

sacrificial services remind us of this with the word *adam*. This idea is expanded upon in Isaiah 6:7 where *Hashem* proclaims, 'I will bring them to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their elevation offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable upon My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' (Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, 4). While the propensity, and often the ideal, in the observant world is to progressively divorce oneself from the "outside world," Torah, according to Rabbi Elie Munk, comes to teach us otherwise. One's temple should and must be open to others. Only in such a place may God's presence truly dwell.

This topic becomes all the more pressing in the weeks leading up to Passover. Pesah is the quintessential festival of particularity. We celebrate the birth of the Israelites as a nation freed from the oppression of Egypt. Given the Torah's sacred mantra in the aftermath of the Exodus, however, it would appear that the true message of Pesah is more universal and global in scope. For Torah cautions numerous times, "remember that you were a slave in Egypt," for the Israelites indeed know well the soul of one who is oppressed. Torah mandates that a lesson be learned: the stranger in one's midst is to be respected, not exploited. Care and respect must not only be given to the particular Israelite, but it must become a universal value.

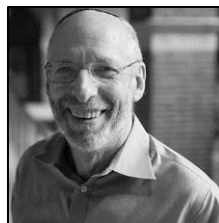
May our particularity always be a path toward respecting both ourselves and "the other" in our midst.

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Vayikra 5781

ויקרא תשפ"א



Standing at the Gates

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In Kafka's cryptic parable "Before the Law," a man stands before a gate seeking entry into the Law. The gate is open, but at its side is a gatekeeper who refuses his request to enter. The man uses every stratagem that he can think of to gain the gatekeeper's permission, but every attempt fails. This stalemate continues until the moment of death arrives. The tale ends with the following exchange:

"Look, if every man strives after the Law," says the man. "How does it happen that in all these years nobody but myself has demanded entry?" The gatekeeper recognizes that the man has already reached his end and, so as to reach him through his failing hearing, he shouts to him: "Nobody else could obtain permission here. This entrance was destined only for you. And now I am going to shut it."

What this tale signifies is anyone's guess—not surprising, given that the author is Kafka. Is Kafka describing a world of absurdity, in which one is simultaneously granted a portal and barred from entry? Alternatively, had the man simply strolled up to the gate without asking permission to enter would the gatekeeper have stepped aside?

What we can say is this: entrances are complex; they can be simultaneously open and inaccessible. And there are portals that we are meant to enter, and yet we fail to do so, through a combination of factors within and beyond our control.

An oft-mentioned locale in Leviticus is the *petah ohel mo'ed* (Lev. 3:2 and elsewhere), the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (as it is generally translated)

or Mishkan, the dwelling place of divine glory. It is both an entryway and a checkpoint. As a point of contact between human and the divine, it is the site of much of the sacrificial service that is to be done “before the Lord” (Exod. 29:11 and elsewhere). Yet the entrance also demarcates the restricted realm of the holy. Few are allowed beyond this point, and only to perform specific sacred tasks.

At the outset of Leviticus, as Moses stands before the entrance, God calls to him “from within the *ohel mo’ed*” (Lev. 1:1) in order to give him instruction. Rabbinic commentators understand the significance of this phrase as follows: When the Divine Presence descends upon the sanctuary and God’s glory fills it, Moses cannot enter the tent (Exod. 40:34–35). He yearns to go within but he must await God’s permission to enter. God’s call to Moses at the beginning of Leviticus is an invitation to pass through the portal so that God can instruct him.

A very different narrative is that of Jacob at Bet El. Jacob encamps there for the night on his way to Haran. In his dream he both sees a ladder connecting heaven and earth and hears God speak to him. When he awakes, he proclaims, “Indeed, God is in this place and I did not know . . . this [place] is nothing other than God’s house and here is the gateway to heaven” (Gen. 28:16–17). Upon arrival at Bet El Jacob had not seen the heavenly portal that was before him; he drifted off into slumber totally unaware of its presence. It is God who must show him the true nature of the ground upon which he lies.

These three stories lead me back to one of the most poignant passages in the Yom Kippur liturgy, found in the Ne’ilah service:

“Open (*petah*) the gates for us, in this moment of the closing of the gates, for the day has waned.”

This petition is a bit curious: Why ask for the gates to be opened precisely at the moment that they are to be closed? Perhaps we should understand the Hebrew *petah* not as “open” but “keep open.” We know that the gates must now close but we ask for a few more moments to be heard.

Another solution suggests itself. Perhaps we have been spiritual sleepwalkers, inattentive throughout the day to the open gates. It is only at day’s end when the gates begin to close that we open our eyes; it is only now that the gates are truly open for us. Are we too late? We pray that it not be so.

We stand at so many gates struggling to gain entry. Yet in those same moments we can be oblivious to other gates that open themselves to us, waiting for us to step through them. Maybe we are standing at the wrong gate. Maybe we need to open ourselves up and search for the gate that is meant for us.

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A Taste of Torah



A House of Prayer for All Peoples

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Creative tension is ever present in the poles found within Judaism. We are drawn to the balance between *keva* and *kavannah*, that which is fixed and that which is spontaneous; Hassidim fervently debate the Mitnagdim over the line between spirituality and intellectualism; and we are constantly in search of the golden mean between halakhah (law) and aggadah (lore). Another pair of opposites embedded within Judaism is the constant tension between particularity and universality. To what extent should a Jew be zealous in the particular observance of Jewish identity? Or is Torah better understood as a Jewish lens into universal experience? Interestingly enough, the opening of Parashat Vayikra alludes to this mindful balancing act between universality and particularity.

The second verse of the opening chapter of Leviticus states, “Speak to the Children of Israel (*benai Yisrael*) and say to them, when a human (*adam*) from you presents an offering of cattle to the Lord . . .” (Leviticus 1:2). Though the laws relating to the sacrificial observances are clearly addressed to the Israelite community, the transition between the particular Children of Israel and the universal human is notable. Rabbi Elie Munk writes, “We are taught that the Temple remains open to all, whatever their religion. Everyone can bring an offering there (BT Hullin 13b). The Temple has a cosmopolitan character, and so the first words of instruction concerning the