

מְזוּזוֹת

Mezuzot / Thresholds

How does Judaism sanctify a liminal space?

Living In-Between

Richard Hirsh

Boundaries, which simultaneously separate and connect, are places of transaction and transition. Differences are delineated, relationships are negotiated, and similarities are shared, helping us to define ourselves by knowing who we are and who we are not.

These binary functions dissolve at the threshold — at what sociologists call “liminal” (drawn from the Latin, “*limen*,” meaning “threshold”), or “in-between” spaces. Thresholds are implicitly places of uncertainty. What seems clear on either side becomes imprecise at the point where such distinctions become blurred. Consequently, liminal space can be associated with anxiety and danger — or opportunity.

We mark thresholds with a mezuzah, a ritual capsule containing parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah — Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. Often thought of as a symbol of a Jewish home, the mezuzah originated in the more dramatic traditions of protective amulets that secure vulnerable thresholds. At Pesach, we recall the night of the tenth plague in Egypt, when applying sacrificial blood to the doorpost (threshold) of Israelite homes was required to ward off the Destroyer. (Exodus 12:7, 13)

Rabbi Steven Sager (whose commentary is found on page 4 of this issue) taught me a text that highlights the implicit ambiguity about this threshold ritual. The text asks: Was protective blood placed on the inside or the outside of the doorway? Was the intended audience the Israelites, the Egyptians, or God? (*Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha, 6*) Does a mezuzah signify identity to us or to others?

Liminality is a condition not only of space, but also of time. Sociologists Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep identify three moments or beats of liminal time: “separation” from what has been, “transition” (suspension

at the threshold), and “incorporation” into what will be. Like liminal space, liminal time is associated with instability and uncertainty.

We mark transitional moments of time the same way that we mark transitional moments of place: We ritualize them. This is why lifecycle events are so powerful: They provide a safe space to hold the imprecision of liminal time. A couple comes to the *chuppah* as two single individuals. They walk back from the *chuppah* as spouses. During their liminal time under the *chuppah*, the distinctions between “single” and “married” are blurred. The ritual space and blessings embrace the ambiguity that necessarily stands between past and future.

There are other profound moments in life that we can also name as liminal. The ways in which I experience my work differs according to the way I describe it. If I say I am “semi-retired,” I am in a liminal moment of in-between, with all the ambiguity and instability that suggests. If I say I am “working part-time,” I remain rooted in what has been, with all the comfort and stability of the familiar.

As for the individual, so, also, for the collective: When we wonder about how to maneuver in this vulgar, cruel, disruptive, and disturbing moment in American life, naming such a moment as “liminal” may help to create a semi-stable place from which to respond and react with humility and patience. Claiming this liminal political moment as a new era or as a time between two eras can shape the way we live in and through this turbulent time.

In describing uncertain moments as threshold moments — personal as well as communal — we may be able to bring some degree of comfort and calm to the inevitable vulnerability and instability of living between what has been and what is yet to be.

Rabbi **Richard Hirsh** is the assistant rabbi at Congregation M’kor Shalom in Cherry Hill, N.J.

Art by Ruth Weisberg
“Threshold” 2004
oil and mixed media on unstretched canvas, 60" x 74"

NiSh'ma

On this page, we offer three takes on a midrash about thresholds. Our commentators try to understand a perplexing line — “the little contains the much” — and how to make relevant the notion that all of the community of Israel stood in the doorway of the great Tent of Meeting. Our online version is interactive, and we welcome your comments. —S.B.



Steven Sager: In order to provide witnesses for the investiture of the priests, God commanded Moses, “Assemble all of the community in the doorway of the Tent of Meeting.” (Leviticus 8:3) Such crowding of the threshold was certainly impossible.

The *ba'al ha-midrash* (story master) insists that the word “all” opens things up wondrously — not to a measurable fact, but to the spacious truth of metaphor. Thresholds of consciousness, emotion, pain, and awareness offer vistas wider than their framing moments. At such thresholds, “the little contains the much”: Events deepen into experiences; moments become momentous.

On the “*limen*” (Latin for “threshold”), we experience liminal, transitional moments; perception crosses a threshold and a deepening awareness creates in us an expanded vision.

The *ba'al ha-midrash* positioned all of us — those present and those yet to be — on a threshold of religious imagination, inviting coherence, consciousness, and continuity, and allowing us be present to holiness-in-the-making that is beyond us and within us.

The *ba'al ha-midrash* extended this teaching to include Jerusalem herself. Like the threshold of the sacred tent, Jerusalem became “the little that contains the much” — always wide enough to contain those who seek her. May it be so, quickly, and in our day.

Rabbi **Steven Sager** is the founder and director of Sicha — Continuing the Conversation, an organization that offers special support and resources to rabbis who guide and direct end-of-life issues. Sager is rabbi emeritus of Beth El Synagogue in Durham, N.C. and a senior rabbinic fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.



Sara Luria: The poet John O'Donohue teaches that a threshold, from the Old English word “*threscan*,” is the place where one separates the wheat from the chaff. Threshing is an embodied experience of separating. Right after Moses assembles the entire community at the Tent of Meeting, he washes Aaron and his sons in preparation for their sacred roles. The mikveh ritual, an immersion in living waters, is an embodied Jewish transition ceremony that facilitates spiritual threshing. Those who immerse themselves

allow what is not useful anymore to dissolve in the water, and thus they emerge lighter and more prepared for what is to come.

In the mikveh — and at the threshold to the Tent of Meeting — we are standing in a place in between what we were and what we will become. This is what Rabbi Steven Sager teaches, echoing Leviticus Rabbah, “the little contains the much.” Perhaps, each of us is the little that contains the much. Our small bodies hold vast experiences — losses, hopes, fears, love, pain, and joy. Leviticus Rabbah teaches us that all of Israel — 600,000 people — assembled to participate in transformation. Each of us is one of the 600,000. Each of us is alone as we stand in the mikveh or at a threshold.

Rabbi **Sara Luria's** experiences as a community organizer, birth doula, and hospital chaplain inspire her work as the founder and executive director of ImmerseNYC, a pluralistic, feminist, grassroots-energized community mikveh project. Her new project, Beloved, is a home-based experiment in Jewish living that integrates community, ritual, food, and art.



Gray Myrseth: In his commentary on Leviticus Rabbah, Rabbi Steven Sager speaks of “liminal, transitional moments” where we can be present with “holiness-in-the-making” and encounter a spaciousness that bends the ordinary laws of physics.

וְאֵת-כָּל הָעֵדָה הַקְּהֵל 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 שֶׁחֻזַּק מוֹעֵט אֶת הַמְּרַבֵּה.

“All of Israel numbered 600,000, yet you say, ‘Assemble all of the community in the doorway of the Tent of Meeting.’ (Leviticus 8:3) Impossible, except that this is one of the places where the little contains the much.”

Leviticus Rabbah 10:9

When I think of the *limen* and the threshold, I imagine everyone standing at the edge of our communities, wondering what kind of welcome they will receive as they approach. I think of Jews of color, queer and transgender Jews, Jews with disabilities, and Jews by choice. I think of people with one Jewish parent, people who are unsure for a wide range of reasons whether they will find the right fit in any Jewish community or whether they will stand at the edges forever.

As we consider the thresholds of our homes and sanctuaries, it is my hope that we can remember that the first Tent of Meeting created by our desert ancestors was wide enough to hold every person who approached its doorway. That tent was wide enough to hold the spirit of the Holy One, who defines boundaries and binaries, and who welcomes human beings who do the same. May our own present-day Jewish spaces be as welcoming to the fullness of the Jewish people in all our queer and liminal splendor, as the Tent of Meeting was so long ago. What we find beyond the threshold will be infinitely more fabulous when we do.

Rabbi **Gray Myrseth**, who currently serves as school director at the Kehilla Community Synagogue in Piedmont, Calif., was ordained in 2017 by the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College in Newton Centre, Mass.



“Threshold” by Ruth Weisberg

Jewish sensibilities are approaches to living and learning that permeate Jewish culture. The ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors they express — emanating from Jewish history, stories, and sources — provide inspiration and guidance that help us to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. Sensibilities are culturally informed senses or memes. This month, *Sh'ma Now* looks at the sensibility embodied by "mezuzot," the markers that many Jews affix to the doorposts of their homes, as we explore Jewish wisdom around thresholds and liminal space.

The Chuppah: Private, yet Permeable

Anna Goren

In the weeks and months after marrying my wife, Alex, people asked me the same question: Do you feel different? The question gave me pause. No magical cloak of marriage had suddenly enshrouded us. We stood under the *chuppah*, we danced, we ate pie; yet, the basic elements of our lives remained unchanged. We had already been sharing our home and finances, and we had already addressed the big questions about sharing our lives together before marriage. What specific threshold did we cross as we stood under the *chuppah*?

Traditional representations of marriage in American culture elicit the image of the groom carrying the bride, still in her wedding dress, across the doorway of their new home, signifying their departure from their respective families and community to form the nuclear family that is the foundation of our society.

Jews have our own version of the marriage threshold, the *chuppah*, erected as a canopy for the couple to stand under during the wedding ceremony. Instead of crossing over into a private and permanent space, we enter into marriage under a temporary structure, with our loved ones watching.

Our *chuppah* was built by a friend who brought it to a small town near Lake Ontario, where my wife's family has a home. On the day before the wedding, he erected the canopy with the help of our families. We draped the *chuppah* with my dad's *tallit* and decorated it with flowers.

On the day of our wedding, as we circled one another and stepped inside the *chuppah's* frame with our backs to our guests, it was as if we had stepped into a private room in the middle of a sprawling park. Our focus on one another was intense. As the ceremony began, friends and family rotated in and out of the *chuppah* to offer us the *sheva*

brachot, the seven betrothal blessings. This dance between partner, self, and community was a reminder of our commitment to each other, devotion to ourselves, and need to participate in the world around us.

The *chuppah's* open sides allow for continual movement: wedding guests enter and leave as they participate in the ceremony — just as they will participate in our shared life. The *chuppah's* fragile, temporary structure also reminds us just how vulnerable our lives are. We stand under it because we acknowledge that our relationships are always changing, constantly improving, redecorating — even rebuilding. We need open pathways for others to easily come in and out, to offer us advice and companionship, or simply to witness.

Jews have long been accustomed to liminal spaces — those deeply uncomfortable, transitional places where we are at the margins of certainty. The time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the years wandering in the desert, the mezuzah that marks the transition into and outside of the home — these are all thresholds we cross as Jews as we perform the rituals built into our lunar cycle and our daily routines.

A marriage, by all standards, is supposed to be a time for certainty. But the *chuppah* at the center of the wedding ritual reminds us of our limitations in knowing what will be. Even as we cannot prepare for everything, the *chuppah* reassures us we can choose the people we invite into our spaces and the values and traditions that will form the foundation of our lives.

It has been said that your wedding day is to the rest of your life as Shabbat is to the rest of the week: a taste of what can be and a reminder of what we strive to build. So, what changed, that day? It wasn't some new revelation, new legal status, or new feeling of strengthened commitment. It was a subtle change — an integration of our relationship with the most important people in our lives.

Marriage is not a finish line we cross. Today, marriage is not even necessary for having a family, or security, or happiness. When we crossed into the *chuppah* — a structure both private and permeable, we acknowledged the privilege of having a community to witness and uphold something greater than two people. That threshold marked the beginning of that journey — just one really good day to set the tone for all the unknowns that follow.

Anna Goren is a writer and communications consultant in Seattle, Wash., where she works with nonprofits to help them tell their stories.

Finding Flux

Iddo Tavorly

We spend much of our lives transitioning between identities. Imagine the movement from childhood to adulthood, or, most notably, to adolescence, a period of ambiguity with a potential for rebellion, passionate romances, and experimenting with new identities.

This ambiguity during liminal times seems to threaten the structure of social life. As we see ourselves and other people escaping from defined categories and roles, we are forced to wrestle with its meaning. This period constitutes a time of transition, when one set of meanings and hierarchies is no longer applicable, and another is still held in abeyance. It is a time brimming with danger and possibility. Rituals across societies, especially those marking changes in identity — such as young Masai men who sleep in the wilderness and are then circumcised before they are inducted as a new class of warriors — have a similar structure.

Ritual moves us from one role to another, but it needs to take us through a liminal stage. This moment of in-betweenness is more than an afterthought. It is crucial to the possibility of transformation taking root. For example, new recruits entering the army are stripped of their identity through the experiences of boot camp, a series of rituals that erase many of the markers that provided them with a sense of identity in their civilian life. We are emptied, as it were, so that we can become a vessel for a new identity.

For Jews, wandering in the desert was a time of in-betweenness. No longer slaves, but not yet a sovereign people, the Jewish people traveled through the desert, a symbolic nothingness. It is only when we are emptied out, when the generation that clung to its identity has passed, that we are ready to move forward. Jewish thought not only acknowledges this liminality, but also fills it with meaning. For, despite describing a condition of being between moments, liminality is meaningful in its own right. The teenage years are not simply a period in which we wait for adulthood to occur. Rather, these years are a meaningful time of becoming and of coming to terms with and shaping the identities we see on our horizon.

For some, liminality is etched more deeply. During the years I spent with Orthodox men and women in the La Brea neighborhood in Los Angeles, some of my friends were Messianic Chabadniks who were awaiting the imminent reappearance of the rebbe. The world around them was interpreted and

reinterpreted in light of the end of Jewish exile — that long time of liminality, moving toward a new age.

Even if we move from cosmic time to a more mundane existence, liminality is far more common than we may imagine. Social life is not made of only one rhythm of transformation. There are contending rhythms and trajectories. There are the rhythms of relationships and the rhythms of work, religious rhythms and secular rhythms, market rhythms and political rhythms. For example, we may be on a secure footing at work, but then return to a place of liminality at home, where we are in between marriage and singlehood. We may feel as if we live in stable economic times while knowing that the possibility of an ecological disaster places us on a threshold between a secure world and a global cataclysm.

We are, then, almost always living in liminal time, at least from some perspective. Understanding the ubiquity of such liminality allows us to think about social life not as a settled world punctuated by moments of flux, but rather as a place of transition marked by a constant oscillation among different modes of being. Structure and formlessness feed upon each other. Structure gives us the basic categories through which we experience the world and the institutions that make it livable; formlessness provides us with creative possibilities and the ability to question and refashion our lives. Liminality represents not only a threatening tear in the social fabric, but also excitement and possibility.

Iddo Tavory, an associate professor of sociology at New York University, studies culture and religion. His 2016 book, *Summoned: Identification and Religious Life in a Jewish Neighborhood*, is an ethnography of an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Los Angeles.

Where Tricksters Lurk

Ari Y. Kelman

If you believe the legends, American popular music was born at a crossroads. Robert Johnson, a blues singer whose few recordings have shaped popular music, told his version of this story in his 1936 song "Cross Road Blues."

*I went down to the crossroad
fell down on my knees
I went down to the crossroad
fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above "Have mercy now
save poor Bob if you please"... **

A crossroads is where tricksters lurk, where uncertainty prevails, where the possibility becomes clear that things may not go quite as they were planned. Crossroads are liminal spaces, both metaphorically and realistically. They are places of rebirth and reinvention, of transformation and confusion. They are doorways, marketplaces — places where things are traded, where value is assessed and ascribed, and where cultures meet. Crossroads are full of danger and promise, which is part of their allure.

Johnson was singing about a specific place where he sold his soul to the devil. In this legend, the crossroads was an intersection and a threshold, a place where roads cross and where he could cross over, where things mix that should not mix, and where that mixture, no matter how impure, generates something new.

Whether or not you believe the legend, American popular music is the result of these mixtures, the sources of which are harder to locate than the actual places where music crossed paths: New Orleans, Memphis, New York, Chicago. Popular music is the product of these intersections of race, gender, class, and religion. Music migrates and crosses cultural, political, and national boundaries with remarkable speed, penetrating unintended places and allowing new tricksters to find their voices in between the expected styles. Pretty much all of global pop music has its roots in some other kind of music from some other place.

The musical world has been moving steadily toward the hybrid and the messy. Music always creeps into the cultural cracks and opens up new spaces for enjoyment, expression, and connection. This blatant musical composite is part of what makes it so pleasurable and so provocative.

Record stores used to be organized by genre, but even genres seem inadequate to describe so much of popular music. Spotify and other streaming services now offer playlists designed to match one's moods, and they are always serving up recommendations for new songs that lie just beyond the choices we might figure out for ourselves.

Unexpected encounters happen when musical genres meet. For example, Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin drew heat for bringing gospel into popular music, and the Beatles and the Rolling Stones cut their musical teeth playing covers of African American blues recordings.

In Afro-Caribbean religions, Exu is the god of the crossroads and the divine messenger. He takes people and knowledge from one place to the next. He knows well the dangers and appeals of liminality. The danger he represents — the possibility of selling one's soul to play music — is what makes communication and transformation possible.

But here's the thing: Robert Johnson did not sell his soul to the devil to play the blues, though his lyrics sound as though he may have. He certainly spent time at the crossroads and enough time with other transients to bring sounds from one place to another and back again. And his music flirted with the danger of mixing with people and elements that were always from somewhere else.

This is the nature of transitional and transactional places such as doorways, thresholds, and crossroads. While singing about going down to the crossroads may not mean that you are going to sell your soul, in the process of crossing over and crossing back, it may sound as though you have. Or maybe you give a little of your soul away because you can't keep it all to yourself. That's the nature of exchange. Not crossing over is never an option. When you reach a crossroads, you have no choice but to make a choice.

*...Standin at the crossroad, babe
risin sun goin down
Standin at the crossroad baby
risin sun goin down
eee eee eee, risin sun goin down
I believe to my soul now,
Poor Bob is sinkin down... **

Ari Y. Kelman is the Jim Joseph Professor of Education and Jewish Studies at the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. He is the interim director of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford.

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We mourn the death of Rabbi Neil Gillman, mensch, friend, and deeply thoughtful and pioneering theologian. He chaired the *Sh'ma* Advisory board for many years.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Mezuzot' —
Thresholds

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the theme of **the mezuzah as a liminal or threshold experience**. Judaism has many boundaries — rituals, customs, and laws — that delineate Jewish time, space, and people. Thresholds, though, are places of uncertainty and mixing. They are places where and times when we are in-between. These liminal moments offer rich opportunities, and *Sh'ma Now* is delighted to share some smart and creative thinking about the thresholds in our lives.

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or “meaning-making” as solely an individual activity. That’s why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and prompts for individual contemplation and informal or more structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation, inviting a small group of friends and family to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal might be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at <http://forward.com/shma-now/>.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other’s comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Mezuzot' —
Thresholds

Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Rabbi **Richard Hirsh** [page 1] introduces readers to the way the mezuzah serves as a ritual marker of liminal space. It is “a ritual capsule containing parchment inscribed with scriptural passages. Often thought of as a symbol of a Jewish home, the mezuzah originated in the more dramatic traditions of protective amulets that secure vulnerable thresholds.” He goes on to discuss the threshold as a place of uncertainty — a place neither on the inside nor the outside of a doorway. He writes, “What seems clear on either side becomes imprecise at the point where such distinctions become blurred. Consequently, liminal space is often associated with anxiety and even danger.” How are threshold experiences marked by Jewish ritual? A mezuzah on the doorpost of one’s home often becomes an “unseen” marker, ignored rather than kissed as one enters or leaves one’s home. How could this threshold experience be reinvigorated? How could we re-establish our thresholds as places that invite our attention and our renewed consideration?
- **Ari Y. Kelman** [page 4] writes about blues singer Robert Johnson, whose 1936 song, “Cross Road Blues,” describes the liminal moment when he sold his soul to the devil. Kelman explores the ways in which music can cross thresholds. “Music migrates quickly and crosses cultural, political, and national boundaries with remarkable speed, penetrating unintended places and allowing new tricksters to find their voices in between the expected styles. Pretty much all of global pop music has its roots in some other kind of music from some other place.” He notes that part of the allure of this musical crossroads is its inherent “danger and promise” — the certainty that when “you reach a crossroads, you have no choice but to make a choice.” How do you perceive the dangers of crossroads, and how do you suggest approaching these threshold experiences? Where does Jewish music mix with other genres, and what is the outcome? How are Jewish rituals, traditions, and customs influenced by mixing with host cultures? How do you understand the act of welcoming interfaith families as a threshold experience?
- **Iddo Tavory** [page 3] explores the complicated relationship between ritual and liminal space and time. He writes, “Ritual moves us from one role to another, but it needs to take us through a liminal stage. This moment of in-betweenness is more than an afterthought. It is crucial to the possibility of transformation taking root.” He offers the example of army recruits being stripped of their identity “through the experiences of boot camp, a series of rituals that erase many of the markers that provided them with a sense of identity in their civilian life.” He writes about the importance of being emptied “so that we can become a vessel for a new identity.” And then he points to the ultimate Jewish experience of liminality: “For Jews, wandering in the desert was a time of in-betweenness. No longer slaves, but not yet a sovereign people, the Jewish people traveled through the desert, a symbolic nothingness. It is only when we are emptied out, when the generation that clung to its identity has passed, that we are ready to move forward. Jewish thought not only acknowledges this liminality, but also fills it with meaning.” What happens to society as we move from stability to uncertainty and back again to stability? What kind of an impact does ambiguity or a sense of disorientation have on society? Especially at this moment (and in this particular political climate), what is the relationship between the chaos of the political scene and the liminality of a threshold? How does the destabilization of our government affect us? Does President Donald Trump’s cozying up with white supremacists destabilize our country’s social norms and also bid us to start questioning our very foundations as a country? What threshold rituals are most evocative and powerful?

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Mezuzot' —
Thresholds

Reflective Questions

can help one to integrate the ideas in these articles with one's own sense of self.

- **Anna Goren** [page 3] shares the story of her own liminal moments under the *chuppah*. She describes the moments before, during, and after her *chuppah* — a magical transformation through liminal space. About marriage, she writes, “A marriage, by all standards, is a time for certainty. And the *chuppah* at the center of the wedding ritual reminds us of our limitations in knowing what will be. We cannot prepare for everything, but we can choose the people we invite into our lives and the values and traditions that form the foundation of our lives.” How would you describe the threshold of marriage as being ritualized under the *chuppah*? Why is the experience of *chuppah* a threshold experience? What are the dimensions of liminality that occur at a wedding?
- In *NiSh'ma*, [page 2], our simulated Talmud page, three writers explore a midrash about thresholds. Our commentators try to understand a perplexing line — “the little contains the much” — and to make relevant the notion that all of the community of Israel stood in the doorway of the great Tent of Meeting. Rabbi **Steven Sager** writes that this midrash “positioned all of us — those present and those yet to be — on a threshold of religious imagination, inviting coherence, consciousness, and continuity, and allowing us to be present to holiness-in-the-making that is beyond us and within us.” Rabbi **Sara Luria** describes the role of mikveh and washing: “Right after Moses assembles the entire community at the Tent of Meeting, he washes Aaron and his sons in preparation for their sacred roles. The mikveh ritual, an immersion in living waters, is an embodied Jewish transition ceremony that facilitates spiritual threshing (separating). Those who immerse themselves allow what is not useful anymore to dissolve in the water, and thus they emerge lighter and more prepared for what is to come.” Rabbi **Gray Myrseth** encourages us to consider the Tent of Meeting a model of welcome: “As we consider the thresholds of our homes and sanctuaries, it is my hope that we can remember that the first Tent of Meeting created by our desert ancestors was wide enough to hold every person who approached its doorway. That tent was wide enough to hold the spirit of the Holy One, who defines boundaries and binaries, and who welcomes human beings who do the same.” How are you stretching the metaphorical Jewish “tent of meeting” today? What role may a ritual such as mikveh — an immersion in water to separate one moment from another — play in your life? If you were standing on a spiritual threshold, what questions would you be asking? What direction would you be seeking?