



Soul Matters

**What does it mean to be
a people of THRESHOLDS?**

Small Group

May 2020

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Thresholds?

When encountering thresholds, we often talk as if our work is that of successfully “passing through” them. We speak of “making healthy transitions.” We seek out advice and support as we decide which thresholds to lean into and which to resist. The goal, it would seem, is figuring out how to travel *forward* in the *right* way.

But what if the true invitation of a threshold is not to successfully move from here to there, but instead to just sit and pause? What if we saw thresholds as resting places rather than as those moving walkways that transport us through airports? What if thresholds help us “become” by asking us to just “be” for a while? No moving. Just noticing and naming. Less traveling and more listening.

One of our Soul Matters ministers, the Rev. Sara LaWall, gets at this when she writes, “A [threshold is] a space to imagine a new way, and new self. Not moving or pushing but sitting and cultivating... [the goal] is to allow you space and time to reflect on your past, present, and future. To imagine a new beginning...”

And that imagining and naming may be more powerful than we usually assume. From the outside, it may seem that nothing has changed in our lives, and yet once that imaging takes shape in our minds and hearts, nothing is ever the same. The idea, the dream, the recognition suddenly takes on gravity. And that gravity creates an inevitability that transforms us, sometimes whether we like it or not.

Here’s how the writer Gary Zukav puts it, “At that moment [of realization], a threshold is crossed. What seemed unthinkable becomes thinkable... Once that realization has emerged, you can either honor it or ignore it, but you cannot forget it. What has become known can not become unknown again.”

So friends, maybe our question this month isn’t “Are you ready to change?” but “How have you *already* changed?” How have you *already* passed through? How is your “threshold work” the work of noticing a shift inside you that has *already* occurred?

There is, after all, no forgetting it. Only living it. And letting it live in us.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A ***A Threshold Snapshot***

One of the best ways to take ourselves back to the threshold moments of our lives is to revisit the pictures we took of them. So here are your instructions:

**Find a picture of yourself after having gone through
an important threshold or right in the middle of it!**

Likely, you will stumble on a number of other pictures of the same moment. Take your time going through them all. Try to notice the subtle differences, and what those subtle differences might be trying to tell you.

Bring your “threshold picture” to your group and be prepared to share the story that goes with it. What new thing did you notice about yourself as you looked at the picture again? Who was with you at the time? How did they help you get through that threshold moment or celebrate it? How are you still the same person in the picture? How have you changed?

Option B ***The Threshold of a New Day***

Our Jewish siblings live with a heightened sense of threshold every day. Their practice of hanging [mezuzahs](#) at their doorways calls them pause and be more intentional about what they want to bring with them and what they leave behind as they cross between their home and the world.

Imagine how your days might be different if you took a sacred pause at the doorway to your home and asked yourself, “What do I want to bring with me and what do I want to leave behind (or keep out) as I cross over?” How does my house and family need protected from the energy I picked up from the world today? How might my day be better if I bring some treasured value of mine with me to work or school today?

Why just imagine it?! This exercise invites you to *live it*. Allow the practice of hanging mezuzahs to inspire you. The goal is to alter something physical near the entrance of your home so you are reminded to pause as you go out and come in. Don’t worry about literally hanging something on your doorway, although you can if you want. Maybe just change the location of your key bowl or key rack. Maybe move the place where you put on and take off your shoes, locating it instead by a chair that reminds you to physically sit down for 20 seconds longer and reflect rather than rush out or in the door. Whatever it is, use your “doorway change” for at least a week to make you pause and answer the all-important threshold question:

**What do I want to bring with me and what do I want
to leave behind (or keep out) as I cross over?**

Come to your group ready to tell the story of what you did and how it made a difference in your days.

Oh, and here’s a great video about how one person finds meaning through her mezuzah:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EspYJ5NYHKE&list=LLup34DppxgIUA4QmkdOV5Gg&index=720>

Option C

Find or Create a “Thin Place” of Your Own

When talking about thresholds in a religious context, inevitably the topic of “thin places” will come up. It’s a term that is used to draw our attention to those spaces and moments when “the veil” between the ordinary and the sacred grows porous and we encounter the world and ourselves in a new way, even a transformative way.

This exercise is about having that encounter for ourselves.

Start with a bit of reading. Using the suggested articles below, spend some time this month learning about how others define and experience the thin places in their lives.

From there, figure out a way to find or create a thin place of your own. Many of us will likely remember a thin place experience from our past right away. Reconnecting with such memories is a gift in and of itself. But don’t stop there. The deeper gift lies in knowing that thin places are available in our daily living all the time.

So give yourself that gift, that encounter, this month. And come to your group meeting ready to share how it offered you a new experience of yourself and the world.

Suggested Reading on Thin Places

- Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/11/travel/thin-places-where-we-are-jolted-out-of-old-ways-of-seeing-the-world.html>
- Thin Places
<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/thin-places/>
- This column will change your life: where heaven and Earth collide
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/22/this-column-change-your-life-heaven-earth>
- Finding “Thin Places”
<https://www.ruminatemagazine.com/blogs/ruminate-blog/finding-thin-places>
- Where Are the Thin Places?
<https://aleteia.org/2016/02/24/where-are-the-thin-places/>
- Stories of Personal Thin Places
<https://www.thinplacesproject.com/water>

Option D

Find a “Threshold Call” in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of thresholds. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of “a threshold experience.” After you’ve found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question represents the call of your inner voice. Once you've figured that out, think about what that question is trying to get you to notice or acknowledge. Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. What was your favorite threshold time in your life? How are you honoring the joy and gift of that time in your life right now?
2. Who taught you the most about leaping through and trusting thresholds?
3. You've left that door open for a long time now. What keeps coming through hasn't been good for your soul for a while. What help do you need to finally close that door shut and lock it tight?
4. Looking back on the last major threshold you crossed, was there something you now wish you'd brought along? Or maybe something you wish you'd left back there?
5. What is your next challenge in [daring](#) to be human?
6. Who or what do you need to learn to love [next](#)?
7. What door have you not opened for a while? What room in your life has grown dusty and needs a visit?
8. What [new creation](#) wants to be born in and through you?
9. What new threshold is your awareness of white supremacy calling you to travel through?
10. Are you good at making graceful exits? Or is your style one of slipping out the door without anyone noticing? Or maybe even thundering out of the room?
11. What if thresholds are meant to rest in, not rush through?
12. How would someone be able to tell that you've made a journey through a spiritual threshold?
13. Is it time to turn from wishing you could have a new beginning to working on making a new ending?
14. Were you a child that loved to visit dark attics and basements? Or were you the kid who would do anything to avoid it? How about today? Do the attics and basements of your life lure you or scare you?
15. So you've made the journey over that threshold. How are you now supporting those who are still on the other side? The ones still working to make it over?
16. Has the pain of continuing exceeded the pain of stopping?
17. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of thresholds.

Word Roots

If you go back to the etymology of the word 'threshold,' it comes from 'threshing,' which is to separate the grain from the husk. So the threshold, in a way, is a place where you move into more critical and challenging and worthy fullness.

[John O'Donohue](#)

Wise Words

It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.

Bilbo Baggins, The Fellowship of the Ring

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Nin

Our only security is our ability to change.

John Lilly

If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.

Proverb, [author unknown](#)

There comes a time when the pain of continuing exceeds the pain of stopping. At that moment, a threshold is crossed. What seemed unthinkable becomes thinkable. Slowly, the realization emerges that the choice to continue what you have been doing is the choice to live in discomfort, and the choice to stop what you have been doing is the choice to breathe deeply and freely again. Once

that realization has emerged, you can either honor it or ignore it, but you cannot forget it. What has become known can not become unknown again.

Gary Zukav

Those who stand at the threshold of life always waiting for the right time to change are like the person who stands at the bank of a river waiting for the water to pass so they can cross on dry land.

Joseph B. Wirthlin

We're already in the new age, she said. What does that mean? I said, It means we can stop waiting & start living, she said. But after she left, I still waited a little while more just to be safe.

[StoryPeople](#)

The purpose of the journey is compassion. The return is seeing the radiance everywhere.

Joseph Campbell

I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. Because I was once a searching adolescent, given to moods and ecstasies, these are still part of me, and always will be... This does not mean that I ought to be trapped or enclosed in any of these ages... but that they are in me to be drawn on... Far too many people think that forgetting what it is like to think and feel and touch and smell and taste and see and hear like a three-year-old or a thirteen-year-old or a twenty-three-year-old means being grown up. When I'm with these people I feel that if this is what it means to be a grown-up, then I don't ever want to be one. Instead of which, if I can retain a child's awareness and joy, and be fifty-one, then I will really learn what it means to be grown up.

Madeleine L'Engle, author of A Wrinkle in Time, wrote in A Circle of Quiet

There's a trick to the Graceful Exit, I suspect. It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, a relationship, is over and to let it go. It means leaving what's over without denying its validity or its past importance in our lives... It's hard to learn that we don't leave the best parts of ourselves behind, back in the dugout or the Capital or the office. We own what we learned back there, the experience and the growth are grafted onto our lives. And when we exit, we can take ourselves along.

Ellen Goodman

Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.

Maria Robinson

Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step toward disaster... We resist transition not because we can't accept the change, but because we can't accept letting go of that piece of ourselves that we have to give up when and because the situation has changed.

[William Bridges](#)

A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience of a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up. At this threshold, a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope.

[John O'Donohue](#)

then on the shore

Full poem at

<https://hellopoetry.com/poem/1770153/-then-on-the-shore/>

On the struggle with and lure of liminal space

"...I feel at home in the liminal, where the tensions hurt and erode but it's safe here, or safe enough... It hurts but not as much as it should."

Poem - The Layers, Stanley Kunitz

Full poem at

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54897/the-layers>

Video reading by author:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wk6xW41EFoA>

Video reading from alternative perspective:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRQIISF4prA>

"...And in my darkest night when the moon was covered and I roamed through wreckage a nimbus clouded voice directed me: 'live in the layers, not on the litter,' and though I lack the art to decipher it no doubt the next chapter in my book of transformations is already written. I am not done with my changes." What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb? What if our America is not dead but a country still waiting to be born? What if the story of America is one long labor?

[Valarie Kaur](#)

If American democracy fails, the ultimate cause will not be a foreign invasion or the power of big money or the greed and dishonesty of some elected officials or a military coup or the internal communist/socialist/fascist takeover that keeps some Americans awake at night. It will happen because we—you and I—became so fearful of each other, of our differences and of the future, that we unraveled the civic community on which democracy depends, losing our power to resist all that threatens it and call it back to its highest form.

[Parker Palmer](#)

For now I will focus briefly on this "state of carefully repressed terror in relation to blacks." This terror is the reason for white culture having found the need to turn blackness into something monstrous, and as "racists confessing to their crimes is not in their self-interests (Kendi, Prologue), we continue to reject black Americans as part of this country, whether by deleting them from historical narratives, or by eliminating them from our consciousness. But the monster always returns, no matter how often we reject it (Cohen). It crosses the liminal space from its existence on the thresholds and reminds us of its presence until we acknowledge it as belonging to this house, this American house.... Historically and currently, blackness has been kept on the threshold of American consciousness and American vision...

[Naomi McPeters](#)

The truth is, indeed, that love is the threshold of another universe.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Threshold

R.S. Thomas

Full poem at

<https://jrbenjamin.com/2013/06/01/threshold/>

On “sacred thresholds” and the hunger to touch the Sacred

Psychic or spiritual thresholds are not known for their grand entrances... Spiritual thresholds are not even necessarily known by their size. They are known, I think, by their quality. It's almost as if the air is different. An electricity? An intensity? A vibration? Certainly, it's invisible to the naked eye, but it's there, the change, the shift, the entrance, ready to be sensed and engaged.

[Rev. Karen K. Johnston](#)

There is in Celtic mythology the notion of ‘thin places’ in the universe where the visible and the invisible world come into their closest proximity... Mountains and rivers are particularly favored as thin places marking invariably as they do, the horizontal and perpendicular frontiers. But perhaps the ultimate of these thin places in the human condition are the experiences people are likely to have as they encounter suffering, joy, and mystery.

[Peter Gomes](#)

A friend recently taught me a beautiful Sufi practice. When changing activities, the practice is to put your hand on your heart, pause for a moment and say 'Bismillah', which means in 'the name of God.' Anything can become a 'Bismillah moment'."

[Polly Burns](#)

Whatever your threshold event is, whether it's developing a curative vaccine, entering into marriage, starting a new job, moving into a new home, becoming a parent, or becoming a UU minister, I hope you allow yourself the grace of a self-hug as well as the hugs of loved ones. May you be open to the grace that seeks to embrace us all on our journeys.

Rev. Daniel Gregoire

Music

We create two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations. Follow the links below to connect with this month's "threshold songs."

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Thresholds](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Thresholds](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Videos & Podcasts

The Parable of the Trapeze

Danaan Parry

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvV5N4hOGc>

Text: <https://balanceyourlife.com/2016/01/the-parable-of-the-trapeze/>

The Layers, Stanley Kunitz

Video reading by author:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wk6xW41EFoA>

Video reading from alternative perspective:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRQIISF4prA>

The Syracuse Community Choir sings "We Shall Be Known" by MaMuse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9ONVrVxLlO>

The World Is Our Field of Practice - On Being

Rev. angel Kyodo williams

<https://onbeing.org/programs/angel-kyodo-williams-the-world-is-our-field-of-practice/>

“The willingness to be in denial is dying in a meaningful number of us.... And when it happens in enough of us, in a short enough period of time, at the same time, then you have a tipping point, and the culture begins to shift.... bring it on. I have to face it; we have to face it.”

Articles

The Journey of Transformation, Jim Marsden

<https://onbeing.org/blog/the-journey-of-transformation/>

“The journey of transformation begins with an event in one’s life sometimes referred to as “The Call”...

The New Midlife Crisis: Why (and How) It's Hitting Gen X Women

Ada Calhoun

<http://www.oprah.com/sp/new-midlife-crisis.html>

We Are Not Middle Aged: What Medieval Women Taught Me About My 40s

Kaya Oakes

<https://onbeing.org/blog/kaya-oakes-we-are-not-middle-aged-what-medieval-women-taught-me-about-my-40s/>

The End Of Capitalism Has Begun

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR1THrLleFa3W85tMf5JerfS-383CmBldtlu5lo1NLIiDNX2eubQ_i0zWs10

Books

To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

John O'Donohue

Thresholds: How to Thrive Through Life's Transitions to Live Fearlessly and Regret-Free

Sherre Hirsch

Darkening the Doorways: Black Trailblazers and Missed Opportunities in Unitarian Universalism

Mark D. Morrison-Reed

Related article [here](#)

Healing The Heart Of Democracy

Parker Palmer

Review:

<https://www.ywboston.org/2018/04/healing-the-heart-of-democracy/>

On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men

Richard Rohr

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End

Atul Gawande

On the thresholds of sickness and death

Video reflection by author:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRkr09ZMI3w>
&

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kEsEYG9OUg>

Movies

[Boyhood](#)

[Moonlight](#)

[To Sir, With Love](#)

[Sliding Doors](#)

[A Star is Born](#)

[Wild](#)

[Jojo Rabbit](#) (On the threshold of fascism.)

[What a Way to Go: Life at the End of Empire](#)

Family Movies: On growing up, letting go and holding on to the blessings of our childhoods

[Toy Story 3](#)

[Monsters Inc.](#)

[The Chronicles of Narnia](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).

Find support for bringing the
monthly themes home and into your family life with

Soulful Home: A Guide for Families:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>

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