


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”

חִיב אָדָם לְהַזְהֵר בְּמִזְוָזָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִיא חֹבֶת הַכָּל תָּמִיד. וְכָל זְמַן שֶׁיֵּכְנִס וַיֵּצֵא, יִפְגַּע בִּיְחֻד הַשֵּׁם, שָׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶהְבֵּתוֹ. וַיַּעֲזֹר מִשְׁנֵתוֹ וּמִשְׁגִּיּוֹתָיו בְּהִבְלֵי הַזְּמַן, וַיֵּדַע שֶׁאֵין דָּבָר הָעוֹמֵד לְעוֹלָם וּלְעֶלְמֵי עוֹלָמִים אֶלָּא יִדְיַעַת צוּר הָעוֹלָם- וּמִיָּד הוּא חוֹזֵר לְדַעְתּוֹ וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי מִישְׁרִים. אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים הָרָאשׁוֹנִים: כָּל מִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ לוֹ תַּפְלִין בְּרָאשׁוֹ וּבִזְרוּעוֹ וְצִיצִית בְּבִגְדוֹ וּמִזְוָזָה בְּפֶתְחוֹ- מְחַזֵּק הוּא שֶׁלֹּא יִחָטָא, שֶׁהָרִי יֵשׁ לוֹ מִזְכִּירִים רַבִּים. וְהֵם הֵן מְלָאכִים שֶׁמַּצִּילִין אוֹתוֹ מִלְּחָטָא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: חוֹנָה מִלֵּאדָּה הַשֵּׁם סָבִיב לִירְאָיו וַיַּחֲלֹצֵם (תהילים 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 נחוניא בן הקנה היה מתפלל בכניסתו לבית המדרש ובציאתו תפילה קצרה. אמרו לו: מה מקום לתפילה זו? אמר להם: בכניסתי אני מתפלל שלא תארע תקלה על ידי, ובציאתי אני נותן הודיה 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)



Rachel Whiteread

English, born in 1963

Lives in London



Double—Doors II (A + B), 2006–07

Plasticized plaster with interior aluminum framework

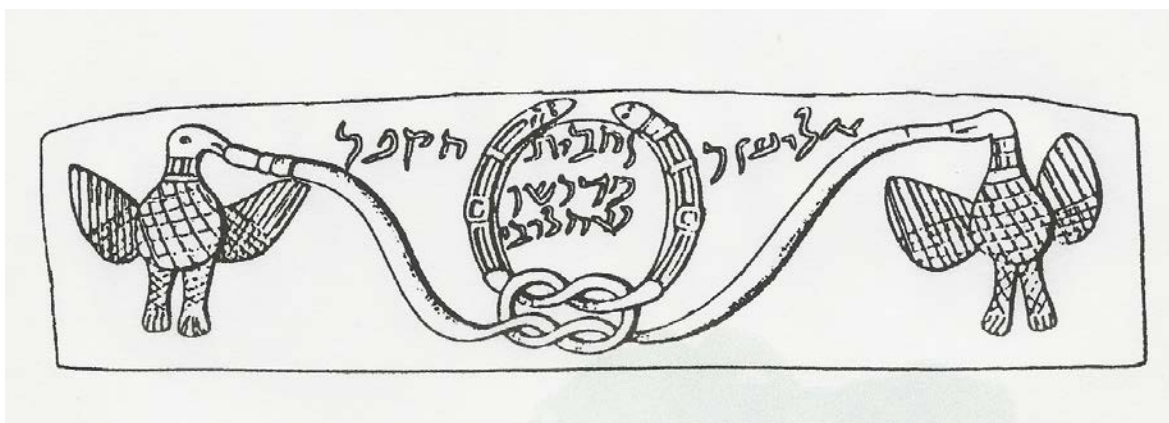
Look carefully—this work is more complicated than it seems. These are not doors; instead, they capture the space created by doors. Whiteread made plaster casts of both sides of two doors, then assembled the casts back to back. The finished work combines the spaces on either side of a threshold—fusing entrance and exit into one solid form. The pale doors suggest the ambiguous emotions attached to coming and going and, in the way they resemble funerary slabs, maybe even the fleeting passage of life.

Be Like A Threshold

רבי אלעזר הקפר אומר: אל תהא כמִשְׁקוֹף הָעֲלִיּוֹן, שְׁאִין יָד בְּנִי-אָדָם יְכוּלָה לָגַע בָּהּ. וְלֹא כְּאַסְקָפָה הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה שֶׁמַּבְלַעַת פְּרָצוּפוֹת. וְלֹא כְּאַסְקָפָה הָאֲמֻצָּעִית, שֶׁמְנַגֶּפֶת הָרַגְלִים. אֲלָא הֵוִי כְּאַסְקָפָה תַּחְתּוֹנָה שֶׁהַכֹּל דָּשִׁין בָּהּ. וְסוֹף כָּל הַבְּנֵן נִסְתֵּר, וְהִיא בְּמִקּוֹמָה עוֹמֶדֶת.

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 l'rabbi Eleazar HaKappar.*

Generations In The Doorway

וְאֵת כָּל הָעֵדָה הַקָּהָל אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (ויקרא ח: ג) - אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר:
כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂשִׁים רְבּוּא וְאֵת אוֹמֵר: "אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד"?! אֵלֶּא זֶה אֶחָד
מִן הַמְּקוֹמוֹת שֶׁהַחֲזִיק מוֹעֵט אֶת הַמֶּרְבֶּה. דְּכֻתָּה: "יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד" (בראשית א: ט). בְּנֶהֱג שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם אָדָם מְפָנָה כָּלִי
מָלֵא לְתוֹךְ כָּלִי רִיקוֹן, אוֹ שְׁמָא כָּלִי מָלֵא לְתוֹךְ כָּלִי מָלֵא?! הָעוֹלָם כָּלוּ מַיִם
בְּמַיִם וְאֵת אוֹמֵר: "יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם"?! אֵלֶּא זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמְּקוֹמוֹת שֶׁהַחֲזִיק
מוֹעֵט אֶת הַמֶּרְבֶּה. דְּכֻתָּה: "קָחוּ לָכֶם מֵלֵא חֲפִינֵיכֶם פִּיחַ כְּבָשָׁן" (שמות
ט: ח). אָמַר רַב הוֹנָא: לֹא דְמֵי הֵדִין דְּחִפִּין לְהֵדִין דְּקָמִיץ, הֵדִין דְּחִפִּין תִּרְיִן
הֵדִין דְּקָמִיץ, אֲרַבַּע חֲפִיִּין תִּמְנִיָּא קָמִיץ, נִמְצָא חֲפִינוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה מִחֲזָקַת שְׁמִנָּה
קָמִיץ?! אֵלֶּא מְלֻמֵּד שֶׁהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְסַפִּיק וְאֶהְרֹן חוֹפֵן וּמֹשֶׁה זוֹרְקוֹ.
וְאֵת אוֹמֵר: "וְזָרְקוּ מֹשֶׁה הַשְּׂמִימָה" בְּבֵת אַחַת?! אֵלֶּא זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמְּקוֹמוֹת
שֶׁהַחֲזִיק מוֹעֵט אֶת הַמֶּרְבֶּה.

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.

דְּכֻתָּה: "אוֹרֶךְ הַחֲצֵר מֵאָה בָּאַמָּה וְרֹחַב חֲמִשִּׁים בְּחֲמִשִּׁים" (שמות כז: יח).
אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי בַר חֲלֵפְתָּא: "אוֹרֶךְ הַחֲצֵר מֵאָה בָּאַמָּה" וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹמְדִים
בְּתוֹכָהּ?! אֵלֶּא זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמְּקוֹמוֹת שֶׁהַחֲזִיק מוֹעֵט אֶת הַמֶּרְבֶּה. דְּכֻתָּה:
"וַיִּקְהֲלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע" (במדבר כ: י). אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִין: כָּמִין
כְּבָרָה הֵיטָה, וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹמְדִין עָלֶיהָ?! אֵלֶּא זֶה אֶחָד מִן הַמְּקוֹמוֹת שֶׁהַחֲזִיק
מוֹעֵט אֶת הַמֶּרְבֶּה. דְּכֻתָּה: "וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל גִּשּׁוּ הַנֶּה" (יהושע
ג: ט). רַב הוֹנָא אָמַר: זִקְפֹּן בֵּין שְׁנֵי בֵּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, וְרַבִּי חֲמָא בְּר' חֲנִינָא אָמַר:
שְׁמֹן בֵּין שְׁנֵי בֵּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, וְרַבָּא אָמַר: צִמְצָמֹן בֵּין שְׁנֵי בֵּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, הִדָּא הוּא
דְּכָתִיב: "וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בָּזֹאת תִּדְּעוּן כִּי אֵל חַי בְּקִרְבְּכֶם" (יהושע ג: י). אָמַר
לָהֶם: מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהַחֲזִיקוּ אֶתְכֶם שְׁנֵי בֵּדֵי הָאָרוֹן, יוֹדַע אֲנִי שֶׁשְׂכִּינְתוֹ בֵּינֵיכֶם. אֶף

בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ כֵּן, דִּתְנִינָן: עוֹמְדִים צְפוּפִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים רְחוּסִים. רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר אִיבִיָּה בִּשְׁם רַבִּי אֲחָא אָמַר: רוּחַ אֲרַבַּע אַמּוֹת בֵּין כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד, אֲמָה לְכָל צֶדֶד, שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה אֶחָד מֵהֶן שׁוֹמֵעַ קוֹל חֲבֵרוֹ מִתַּפִּיל. אֵף לַעֲתִיד לָבוֹא כֵּן, שְׁנֶאֱמַר: "בָּעֵת הַהִיא יִקְרְאוּ לִירוּשָׁלַיִם כְּסֵא ה' וְנִקְווּ אֵלֶיהָ 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 סָלַק לְמִשְׁאֵל בְּשִׁלְמָה דְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא וְאַשְׁכַּח דְּהוּהָ עָסִיק בְּהָדִין פְּסוּקָא: "בָּעֵת הַהִיא יִקְרְאוּ לִירוּשָׁלַיִם כְּסֵא ה' וְנִקְווּ אֵלֶיהָ כָּל הַגּוֹיִם" (ירמיה ג:יז). אָמַר לוֹ: וּמִחֲזָקֶת הִיא אוֹתָן?! אָמַר לוֹ: הַמִּקְרָא אוֹמֵר: "הִרְחִיבִי מְקוֹם אֹהֶלֶךָ... כִּי יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל תִּפְרָצִי" (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).

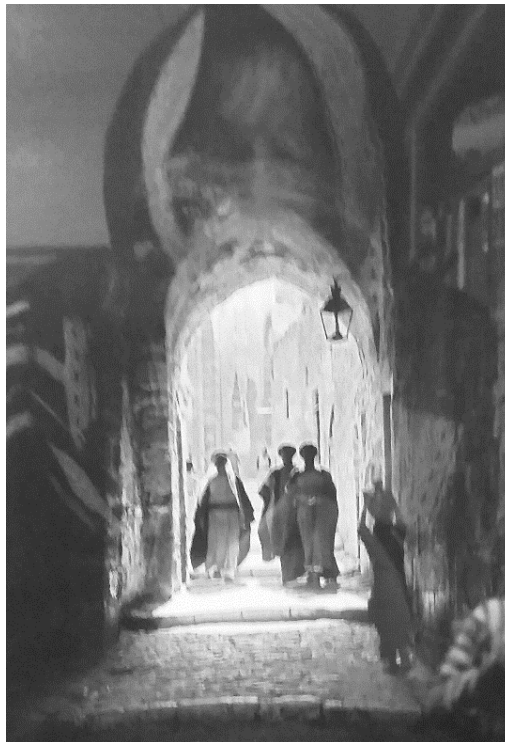
(Leviticus Rabbah 10:9).

Teacher As Doorway

רבי מאיר אומר: אם למדת מרוב אחד, אל תאמר: די. אלא לך אצל חכם ולמד תורה, ואל תאמר: לא אלך אלא למי שהוא קרוב אלי. שנאמר: "אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה" (משלי ב:ד). וחובה הוא לאדם שישמש שלשה תלמידי חכמים, כגון רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי עקיבא. שנאמר: "אשרי אדם שומע לי לשקד על דלתתי יום יום, לשמר מזוזת פתחי" (משלי ח:לד). אל תקרי "דלתתי", אלא "דלת דלתתי". "כי אינך יודע איזה מהם יתקיימו בידיך. הנה או זה, או שניהם כאחד טובים, שנאמר: "בבקר זרע 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

"אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם שׁוֹמֵעַ לִי" (משלי ח: לד) - מהו "אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם שׁוֹמֵעַ לִי"? אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: אֲשֶׁרִי לְאָדָם בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁשְׁמוֹעוֹתָיו לִי. מֵהוּ, "לִשְׁקֹד עַל דְּלַתִּי" (משלי ח: לד)? אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: אִם הִלַכְתָּ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּתוֹךְ בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת אֶל תַּעֲמֹד עַל הַפֶּתַח הַחִיצוֹן לְהִתְפַּלֵּל שָׁם אֲלֹא הָיִי מִתְכַּוֵּן לְהַכְנִיס דְּלַת לְפָנַי מִדְּלַת. "לִשְׁקֹד עַל דְּלַתִּי" אֵין כְּתִיב כָּאֵן אֲלֹא "עַל דְּלַתִּי" - שְׁתִּי דְּלַתוֹת. וְלָמָּה כֵּן? שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹנֶה פְּסִיעוֹתַיִךְ וְנוֹתֵן לָךְ שָׂכָר. וּמֵהוּ "לִשְׁמֹר מְזוֹזוֹת פֶּתַחִי" (משלי ח: לד)? אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בַּר סִימָא: וְכִי יֵשׁ מְזוֹזָה בְּבֵיתִי כְּנִסְיוֹת? אֲלֹא מֵהַמְּזוֹזָה הַזֹּאת אֵינָה זָזָה מִהַפֶּתַח כִּךְ לֹא תִהְיֶה זֶז מִבֵּיתִי כְּנִסְיוֹת וּמִבֵּיתִי מְדַרְשׁוֹת. אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: אִם תַּעֲשֶׂה כֵן דַּע שֶׁאַתָּה מְקַבֵּל פְּנֵי שְׂכִינָה. מֵה כְּתִיב אַחֲרָיו? "כִּי מִצְּאִי מְצָא חַיִּים" (משלי 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)



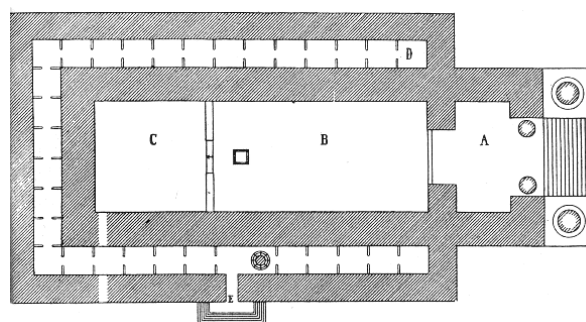
Doors And Generations

וְאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: כְּשֶׁהָיִינוּ לומְדִין תּוֹרָה אֶצֶל רַבִּי אוֹשְׁעִיָּא הָיִינוּ יושְׁבִין אַרְבָּעָה אַרְבָּעָה בְּאַמָּה. אָמַר רַבִּי: כְּשֶׁהָיִינוּ לומְדִין תּוֹרָה אֶצֶל רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ הָיִינוּ יושְׁבִין שְׁשָׁה שְׁשָׁה בְּאַמָּה. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: רַבִּי אוֹשְׁעִיָּא בְּרִיבִי בְּדוֹרוֹ כְּרַבִּי מֵאִיר בְּדוֹרוֹ. מָה רַבִּי מֵאִיר בְּדוֹרוֹ לֹא יָכְלוּ חֲבֵרָיו לַעֲמוֹד עַל סוֹף דַּעְתּוֹ, אֲףֹרַם רַבִּי אוֹשְׁעִיָּא לֹא יָכְלוּ חֲבֵרָיו לַעֲמוֹד עַל סוֹף דַּעְתּוֹ. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: לִבָּן שֶׁל רֵאשׁוֹנִים כְּפֶתַח שֶׁל אוֹלָם, וְשֶׁל אַחֲרוֹנִים כְּפֶתַח שֶׁל הַיֵּכָל, וְאָנוּ כְּמִלָּא נִקְבַּ מַחֲטָ סִידְקִית. רֵאשׁוֹנִים, רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, אַחֲרוֹנִים- רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ. אִיכָא דְאָמְרִי: רֵאשׁוֹנִים, רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ, אַחֲרוֹנִים- רַבִּי אוֹשְׁעִיָּא בְּרִיבִי.

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 Shamuah, 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 Shamuah. There are some who say: Early masters include Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamuah, 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 בְּרָחוֹב, בְּעֶרֶב קִיץ,
 רָאִיתִי אִשָּׁה שֶׁכָּתְבָה מְלִים
 עַל נִיָּר פָּרוּשׁ עַל דֶּלֶת עֵץ נְעוּלָה,
 וְקִפְּלָה וְשָׂמָה בֵּין דֶּלֶת לַמְּזוּזָה וְהִלְכָה לָהּ.

וְלֹא רָאִיתִי אֶת פְּנֵיהָ וְלֹא אֶת פְּנֵי הָאִישׁ
 שִׁיקְרָא אֶת הַכְּתוּב
 וְלֹא רָאִיתִי אֶת הַמְּלִים.

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 (2nd century) and Rabbi Yonatan (3rd 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 (3rd 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 ונתן לתוך ידו של בעל הבית, או שנטל מתוכה והוציא- העני חייב ובעל הבית פטור. פשט בעל הבית את ידו לחוץ ונתן לתוך ידו של העני, או שנטל מתוכה והכניס- בעל הבית חייב והעני פטור. פשט העני את ידו לפנים ונטל בעל הבית מתוכה, או שנתן לתוכה והוציא- שניהן פטורין. פשט בעל הבית את ידו לחוץ ונטל העני מתוכה, או שנתן לתוכה והכניס- שניהן פטורין.

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 homeowner, or he takes something from the hand of the homeowner and brings it outside—either way, the poor person has violated the Sabbath and the homeowner is exempt.

The homeowner 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 homeowner is culpable and the poor person is exempt.

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

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

You Open for Him

אַתָּ פֶּתַח לוֹ
 בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ נְמוּךְ מִלְּפָתַח
 אַתָּ שָׂאֵהוּ עַל כְּתִפֶּיךָ
 וְהַרְגִיעָהוּ "אַל תִּירָא"
 לֹאט פֶּתַח לוֹ, בְּפִתְחִים אֵינּוּ מְרֻגָל
 עַד כֹּה דָמָה שֶׁהַכָּל פֶּתוּחַ
 הַקִּירוֹת, דָּמָה, עֲבִירִים וְשְׁקוּפִים כְּמִשָּׁב שֶׁל רוּחַ
 הַקִּירוֹת, דָּמָה, פְּקוּחִים כְּמִישׁוֹר סִבְלָנִי, מִפְּהֶק
 מִשְׁקוּף וּמְזוּזָה לֹא הִכִּיר לְדַעַת
 לֹא צִיר וְלֹא דָלֶת
 אַתָּ שָׂאֵהוּ לְחֶכֶךְ צִדּוֹ בְּמְזוּזוֹת
 תַּחַת הַמִּשְׁקוּף לְהִרְכִּין רֹאשׁוֹ
 לֹאט עַל הַסֵּף הַנִּיחָהוּ
 עַד בָּטַח יִפְסַע, לֹא כְּנִמְלִט
 מִבַּעַד מִפֶּתֶן הַדָּלֶת.

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

אֶשְׁכַּחִיָּה שְׁמוּאֵל לְרַב יְהוּדָה דְּתַלְי בְּעִיבְרָא דְּדָשָׂא וְקָא בְּכִי. אָמַר לִיה: שִׁינָא, מַאי קָא בְּכִית? אָמַר לִיה: מִי זִוטְרָא מַאי דְּכָתִיב בְּהוּ בְּרַבָּנָן, "אֵיָה סִפֵּר אֵיָה שְׁקֵל אֵיָה סִפֵּר אֶת הַמִּגְדָּלִים" (ישעיה לג: יח). "אֵיָה סִפֵּר" – שְׁהִיו סוֹפְרִים כָּל אוֹתִיּוֹת שְׁבַתוֹרָה. "אֵיָה שְׁקֵל" – שְׁהִיו שׁוֹקְלִים קֶלֶין וְחִמּוּרִין שְׁבַתוֹרָה. "אֵיָה סִפֵּר" – שְׁהִיו סוֹפְרִים כָּל אוֹתִיּוֹת שְׁבַתוֹרָה. "אֵיָה סִפֵּר אֶת הַמִּגְדָּלִים" – שְׁהִיו שׁוֹנִין שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת הֶלְכוֹת בְּמִגְדָּל הַפּוֹרֵחַ בְּאוּר. וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֲמִי: תֵּלֶת מֵאָה בְּעֵי בָּאוּ דּוֹאֵג וְאַחִיתוֹפֵל בְּמִגְדָּל הַפּוֹרֵחַ בְּאוּר. וְתֵנּוּ: שְׁלֹשָׁה מְלָכִים וְאַרְבָּעָה הִדְיוּטוֹת אֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, אֲנִן מַה תְּהִיו עָלֶיךָ! אָמַר לִיה: שִׁינָא, טִינָא הִיתָה בְּלִבָּם. אַחֵר מַאי? זָמַר יוֹוֵי לֹא פָסַק מִפּוּמִּיהָ.

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)

דְּאַבְיֵי שְׁמַעִיָּה לְהֵוָה גִּבְרָא דְּקָאֵמַר לְהֵוָה אֶתְתָּא: נִקְדִּים וְנִיזִיל בְּאוּרְחָא. אָמַר: אִיזִיל אֶפְרָשִׁינְהוּ מֵאִיסוּרָא. אִזֵּל בְּתַרְיִיהוּ תֵּלֶתָא פְּרָסִי בְּאַגְמָא. כִּי הָווּ פְּרָשִׁי מִהֲדָדִי שְׁמַעִינְהוּ דְּקָא אָמַרִי: אוּרְחִין רְחִיקָא וְצוּוֹתִין בְּסִימָא. אָמַר אַבְיֵי: אִי מֵאֵן דְּסִי לִי הָוָה – לֹא הָוָה מְצִי לְאוֹקוּמִיָּה נִפְשִׁיָּה. אִזֵּל, תֵּלָא נִפְשִׁיָּה בְּעִיבּוּרָא דְּדָשָׂא וּמִצְטַעַר. אֶתְתָּא הֵוָה סָבָא, תֵּנָא לִיה: כָּל הַגְדוֹל מִחִבִּירוּ? צֵרוּ גְדוֹל הַיָּמָנוּ.

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)

רבינא אשפחיה לרב נחמן בר יצחק דתלי וקאי בעיבא דדשא, וקא מיבפציא ליה: "בטל", מהו? תיקו.

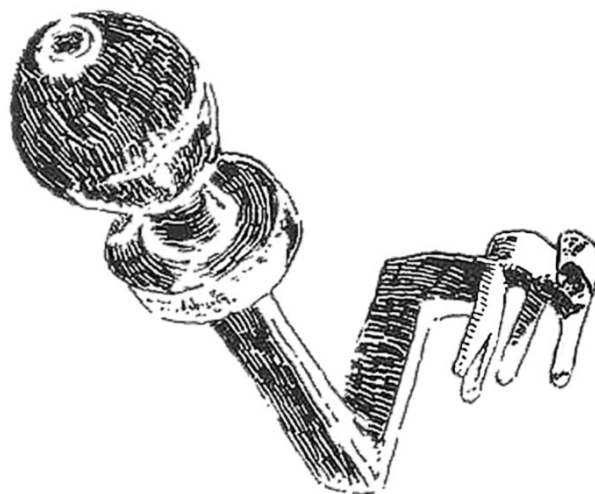
[The case: A man reconsiders the divorce document that he has sent to his wife through an agent. He sends another agent with the message to "nullify." But what does "nullify" mean absent of any other context? Is the intent to nullify the divorce, or to say that legal document already dispatched needs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

רב ששת כל תלתין יומין מהדר ליה תלמודיה, ותלי וקאי בעיבא דדשא ואמר: חדאי נפשאי! חדאי נפשאי! לך קראי! לך תנאי! איני? והאמר רבי אלעזר: אלמלא תורה לא נתקיימו שמים וארץ? שנאמר: "אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמתי" (ירמיה לג: כה). מעיקרא כי עבד איניש- אדעתא דנפשיה קא עבד.

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 Pesachim 68B)

Inner Doors And Outer Doors

אמר רבה בר רב הונא: כל אדם שיש בו תורה ואין בו יראת שמים, דומה לגזבר שמסרו לו מפתחות הפנימיות ומפתחות החיצוניות לא מסרו לו. בְּהִי עֵייל?

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?

מכריז רבי ינאי: חבל על דלית ליה דרפתא, ותרעא לדרפתא עביד.

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



אמר רב יהודה: לא ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו אלא כדי שיִיראו מלפניו, שנאמר: והאלהים עשה שיִיראו מלפניו.

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

מר עוקבא הוה עניא בְּשִׁיבּוּתִיהּ, דְּהוּה רְגִיל כָּל יוֹמָא דְּשָׂדֵי לִיה אֶרְבָּעָה זוּזֵי בְּצִינוּרָא דְּדָשָׁא. יוֹם אֶחָד אָמַר: אִיזִיל וְאַחֲזִי מֵאֵן קַעֲבִיד בִּי הֵהוּא טִיבּוּתָא. הֵהוּא יוֹמָא נִגְהָא לִיה לְמַר עוֹקְבָא לְבִי מִדְּרָשָׁא, אֲתִיָּא דְּבִיתָהּ בְּהֵדִיָּה. כִּיּוֹן דְּחִזְיוּהּ דְּקָא מַצְלִי לִיה לְדָשָׁא- נֶפֶק בְּתַרִּיָּהּ. רְהוּט מְקַמִּיהּ. עֲיִילִי לְהֵהוּא אֲתוּנָא דְּהוּה גְּרוּפָה נוּרָא, הוּה קָא מִיְקַלִּין פְּרַעִיָּה דְּמַר עוֹקְבָא. אֲמַרָה לִיה דְּבִיתָהּ: שְׁקוּל פְּרַעִיָּד אֲוִתִּיב אֶפְרַעֲאִי. חֲלַשׁ דַּעֲתִיָּה. אֲמַרָה לִיה: אָנָּא שְׂכִיחָנָא בְּגוּיָה דְּבִיתָא, וּמְקַרְבָּא אֶהְנִיָּתִי.

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

דְּרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא הָוִיא לִיה בְּרֵתָא, אָמְרִי לִיה כְּלָדָאִי : הָהוּא יוֹמָא דְעֵיילָה לְבִי גִנָּא, טָרִיק לָה חִיּוּנָא וּמִיתָא. הָוִה דְּאִיגָא אֲמִילָתָא טוֹבָא. הָהוּא יוֹמָא שְׁקָלָתָא לְמַכְבָּנָתָא, דְּצִתָּא בְּגוּדָא, אֲתֵרְמִי אִיתִיב בְּעֵינֶיהָ דְּחִיּוּנָא. לְצַפְרָא כִּי קָא שְׁקָלָא לָה. הָוִה קָא סָרִיד וְאֵתִי חִיּוּנָא בְּתֵרָה. אָמַר לָה אָבוּהָ : מָאִי עֲבַדְתָּ? אָמְרָה לִיה : בְּפִנְיָא אֲתָא עֲנִיָא, קָרָא אֲבָבָא, וְהוּוּ טָרִידִי כּוּלִי עֲלָמָא בְּסֵעוּדָתָא, וְלִיכָא דְשִׁמְעִיהָ. קָאִימָנָא, שְׁקָלָתִי לְרִסְתָּנָאִי דִּיהֲבִית לִי, יְהִבְתִּיהָ נִיהִלִּיהָ. אָמַר לָה : מְצוּהָ עֲבַדְתָּ! נָפַק רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְדָרַשׁ : "וּצִדְקָה תַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת" (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 אָבִין : הָעֲנִי הֵזָה עוֹמֵד עַל פֶּתַחְךָ וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ, דְּכִתִּיב : "כִּי יַעֲמֹד לְיָמִין אָבִיו" (תהלים קט:לא). אִם נָתַתָּ לוֹ, דַּע מִי שְׁעוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ וְנוֹתֵן לָךְ שְׂכָרְךָ. וְאִם לֹא נָתַתָּ לוֹ, דַּע מִי שְׁעוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ פּוֹרֵעַ מִמֶּךָ דְּכִתִּיב : "לְהוֹשִׁיעַ מִשְׁפָּטִי נַפְשׁוֹ" (תהלים קט:לא).

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

למִמָּרָא דְּבֵית שַׁעַר מַעֲלִיּוֹתָא הִיא? וְהָא הֵהוּא חֲסִידָא דִּהְוָא רָגִיל אֵלֶיהּ
 דִּהְוָא מְשַׁתְּעֵי בְּהִדְיָה, עֲבַד בֵּית שַׁעַר וְתוּ לָא מְשַׁתְּעֵי בְּהִדְיָה! לָא קִשְׁיָא: הָא
 מְגֻוָּאי, הָא מְבָרָאי. וְאִי בְּעִית אִימָא: הָא וְהָא מְבָרָאי, וְלָא קִשְׁיָא. הָא דְּאִית
 לִיה דְּלִת, הָא דְּלִית לִיה דְּלִת אִי בְּעִית אִימָא: הָא וְהָא דְּאִית לִיה דְּלִת, וְלָא
 קִשְׁיָא. הָא דְּאִית לִיה פּוֹתַחַת, הָא דְּלִית לִיה פּוֹתַחַת. אִי בְּעִית אִימָא: הָא
 וְהָא דְּאִית לִיה פּוֹתַחַת, וְלָא קִשְׁיָא. הָא דְּפּוֹתַחַת דִּידְיָה מְגֻוָּאי, הָא דְּפּוֹתַחַת
 דִּידְיָה מְבָרָאי.

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 הייתי מהלך בדרך, ונכנסתי לחורבה אחת מחורבות ירושלים להתפלל. בא אליהו זכור לטוב ושמר לי על הפתח והמתין לי עד שסיימתי תפילתי. לאחר שסיימתי תפילתי אמר לי: בני, מפני מה נכנסת לחורבה זו? אמרתי לו: להתפלל. אמר לי: היה לך להתפלל בדרך. ואמרתי לו: מתירא הייתי שמא יפסיקו בי עוברי דרכים. ואמר לי: היה לך להתפלל תפילה קצרה. באותה שעה למדתי ממנו שלשה דברים: למדתי שאין נכנסין לחורבה, ולמדתי שמתפללין בדרך, ולמדתי שהמתפלל בדרך מתפלל תפילה קצרה.

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.

ואמר לי: בני, מה קול שמעת בחורבה זו? ואמרתי לו: שמעתי בת קול שמנהמת פיונה ואומרת: אוי לבנים שבעונותיהם החרבתי את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתים לבין האומות! ואמר לי: חניך וחיי ראשך, לא שעה זו בלבד אומרת כך, אלא בכל יום ויום אומרת כך. ולא זו בלבד, אלא בשעה שישאל נכנסין לבתי כנסיות ולבתי מדרשות ועונין "יהא שמיא הגדול מבורך" הקדוש ברוך הוא מנענע ראשו ואומר: אשרי המלך שמקלסין אותו בביתו כך! מה לו לאב שהגלה את בניו, ואוי להם לבנים שגלו מעל שולחן אביהם

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

וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת מִנְּשֵׁי בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים צָעָקָה אֶל-אֱלִישָׁע לֵאמֹר עֲבָדְךָ אִישִׁי מֵת וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ כִּי עֲבָדְךָ הָיָה יָרָא אֶת ה' וְהַנְּשָׂה בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת שְׁנֵי יְלָדָיו לֹו לְעֲבָדִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלִישָׁע מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה-לָּךְ הַגִּידִי לִי מַה-יֵּשׁ-לָּךְ בַּבַּיִת וְתֹאמַר אֵין לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ כָּל בַּבַּיִת כִּי אִם-אֶסוּדָּ שָׁמֹן. וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי שְׂאֲלִי-לָךְ כָּלִים מִן-הַחוּץ מֵאֵת כָּל-שֹׁכְנֶיךָ כָּלִים רַקִּים אֶל-תִּמְעִיטִי. וּבָאת וְסָגַרְתָּ אֶת הַדֶּלֶת בְּעֵדְךָ וּבְעַד-בְּנֶיךָ וַיִּצְקֶתָ עַל כָּל-הַכֵּלִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהִמָּלֵא תִסִּיעֵנִי

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 maidservant 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."

וְתִלְךְ מֵאֵתוֹ וְתִסְגֹּר אֶת הַדֶּלֶת בְּעֵדְךָ וּבְעַד בְּנֶיךָ הֵם מִגִּישִׁים אֵלֶיהָ וְהִיא מוֹצֵקֶת. וַיְהִי כִּמְלֵאת הַכֵּלִים וְתֹאמַר אֶל-בְּנֶהּ הַגִּישָׁה אֵלַי עוֹד כָּלִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֵין עוֹד כָּלִי וַיַּעֲמֵד הַשָּׁמֹן. וְתָבֵא וְתִגַּד לְאִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי מְכָרִי אֶת-הַשָּׁמֹן וְשִׁלְמִי אֶת-נַשְׁיֶיךָ וְאֶת וּבְנֶיךָ תַּחֲיִי בְנוֹתֶר.

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 וַיַּעֲבֹר אֱלִישָׁע אֶל-שׁוֹנִים וְשָׁם אִשָּׁה גְדוֹלָה וְתַחֲזֹק-בּוֹ לֶאֱכָל-לֶחֶם וַיְהִי מִדֵּי עֲבָרוֹ יָסַר שָׁמָּה לֶאֱכָל-לֶחֶם. וְתֹאמַר אֶל-אִשָּׁה הִנֵּה-נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא עֹבֵר עָלֵינוּ תָּמִיד. נַעֲשֶׂה-נָּא עֲלִית-קִיר קִטְנָה וְנָשִׂים לֹו שָׁם מִטָּה וְשִׁלְחָן וְכִסֵּא וּמְנוֹרָה וְהָיָה בְּבֹאוֹ אֵלֵינוּ יָסוּר שָׁמָּה. וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֵא שָׁמָּה וַיָּסַר אֶל-הָעֲלִיָּה וַיִּשְׁכַּב שָׁמָּה. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גִּחְזִי נִעְרוֹ קְרָא לְשׁוֹנְמֵיִת הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָא-לָהּ וַתַּעֲמֵד לְפָנָיו. וַיֹּאמֶר לֹו אָמֵר-נָא אֵלֶיהָ הִנֵּה חֲרַדְתָּ אֵלֵינוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַחֲרָדָה הַזֹּאת מָה לַעֲשׂוֹת לָךְ הֲיֵשׁ לְדָבָר-לָךְ אֶל-הַמָּלֶךְ אוֹ אֶל-שָׂר הַצָּבָא וְתֹאמַר בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אָנֹכִי יֹשֶׁבֶת. וַיֹּאמֶר וּמָה לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר גִּחְזִי אֲבָל בֶּן אֵין-לָהּ וְאִשָּׁה זָקֹן. וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָא-לָהּ וַיִּקְרָא-לָהּ וַתַּעֲמֵד בַּפֶּתַח. וַיֹּאמֶר לְמוֹעֵד הַזֶּה כָּעֵת חָיָה אֶת חֲבִיקָת בֶּן וְתֹאמַר אֶל-אֲדָנִי אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-תִּכְבֹּב 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 maidservant."

וַתַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן לְמוֹעֵד הַזֶּה כַּעַת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלִישָׁע. וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אָבִיו אֶל-הַקּוֹצְרִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אָבִיו רֹאשִׁי רֹאשִׁי וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הַנָּעַר שָׂאֵהוּ אֶל-אִמּוֹ. וַיִּשָּׂאֵהוּ וַיְבִיֵּאֵהוּ אֶל-אִמּוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל-בֶּרֶכְיָה עַד-הַצְהָרִים וַיָּמָת. וַתַּעַל וַתִּשְׁכְּבֵהוּ עַל-מִטַּת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּסְגֹּר בַּעֲדוֹ וַתֵּצֵא. וַתִּקְרָא אֶל-אִשָּׁה וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלָחָה נָא לִי אֶחָד מִן-הַנָּעָרִים וְאַחַת הָאֲתוֹנוֹת וְאֶרְוֶצָה אֶל אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶשׁוּבָה. וַיֹּאמֶר מִדּוּעַ אֶתְּ הוֹלֶכֶת אֵלָיו הַיּוֹם לֹא-חֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא שַׁבָּת וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם.

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."

וַתַּחֲבֹשׁ הָאֲתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-נָעֲרָה נָהֵג וְלֵךְ אֶל-תַּעֲצָר-לִי לְרֹכֵב כִּי אִם-אֶמְרָתִי לָךְ. וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבוֹא אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַר הַכֶּרְמֶל וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֹתָהּ מִנֶּגֶד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גִּיחֲזִי נָעֲרוּ הַנָּהָה הַשּׁוֹנְמִית הַזֶּה. עֲתָה רוֹץ-נָא לִקְרֹאתָהּ וְאָמַר-לָהּ הַשְׁלוֹם לָךְ הַשְׁלוֹם לְאִישֶׁךָ הַשְׁלוֹם לְיֶלֶד וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם. וַתָּבוֹא אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַהָר וַתִּחַזַּק בְּרִגְלָיו וַיִּגַּשׁ גִּיחֲזִי לְהַדְפָּה וַיֹּאמֶר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים הֲרִפָּה-לָּהּ כִּי-נִפְשָׁה מְרָה-לָּהּ וְהִ' הָעֲלִים מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא הִגִּיד לִי. וַתֹּאמֶר הַשְׁאֵלְתִּי בֶן מֵאֵת הִ' הֲלֹא אֶמְרָתִי לֹא תִשָּׁלַח אֹתִי.

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 לְגִיחִזִּי חֲגֹר מְתִנִּיךְ וְקַח מִשְׁעָנִתִּי בְיָדְךָ וְלֵךְ כִּי-תִמָּצָא אִישׁ לֹא תִבָּרְכֶנּוּ וְכִי-יִבָּרְכְּךָ אִישׁ לֹא תַעֲנֶנּוּ וְשִׁמַּת מִשְׁעָנִתִּי עַל-פְּנֵי הַנָּעַר. וַתֹּאמֶר אִם הַנָּעַר חַי-ה' חַי-נִפְשְׁךָ אִם-אָעֻזְבְּךָ וַיָּקֶם וַיֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ.

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!" so he arose and followed her.

וַיִּחֲזִי עֶבֶר לַפְּנִיָּה וַיֵּשֶׁם אֶת-הַמִּשְׁעָנָה עַל-פְּנֵי הַנָּעַר וַאֲיִן קוֹל וַאֲיִן קֶשֶׁב וַיֵּשֶׁב לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּגְד-לוֹ לֵאמֹר לֹא הִקִּיץ הַנָּעַר. וַיָּבֹא אֶלְיִשָׁע הַבִּיתָה וְהִנֵּה הַנָּעַר מֵת מִשְׁכָּב עַל-מִטָּתוֹ. וַיָּבֹא וַיִּסְגֹּר הַדֶּלֶת בְּעַד שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל אֶל-ה'. וַיַּעַל וַיִּשְׁכַּב עַל-הַיֶּלֶד וַיֵּשֶׁם פִּיו עַל-פִּיו וַיַּעֲיֵנוּ עַל-עֵינָיו וְכַפָּיו עַל-כַּפָּיו וַיִּגָּהֶר עָלָיו וַיִּזְוֹר הַנָּעַר עַד-שִׁבְעַ פְּעָמִים וַיִּפְקַח הַנָּעַר אֶת-עֵינָיו. וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-גִּיחִזִּי וַיֹּאמֶר קְרֹא אֶל-הַשְּׁנַמִּית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָאָהּ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂאִי בְנֶךָ. וַתָּבֹא וַתִּפֹּל עַל-רַגְלָיו וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶרְצָה וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת-בְּנָהּ וַתֵּצֵא.^o

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

רבי יהושע בן לוי אשכח לאליהו, דהוי קיימי אפתחא דמערתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי. אמר ליה: אתינא לעלמא דאתי? אמר ליה: אם ירצה אדון הנה. אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: שנים ראיתי וקול שלשה שמעתי. - אמר ליה: אימת אתי משיח? - אמר ליה: זיל שיליה לדידיה. - והיכא יתיב? אפתחא דרומי. - ומאי סימניה? - יתיב ביני עניי סובלי חלאים, וכולן שרו ואסירי בחד זמנא, איהו שרי חד ואסר חד. אמר: דלמא מבעינא, דלא איעבב. אזל לגביה, אמר ליה: שלום עליך רבי ומורי! אמר ליה: שלום עליך בר לואי. - אמר ליה: לאימת אתי מר? - אמר ליה: היום. אתא לגבי אליהו. אמר ליה: מאי אמר לך? - אמר ליה: שלום עליך בר לואי. אמר ליה: אבטחך לך ולאבוך לעלמא דאתי. - אמר ליה: שקורי קא שקר בי, דאמר לי "היום אתינא" ולא אתא! אמר ליה: הכי אמר לך: "היום אם בקולו תשמעו."



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

"דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קִרְאֵהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב" (ישעיה נה:ו) - אֵלּוּ עֲשֶׂרֶת יָמֵי תְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁהוּא שָׂרוֹי בִּינִיכָם. שָׁכֵן יִחְזָקֵאל אוֹמֵר: "בְּתִתֶּם סָפֶם אֶת-סָפִי וּמְזוֹזֹתֵם אֶצֶל מְזוֹזֹתַי וְהִקִּיר בִּינִי וּבִינֵיהֶם..." (יחזקאל מג:ח). הֲוִי, "קִרְאֵהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב." יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דִּרְכּוֹ וְאִישׁ אָוֶן מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶל ה' וַיִּרְחַמֵּהוּ (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

הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא, קִצֵּת לְמַעַלָּה מֵעֶצֶם הַבְּרִיחַ
מִשְׁמָאל
בּוֹ לֹא נָגַע אִישׁ וְלֹא יִגַּע אִישׁ לְעוֹלָם
הַמָּקוֹם הַנֶּעְלָם, שֶׁאִישׁ עָלִיו יָד לֹא הֵנִיחַ
הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁאֵינָנו יוֹדֵעַ לְשָׂאֵל-

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 משום רבי יוסי: מנין שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתפלל? שנאמר, "והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושמתים בבית תפילתי." "תפילתם" לא נאמר אלא 'תפילתי'. מכאן שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתפלל. מאי מצלי? אמר רב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב: יהי רצון מלפני שיכבשו רחמי את כעסי, ויגולו רחמי על מדותי, ואתנהג עם בני במדת רחמים, ואכנס 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.

תניא, אמר רבי ישמעאל בן אלשיע: פעם אחת נכנסתי להקטיר קטורת לפני ולפנים וראיתי אפתריאל יהי' צבאות שהוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא ואמר לי: ישמעאל, בני, ברכני! אמרתי לו: יהי רצון מלפניך שיכבשו רחמיך את כעסך, ויגולו רחמיך על מדותיך ותתנהג עם בניך במדת הרחמים, ותכנס להם לפנים משורת הדין. ונענע לי בראשו. וקמשמע לן שלא תהא ברפת הדיוט 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

וּבְחֶדֶר הַפְּנִימִי אָנוּ שׁוֹמְרִים אֶת כָּבֶד הַפֶּה שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה
אֶת עֵינָיו הַקְּהוֹת שֶׁל יִצְחָק, אֶת רִגְלוֹ הַנִּגְרָרֶת שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב.
וּבְהִתְרַגֵּשׁ מִלְחָמָה עָלֵינוּ, לְחֶדֶר הַפְּנִימִי נִכְנָס
לְהִבִּיט בָּהֶם בְּקִרְבָּה.
כִּי כָל אֲשֶׁר יוֹצֵא אֶל הַקֶּרֶב, רַק בְּאֵלָה עֲצָמוֹ יַעֲטֹף.

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 her, 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

תיאולוגיה יהודית, תיאור, תיאור, בילדותי הכרתי ילד
ששמו היה תיאודור, כמו הרצל, אבל אמו קראה לו
תיאור, תיאור ממגרש המשחקים, בוא הביתה תיאור
אל תשאר אם ילדים רעים,
תיאור, תיאור, לוג, יה יה יה.

אני רוצה אל נראה ולא רואה, שאוכל להובילו
ולספר לו מה שהוא לא רואה. ואני רוצה
אל נראה ורואה. אני רוצה לראות
איך הוא מכסה את עיניו, כמו ילד שמשחק עור.

אני רוצה אל כמו חלון שאם אני פותח אותו
אראה את השמים ובעצמי נשאר בבית,
אני רוצה אל כמו דלת שנפתחת רק החוצה,
אבל האל הוא כמו דלת מסתובבת על צירה
פנימה והחוצה, על סביבותיה תסב
בלי ראשית בלי אחרית.

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 מילתא לרבי אבא בהדיה, אזל אתיב אדשא דרבי אבא. בהדי דשדא אמתיה מנא מטא זרזיפי דמנא ארישא. אמר: עשאוני פאשפה, קרא אנפשיה: "מאשפות זרים אביון" (תהלים קיג:ז). שמע רבי אבא ונפיק לאפיה. אמר ליה: השתא צריכנא למיפק אדעתך, דכתיב: "לך התרפס וירבה רעידך" (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 זיירא, כי הוה ליה מילתא בהדי איניש הוה חליף ותני לקמיה וממציא ליה, כי היכי דניתי וניפוק 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 מילתא בהדי ההוא טבחא- לא אתא לקמיה. במעלי יומא דכפורי אמר איהו: איזיל אנא לפיוסי ליה. פגע ביה רב הונא. אמר ליה: להכא קא אזיל מר? אמר ליה: לפיוסי לפלגנא. אמר: אזיל אבא למיקטל נפשא אזל וקם עילויה. הוה יתיב וקא פלי רישא, דלי עיניה וחזייה, אמר ליה: אבא את! זיל, לית לי מילתא בהדך! בהדי דקא פלי רישא אישתמיט גרמא, ומחיה בקועיה, וקטילה.

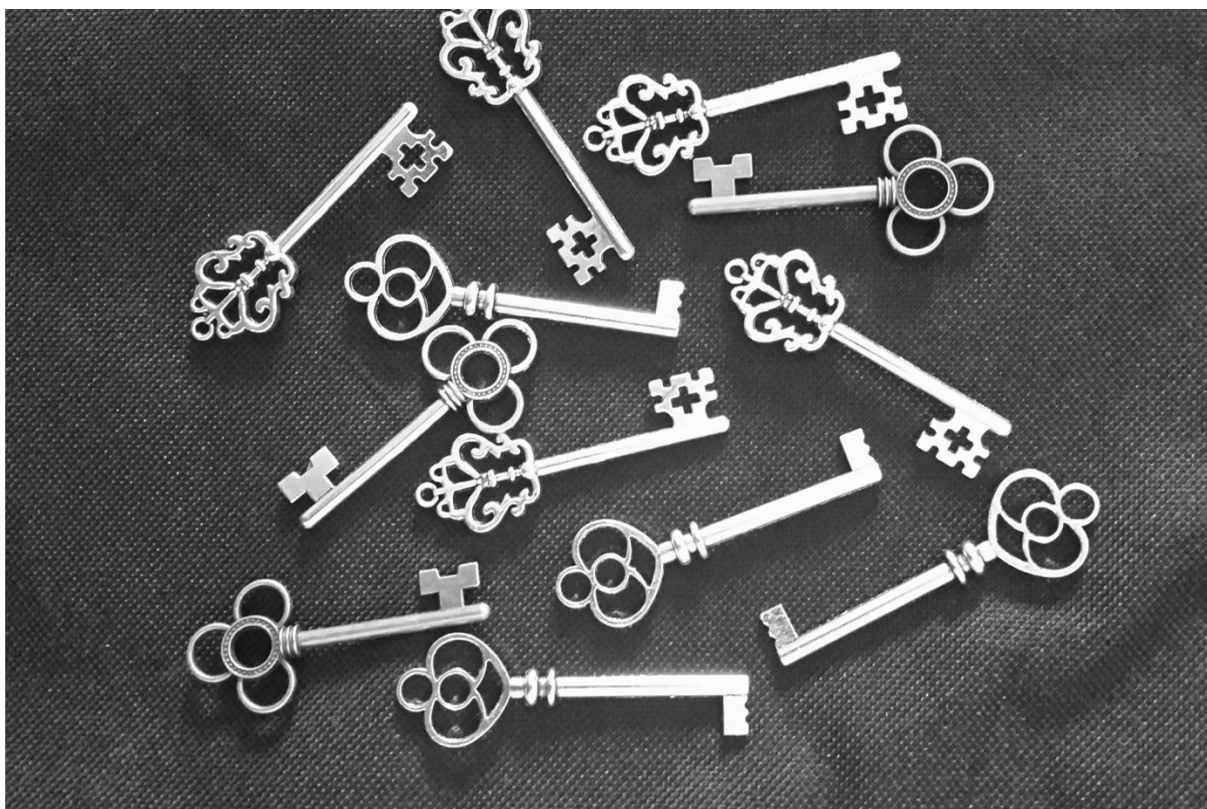
Rav was once offended by a certain butcher and when, by the eve of Yom Kippur, the butcher did not come to him, Rav said: I will go to the butcher and reconcile with him. Rabbi Huna, a student and colleague, met Rav along the way and asked: Sir, where are you going so close to Yom Kippur? Rav answered: 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."

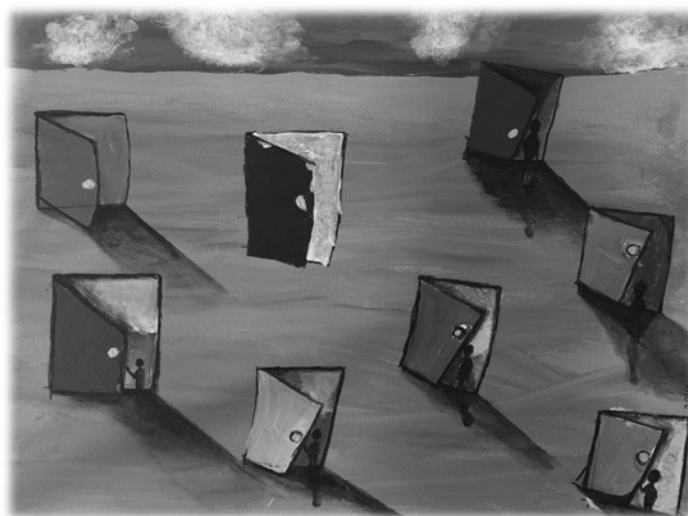
Franz Kafka, from The Trial

Open All Of The Gates

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ יְמֵי מֹשֶׁה לִפְטוֹר מִן הָעוֹלָם אָמַר לוֹ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: "הֵן קָרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ" (דברים לא:יד). אָמַר לִפְנָיו: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אַחֲרַי כָּל הִיגִיעָה הַזֹּאת אֲמַר לִי, "הֵן קָרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ"?! "לֹא אֲמוֹת כִּי אַחֲיָה וְאַסְפֵּר מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה" (תהלים קיח:יז). אָמַר לוֹ: אֵי אַתָּה יָכוֹל, "כִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם" (קהלת יב:יג). אָמַר מֹשֶׁה: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, דַּבֵּר אֶחָד אֲנִי מִבְּקֵשׁ מִמְּךָ לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי: שֶׁאֶכְנֵס וְיִבְקְעוּ כָּל הַשְּׁעָרִים שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּתְהוֹמוֹת וְיִרְאוּ שְׂאִין זוֹלָתְךָ. מִנֵּן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֵּדַע הַיּוֹם וְהַשַּׁבָּת אֶל לְבָבְךָ כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת אֵין עוֹד" (דברים ד:לט). אָמַר לוֹ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: אַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ "אֵין עוֹד" אֲף אֲנִי אֹמֵר: "וְלֹא קֵם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה... לְכָל הָאֵתָה וְהַמוֹפְתִים... וְלְכָל הָאֵתָה וְהַמוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל" (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 דֶּרֶךְ הַפֶּצַע בְּחֻזִּי But through the wound in my chest
מְצִיץ אֱלֹהִים לְתֵבֵל. God peaks into the world.

אֲנִי הַדֶּלֶת I am the door
בְּדִירְתּוֹ. of his dwelling.

Yehuda Amichai
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



Notes