

Thresholds

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My 6th grade teacher was a vocabulary fiend. Every day, when we walked into the classroom, there were three new words on the blackboard. She got every single word that she gave to us from the front page of the New York Times. Every month, on the last day of the month, we had a vocabulary test on all the words we had learned that month. The words, and their definitions, continue to swirl through my head.

Nocturnal: of the night.

Versatile: able to do many things well.

Fortunately, the love for words that Mrs. Redlener planted inside the hearts and souls of her 6th graders has continued to grow and develop. Just like her 6th grade class, we Jews are *ohavei milim*, lovers of words.

I remember a particular word that I learned when I was a rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College in 1982. The word was "*liminal*" and we managed to focus upon that word and its implications for an entire semester. I have been focusing on that word again these days, often, because it describes so much of what is happening right now, for you and for me. The word "*liminal*" comes from the Latin word "*limen*" which means "*threshold*."

To be at a liminal moment in one's life, is to be at a threshold, to be in the midst of a transition, to be coming and going, entering and leaving, in motion and in suspension, all at the same time. You, Temple Beth Tikvah, are in the midst of a liminal moment. And I, still the rabbi of TBT, am in the midst of a liminal moment. But for each of us, the liminal moment that we are in the midst of, is very different.

For me: I am retiring. Nancy and I are looking forward to more time with our family, to traveling, to discovering new ways to live and learn and grow.

You are about to embark upon a new chapter in TBT's history, and a new chapter in your own story, with a new rabbi as your spiritual guide. I could not be more thrilled than to know that you will be in the very sure hands of Rabbi Danny Moss, a rabbi of substance and warmth, who understands, admires and supports the values that are so treasured by everyone here at TBT.

Big changes are in store for each of us, rabbi and congregation. Different changes, to be sure. But you and I will each gain strength walking into an unknown future by relying upon a proven past. We will bring our memories with us. We will bring the wisdom of our experiences with us. We will bring our highlights with us.

As your rabbi, much of my work has been focused upon honoring the *liminal* moments in your lives. It has been my privilege to be with you when you brought newborns into the world, when you married your partners, when you grieved over losses, when you celebrated a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. I am so gratified to think that I have been able to help you go from one place to another with wondrous Jewish rituals that help to carry us across the threshold.

And now at this liminal moment in my own life, I want to thank you for helping me cross this major threshold. With your wonderful farewells, the spectacular service last week, the one-on-one goodbye visits and an amazing party on Sunday that Nancy and I so look forward to. The laughter and recollections. The Religious School and Preschool gifts. The gift of an original piece of art that already graces our home. The trees that will be planted in our honor in our newly landscaped campus.

All of these loving farewells that you have lavished upon me and Nancy have helped us across the threshold. They have helped us walk through this liminal moment, so that we might better cross all the thresholds that we encounter in our lives.

I am convinced that this is the true reason why we put *mezuzot* on our doors. Not just so that the "*shomer delatot yisra'el*," the Guardian of the doors of Israel, can protect what is inside our homes, but so the Shomer can guard our comings and our goings, our changes, our transitions, our movements to and fro,

away and towards, our smallest steps and our biggest ones too that take us over a threshold and into a new realm.

The actual threshold moment—the literal moment that you are crossing through that doorway—you are, to use the Yiddish phrase: *"nishta hin and nishta heyr."* You are neither here nor there; you are in that suspended, liminal moment. It is where we are, right now.

When I was in 6th grade, I was given some pretty difficult vocabulary words to grapple with, words like "nocturnal" and "versatile". It took being in rabbinical school to advance to a word like "liminal." And now, after 37 years in the rabbinate, I'm faced with the hardest words of all, words like "love" and "goodbye." The simple act of saying goodbye is so hard but so necessary. This poem says it best:

The hardest things to say

 Hello

 I love you

 Goodbye

To say hello

 Is to begin to say I love you

 Is to begin to say goodbye

To say I love you

 Is to profoundly say hello

 Is to declare the inevitability of goodbye

To say goodbye

 is to affirm the glory of risking the hello

 to know fulfillment in saying the hardest things to say.

Thank you for the fulfillment I have found with you. May God watch over your comings and your goings. May you be fulfilled in every endeavor, in every way, today and tomorrow.

AMEN