**(Poetry**)

**Read**: Today you are invited to read poems by two Jewish poets who write about the Closing of the Gates.

The first is from a section of Israeli poet [Yehudah Amichai’s](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9699843) “Jerusalem 1967.”

Jerusalem, 1967

5.

On Yom Kippur in 1967 the Year of Forgetting, I put on

my dark holiday clothes and walked to the Old City of Jerusalem.

For a long time I stood in front of an Arab’s hole-in-the-wall shop,

not far from the Damascus Gate, a shop with

buttons and zippers and spools of thread

in every color and snaps and buckles.

A rare light and many colors, like an open Ark.

I told him in my hear that my father too

had a shop like this, with thread and buttons.

I explained to him in my heart about all the decades

and the causes and the events, why I am now here

and my father’s shop was burned there and he is buried here.

When I finished it was time for the Closing of the Gates prayer.

He too lowered the shutters and locked the gate

and I returned, with all the worshippers, home.

.

***Questions to Ponder:*** The opening images of threads, needles and buckles are of materials that fasten things together, that make new things and repair things that have ripped. Amichai describes the shop as a rare light with many colors, and he thinks of it as an open Ark, an image of welcoming, of safety in a storm. The middle stanza tells a story of both spoken and unspoken connection. The ending stanza describes the closing and locking of physical gates, as boundaries and barriers, and the spiritual Closing of the Gates. What invitation does this poem offer you to find connection with others? What are the barriers to those connections? How does the spiritual work of the holidays relate to connections you might seek? What is the meaning of the ending word, “home,” at the end of the poem?

The second poem is Jewish-American poet [Marge Piercy’s](https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/piercy-marge) “[Ne’ilah](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57591/neilah).”

Ne’ilah

The hinge of the year

the great gates opening

and then slowly slowly

closing on us.

I always imagine those gates

hanging over the ocean

fiery over the stone grey

waters of evening.

We cast what we must

change about ourselves

onto the waters flowing

to the sea. The sins,

errors, bad habits, whatever

you call them, dissolve.

When I was little I cried

out *I! I! I! I want, I want.*

Older, I feel less important,

a worker bee in the hive

of history, miles of hard

labor to make my sweetness.

The gates are closing

The light is failing

I kneel before what I love

imploring that it may live.

So much breaks, wears

down, fails in us. We must

forgive our broken promises—

their sharp shards in our hands.

**Questions to Ponder:** Marge Piercy describes a change in her understanding of the Taschlich and Yom Kippur confessions, the casting out of sins, “errors, bad habits, whatever you call them,” a change that is less egocentric about those sins and more collective in its approach. And she acknowledges the sharp shards of our broken promises. How has your understanding of the confessions of this season changed over time? What parts feel sharp and painful? What parts are as gentle as the waters of the evening?

**Deepen the Experience:**

***Do you like to write?*** Consider the image of a gate, its opening, its closing. What does it mean to you to approach that sacred Gate? What every day gates have opened or closed in your life during the past year? What tools can you bring to repair a broken gate? Who is on the other side to help when a gate gets stuck? How is a gate different from a door? What might it be like to look through a gate, or over it? What is the nature of longing? What is the nature of forgiveness?

***Do you like to draw? For Singles, Families and Households of all Ages:***  Do you remember drawing dot-to-dot pictures when you were a child? Try placing random dots on a page. Your young children can use stickers to make dots if they wish. As you draw lines between the dots, symbolically stitching them together, as Amichai suggests, think about the connections you would like to make with others. Talk or journal about those people or those feelings or places. In what ways can you bring them with you through the holidays?