Rav Zutra bar Tovyah cited Rav: Here is God's prayer: May it be my own will that my compassion subdue my anger and that my compassion prevail over my other dispositions; and that I conduct myself with my children according the attribute of compassion and that I deal with them beyond the measure of justice.

פניא, אמר רבי ישמעאל בן אלשיך: פעם אחת נכנסתי להקטיר קטורת לפני ולפניהם וראיתי אפתריאל יה' צבאות שהוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא ואמר לי: ישמעאל,بني, ברכני! אמרתני לו: יהי רצון מלפניך שיכבשו רחמיך את בעסיך, ויגלו רחמיך על מדותיך ותתנаг עם בניך במדת הרחמים, ותקנש להם לפנים משורת הדין. ונענע לי בראשו. וקמישמע לו שלא תהא ברכת הדין קלה בעיניך.

It was taught: Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, the High Priest, said: Once, I entered before and within to offer the incense in the Holy of Holies and I saw Akatriel Yah, the Lord of Hosts, sitting on his throne, high and exalted and he said to me: Ishmael, my son, bless me! I said to him: May it be your will that your compassion subdue your anger and that your compassion prevail over your other dispositions; and that you conduct yourself with your children according to the attribute of compassion and deal with them beyond the measure of justice. He nodded his head to me. We learn from this that one should not take lightly the blessing of an ordinary person.

(Babylonian Talmud Berachot/Blessings 7A)

## Between The Inner Room And The Outer Room

### In The Inner Room

ובחדר הפנימי אנו שומרים את בז' הפה של משה  
 את עיניו הקלות של יצחק, את רגלו הנגררת של יעקב.  
 ובהתרגש מלכמיה עליינו, לחדר הפנימי נכנס  
 להבט בכם בקרוב.  
 כי כל אשר יוצא אל הקרב, רק באלה עצמו יעתף.

And in the inner room we keep Moses' heaviness of mouth  
 Isaac's weak eyes, and Jacob's dragging leg.  
 And when war stirs us, it is to the inner room we go  
 To examine them closely.  
 For each one who goes out to battle wraps himself in just these.

Rivka Miriam  
 Translated by Steven G. Sager

### The Inner Room Is The Outer Room

Somewhere here I want to bring in a learning which has been most rewarding, because it makes me feel so deeply akin to others. I can word it this way: What is most personal is most general. There have been times when in talking with students or staff, or in writing, I have expressed myself in ways so personal that I have felt I was expressing an attitude which it was probable no one else could understand, because it was so uniquely my own... In these instances I have almost invariably found that the very feeling which has seemed to me most private, most personal and hence most incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there is a resonance in many other people. It has led me to believe that what is most personal and unique in each of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others....

Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person, p.26

## The Threshold of Consciousness

5569 [1808], *the first night of Hanukkah, after the candle had been lighted.*

A guest came into someone's home. He asked the householder, "How do you make your living?" The latter replied that he had no fixed source of income and that he was supported by public funds. The guest then inquired what the householder was studying, and they began to discuss it. Their conversation became intense and personal, and the householder revealed his longing to achieve some true rung of holiness. The guest agreed to teach him, and then the householder was astonished, fearing that perhaps this was no human being at all. But as he saw that they seemed to be having an ordinary human conversation, his trust was restored, and he began calling the other "my teacher." "First," he said, I want to learn what I should do to treat you with proper respect. Not, of course, that I would really insult you. It's just so hard for a person to take proper care of such things. Teach me, then, how to treat you correctly."

I have no time for that now, was the answer. "Another time I will come and teach you that. Now I have to leave you." The other insisted, "This too is something I should learn about. How far am I expected to accompany you on your way?" "Just past the doorway," was the reply.

But how shall I go outside with him? thought the householder. Now too we are together, but there are other people around. But once I am outside alone with him... who knows who he is? So he turned to the guest and said, "I am frightened to go out with you," to which came the reply, "If I can teach you all these things, who could stop me if I wanted to do something to you right here and now?" So he went with him out the door, but as soon as they were out the other grabbed him and began to fly with him. He felt cold, but the one with whom he flew gave him a garment. "Take this," he said, "and all will be well. You will have food and drink and dwell in your home." And they flew on.

Meanwhile the householder looked around and found that he was back in his house....

He wondered greatly about all this, not understanding how he was here in one minute but there in the next. He wanted to tell someone about it, but how do you tell people about something as unbelievable as this? Looking out the window, he saw the guest walk by. "Come in," he said, but the other replied. "I have no time, for I am going to see you."

"Even this is a shock. I'm right here and you say you're going to see me?"

"In the moment you agreed to go with me, to accompany me to the doorway, I took your soul from you and gave it a garment from the lower rung of paradise. Only the lower parts of your spirit remained with you. That is why you can be there when you turn your thoughts there; you are able to draw illumination into yourself. But when you return here, you are here."

I do not know what world he was from, though surely it was from the good. The matter has not yet been ended or concluded.

From The "Dream-Talks" of Nahman of Bratslav.

Translated by Arthur Green in, Rabbinic Fantasies, Stern and Mirsky, eds.

## Jewish Theology: God Who Is Like A Door

תִיאוֹלָגִיה יְהוּדִית, תִיאוֹ, תִיאוֹ, בִּילְדוֹתִי הַפְּרָתִי יַלְדָשֶׁמֶוּ קִיה תִיאוֹדָר, כְמוּ חֶרְצָל, אֲבָל אַפּוּ קָרָאָה לוּ  
תִיאוֹ, תִיאוֹ מִפְגָּשָׁה הַמְשָׁחִים, בֹּזָא הַבִּיתָה תִיאוֹ  
אֲלַתְּשָׁאָר אָם יְלִדִים רַעִים,  
תִיאוֹ, תִיאוֹ, לֹגָג, יְהָ יְהָ יְהָ.

אֲנִי רֹצֶחֶת אֶל נְרָאָה וְלֹא רֹזֶחֶת, שָׁאוּכָל לְהַזְבִּילָוּ  
וְלִסְפָּר לוּ מַה שְׁהָוָא לֹא רֹזֶחֶת. וְאֲנִי רֹצֶחֶת  
אֶל נְרָאָה וְרֹזֶחֶת. אֲנִי רֹצֶחֶת לְרֹאָות  
אַיִד הָוָא מִכְשָׁה אֶת עַיְנָיו, כְמוּ יַלְדָ שְׁמַשָּׁק עַוְרָ.

אֲנִי רֹצֶחֶת אֶל כָּמוּ חַלְוָן שָׁאָם אֲנִי פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת  
אֲרָאָה אֶת הַשְּׁמִים וּבְעַצְמֵי נְשָׁאָר בְּבִיטָה,  
אֲנִי רֹצֶחֶת אֶל כָּמוּ דָלָת שְׁנַפְתָּחָת רַק מְחוֹצָה,  
אֲבָל הָאֵל הָוָא כָמוּ דָלָת מְסֻתּוֹבֶת עַל צִירָה  
פְּנִימָה וּמְחוֹצָה, עַל סְבִיבּוֹתִיהָ תְּסַבֵּבּ  
בְּלִי רְאָשִׁית בְּלִי אַחֲרִית.

Jewish Theology, Theo, Theo, in my youth I knew a boy  
whose name was Theodore, like Herzl, but his mother called him  
Theo, Theo, come home from the playground, Theo,  
don't hang around with bad kids,  
Theo, Theo, log, Yah, Yah, Yah.

I want a God who is seen but does not see, whom I can lead around  
in order to tell him about that which he does not see. And I want  
a God who is seen and who sees. I want to see  
how he covers his eyes, like a child playing blind.

I want a God like a window that if I open it  
I will see the heavens while myself staying in the house,  
I want a God who is like a door that opens only outward.  
But God is like a door that swings on its hinge  
in and out, and continues to swing through its arc  
without beginning, without end.

Yehuda Amichai  
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

## Threshold Of Forgiveness

רבי ירמיה הוה ליה מילטא לרבי אבא בחדיה, אזל אתיב אדשא דרבנן אבא. בחדיה דשדי אמתיה מיא מטא זריזי דמייא ארישא. אמר: עשאוני פאשפה, קרא אנטישיה: "מאשפות ירים אביוו" (תהלים קיג: ז). שמע רבי אבא ונפיק לאפייה. אמר ליה: השטה צריכנא למיפק אדעתך, דכתיב: "בלח התרפס ורhab רעיך" (משלי ו: ג).

Rabbi Abba was once offended by Rabbi Jeremiah. Rabbi Jeremiah went to Rabbi Abba's house to apologize, but he could not bring himself to knock on the door. He sat down on the threshold. Just then the maid threw some dirty water out of the window and some of it splashed onto Rabbi Jeremiah's head. Rabbi Jeremiah yelled: I came to apologize and they've made a trash dump out of me!? Angrily, he shouted: Just remember! *He raises the poor out of the dust, the wretched from the trash dump* (Psalm 113:7). Rabbi Abba heard and came out. When he saw the splattered Rabbi Jeremiah, he said begrudgingly: Now I suppose I have to apologize to you since Solomon has said: *Go, grovel and badger your neighbor 'til he releases you* (Proverbs 6:3).

רבי זира, כי הוה ליה מילטא בחדי איניש הוה חלייף ותני לקמיה ומצאי ליה, כי היכי דגניתי ונפיק ליה מדעתיה.

When Rabbi Zeira had an issue with someone who had offended him he would repeatedly walk by that person making himself visible so that the other might approach him.

רב הוה ליה מילטא בחדי ההוא טבחא- לא אטה לקמיה. במעלי יומא דכפורי אמר איהו: איזיל אנה לפיטסי ליה. פגע ביה רב הונא. אמר ליה: להכא קא איזיל מרי? אמר ליה: לפיטסי לפלאניא. אמר: איזיל אבא למיקטן נפשא אזל וקם עילוייה. הוה יתיב וקא פלי רישא, דלי עיניה ומחזיה, אמר ליה: אבא את! זיל, לית לי מילטא בחדך! בחדך קא פלי רישא אישתמייט גראם, ומחייב בקועיה, וקטלה.

Rav was once offended by a certain butcher and when, by the eve of Yom Kippur, the butcher did not come to him, Rav said: I will go to the butcher and reconcile with him. Rabbi Huna, a student and colleague, met Rav along the way and asked: Sir, where are you going so close to Yom Kippur? Rav answered: I am going to reconcile with So-and-So. Rabbi Huna thought: Abba is about to kill someone. Rav went to the butcher and remained standing in front of him as the butcher was sitting and chopping an animal's head. The butcher raised his eyes and saw Rav. Then he said: You are Abba. Go away! I have nothing to say to you! While he was chopping the head, a bone flew off and killed him.

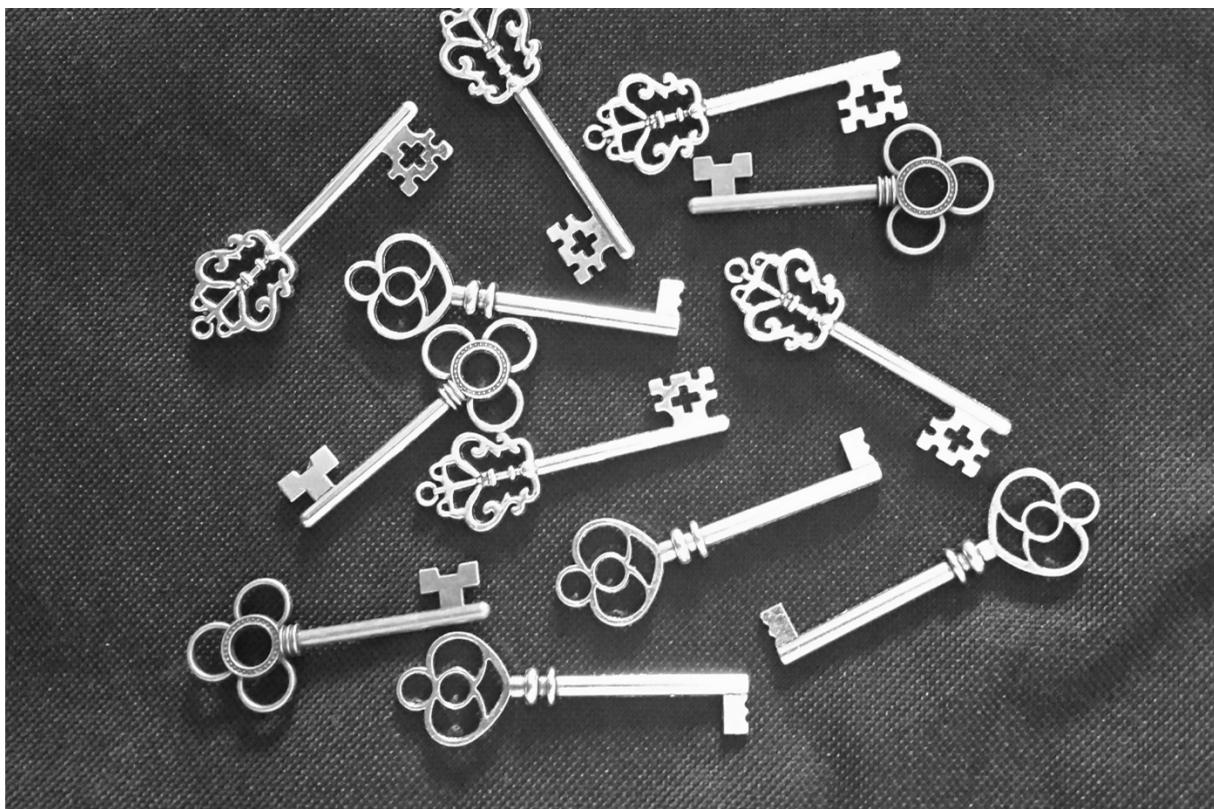
Babylonian Talmud Yoma 87a

## The Master Key To Heaven's Doors

Once, the Ba'al Shem Tov, of blessed memory, commanded Rabbi Ze'ev Kitzes, of blessed memory, to learn the deep meanings behind the names of the shofar blasts, for he would be the one who called the notes on Rosh Hashanah. Rabbi Ze'ev learned the deep meanings and wrote them on a piece of paper intending to look at them during the service and he put the paper in his robe, next to his heart. When the Shofar service came, he searched for the paper everywhere but it was gone and he did not know how to focus on the deep meanings. It saddened him and, with a broken heart, he sobbed the notes in a simple way—without the deep meanings. Afterwards the Baal Shem Tov said to him: Behold, in the palace of the king there are many rooms and halls with different keys for each and every door. But, the master key is the axe with which it is possible to open all of the locks on all of the doors. The deep meanings are just like the keys. For each door there is a different deep meaning, but the master key is the broken heart. When a person is truly heartbroken before the blessed Name, that person can enter every door in the palace of the king who is king of all kings, the blessed Holy One.

From S.Y. Agnon, *Yamim Nora'im/The Days of Awe*

Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



## Before the Law Stands A Doorkeeper

...before the Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. "It is possible," answers the doorkeeper, "but not at this moment." Since the door leading into the Law stands open as usual and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man bends down to peer through the entrance. When the doorkeeper sees that, he laughs and says: "If you are so strongly tempted, try to get in without my permission. But note that I am powerful. And I am only the lowest doorkeeper. From hall to hall, keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other. And the sight of the third man is already more than even I can stand." These are difficulties which the man from the country has not expected to meet, the Law, he thinks, should be accessible to every man and at all times, but when he looks more closely at the doorkeeper in his furred robe, with his huge pointed nose and long thin Tartar beard, he decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits waiting for days and years. He makes many attempts to be allowed in and wearies the doorkeeper with his importunity. The doorkeeper often engages him in brief conversation, asking him about his home and about other matters, but the questions are put quite impersonally, as great men put questions, and always conclude with the statement that the man cannot be allowed to enter yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he takes each gift: "I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone." During all these long years the man watches the doorkeeper almost incessantly. He forgets about the other doorkeepers, and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the Law. In the first years he curses his evil fate aloud; later, as he grows old, he only mutters to himself. He grows childish, and since in his prolonged study of the doorkeeper he has learned to know even the fleas in his fur collar, he begs the very fleas to help him and to persuade the doorkeeper to change his mind. Finally, his eyes grow dim and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the door of the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies, all that he has experienced during the whole time of his sojourn condenses in his mind into one question, which he has never yet put to the doorkeeper. He beckons the doorkeeper, since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend far down to hear him, for the difference in size between them has increased very much to the man's disadvantage. "What do you want to know now?" asks the doorkeeper, "you are insatiable." "Everyone strives to attain the Law," answers the man, "how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?" The doorkeeper perceives that the man is nearing his end and his hearing is failing, so he bellows in his ear: "No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended for you. I am now going to shut it."

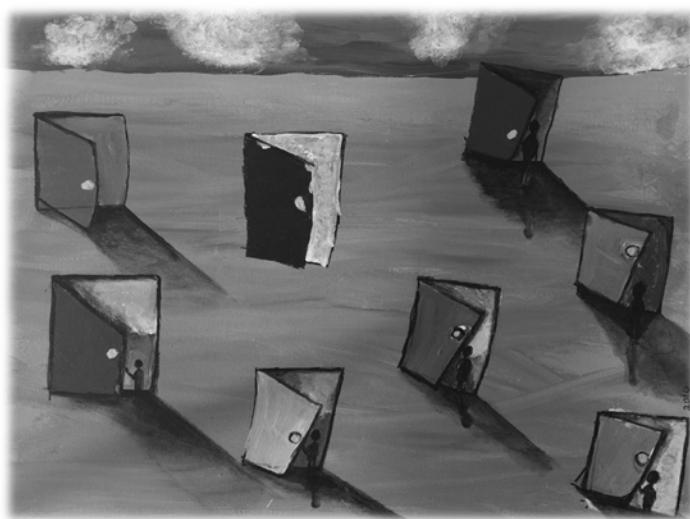
Franz Kafka, from The Trial

## Open All Of The Gates

בשעה שהגיעו ימי משה לפטור מן העולם אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: "מו קרבו ימיך" (דברים לא:יד). אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, אחר כל היגיינה הזו אתה אומר לי, "הו קרבו ימיך"? לא אמרת כי אחיה ואספר מעשי יה" (תהלים קich:יז). אמר לו: אי אתה יכול, "כפי זה כל הארץ" (קהלת יב:יג). אמר משה: רבונו של עולם, דבר אחד אני מבקש מך לפני מותי: שאננס ויבקעו כל השערים שבשמי ות Hormotot ליבך כי הוא האלוהים בשמי ממעל ועל הארץ מתקנת אין עוד" (דברים ד: לט). אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: אתה אמרת אין עוד" אף אני אומר: "ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה... לכל האתת והמופתים... וכל האתת והמוראה הנדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל" (דברים לד: י-יב).

When Moses was about to depart from the world, Holy One, blessed be he said to him: *Your days have drawn to a close* (Deuteronomy 31:14). He replied: Master of the world, after all of my toil you say to me, your days are drawing to a close?! *I should not die but live and recount the deeds of the Lord* (Psalms 118:17). God replied to Moses: *You cannot prevail, for this is the lot of every person* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Said Moses: Master of the universe, I beg one thing of you before I die: that I may enter and that all of the gates in the heavens and the depths be opened and that everyone see that there is none beside you. What is the source of this? It is said: *Know this day, and take it to your heart, that the Lord is God... there is no other* (Deuteronomy 4:39). The Holy One, blessed be he, replied to him: You have said, *there is no other*, and so I will say: *There has arisen no other prophet in Israel like Moses... in all the signs and the wonders... and in all of the great awe which Moses made in the sight of all Israel* (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

(Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:8)



## God's Door Into The World

אָבֶל דָּרְדָּה פְּצָע בְּחִזִּי  
 מְצִיאָה אֱלֹהִים לְתָבֵל.

But through the wound in my chest  
 God peaks into the world.

אָנָּי הַדָּלָת  
 בְּדִירָתָו.

I am the door  
 of his dwelling.

Yehuda Amichai  
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



## Notes