



The Gates Are Open

a freeform larp by Chance J. Feldstein

cover art by [Lucas Pezeta](#)

A great rabbi once said the gates of prayer are sometimes open, and other times they are closed. But who guards those gates? In this game, you'll portray someone who processes requests for a god or other mythic figure. (Gods are busy. That's why they have staff.) Only one of today's petitions might make it to the Big Boss, but which will it be? And what rituals will your team prescribe for each petitioner?

The Gates Are Open is a freeform larp for 3 or more players. You can play it in-person as a silent committee / note-passing / gesture game, or remotely through the mail. It's loosely based on *Dear God* by Halden Ingwersen, an elegant and poignant game that has lived rent-free in my head ever since I first read it. I hope this game preserves some of the reverence and mystery of the original.

These rules include a recreational version similar to the original game, and a ritual version you might play with your coven, chavurah, or other working group. Follow the steps for the version your group prefers.

Supplies needed for in-person play:

- A copy of this game, and a copy of *Dear God*
- A table and chairs
- Name tags, and pens or markers
- As many sheets of paper as there are players

Additional supplies needed for remote play:

- Envelopes
- A shared document with everyone's physical address, one per line or cell
- (Optional) A moderator to anonymize the letters, if the players want to keep their petitions private

Begin by establishing group content standards. I suggest using the [RPG Consent Checklist](#), or [the larp version](#).

Step 1

Recreational - Choose a god/dess or other spirit who might receive prayers or requests from humans. You might pick an existing one from lore or fiction, or make up your own from scratch.

Ritual - Choose a god/dess that your group has an existing relationship with, or that you would like to build a greater connection with.

Use tarot or some other form of divination to ask whether that being is a good choice; if not, choose another.

Light candles, cast a circle, say prayers, place an offering on the altar, or do whatever else you normally would, to begin spirit communication.

Step 2

Write down your boss spirit's name, domain(s) or area(s) of expertise, and any other information about them that feels important. Then decide what kind of creatures you will be playing.

So, for example, you might all be playing:

- Angels of the One God of Israel
- Priestesses at the Temple of Athena

- Shoggoths under the thrall of Cthulhu the Great Old One
- Satyrs who run Dionysus's eternal revel
- Vestal Virgins tending the sacred hearth fire of Rome
- Dream servants of Lord Morpheus
- Valkyries ruling Valhalla at while Odin is away
- Elves laboring in Santa's workshop

Step 3

Recreational - Pick a name for your servant / messenger character. Write it on your name tag, if playing in person. If playing remotely, you'll use it instead of your real name when writing your return address (p.4).

If desired, and if other players agree it makes sense, you may give your character their own domain or area of expertise (e.g. the Angel of Harmony, the Valkyrie who specializes in unarmed combat, the priestess in charge of the kitchens).

Ritual - As above, but consider making your character in charge of some quality or ability you want to invoke or emphasize, for yourself, your group, or a community you're part of. Invoke this spirit as you normally would.

Step 4

Recreational - As in the first paragraph of Step One of *Dear God*, consider a problem either real or fictional, something your boss might care about. Make a specific or more general request related to this problem.

Optionally, you may decide the human petitioner's name, age, location, occupation, hobbies, and/or personality traits before deciding what question they'd ask.

If playing in-person, write your request on a piece of paper and pass it to your left. Please avoid requests related to extreme issues such as terminal illness, natural disaster, or severe legal trouble. This is a cooperative narrative game, not a competition to see who can think of the most horrible sob story. **As in a library, silence is essential for everyone to read their allotted quota of petitions each day,** so avoid making noise unless there's a rules question or a safety issue.

If playing remotely, proceed as paragraphs 2 and 3 of Step One of *Dear God* direct. Decorate and mail your letter to the person below you on the shared address document, or mail it to the moderator if your group prefers anonymity. If your name and address are at the bottom, your letter goes to the person at the top of the list.

Ritual - As above, but your petition should be real rather than fictional. You may change details to protect anonymity for yourself or someone else, but don't change the specifics of the problem or desire involved. Petitions on behalf of a family member, friend, or colleague are also fine.

Step 5

As Step Two of *Dear God*, with one modification: you may only write one action of the ritual (e.g. "light a candle", "say this prayer this many times", "dance this way for this long"). If you like, you may also add one word to the reply message. Write that word at the bottom of the page. Consider what makes sense, and also what the boss would want you to say, before writing anything.

When you're done with your first petition, pass it to your left or mail it to the appropriate person. You'll then receive a second petition with the first action and (possibly) word of a message already filled in. Add another action, and another word if you want to. If you're stumped, or if this petition matters enough to pass along to your master, you may instead write "Pass".

Repeat until all players have read and replied to every petition. Return the petitions to the players who wrote them. Count the number of "Pass" votes on each one.

Step 6

Recreational - Whichever petition(s) have the most Pass votes will also have the shortest and simplest ritual... but they also receive a personal message from the god or spirit who employs them. Have the player(s) who wrote them leave the room, or use a private chat, to determine the message(s) as a group. Or if you have a moderator, you can let them come up with the messages on their own.

Ritual - The petition(s) with the most Pass votes may be worthy of further study and exploration. Consult your divinatory tools and helping spirits to learn more, in whatever way works for your group. Pray or meditate about it. If necessary, seek outside help from a professional practitioner.

If you didn't anonymize the petitions, discuss what your group can do together (magical and mundane) to support the petitioner in solving their problem or fulfilling their desire. Then follow through on those plans.

Optional Debrief

If playing in-person, take a few minutes to allow anyone who wants to leave to do so. If playing remotely, pre-arrange a date and time to meet via Discord, Zoom, etc. Then together, discuss some or all of these questions:

- How did you feel about the ritual you received? Did it make sense? Did you perform it?
- How did you feel about the message, if there was one?
- If your petition got a lot of Pass votes, what do you (and everyone else) think that means?
- Have your thoughts or feelings about any of these spirits changed since the beginning of the game?
- Discuss how you look at the concepts of sacred play and ritual drama.
- What might have made this game better for you?

Inspirations:

- *Dear God* by Halden Ingwersen
- *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner
- *Mortal Affairs Review Board* and *Whose Deity Is It Anyway?* by Chance J. Feldstein
- Midrash Devarim Rabbah 2:12
- Every tandem story I've been involved in, and every chain letter I've ever received

Optional Ingredients from Previous Years:

- Silence (2019)
- Minority religious experience (2021)
- Committee larp (2021)

Special thanks to Nick Walker, for helping me to understand the need for games that include non-speaking people and people with auditory sensitivities; to Sarah Lynne Bowman, for everything; and to my coven.