



Holidays: Thresholds

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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There are a number of interesting theories about the origin of the word "threshold". In ancient times houses were built at ground level. Families who were poor therefore had dirt floors. Sometimes they used straw which some term as "thresh" to prevent slippage when walking. If the straw was trampled, it might move. Households would therefore put a divider or "threshold" in the doorway to prevent the straw from moving to places where it didn't belong.

Other theories argue that the threshold was built high enough to keep water and animals from entering under the door of the house.

Both theories imply that the threshold separates and protects.

We usually talk about the tradition of a groom carrying his bride over the threshold. This signifies a new beginning for the two of them. It began as a practical as well as a symbolic action.

In psychology, the threshold theory implies that stress and trouble can pile in layers into a person's life. An individual can cope only until the top of the threshold is reached and then the slightest "little" thing can push them over the top. Crisis therapists usually try to lower the stress a little so that the person is able to cope again. But this does not really solve the problem. The next time a little problem occurs they will be over the top again and unable to cope.

And so, December 31st is the threshold that divides this year from the one that we face. It signifies that there is a difference, a new beginning awaiting us. All we need to do is carry ourselves over that threshold and we will be there. For some, there is little to do. Others might symbolize the new beginning with a new year's celebration or resolutions to make life changes in the weeks to come.

The other part of this though is the fact that each of us needs to deal with the unique psychological threshold in our own personal lives.

Some have learned how to reduce, deflect or eliminate the difficulties that might otherwise form layers. Assertiveness, self-care and good boundaries have facilitated health for them.

Others are at a point in life where the stress level is right at the top or has just poured over the top. Coping is difficult. The important thing for them to remember is that trying to move the level to slightly below the top is not enough. Work is needed to eliminate the layers of old stress, hurts and resentments and that usually requires professional help.

Well, as the new year approaches rapidly there are two thresholds to consider.

First of all, when you cross the calendar's threshold, will you do so with expectation and an attitude of new beginnings? Secondly, what will you do to ensure that you are well below the threshold level needed to enjoy psychological well-being?

My very best wishes for a happy and healthy new year.