

Meeting Courage and Fear in Threshold Moments

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In December 2019, the 7th Conference for Culture at the Threshold was held at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, with the theme “Self-Courage and Self-Transformation at the Threshold.” We had the pleasure of contributing a biography and social art workshop that fit with this theme of culture at the threshold, and we were joined by twenty-seven participants from twelve countries. While the term *threshold* often connotes major transitions, such as the thresholds of birth and death, we wanted to explore the thresholds of daily life – the moments in which we encounter the possibility of transformative change if we are able to release our hold on the familiar. In such moments, the past, present, and future converge. There is a certain inertia that keeps us anchored in the past, something drawing us from the future, and the question of how to act in the present.

In the workshop, which we titled “The Courage to Die and the Fear to Become”, we focused on the potential for bringing new life to traditions that had lost their fire. You might think to yourself what traditions in your life would fit this description. What are the ingredients needed to transform such traditions? As the title suggests, we worked with *courage* and *fear*. When it comes to the big and small threshold moments of life, there is a clear need for courage. Courage is a forward-directed energy that keeps one focused on a goal in spite of resistance or adversity. Threshold experiences are also often connected with feelings of fear. Take a minute to think about the associations that you have with fear in such moments. Fear is often seen as an obstacle or hindrance in these circumstances – even as the reason that courage is necessary. However, we considered the possibility that fear can be a constructive tool for navigating thresholds. Fear can promote slowing down and increasing awareness – a countermovement to that of courage. If we welcome fear as a messenger, it can make us more receptive to what is coming and more present to this unknown future.

What is the relationship between fear and courage in these threshold moments? When fear leads, there can be a tendency to freeze or retreat to the familiar. On the other hand, resisting or avoiding fear can lead to foolhardiness – as one participant put it, “When I don’t have *enough* fear, I jump forward and fall flat on my face!” To step through the threshold with confidence and caution in equal measure, we need the courage to let the past die with a healthy dose of fear of what is to come. When we do so, a spark of *enthusiasm* can arise. Enthusiasm is a short-lived burst of creative energy that balances the forward drive of courage with the alertness of fear. With enthusiasm, we open ourselves to the presence of the spirit – in fact, the word enthusiasm derives from a Greek word meaning “divinely inspired.” We could say that the feeling of enthusiasm is an outer manifestation of an inner spiritual impulse.

Bringing consciousness to these daily threshold experiences serves the process of human becoming that is necessary in our time. As Rudolf Steiner described a century ago, “In the future, human beings, the older they get, will need to take in spiritual impulses if they want to be able to grow younger and younger and really develop their inner life. If they do so, they may have grey hair and wrinkles and all kinds of infirmities, but they will get younger and younger, for their souls are taking in impulses which they will take with them through the gate of death.

People who relate only to the body cannot grow younger, for their souls will share in everything the body experiences. Of course, it will not be possible to change the habit of going grey, but it is possible for a grey head to gain a young soul from the wellsprings of spiritual life" (Dornach, 26 October 1917). We hope this workshop provided some tools for working toward this needed impulse for the soul to grow younger while getting older.