

**When do the Gates of Repentance Close?**  
**Student Rabbi Aaron Torop, Temple Shalom, Lafayette, LA**

0:00-0:10 Schmooze

0:10-0:15 Havdalah

0:15-0:20 Introduction to Topic

- As we enter the High Holy Day season, I figured we would start the season by thinking about the end! How long do we have to repent? When are the gates of repentance open or closed?
- What is your experience of Neilah? What do you hear, feel, and think about?

0:20-0:50 What gates?

- Read Reuven Hammer
  - Two kinds of gates: temple and prayer
  - What is the connection between them?
  - Explain worship service based on Temple
- Read Piyyut
  - What gates are closing? Which are opening?
  - What is the poet calling upon us to do? Calling God to do?
- What gates does Rabbi Alan Lew specify?
  - Gates of heaven!
- Transition to other sources -- perhaps the Gates of Heaven are not so accessible
- Read Baba Metzia 59a
  - Gates of heaven are locked
  - Is there a connection between the gates of Repentance, tears, mistreated? Why might these get through?

0:50-1:30

- Add on Hoshanah Rabbah
  - Why might the mystical texts extend the meaning of teshuvah?
  - What is there to gain? What is there to lose?
  - What is the connection between water and repentance for them? For us?
- Add on Hanukkah
  - What is the significance of Hanukah?
  - Why do we keep extending it?

1:30-2:00 Conclusion

- The gates of repentance are never closed - read Eichah Rabbah and Deuteronomy Rabbah
- So...why have Neilah at all?
- Why do we need to tell ourselves the gates are closing?

**When do the Gates Truly Close?**  
**Student Rabbi Aaron Torop, Temple Shalom, Lafayette, LA**  
**September 17, 2022**

**Machzor Lev Shalem, adapted from Reuven Hammer**

Neilah means “closing” and referred originally to the closing of the gates of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. It then took on a more spiritual meaning, and was understood to refer to the symbolic closing of the gates of heaven.

On ordinary days there are three services at which we recite the Amidah. On Shabbat and festivals we add a fourth. In the Talmud, a fifth service, called Neilah, was added on all fast days. Today, we recite a Neilah service only on Yom Kippur.

Neilah is one of the most moving of all services, bringing this sacred day to close with poetic additions to the liturgy and unique melodies. It is a worthy parallel to Kol Nidre, with which the Yom Kippur journey began.

**“Open a Gate for Us,” a medieval piyyut**

Open a gate for us when the gates are being closed, for the day is about to fade. The day shall end, the sun shall set. Let us enter Your gates!	פתח לנו שער, בעת נעילת שער כי פנה יום. היום יפנה, השמש יבא ויפנה, נבואה שערך
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**This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared, Rabbi Alan Lew**

Rabbi Levi Yitzchâak of Berditchev said that it isn’t just that the gates of heaven are open during the Ten Days of Teshuva; what is far more significant is that an energy, an attractive force, passes through this opening during these days. This is a very subtle energy, and for most of the Ten Days, when the gates are wide open, we don’t even notice it. But during the Neilah service, as the gates begin to close and the opening becomes narrower and narrower, this attractive energy becomes more and more intense, more and more noticeable. It is precisely this energy which draws us to the Neilah service so intensely, and which inspires us to pray so fervently once there. The prayer we utter at Neilah is that most urgent of all human prayers, the prayer of the last chance. The gates of heaven are closing. We only have a few minutes left.

### **Talmud Bavli, Baba Metziah, 59a**

א"ר אלעזר מיום שנחרב בית המקדש ננעלו שערי תפלה שנאמר (איכה ג, ח) גם כי אזעק ואשוע שתם תפילתי ואע"פ ששערי תפלה ננעלו שערי דמעות לא ננעלו שנאמר (תהלים לט, יג) שמעה תפילתי ה' ושועתי האזינה אל דמעותי אל תחרש  
Rabbi Elazar says: Since the day the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer were locked,, as it is stated: "Though I plead and call out, He shuts out my prayer" (Lamentations 3:8). Yet, despite the fact that the gates of prayer were locked, the gates of tears were not locked, as it is stated: "Hear my prayer, Lord, and give ear to my pleading, keep not silence at my tears" (Psalms 39:13

אמר רב חסדא כל השערים ננעלים חוץ משערי אונאה שנאמר (עמוס ז, ז) הנה ה' נצב על חומת אנך ובידו אנך

Rav Ḥisda says: All the gates are locked, except for the gates of prayer for victims of verbal mistreatment, as it is stated: "And behold, the Lord stood upon a wall built with a plumb line, and a plumb line in His hand" (Amos 7:7

### **Hoshanah Rabba, chabad.org**

The seventh day of Sukkot is called Hoshana Rabbah, and is considered the final day of the divine "judgment" in which the fate of the new year is determined. It is the day when the verdict that was issued on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is finalized.

The Midrash tells us that G-d told Abraham: "If atonement is not granted to your children on Rosh Hashanah, I will grant it on Yom Kippur; if they do not attain atonement on Yom Kippur, it will be given on Hoshana Rabbah."

### **Sukkot: Hoshana Rabba, Jewish Virtual Library**

There was a very widespread belief that he who did not see the shadow of his head on the night of Hoshana Rabba would die during that year, for Hoshana Rabba was the day of the "seal," wherein the verdict of man (passed on the Day of Atonement ) is "sealed," or the day on which the "notices" of the verdict were sent out (*Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. by R. Margoliot (1957), nos. 452–3; Nahmanides on Num. 14:9; Zohar, Ex., 142a–b). It is probable that the view of Hoshana Rabba as a day of judgment was originally connected with the ancient belief that "during the festival [i.e., Sukkot], the world is judged for the water to be received" (RH 1:2), i.e., whether the coming year would be blessed with rain or be one of drought and Hoshana Rabba is the conclusion of Sukkot. This would explain the numerous *hoshanot* of Hoshana Rabba in which the motif is water. There is also an allusion to a Prayer for Rain on Hoshana Rabba (*Sefer Ḥasidim*, no. 248).

Over the generations, the conception of Hoshana Rabba as a day of judgment has been expressed by a series of distinct customs, all or some of which have been included in the prayer service of the day in the various rites (see Sh. Ar., OH 664:1): ...in some rites the *Ḥazzan* wears a white robe...; the sentences (of the Ten Days of Penitence), "Remember us unto life," and "Who is as Thou," are included in the *Amidah*; *Avinu Malkenu* , the Great Kedushah , and *U-Netanneh Tokef*

are said in the *Musaf* prayer; and the *shofar* is blown during the processions. In some rites *selihot* are recited.

### **Final Judgment on Hanukkah, aish.com**

The notion does not appear in the Talmud, Midrash or Zohar, but is found in more recent Hassidic works. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16b) states that the judgment of the fully righteous and the fully wicked is decided on Rosh Hashanah, while the rest of mankind is given till Yom Kippur to merit a good judgment. The Zohar (Vayechi 220a, Tzav 31b), however, extends the deadline till Hoshanah Rabbah, the last day of the holiday of Sukkot, stating that although the judgment is sealed on Yom Kippur, it is not "concluded" or delivered until then.

However, Hassidic masters quote from Kabbalistic sources that the God's mercy extends even further, giving the Children of Israel till the final day of Chanukah (known as "*Zot Chanukah*" based on words which appear in the Torah reading of that day), to return to Him and receive a favorable judgment. They see several hints to this in different verses. One is Isaiah 27:9:

"Through this (*zot*) will Jacob's sin be forgiven" – i.e., on account of the holiness of *Zot Chanukah*.

(The notion appears to be stated slightly differently in different works – such as that the judgment is sealed on Hoshanah Rabbah but not delivered until Chanukah, or that a "temporary" one is delivered earlier but the "final version" not till Chanukah, or that a Divine Hand is extended till the end of Chanukah awaiting our repentance.)

### **Eichah Rabbah 3:15**

אָמַר לֹא נִמְשְׁלָה תְּפִלָּה כְּמִקְוֵה וְנִמְשְׁלָה תְּשׁוּבָה כִּיּוֹם. מִה מִקְוֵה זֶה פְּעֻמִּים פְּתוּחָה פְּעֻמִּים נְעוּלָה, כִּי שַׁעְרֵי תְּפִלָּה פְּעֻמִּים נְעוּלִים  
פְּעֻמִּים פְּתוּחִין, אָכֵל הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְעוֹלָם פְּתוּחָה, כִּי שַׁעְרֵי תְּשׁוּבָה לְעוֹלָם פְּתוּחִין

Prayer is likened to a *mikveh* and *teshuvah* (return/repentance) is likened to the sea. Just like a *mikveh* is sometimes open and other times closed, so too the gates of prayer are sometimes open and other times closed, but the sea is always open, so too with the gates of *teshuvah*, they are always open.

### **Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:12**

זֶה שֶׁאָמַר הַכֶּתוּב (תהלים סט, יד): וְאֲנִי תְּפִלָּתִי לְךָ ה' עַת רְצוֹן, רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בַר פִּפְאִי שָׁאֵל לְרַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָן מֵהוּ דְּכִתִּיב וְאֲנִי  
תְּפִלָּתִי לְךָ ה' עַת רְצוֹן, אָמַר לֹא שַׁעְרֵי תְּפִלָּה פְּעֻמִּים פְּתוּחִים נְעוּלִים, אָכֵל שַׁעְרֵי תְּשׁוּבָה לְעוֹלָם פְּתוּחִים

As it says (Psalms 69:14), "As for me, may my prayer come to You, O Eternal, at a favorable moment. [O God, in Your abundant faithfulness, answer me with Your sure deliverance.],

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said to Rabbi Hannina bar Papa, the gates of prayer are sometimes open and sometimes closed, but the gates of repentance are always open.

### **Before, Yehuda Amichai**

Before the gate is locked and shuttered  
Before every word is said and uttered

ent— בְּטָרָם הַשַּׁעַר יִסְגָּר,  
בְּטָרָם כָּל הָאָמוֹר יֵאָמֵר,  
away בְּטָרָם אֶהְיֶה אַחֵר.  
בְּטָרָם יִקְרִישׁ דָּם נְבוֹן,  
בְּטָרָם יִסְגְּרוּ הַדְּבָרִים בְּאָרוֹן,  
d בְּטָרָם יִתְקַשֶּׁה הַבֶּטוֹן.  
בְּטָרָם יִסְתַּמוּ כָּל נִקְבֵי הַחֲלִילִים,

Before I have become something different, something other

Before the mind has lost its way  
Before possessions are packed and put away  
Before the pavement hardens, here to stay

Before the apertures of flutes are sealed  
Before the laws of nature revealed  
Before the vessels break, and can't be healed

Before decrees and edicts are imposed  
Before the hand of God has closed  
Before we rise to leave this place, and go.

**Open for Us a Gate, Leah Goldberg**

One after another things  
are happening to me which  
at another time would light up in me  
all the lamplights of joy.  
And I would walk then lovely,  
careful, lest they both be extinguished,  
carrying back and forth  
humble thanksgiving.

But in this setting  
they are summer's flashes,  
sparks -  
when they vanish  
the clouds are even darker  
and in the stifling air  
there is no expectation of rain.

Heaven stands sealed.  
Open for us a gate.

בְּזֶה אַחַר זֶה קוֹרִים לִי  
מְקוֹרִים שְׂבִיעַת אַחֲרֵת  
הָיוּ מִדְּלִיקִים בִּי אֶת כָּל  
פְּנִסֵי הַשְּׂמֻחָה.  
וְהָיִיתִי הוֹלֶכֶת יָפָה,  
זְהִירָה, פֶּן יִכָּבֹּד,  
וְנוֹשְׂאֵת בִּי הַלֶּךְ וְנֹשֵׂא  
הַכְּבֻעַת הַזֹּדֵדָה.

אֲבָל עַל הַרְקֵקֵה הַזֶּה  
הֲלֹא הֵם בְּרִקֵי־קִיּוֹן,  
חֲזִיזִים -  
וּבְהֶעֱלָמָם  
הָעֵבִים כִּהֵיִם עוֹד יוֹתֵר  
וּבִמְחֻנֵּק  
אִין צְפִיָּה לְגֶשֶׁם.

הַשָּׁמַיִם עוֹמְדִים אֶטוּמִים.  
פְּתַח לָנוּ שַׁעַר.