

6. Prose is a wall, an encloser, a confiner: poetry is a gate, an invitation to more space. While folks differ in their verbal index in general, and in particular in their power to play with words, to make them dance and sing before the Lord of Life, every human being with a right brain-hemisphere can respond to the poetic dimension, from which healing usually comes. IMAGES!

A rabbi just dropped me off at the seminary [10Oct75] to prepare for the second session, this afternoon, of the Pastoral Counseling Integration Seminar. Chief subject of our conversation in transit was the midrashic-meditational use, in the rabbinic tradition (and also Christianity), of "gates" and its modifiers--he, as the editor, having chosen this image for the title of the new Reform prayerbook, GATES OF PRAYER [Central Conference of American Rabbis/75], to be followed by GATES OF REPENTANCE and GATES OF SONG....Earlier in the morning, in my home, he'd shared with me a poem he just wrote for the next Yom Kippur service in his own temple. I can't remember the wording, but I've picked up the images and message thus:

*When will our promises take root and not be like fallen, driven leaves?  
And when shall our lust be for wisdom?*

I midrashed backward from the dead leaves to the live seed, thus expanding the image to an earlier stage of the natural process....A dead leaf is a shut door, a closed gate; a seed planted is a door open, a gate wide against the forces of death....Lord of resurrection, turn the dry leaves to tended seeds.

This thinksheet is a pile-up of associations with (1) this morning's conversation with the rabbi and (2) the gut fact that people coming for counseling do so because (a) a gate they hoped would open has not or (b) they are "up against the wall" both in the sense that they find no way to get in to life "abundant" (to use Jesus' word) and in the sense that their situation feels like execution, death....The counselor as servant of the gates of new life.

1. Jacob after the ladder dream: "This is God's dwelling, heaven's gate, and I, I didn't know it!" Entrapment become opportunity! The death threat become new-life entrance!....Lord, make me a ladder!
2. Letter to the Hebrews: "God never leaves us without a way out [ex-odus]." As biblical counselor, my job is to help the counselee not just to return to coping but rather to discover the particular ex-odus God has for him/her at this life-juncture. Most gates are closed; some gates are open; the Voice calls through one gate. Christopher Fry begins his numinous play, "The Boy with the Cart," something like this: "In the evening, when all is still, including our hearts, something comes to us over our gates." In the personalization of prayer, that something is Someone...a Speaker-Redeemer God.
3. The guilt/judgment/forgiveness-through-repentance process is governed by one's vision of natura rerum [the way things are, to use a recent translation of the Roman classic's title] and of lex naturae [the way things work], and of both lex orandi [the way one prays, yearns, hopes] and lex credendi [the way one believes, sees, trusts]. The Freudian handling of guilt is sicker than the actual guilt the counselee brings: ergo, almost all counselors now get off Freud's train on "guilt," or at least claim to. The biblical counselor's danger is that, in encouraging "return" [t<sup>e</sup>shuvah, "conversion"] to the biblical way of seeing and living in the world, the return may be not to a freer Eden but to a plastic garden, an old or new entrapment instead of a fresh liberation in God in Christ, a messianic banquet, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb....Pray hard, and trust.
4. Kafka's story of the man who thought he could go through the Gate if he saw someone else doing it. As he's dying, he asks why he never saw anyone go through the gate, and the Voice says, "Because it was for you, you alone."
5. #699 studies "gate" as a synecdoche-metonymy for "city," especially the juridical function, the city gate being the ancient semitic place of judgment. On which see paragraph 3, above.

7. Thus, Jn.10.7JB: Jesus says, "I am the gate of the sheepfold....I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture....I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." [A Christian midrash on Ps.23.]