

# The Pause That Refreshes: Enjoying Liminal Space

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By Penney Peirce

Look around! We are addicted to constant stimulation these days. Can't put the cell phone down, can't be separated from our screens, can't be out of touch with our tribe, have to be busy, even if it's not productive. If forced to stop, we almost jump out of our skin. We rebel like a bull in the too-tight bull-riding pen, just busting to leap out to buck and twist.

Sometimes, though, life does close in on us, and whether it comes as some sort of failure, loss, reprimand, embarrassment, snag, anxiety-paralysis, or just a period of woolly-minded spaciness—what a friend calls the “goo state”—we are forced to slow down, pause, and perhaps stop altogether. Yes, it's frustrating! Yes, it can be scary. After so much activity and stimulation, stopping can seem like Nothingness. And who am I if I'm not my actions, relationships, opinions, and feelings?

Normally, as an intuitive and empath, I am one of those people who is “in the world but not of it,” but lately my consciousness has been drawn, as though by gravity, into the practical, logistical, physical world where I have become captive of the daily “to-do” list. At times, life has even retracted like a surprised turtle, offering no fluidity at all. I have not been traveling to distant lands or addressing large audiences or reaching into the higher realms for inspiring subjects to write about. The shift from being busy, out in the world, and free-flowing to being contained and isolated has been dramatic.

Wanting to stay positive, I figured I obviously must need to pay attention to something smaller and deeper, something only reachable through stillness, something present within arm's reach. Part of me pushes restlessly against the walls, while another part senses that behind this “restriction,”

a wave is coming to lift me—and all of us—into a new kind of lit-up self-expression, to a new level of energy that we'll come to know as normal. But I can't see it yet! I want to be there, but I'm not there yet. Grrrrrr! It's hard to see that the restriction itself is the gift.

## The principle of art is to pause, not bypass.

Jerzy Kosinski

### MELTING DOWN

Perhaps when drawn into inaction and frustrated forward movement, we're actually cocooning, preparing, gathering ourselves. I learned from a science documentary that the caterpillar, when it enters the pupa stage, actually liquefies itself before the raw material of its body reformulates as the butterfly. That's what I feel I've been doing internally—melting down.

This melting process is really a key part of personal transformation—in which our identity as a limited personality unfurls new wings to become the unlimited soul. I recently participated in a group discussion about the concept of *liminal space*—and the term intrigued me. “Liminal” relates to the idea of the threshold. In fact, it pertains to *the space (or experience) before and after a threshold*. That caught my attention because usually we think of what comes before a threshold is reached, and not so much about what comes immediately after, before the new experience becomes truly recognizable and integrated.

I realized that *so many of us are in liminal space right now*—whether we recognize it or not. Perhaps we're about to cross a threshold, or have already crossed it but don't quite know it. We interpret this transitional experience differently, but you can count on a few things: you feel like

you're in limbo, that you don't know, that the old way is boring or damaging to your body and spirit, and that you are out of your comfort zone. You haven't found an answer yet, can't imagine your future, the Flow seems to have stopped, and you're losing meanings and security. You forget that liminal space is a valuable, interesting experience in its own right because you're busy resisting it and feeling anxious.

If you are a left-brain dominant person—analytical, definition-loving, and security-oriented—your left brain will go nuts in this undefined state. It wants to know what to do, what to emphasize, what to plan for. It wants to figure something out. It does not tolerate ambiguity and wants facts. The left brain may label this as a time of chaos and negativity, or it will throw you into irritability, reactionary behavior, panic, avoidance, addiction, manic activity, or depression—just to have something to do. It might prefer to fill the liminal space with drama, trauma, accident, or illness—anything but Nothingness! Many people I talk to these days are caught in these distraction mechanisms, and say they feel “stuck.” They feel exhausted by struggle and negativity. This is the left brain talking, not the soul.

If, on the other hand, you are more practiced in perceiving from your right brain, body, heart, and intuition, you will probably feel liminal space as a lovely vacation or important pause. You will trust the Flow and the evolution process, and be more comfortable being with the moment as it is, knowing there is wisdom to be had by paying close attention and feeling into your experience. Waiting doesn't cause impatience. Being quiet doesn't feel like the Void. Feeling spacious and full of potential is downright pleasurable. This is the soul perceiving liminal space.





**He who can no longer pause  
to wonder and stand rapt  
in awe, is as good as dead;  
his eyes are closed.**

Albert Einstein

In liminal space you are being directed into the nonphysical world to clear old patterns so you can receive your new set of instructions, your new imaginations, and more of your true self. You, the soul, are opening a path, a clearing, so the spiritual can flood into the physical and you can learn to be your soul and be soul-directed. *In liminal space you are being asked to occupy the present moment fully, to be still and transparent.* Here we must be comfortable being timeless; we must become the pause.

#### **LIMINAL SPACE ACTS LIKE A MAGNET**

It may seem like you're waiting, but something profound is busy happening beneath the surface. The openness and peacefulness of this quiet state can catalyze compassion, unbridled creativity, and great wisdom if you drop into it and be with it purely and innocently. Author Gail Sheehy has said, "Creativity can be described as letting go of certainties." When you relax those fixed ideas, every other possible combination of ideas is there to be known. And the next just-right thoughts and motives come to *you*. You don't have to chase them down.

Liminal space can also draw forth everything that is not in harmony with your deeper truth and ability to experience love. If a disturbance occurs in this in-between space, you can be sure it's about an issue that's blocking you, that you're trying to see through and dissolve. If you wait and feel for the tip of the issue, you may sense it as a glimmer. If you give it loving attention it will reveal itself so you can understand and not feel afraid.

If you trust what emerges in liminal space, you can actually enjoy the dissolving—or in caterpillar terms, the liquefying that is the pre-threshold experience. You won't make judgments about how what comes is "bad" or that you are failing somehow. Earlier this year, and even now to a lesser degree, I began to feel like a stranger in my life. "Who is driving this car to the market?" I'd think. "Who needs to buy food and eat? Who is walking this body down the hall?" I began to feel that my story was not mine, or that I didn't care to recite it anymore because it felt boring. After all, it could belong to anyone! And I could be anything; I could change the story. I let go of my history but interestingly, the memories were all still there—I *just wasn't holding or possessing them*.

**Between stimulus and response there's a space, in that space lies our power to choose our response, in our response lies our growth and our freedom.**

Victor Frankl

Perhaps when life pauses, it's about us becoming more of an observer. Maybe we're learning not to be so emotionally reactive, but simply more sensitive to the nuances of what's going on energetically. We're becoming new in some way. During my quiet time, I noticed that some people who I counted as friends seemed to be separating from me, or I was softening and loosening my attention on them and on any need I had attached to them. Perhaps relationships need to shudder into new alignments, as though receiving chiropractic adjustments from the energy field, so they can enter new phases, just as individuals do.

But you know, the great thing about liminal space is that it contains the good stuff and it knows what it's doing. Somehow, those melted down caterpillar particles know how to recombine into the butterfly. It's an amazing sort of intelligence! All we need to do is clear the clutter. Get out of the way of the Flow and be willing to be. Receive the rejuvenation. Welcome the surprise of the new arising, the threshold crossing, and the new baby-like state of the fresh self. We are not stuck except for adherence to old left-brain habits, fixed beliefs, doubt, and lack of imagination. What shape will my liquified self be magnetized to take?

I have faith that I will discover it just as it occurs.



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