

Soul Matters 2019-2020

January's Theme: *Threshold*

The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's monthly theme from the previous month in more depth. Here's my reflection on this theme from The Beacon newsletter for January:

January is the threshold to a new year in our western calendar. 2020 is also the start of a new decade. What will it hold – for each of us as well as for our world? Having grown up on the prairies, I imagine this new beginning like a fresh blanket of snow, sparking in the sunlight, untouched, brimming with promise.

Some people make New Year's resolutions. What I find works most effectively for me is to focus my intentions on what I want to be doing that year. I make time to step back from my day-to-day living and formulate my plans. Some things I have some control over – like plans I make with family and friends, self-care actions (sleeping, eating, getting exercise), how to be of serve in the communities of which I am part. Some I have less control over - such as unexpected health crises. Generally, I'm healthy and yet I know various people who are challenged by ill health. In these and other circumstances, how do we make use of the options we do have and make decisions that will promote our well-being and those around us?

Whatever your circumstances, I invite you to set aside some time and take a step back from your life and consider:

- What areas of my life do I think are going well? What do I want to continue doing to support these?
- What areas of my life am I feeling challenged by? What can I do in response to that?
- Who could I turn to for support, for ideas, for a listening ear, so I can check in with them during this year about my plans in response to the two questions above?

Beacon is a place for support, for learning, for sharing. I hope this year, you include activities in this community that focus your passions, interests and skills in ways that serve others and are life-giving to you as well as expand your horizons.

I wish you good health and well-being in this coming year.

Rev. Meg Roberts

A Spiritual Exercise for This Coming Month

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself— something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could. ***I invite you to choose one of the spiritual exercises below and try it out over the coming month.***

Option A

In prayer or meditation, focus on the threshold of crossing from 2019 into the beginning of 2020. What arises? You may want to open yourself to connect with the Spirit of Life, which offers us insights into our lives, who we are, where we are, right now. Consider what you may want to share with the group at our next Soul Matters Circle about this threshold.

Option B

Take time to consider significant thresholds you have crossed in your life. What marked those changes? What insights did you gain about yourself? What did you learn about the meaning of life? Come back to the group with an insight or thoughts to share.

Option C

Consider the role of rites of passage in your life. It might be one shared by others (e.g., marriage, child naming and dedication or baptism, or memorial service). It might be one you created for your specific circumstance. How did that rite of passage support the crossing of a threshold in your life – passing from one stage to another? How did it embody what you believe in? If you are at a life threshold and you’d like to create a rite of passage this month, please do. Come back to the group with a response you’d like to share about a rite of passage in your life.

Option D

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme of “threshold”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Come to the group at our next meeting to share what it was like to create this exercise, how it was to do it, and what you learned from it.

Questions to Live With:

Don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that 'hooks' you most**. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time**. Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.

1. What areas of my life do I think are going well? What do I want to continue doing to support these?
2. What areas of my life am I feeling challenged by? What can I do in response to that?
3. Who could I turn to for support, for ideas, for a listening ear, so I can check in with them during this year about my plans for this year?
4. Where am I at a threshold in my life?
5. How do I cross the threshold into living the life I always wanted to live?
6. What rites of passage have been most meaningful to me? Why?
7. If you believe in a higher power (however you describe it), how does "threshold" connect to your relationship with that higher power?
8. What question do you wish had been included here? Ask yourself that question instead.

Other Resources

Quotes for the weekly e-news update: Beacon This Week

January 2 -

"Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering, 'It will be happier!'"
— Alfred Lord Tennyson

January 9 -

"Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,
That stand upon the threshold of the new."
— Edmund Waller

January 16 -

"I have a thing for doors. I always think of them as a threshold of something new."
— Jada Pinkett Smith

January 23 -

"The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind."
— Khalil Gibran

January 30 -

“Rituals, anthropologists will tell us, are about transformation. The rituals we use for marriage, baptism or inaugurating a president are as elaborate as they are because we associate the ritual with a major life passage, the crossing of a critical threshold, or in other words, with transformation.”

— Abraham Verghese

Family Resources – *How does your family recognize the role of ritual and marking the thresholds we cross together?* Let Meg and Ashley know how it goes and if you want to share it with others at Beacon!

Learn about the role of ritual in your family:

Read this article by Meg Cox from the UU World magazine (July/August 2003):

“New family traditions: Create rituals with and for your children to celebrate your family's values.”

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/creating-rituals-with-for-children>

Option 1

Create a new ritual for your family – consult with your family to see what might interest them. Try it out this month and see how it goes. Adapt it as you see fit, so it is interesting and relevant to everyone.

Option 2:

If your family is going through a significant change or has come through one recently, consider creating a rite of passage to mark that change. Feel free to consult with Meg if you'd like ideas about how to do this.

Please let me know what you think of these family resources and what else we could provide that would be useful about this and other monthly themes.

Quotes

“We may be happy but just don't know it yet. Many want to rebuke themselves for not finding the threshold of well being, since they simply haven't learnt to be nice to themselves and to enjoy the privileged twinklings of life. (“C'est quand le bonheur ?”)”

— Erik Pevernagie

Three things have a limited threshold:
Time, pain, and death.
While truth, love, and knowledge –
Are boundless.

Three things are needed
For humanity to co-exist:
Truth, peace and basic needs.
Everything else -
Is irrelevant.”

— Suzy Kassem, *Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem*

Worship Resources

Chalice Lighting by Lois Van Leer

We light this chalice on the brink of a new year
Letting go of what has been
Open and hopeful for what may come
Renewed, restored, ready
To live Life fully anew
May we move forward with intention.

Chalice Lighting by Cynthia Landrum

In the bleak and cold winter,
We gather ourselves in
To light the fire to warm our spirits,
To kindle the flame of love and hope.

Meditation by Kate R. Walker

In between, liminal, that space where we wait.
Between moments; events, results, action, no action.
To stand on the threshold, waiting for something to end,
And something new to arrive, a pause in the rumble of time.
Awareness claims us, alert, a shadow of something different.

In between invitation and acceptance.
In between symptom and diagnosis.
In between send and receipt of inquiry and question.
In between love given and love received.

Liminality, a letting go, entering into confusion,
ambiguity and disorientation.
A ritual begun, pause ... look back at what once was,
Look forward into what becomes.
Identity sheds a layer, reaches into something uncomfortable to wear.

In between lighting of the match and the kindling of oil.
In between choosing of text and the reading of words.
In between voices and notes carried through the air into ears to hear.
In between creation thrusts ever forward.

Social hierarchies may disassemble and structures may fall.
Communities may revolt or tempt trust.
Tradition may falter or creativity crashes forward.
Leaders may step down or take charge.
The people may choose or refuse.

In between, storm predicted, the horizon beacons.
In between, theology of process reminds us to step back.
In between, where minutia and galaxies intermingle with microbes and mysteries.
In between, liminal, that space where we wait: Look, listen, feel, breathe.

Poem - Winter Meditation” by Tess Baumberger

Something has changed in me this winter.
In the past I’ve focused on how long winter is,
How miserable I find it, and how it seems so interminable.

This winter, I find myself thinking instead
That every day, every hour, every minute
Brings us just that much closer to spring.

We all experience wintry times,
When things seem harsh and frozen,
Or muffled by layered shrouds of snow.

It is helpful to remember that each day that dawns bleakly,
Each night that wraps its cold cloak around our hearts,

Brings us closer to that time of warm and vibrant sun.

It is perhaps helpful to consider that turning toward spring is an active thing,
The earth which seems so stable in fact flies quickly through space,
On its path that tilts us ever towards the Source.

So, too, each memory we lay to rest,
Each truth in ourselves that we encounter and accept,
Each wrong act that we forgive, ushers us on towards our renewal.

Closing by Amy Zucker Morgenstern

When we take fire from our chalice, it does not become less.
It becomes more.
And so we extinguish our chalice, but we take its light and warmth with us,
multiplying their power by all of our lives, and sharing it with the world.