

Doors and Doorways

*An Interfaith Conversation About
Thresholds and Opportunities for the Spirit*

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Temple Beth Or, Raleigh, NC

My Beloved Knocks

I was asleep, but my heart was wakeful. Hark, my beloved knocks! Let me in, my own, my darling, my faultless dove! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night. (Song of Songs 5:2)



Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20)



Happy is the one who listens to me daily coming early to my gates waiting by my doorposts. For one who finds me finds life. (Proverbs 8:34-5)

Open To The Least Who Is The Greatest

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the Righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:34-40)

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Be The One Who Knocks

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial. And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:1-10)



Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

Honoring Need At The Door

Rabbi Akiba had a daughter of whom the astrologers said to him: The very day that she enters her wedding canopy a serpent will bite her and she will die. He worried over this constantly. At the end of the festive day before 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 pierced the eye of a serpent. In the morning, when she drew her brooch pin out of the wall, the dead serpent trailed out 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 the portion that you had given me, and I gave it to him.

He said to her: With your act, you fulfilled a commandment and for that reason you were saved. Rabbi Akiba then went out and, based upon this experience, expounded the verse: *And charity saves from death* (Proverbs 10:2). (Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 156b)



Rabbi Abin observed: The poor person stands at your door and the blessed Holy One stands at his right, as it is written: *Indeed, he stands at the right hand of the needy* (Psalm 109:31). If you give him something, be aware of the one who stands at his right and who gives you what is your due. (Leviticus Rabbah, an ancient rabbinic anthology 34:9)

The Infinite Space Of The Threshold

Assemble the whole community at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Leviticus 8:3). Rabbi Eleazar taught: Israel numbered six hundred thousand, and yet, Scripture, you say: *Assemble the whole community at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting?*

This is one of those instances where the lesser contains the greater. A similar case is: *Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area* (Genesis 1:9). Of course, it is the normal way for a person to empty a full vessel into an empty one. But can one pour a full vessel into a full one!? The whole world was full of water—water covered everything—and yet, Scripture, you say: *Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area?* This must be one of those instances where the lesser contains the greater!

Rabbi Yohanan went to see how Rabbi Hanina was faring and he found Rabbi Hanina engaged in studying the verse: *At that time, they shall call Jerusalem “Throne of the Lord,” and all nations shall assemble there* (Jeremiah 3:17). Rabbi Yohanan asked: Will Jerusalem hold them all? As his answer, Rabbi Hanina quoted: *You will enlarge the site of your tent, extend the size of your dwelling* (Isaiah 54:2). (Leviticus Rabbah, ancient rabbinic anthology 10:9)

On The Threshold Of Learning

We must always be ready to receive and to attend to the words of the blessed Holy One. For there is within every thing a resonance of the Divine Word. For every thing was created by Divine Speech and therefore, hidden within every thing is the power of the Divine Word. It is this hidden illumination that we must search out. In our search, we come to recognize that there are ever deeper levels of inwardness to the point that these levels are beyond counting. And this is the implication of the verse, *Happy is the one who listens to me, who watches at my doors and waits watchfully at my doorposts* (Proverbs 8:34). Namely, one should never presume to have arrived at the deepest truth. Rather, one should understand that one always stands by the door. For door [delet] is related to humility [dalut]. It is by virtue of this unassuming state that the door within the door is opened. (Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter, 19th century hassidic Rabbi)

If The Doors Of Perception Were Cleansed

...[D]oors have soul. They are the guardians of boundaries, they serve both to divide and connect the psychic topography of the house keeping its imagination 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 Re-imagination of Modern Life)



The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell...

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life; and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt....

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell)



When Moses was about to depart this world, God said to him: Behold your days approach...Moses then said: Master of the Universe, I ask of you one favor before I die—that I may enter, and that all the gates of heaven and the deep be opened and people shall see that there is none besides You. From what source is this known? From the verse: *Know this day, and take it to heart, that the Lord is god...there is none else.* (Deuteronomy 4:39) (Deuteronomy Rabbah, an ancient rabbinic anthology)

Unscrew The Locks From The Doors

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
 Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
 No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
 No more modest than immodest.
 Unscrew the locks from the doors!
 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)



About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved"? (Acts 16:25-30)

Open To Opportunity

Rabbi Akiba worked as a shepherd for Kalba Savua. When Rachel, Kalba Savua's daughter, saw that even though Akiba was unassuming, there was something extraordinary about him, she said: If I am willing to be betrothed to you, will you learn in the bet midrash? Rabbi Akiba answered: Yes. So she betrothed herself to him in secret. When Kalba Savua learned what she had done, he drove her out of his house and vowed that she was not to benefit from any of his property. At that, she went off and openly married Akiba. When winter came, they were so poor that they had to sleep in a straw shed. As Rabbi Akiba picked the straw from her hair, he would say: If I had the means, I would give you a golden Jerusalem brooch.

Just then, Elijah, disguised as a mortal, came and cried out at the door: Please give me a bit of straw! My wife is about to give birth and I have nothing for her to lie on. Rabbi Akiba said to his wife: Look at this man—he does not even have the straw that we have. Soon after, she insisted: Go now, and learn Torah. He went away and for twelve years he sat in the bet midrash before Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua. At the end of twelve years, he arose and returned to his home, bringing with him twelve thousand disciples. (Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 62b-63a)

Risks At The Door: Not An Open And Shut Case

There was a poor man in Mar Ukba's neighborhood into whose doorway 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/Study House 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 face to face." (Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b)



Easter Morning

Maybe someone comes to the door and says,
 "repent," and you say, "Come on in," and it's
 Jesus. That's when all you ever did, or said,
 or even thought, suddenly wakes up again and
 sings out, "I'm still here," and you know it's true.
 You just shiver alive and are left standing
 there suddenly brought to account: saved.

Except, maybe that someone says, "I've got a deal
 for you." And you listen, because that's how
 you're trained—they told you, "Always hear both sides."
 So then the slick voice can sell you anything, even
 Hell, which is what you're getting by listening.
 Well, what should you do? I'd say always go to
 the door, yes, but keep the screen locked. Then,
 while you hold the bible in one hand, lean forward
 and say carefully, "Jesus?" (William Stafford)



Entrance

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 from: The Book of Images)