



Thresholds

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community.

It was easily the widest threshold I have come across in an interior doorway — a beautifully finished piece of Pippy Oak stretching more than half a foot on either side of the door. Sanded smooth as a riverbed stone and varnished like a sacred text written in the script of the tree's grain and punctuated by its large knots.

When I first saw this beautiful threshold into the sanctuary of Common Ground Meditation Center, I approached it with reverent curiosity, shoeless in keeping with sangha customs. Remembering ancient taboos against walking on a threshold, I took as big a step as my legs allowed to stretch across it. Then, I noticed the sangha members entering the room, every one of them stepping right on that threshold as if it were an arboreal doormat specifically meant for the soles of their stocking-clad feet.

Later, I learned the threshold was purposely designed to *require* that you step on it. It was meant to make you notice, I was told, a reminder to pay attention as you enter the sanctuary for meditation and as you leave after meditation is over.

Thresholds, physically and metaphorically, are places of encounter and transition — between inside and outside, the known and unknown, here and there, and then and yet to come. In its literal sense, a threshold is a raised strip at the base of a doorway that keeps the mud or snow and cold from coming inside. Just as I did in the sangha, we typically step over it as we come and go, focusing on one side or the other rather than on the place in between.

Not surprisingly, we often do the same when crossing our metaphorical thresholds, too. We try to step across, not lingering in the uncertainty and chaos

found there. Whether it's a passage we have desired and chosen (graduation; new relationship, baby, or identity; new job, opportunity or capacity), or one wholly unbidden and unwanted (the end of a job, relationship, role or ability, or onset of illness or decline), we often avoid dwelling in the risk and dangers in between.

Thresholds require us to leave something, someone, perhaps even some part of ourselves behind. They are marked by vulnerability, as we face the possibilities of transformation, in our surroundings and often in identity. On the other side, we might be required to do things we've never done before, to face fears we have shunned for years, to discover our limitations as well as new abilities, gifts, and opportunities.

Honoring the risks and challenges present on the threshold, many cultures have stories, rituals, blessings and even deities offering protection and safe passage. In ancient Rome, the god Janus reigned over comings and goings. His image, carved over the gates of Roman cities, showed two faces connected at the back and pointed in opposite directions. With one face looking out from the city gate and the other looking in, Janus promised protection while reminding those passing below to notice what they were leaving and where they were going.

There is no question: we are globally all living in threshold times today. The pandemic has quickly swept away our familiar ways of being, living and doing. The magnitude and variety of our losses and uncertainties are too many to count — including the loss of many familiar rites of passage (graduations and coming of age) that happen in the spring and now must be delayed or reimagined.

It is natural to focus on what we are losing, and equally natural to ask, how long will this last and what will the world be like when we move on? But what might we learn — and what might be possible — if we pause and focus instead on the wide, perhaps frightening but also potent threshold of not knowing? To imagine and discover new ways of being present to our heart's truth and to one another in this in between time? What are the stories, rituals and sacred powers that might offer us protection as we do?

Our congregational life offers us the protection of spiritual practices and covenantal relationships to help us all pause and notice what we are departing from and where we are headed. To linger in the chaos of the unknown, which will be different for each of us, but need not be experienced entirely alone. To feel the threshold beneath the soles of our feet. To learn and to practice what grounds us, even there. To notice new choices when we do. To make use of the chaos and choose wisely when we move on.

The challenges of this threshold time are as daunting as they are unique. But if we can pledge ourselves anew to one another now, the net we make for protection and connection will serve us well beyond this time, into the unknowns of every time to come.

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Thresholds Theme Resources
Resources for further reflection
are in this month's Chalice Circle
packet at [www.unityunitarian.org/
chalice-circles.html](http://www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html).