

Threshold and Change

In Thailand, the spirits are a part of everyday life and the raised threshold to a home or temple is reserved for the spirit guardian and also acts as a barrier to keep out evil spirits. Whether you believe in spirits or not is neither here nor there; if you are visiting Thai homes and temples, you show respect for local culture by stepping over the threshold; don't place your foot on it. And don't even think about sitting on it. **Roy Cavanagh, from his blog**

On Spiritual Thresholds. I've become interested in spiritual thresholds, that point of entry that leads us from one spiritual "room" to the next. Thresholds mark our progress, and they represent forward movement in our spiritual maturity. It makes sense, then, that it would be precisely at the thresholds that we experience the most pressure. After all, the enemy of your soul has a vested interest in keeping your interest low in moving forward. The enemy of your soul is not a fan of break-throughs (he prefers spiritual lethargy). So it seems to me that it is as I approach the threshold from one level of intimacy with Christ to another, deeper level, that I begin to encounter greater pressure. Right at the threshold itself, just before the break-through, that pressure can sometimes seem overwhelming.

How interesting that the Hebrew word for threshold captures this very idea. The word is *caphaph* (pronounced "sa-faf"). The word literally means "to wait at the threshold," but it can also mean "to snatch away." Those two definitions together tell a fascinating story. There we are, waiting at the threshold of a new spiritual place, hearing God's invitation to come on in. Meanwhile, some devilish force is luring us backward, creating pressure against our progress. The enemy of our souls does not want us to make these moves from one room to the next and while he is always tempting us away from growth, it seems to be precisely at the doorways that he becomes most desperate and most forceful. I don't think of the enemy as being particularly strategic so much as reactionary, so it makes sense that the real pressure would be at the threshold.

Years ago, a team from our church hosted a thing we call Cowboy Church in several inner-city settings. I was with one of those groups who ministered to about two dozen precious children who live pretty rough lives. I think the take-away image for me from that week was opening the door one night to the room in which I'd been working to find my husband, Steve, holding little D'Marcus by his armpits. Little D'Marcus had one foot on one door jam and the other foot on the other door jam, and he was screaming, "I don't want to go in there!" And Steve was so patiently smiling and saying, "That's fine ... but we are going in there!" And you'd think that a kid being shoved into a room by his armpits would not bounce back but five minutes later, little D'Marcus was having the time of his life. The next day little D'Marcus was right there with us again. Evidently, it was the threat of a new room that most rattled him, not the reality of it.

Carolyn Moore, excerpted from her blog

My good luck in life was to be a really frightened person. I'm fortunate to be a coward, to have a low threshold of fear, because a hero couldn't make a good suspense film.

Alfred Hitchcock

A surprising number of scientific advances have been made and masterpieces of art created by individuals just on the threshold of adulthood. **Benjamin Spock**

Kindness eases Change.

Love quiets fear.

And a sweet and powerful

Positive obsession

Blunts pain,

Diverts rage,

And engages each of us

In the greatest,

The most intense

Of our chosen struggles.

—**Olivia Butler**, *Parable of the Talents*

Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world. **Harriet Tubman**

If you can't change it, change your attitude. **Maya Angelou**

Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself. **Jalaluddin Mevlana Rumi**

Grief can have a quality of profound healing because we are forced to a depth of feeling that is usually below the threshold of awareness. **Stephen Levine**

The mind is in a constant state of flux. No thought, no feeling, no sensation lasts for more than an instant before it is transformed into the next state, next thought, the next sensation. Note those moments... As they pass through, note such states as confidence, bewilderment, effort, trust, distrust, pleasure, discomfort, boredom, devotion, inquiry, pride, anger, desire, etc.

Stephen Levine

Flowers

This morning I was walking upstairs
from the kitchen, carrying your
beautiful flowers, the flowers you

brought me last night, calla lilies
and something else, I am not
sure what to call them, white flowers,

of course you had no way of knowing
it has been years since I bought
white flowers—but now you have

and here they are again. I was carrying
your flowers and a coffee cup
and a soft yellow handbag and a book

of poems by a Chinese poet, in
which I had just read the words “come
or go but don’t just stand there

in the doorway,” as usual I was
carrying too many things, you
would have laughed if you saw me.

It seemed especially important
not to spill the coffee as I usually
do, as I turned up the stairs,

inside the whorl of the house as if
I were walking up inside the lilies.
I do not know how to hold all
the beauty and sorrow of my life.

Cynthia Zarin, *Orbit: Poems by Cynthia Zarin*, 2017

Zen commentary on doors. Do not think of doors as obstacles to whatever is on the other side. Practice opening them magnanimously and closing them with care. Through the mundane activity of entering or leaving a doorway, you can make a commitment to being either inside or outside of something larger than yourself. You can think about what you are leaving behind, about what you are entering into. In the Zen training halls, there are rules about opening, closing, entering, and exiting through zendo doors. These rules are liberating. It is one of the great ironies of Zen practice that through the rigid use of such rules, a sense of freedom is gained.

Doors are more than wood or metal, more than hinges, pivots, fulcrums, locks. They are places that can become turning points—either you pass through them, or they block your path. You

discover your own limits and thresholds. Sometimes it doesn't take anything very substantial for you to fabricate a closed door. For example, when the lock on a bathroom door is absent or broken, a cough, whistle, or quiet song can bar the door. At other times, it may take a more drastic solution to achieve this effect. The writer Jack London, gregarious as he was, often felt the need for privacy when he was writing. He hand-lettered a small sign for his door to be used at such times: "1. Please do not enter without knocking. 2. Please do not knock."

As you walk from room to room in your own home, try to really experience the transition of traveling from one place to another. Notice the differences between motion and stillness. Sense how you relate to various enclosures and open spaces. Feel the differences between entering and leaving, if there are differences. Contemplate the thoughts that become caught between places, in the doorways themselves, and think of the people who have walked these paths before you. While you're thinking of others, the doors of your household begin to become the gates of compassion.

Suzuki Roshi stressed repeatedly that, just like the swinging door, we should move freely back and forth throughout the various aspects of our lives, both wholly independent and, at the same time, completely connected to all things. He viewed the very act of breathing at the breath's entering and exiting a doorway. The image of stepping through a doorway is symbolic of your actual entry into your own life. It might be compared to a film loop in which you're entering the same door over and over again. You are always entering through the doorway of this very moment. There is no retreat. No heading for the exits. Just a continual "going in" to this eternal NOW!

From *Sweeping Changes: Discovering the Joy of Zen in Everyday Tasks* (2020), **Gary Thorp**.

For Reflection and Discussion

A Did this month's guide or topic spark any strong reactions? Did you find any of the quotes particularly compelling for one reason or another?

B Are you facing challenges currently relating to crossing thresholds or coping with change?

C How does your experience at All Souls help you understand and live out your experience of change and threshold in a spiritually nourishing way?