

## Liminal Space

### The Liminal Paradox

By Fr. Richard Rohr

Sheryl Fullerton, an editor and author with whom I have worked for many years, received a cancer diagnosis two years ago which required a difficult surgery. Like many individuals who are on earnest spiritual journeys, she allowed the painful and challenging experience to transform and guide her to greater wisdom.

When we find ourselves in liminal space, does it matter whether we are pushed or whether we jump? Either way, we are not where or what we were before, nor do we know how or where we will land in our new reality. We are, as the anthropologist Victor Turner (1920–1983) wrote, betwixt and between. In that space—which is mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—we are destabilized, disoriented. The old touchstones, habits, and comforts are now past, the future unknown. We only wish such a time to be over. We may be impatient to pass through it quickly, with as little distress as possible, even though that is not likely. . . .

But what if we can choose to experience this liminal space and time, this uncomfortable now, as . . . a place and state of creativity, of construction and deconstruction, choice and transformation. I wonder whether it is, then, also the realm of the Holy Spirit, our comforter, who does not take away the vastness and possibility of this opened-up threshold time, but invites us to lay down our fears and discomfort to see what else is there, hard as that may be. . . .

One transformation in this liminal time of cancer treatment and recovery was my recognition that the staggering vulnerability I was experiencing was not weakness, not shameful, but the source of what would allow me to survive and, eventually, to thrive. I allowed others to see me—not just my broken, lopsided face, but also my pain, sorrow, disappointment, and discouragement, as well as my gratitude, resilience, joy, and recovery. . . .

Like Jonah in the belly of the sea monster, we are led where we do not want to go—not once, but many times in our lives. Dwelling in unsettling liminal space, whether we are pushed or we jump, we are led to draw on resources and possibilities we may not have tapped before. In the unknown space between here and there, younger and older, past and future, life happens. And, if we attend, we can feel the Holy Spirit moving with us in a way that we may not be aware of in more settled times. In liminal time and space, we can learn to let reality—even in its darkness—be our teacher, rather than living in the illusion that we are creating it on our own. We can enter into the liminal paradox: a disturbing time and space that not only breaks us down, but also offers us the choice to live in it with fierce aliveness, freedom, sacredness, companionship, and awareness of Presence.

**Reference:**

**Sheryl Fullerton, "What Else Is There?" "Liminal Space," *Oneing*, vol. 8, no. 1 (CAC Publishing: 2020), 77–78, 79–80.**