



# Chalice Circle Packet

May 2020

## *What Does It Mean to Live Faithfully on the Threshold?*



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# THRESHOLDS

It was easily the widest threshold I have come across in an interior doorway – a beautifully finished piece of Pippy Oak stretching more than half a foot on either side of the door. Sanded smooth as a riverbed stone and varnished like a sacred text written in the script of the tree's grain and punctuated by its large knots.

When I first saw this beautiful threshold in the sanctuary door of Common Ground Meditation Center, I approached it with reverent curiosity, shoeless in keeping with sangha customs. Remembering ancient taboos against walking on a threshold, I took as big a step as my legs allowed to stretch across it. Then, I noticed the sangha members entering the room, every one of them stepping right on that threshold as if it were an arboreal doormat specifically meant for the soles of their stocking-clad feet.

Later, I learned the threshold was purposely designed to *require* that you step on it. It was meant to make you notice, I was told, a reminder to pay attention as you enter the sanctuary for meditation and as you leave after meditation is over.

Thresholds, physically and metaphorically, are places of encounter and transition – between inside and outside, the known and unknown, here and there, and then and yet to come. In its literal sense, a threshold is a raised strip at the base of a doorway that keeps the mud or snow and cold from coming inside. Just as I did in the sangha, we typically step over it as we come and go, focusing on one side or the other rather than on the place in between.

Not surprisingly, we often do the same thing when crossing our metaphorical thresholds. We try to step across, not lingering in the uncertainty and chaos found there. Whether it's a passage we have desired and chosen (graduation; new relationship, baby, or identity; new job, opportunity or capacity), or one wholly unbidden and unwanted (the end of a job, relationship, role or ability, or onset of illness or decline), we often avoid dwelling in the risk and dangers in between.

Thresholds require us to leave something, someone, perhaps even some part of ourselves behind. They are marked by vulnerability, as we face the possibilities of transformation, in our surroundings and often in identity. On the other side, we might be required to do things we've never done before, to face fears we have shunned for years, to discover our limitations as well as new abilities, gifts and opportunities.

Honoring the risks and challenges present on the threshold, many cultures have stories, rituals, blessings and even deities offering protection and safe passage. In ancient Rome, the god Janus reigned over comings and goings. His image, carved over the gates of Roman cities, showed two faces connected at the back and pointed in opposite directions. With one face looking out from the city gate and the other looking in, Janus promised protection while reminding those passing below to notice what they were leaving and where they were going.

There is no question: we are globally all living in threshold times today. The pandemic has quickly swept away our familiar ways of being, living and doing. The magnitude and variety of our losses and uncertainties are too many to count – including the loss of many familiar rites of passage (graduations and coming of age) that happen in the spring and now must be delayed or reimagined.

It is natural to focus on what we are losing, and equally natural to ask, how long will this last and what will the world be like when we move on? But what might we learn – and what might be possible – if we pause and focus instead on the wide, perhaps frightening but also potent threshold of not knowing? To imagine and discover new ways of being present to our heart's truth and to one another in this in between time? What are the stories, rituals and sacred powers that might offer us protection as we do?

Our congregational life offers us the protection of spiritual practices and covenantal relationships to help us all pause and notice what we are departing from and where we are headed. To linger in the chaos of the unknown, which will be different for each of us, but need not be experienced entirely alone. To feel the threshold beneath the soles of our feet. To learn and to practice what grounds us, even there. To notice new choices when we do. To make use of the chaos and choose wisely when we move on.

The challenges of this threshold time are as daunting as they are unique. But if we can pledge ourselves anew to one another now, the net we make for protection and connection will serve us well beyond this time, into the unknowns of every time to come.

May your reflections on the theme of Thresholds this month offer you guidance as we all live into a new threshold time together.

Take good care.

Karen

Karen Hering

Associate Minister

adapted from the April 2020 issue of *CommUNITY*

# Spiritual Practices

## Option A



### ***Threshold as Both Departure and Arrival***

By definition, a threshold is a place where we leave one place or time or realm behind and arrive in a new one. It is as much about departure as it is arrival, although we sometimes focus just on one of these. If the threshold is one we have desired and chosen, we might emphasize what we're moving toward and be reluctant to acknowledge or honor the losses involved in that passage. With an unwanted but unavoidable threshold, we might focus on the losses it will bring and fail to notice the full range of possibilities awaiting our discovery on the other side of the change.

In truth, every threshold desired or not involves both gifts *and* losses, arrivals and departures, beginnings as well as endings. As the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "Every happiness is the child of a separation / it did not think it could survive." The Roman God Janus, mentioned in the opening reflection, encouraged ancient Roman to recognize both. Janus' image (above) with two faces looking in opposite directions, was carved into the gates of Roman cities to remind those coming and going below to notice both where they were going and what they were leaving behind. This poem by Lucille Clifton does too:

***i am running into a new year***  
*i am running into a new year*  
*and the old years blow back*  
*like a wind*  
*that I catch in my hair*  
*like strong fingers like*  
*all my old promises and*  
*it will be hard to let go*  
*of what i said to myself*

*about myself  
when i was sixteen and  
twentysix and thirtysix  
even thirtysix but  
i am running into a new year  
and i beg what i love and  
i leave to forgive me<sup>1</sup>*

Take a moment to name a threshold you are on today. It might be a personal passage, desired or wholly unwanted; or it could be the shared threshold we are all on today in this pandemic time. Just choose one threshold for this practice, and take a moment of silence to consider what might lie on either side of this threshold. What are you leaving behind in this change? What are you moving toward?

Engage your own writing to reflect on these questions by completing the two prompts below, either alternating between them for several rounds, or starting with one, writing a paragraph or two on that and then switching to the other and writing from that one for a similar length. The important thing is to write about both with equal emphasis if you can. Here are the prompts:

**It is a new year, and I am moving toward . . . .**

**It is a new year, and I am leaving . . . .**

Bring your writing to your circle prepared to share either the writing or what you have learned from it.

## ***Option B***

### ***Living the Questions***

The threshold is a place more characterized by questions than by answers. It is full of uncertainty and unknowns, so one of the key skills for living on the threshold is learning to stay with our questions without rushing prematurely into answers. This passage from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* offers helpful advice:

*"... I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."*

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<sup>1</sup> *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969-1980*, Lucille Clifton, BOA Editions, Rochester, NY: 1987.

Rather than seeking answers that are either unavailable or inaccessible to us, if we are not yet able to “live them,” we might be better served by naming questions we can carry with us for a while without answering.

This is especially useful when the questions themselves are open ended, neither suggesting nor requiring an answer in order to bear wisdom. In the pandemic, for instance, we have plenty of questions for which no one knows the answer, such as: “How long will we have to stay at home? Will a vaccine be developed and if so, when?” But these are not open ended enough to bear unexpected fruit when we ask them over time. They might just create more anxiety when repeated. But other questions are open ended enough to expand our thinking when we ask them rather than shutting it down. A few more open ended questions might be: “What might I learn about myself as the stay at home order continues?” Or: “What part of myself might emerge if I don’t know how long this will last?” Or: “What helpful discoveries about human connection and compassion are we making as we live with social distancing and stay-at-home limitations?”

Create a container for your questions – a bowl, a jar, a box – preferably something attractive enough that you can leave it out on a home altar or some other place where you’ll see it daily. Place a stack of small sheets of paper and a pen next to your “question keeper.” Each day, during or after you meditate or complete a spiritual practice or quiet time that invites reflection, jot down any open ended question that occurs to you, related to a personal threshold or the shared threshold of this pandemic time, and place it in your container. If other questions occur to you throughout the day, write them down too, and put them in your question keeper.

At the end of each week, reach into the question keeper and randomly draw one question out. Carry it with you for a full day, and at the end of the day, think or write about it, not necessarily trying to answer it, but letting yourself explore it with curiosity, perhaps even generating more questions. What might it mean to “live” this question long enough to slowly “live into” an answer? Bring your questions to your Chalice Circle gathering and share what you have learned.

## ***Option C***

### ***Crossing Over***

One way to learn about metaphorical thresholds we're crossing in our lives is to notice what happens on other thresholds occurring every day around us. Make a point of looking for and noticing thresholds that you cross frequently in time or space. It might be the literal threshold of your home, and noticing (especially during the stay at home order) what do you feel and do as you step over it, going out and coming in? Does it bring joy, or fear, comfort or anxiety, excitement or regret? Other thresholds you might notice are dawn and dusk, the meeting point between water and land, forest and field, waking or drifting off to sleep. Ask yourself what happens on those thresholds, what's being left behind as they are crossed? What's being gained? What's unknown? What possibilities are present? How are these thresholds like or unlike the metaphorical threshold(s) you're crossing in your life?

Write about the thresholds you notice in your journal. Or keep a running list as a way of remembering or noticing. Or take pictures of them when you notice them. Do you have rituals or habits that mark these threshold crossings? What do you learn from how you cross them that might be useful on the larger thresholds of change in your life?

Bring your list or your photographs or your observations and reflections to share with your chalice circle.

## Questions to Ponder

*Read through the questions below and notice which one(s) resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling – or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of it with your phone. Or record it in your journal – and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you and what you learn from it and your response to it.*

1. Naming a threshold you are on now, what is a hope you have as you cross it? What is a fear?
2. Thinking of a threshold you are on now, what feelings arise when you imagine lingering on it awhile, not knowing when you'll be ready to move on? What might you learn by pausing there? What might be at risk as you do or if you don't?
3. Do you have a habitual response to change in general? Do you welcome its adventure and promise of new experiences and possibilities? Or do you generally prefer to keep things the same? Do you avoid it as much as possible, rush toward it or through it, linger in the midst of it? Enlist companions or go it alone. (No answer is better than the other.) When has that habitual response served you well on a life's threshold and when has it made a threshold especially challenging?
4. Think of a threshold you mostly framed as moving toward something. How did that affect your passage across that threshold? What did you leave behind as you crossed it? Name some of the gifts and losses involved in that passage.
5. Think of a threshold you mostly framed as leaving something or someone or some way of being behind. How did that affect your passage across that threshold? What did you move toward and gain as you crossed it? Name some of the gifts and losses involved in that passage.
6. Choose a threshold you have crossed in the past, and name some of the wisdom sources that guided you as you lived through that change. (These can be particular people or ancestors, teachings, poems, practices or habits, rituals, communities.) How might you enlist some of these sources of support on a threshold you are currently crossing?
7. Think of a change you are facing as if it were a place in nature – a desert, a swamp, a mountain, a cliff, a thick forest, a prairie, a wide river or ocean, a rapid stream. Draw a map of this place, naming its regions as playfully as you like. Ask yourself, what will you need to have with you to cross this terrain? What will you need to leave behind?
8. Who are companions who might accompany, encourage or advise you on your threshold? Who might be already on the other side, encouraging and supporting your passage?
9. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

# Resources

## Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. They will not be analyzed in our circles. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of resilience.

### Word Definitions & Roots

#### Threshold

- 1) the sill of a doorway.
- 2) the entrance to a house or building.
- 3) any place or point of entering or beginning.
- 4) the point at which a stimulus is of sufficient intensity to begin to produce an effect.

#### Word Origin:

before 900; Middle English *threschold*, Old English *threscold*, *threscwald*; akin to [thresh](#) in old sense “trample, tread.”

[In farming] to thresh means to separate the grain, or the nourishing part of a plant, from the inedible chaff. To take what feeds us and helps us grow and leave the rest behind. Notably, the act of threshing is not a gentle plucking or simple sorting, setting the grain to one side, and the chaff to the other. It typically requires both force and time to loosen the grain from the plant’s fierce grip. Threshing by hand is a laborious act of flailing the plants on a threshing floor, a flat, smooth surface made of earth, stone or wood. When possible, animals have been enlisted to crush the plants by walking in circles on it, trampling it underfoot or sometimes dragging a board over it. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the threshing machine took the place of this manual process, marking a significant advance for agriculture.

Whether by hand or machine, the task of threshing is followed by a second process called winnowing to sort the grain from the chaff after they have been separated. Winnowing is often done by the wind lifting the lighter chaff and blowing it away, while the heavier grain settles to the ground to be

gathered up and stored. Old methods of winnowing used a shovel, a fan or a basket to throw the broken pieces of plants into the air, allowing the wind to carry the chaff away. Some barns were built with small winnowing doors positioned to channel the wind inside where it would assist this lifting and tossing and sorting. Often the work of threshing and winnowing was a community labor, a gathering of muscle and breath strong enough to break down what had been cultivated and to recover from within the plant the seeds and sustenance needed for the future.”

From *Living In the Between*, by Karen Hering

### Wise Words

#### From “Notes for a Hypothetical Novel,” *Nobody Knows My Name*, by James Baldwin

“A country is only as good... only as strong as the people who make it up and the country turns into what the people want it to become... I don’t believe any longer that we can afford to say that it is entirely out of our hands. We made the world we’re living in and we have to make it over.”

#### From *To Bless the Space Between Us*, by John O’Donohue

“Looking back along life’s journey, you come to see how each of the central phases of your life began at a decisive threshold where you left one way of being and entered another. A threshold is not simply an accidental line that happens to separate one region from another. It is an intense frontier that divides a world of feeling from another. Often a threshold becomes clearly visible only once you have crossed it. Crossing can often mean the total

loss of all you enjoyed while on the other side; it becomes a dividing line between the past and the future. More often than not, the reason you cannot return to where you were is that you have changed; you are no longer the one who crossed over.”

**From *Sonnets to Orpheus*, by Rainer Maria Rilke**

Every happiness is a separation  
we did not think we could survive.

**From “The Parable of the Trapeze Artist,” *Warriors of the Heart*, by Danaan Parry**

“Is that [space between the trapeze bar we’re letting go of and the one we’re reaching for] just a scary, confusing, disorienting nowhere that must be gotten through as fast and as unconsciously as possible? No!

“What a wasted opportunity that would be. I have a sneaking suspicion that the transition zone is the only real thing and the bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void where the real change, the real growth, occurs for us. Whether or not my hunch is true, it remains that the transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honored, even savored. Yes, with all the pain and fear and feelings of being out of control that can (but not necessarily) accompany transitions, they are still the most alive, most growth-filled, passionate, expansive moments in our lives.

## Poetry

*The world for which you have been so  
carefully prepared  
is being taken away from you  
by the grace of God. – Bruggeman –*

Birth keeps happening.  
Small empty hands curl  
around our hopes and hold

us captive. A child’s needs  
are gifts. We learn again what  
can be taught only from the cradle—

pure pleasure in the body’s  
many miracles, full-bellied  
laughter over falling things.

Small spaces in the heart open  
wider as we linger, putting off  
what seemed to matter more.

Death keeps happening, too:  
Fires burn a path through  
tended gardens and offices

where good stewards sat at work,  
unaware that every page would feed  
an hour’s ravenous flames.

A young man’s body is wracked  
with disease. Another’s, crushed  
between metal and slick road.

Fierce as the love that lets us  
live to see such loss is the hunger  
for life it leaves behind.

Before the backward glance  
a new landscape stretches, newly  
familiar. That was then—

now is a place of decisions  
we do not need to make in fear  
or haste. What we know

is sufficient for the day. We  
speak the words at hand, water  
the plants and watch

for small birds in the sycamore tree.  
Grace keeps happening. Old friends  
invite us, and new ones. We listen

for summonings, subtler now  
than when every morning’s alarm  
set us on a known path.

The call of the moment takes us by surprise.  
Every assent resets our course:  
Begin now. And now. Begin again.

Marilyn McEntyre, untitled poem at:  
<http://marilynmcentyre.com/poems-2/biology-course-review/>

***“Praise the Rain,” by Joy Harjo***

Praise the rain, the seagull dive  
The curl of plant, the raven talk—  
Praise the hurt, the house slack  
The stand of trees, the dignity—  
Praise the dark, the moon cradle  
The sky fall, the bear sleep—  
Praise the mist, the warrior name  
The earth eclipse, the fired leap—  
Praise the backwards, upward sky  
The baby cry, the spirit food—  
Praise canoe, the fish rush  
The hole for frog, the upside-down—  
Praise the day, the cloud cup  
The mind flat, forget it all—

Praise crazy. Praise sad.  
Praise the path on which we’re led.  
Praise the roads on earth and water.  
Praise the eater and the eaten.  
Praise beginnings; praise the end.  
Praise the song and praise the singer.

Praise the rain; it brings more rain.  
Praise the rain; it brings more rain.

***“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” by Walt Whitman and read by astrophysicist Janna Levin*** (a timeless poem about our connectedness across time and space)

***“Alone” by Maya Angelou***

Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And bread loaf is not stone

I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
There are some millionaires  
With money they can't use  
Their wives run round like banshees  
Their children sing the blues  
They've got expensive doctors  
To cure their hearts of stone.  
But nobody  
No, nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is gonna blow  
The race of man is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
'Cause nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
~ From *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well*

***“Praise What Comes” by Jeanne Lohmann***

Surprising as unplanned kisses, all you haven't deserved  
of days and solitude, your body's immoderate good health  
that lets you work in many kinds of weather. Praise

talk with just about anyone. And quiet intervals, books  
that are your food and your hunger; nightfall and walks  
before sleep. Praising these for practice, perhaps

you will come at last to praise grief and the wrongs  
you never intended. At the end there may be no answers  
and only a few very simple questions: did I love,

finish my task in the world? Learn at least one  
of the many names of God? At the intersections,  
the boundaries where one life began and another

ended, the jumping-off places between fear and  
possibility, at the ragged edges of pain,  
did I catch the smallest glimpse of the holy?

**“When Giving Is All We Have,” by Alberto Ríos**

*One river gives  
Its journey to the next.*

We give because someone gave to us.  
We give because nobody gave to us.

We give because giving has changed us.  
We give because giving could have changed us.

We have been better for it,  
We have been wounded by it—

Giving has many faces: It is loud and quiet,  
Big, though small, diamond in wood-nails.

Its story is old, the plot worn and the pages too,  
But we read this book, anyway, over and again:

Giving is, first and every time, hand to hand,  
Mine to yours, yours to mine.

You gave me blue and I gave you yellow.  
Together we are simple green. You gave me

What you did not have, and I gave you  
What I had to give—together, we made

Something greater from the difference.

**“Adios,” by Naomi Shihab Nye**

It is a good word, rolling off the tongue;  
no matter what language you were born with  
use it. Learn where it begins,  
the small alphabet of departure,  
how long it takes to think of it,  
then say it, then be heard.

Marry it. More than any golden ring,  
it shines, it shines.

Wear it on every finger  
till your hands dance,  
touching everything easily,  
letting everything, easily, go.

Strap it to your back like wings.  
Or a kite-tail. The stream of air behind a jet.  
If you are known for anything,  
let it be the way you rise out of sight  
when your work is finished.

Think of things that linger: leaves,  
cartons and napkins, the damp smell of mold.

Think of things that disappear.

Think of what you love best,  
what brings tears into your eyes.

Something that said adios to you  
before you knew what it meant  
or how long it was for.

Explain little, the word explains itself.  
Later perhaps. Lessons following lessons,  
like silence following sound.

## Music

For a playlist inspired by the opening reflection on this month's theme, visit this [Spotify link](#). (Note: you may have to register for a free Spotify account to listen to more than 30 seconds of each song.)

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3bsghVxyL6VNoYO3fcjlmX?si=dybAeEE1SuOzNQG7LaN3pg>.

For detailed notes about these recording artists, see the end of this packet.

## Videos & Podcasts

[How Shocking Events Can Spark Positive Change, a 15-minute Ted Talk by Naomi Klein](#)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi\\_klein\\_how\\_shocking\\_events\\_can\\_spark\\_positive\\_change](https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi_klein_how_shocking_events_can_spark_positive_change)

Journalist and activist Naomi Klein studies how governments use large-scale shocks to push societies backward. And she suggests another option is available to us, if we combine imagination with the muscle of organization. "The shocking events that fill us with dread today can transform us, and they can transform the world for the better," Klein says. "But first we need to picture the world that we're fighting for. And we have to dream it up together."

[You Are Not Alone in Your Loneliness, a 10-minute Ted Talk by Johnny Sun](#)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/jonny\\_sun\\_you\\_are\\_not\\_alone\\_in\\_your\\_loneliness](https://www.ted.com/talks/jonny_sun_you_are_not_alone_in_your_loneliness)

*Being open and vulnerable with your loneliness, sadness and fear can help you find comfort and feel less alone, says writer and artist Jonny Sun. Sun shares his signature illustrations and describes how telling stories about feeling like an outsider helped him tap into an unexpected community and find a tiny sliver of light in the darkness.*

[Navigating Loss without Closure, On Being podcast interview with Pauline Boss](#)

An interview with family therapist and clinical psychologist Pauline Boss who coined the term "ambiguous loss," naming the reality of "complicated griefs" that shift the world on its axis

from one day to the next, with no option for going back to the world of before and no time to set things in order. Offering wisdom and concrete tools for becoming more meaningfully present to what is actually going on inside ourselves and for others in times of great change and loss. (adapted from OnBeing.org)

[Threshold](#), a story-based podcast created by Amy Martin, focusing on significant thresholds the natural world is currently on and the relationship between humans and the earth and other beings. Currently running an interactive project called, [Alone Together: postcards from the pandemic](#), with weekly prompts for recording and uploading listeners' own responses.

## Articles and Online Sources

[What If: An Illustrated Celebration of the Utopian Imagination and the Will to Change the World, by Maria Popova, in Brainpickings](#)

An online exploration of the children's illustrated book, *What If* (listed in books below).

[How Change Happens, by Rebecca Solnit](#),

"The consequences of [recent large social] transformations are perhaps most important where they are most subtle. They remake the world, and they do so mostly by the accretion of small gestures and statements and the embracing of new visions of what can be and should be. The unknown becomes known, the outcasts come inside, the strange becomes ordinary. You can see changes to the ideas about whose rights matter and what is reasonable and who should decide, if you sit still enough and gather the evidence of transformations that happen by a million tiny steps before they result in a landmark legal decision or an election or some other shift that puts us in a place we've never been."

Adapted from the introduction to her book, *Whose Story Is It?*, Haymarket Books, 2019.

## Books

### [What If, Olivier Tallec \(Illustrator\), Thierry Lenain \(Author\), Claudia Zoe Bedrick \(Translator\)](#)

Illustrated children's book [previewed here](#). What if it was the child who decided to be born? Here, from the belly of his mother, now round like an island, the child looks out at the world. Despite all of the trouble and heartache, he decides to be born, strong in his belief that he can help make the world a better place. Stunningly illustrated by Olivier Tallec, with strong colors and sketchy lines, WHAT IF... is a book that gives us a sense of purpose in being born, reminding us that our task is caring for the world and for each other.

### [Comfortable with Uncertainty, by Pema Chödrön](#)

Collected from Pema Chödrön's many books about living well with change, compact volume offers teachings and practices from the Buddhist tradition (and accessible to the nonBuddhist too) for developing compassion and clarity amid the anxieties and hardships of real life. An excerpt is available online here.

### [The Neverending Story, by Michael Ende, translated by Ralph Manheim](#)

The classic (and deeper) tale behind the movie: When Bastian happens upon an old book called *The Neverending Story*, he's swept into the magical world of Fantastica--and finds he has become a character in the story! When he realizes that this mysteriously enchanted world is in great danger, he also discovers that he is the one chosen to save it. Can Bastian overcome the barrier between reality and his imagination in order to save Fantastica?

### [The Apocalypse Now and Then: a Feminist Guide to the End of the World, by Catherine Keller](#)

Theologian Catherine Keller explores the Christian prophecy of apocalypse - the fiery end of the world on Earth – and how it has shaped Western thought and history. Through innovative readings of the Bible, theology and philosophy, feminist and poststructuralist theory, fiction and poetry,

Western history, and current politics, Keller reveals the apocalyptic links of movements and events as diverse as colonialism, urbanization, nineteenth-century American feminism, and the current environmental crisis. Keller constructs an imaginative counter-apocalypse that neither abdicates the prophetic passion for justice nor surrenders to the doomsday dualisms of the apocalypse. (adapted from Good Reads)

### [Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, by J.K. Rowling](#)

The seventh and final book in the Harry Potter series, a heroic journey in which Harry and friends face the multiple challenges and risks of coming of age in a time of death and danger.

### [Station Eleven, by Emily St. John Mandel](#)

A 2014 novel about what follows after a plague wipes out most of the world's population. Its book jacket says "Sometimes terrifying, sometimes tender, *Station Eleven* tells a story about the relationships that sustain us, the ephemeral nature of fame, and the beauty of the world as we know it." Minneapolis *Star Tribune* book critic Kim Ode called it "Audacious ... A group of actors and musicians stumble upon each other and now roam the region between Toronto and Chicago as the Traveling Symphony, performing Shakespeare ... for small settlements they find in the wilderness. Their existence alone provides the novel with a strange beauty, even hope, as one actress notes how these plays survived a bubonic plague centuries ago ... *Station Eleven* is blessedly free of moralizing, or even much violence. If anything, it's a book about gratitude, about life right now, if we can live to look back on it. "

For an article about the author, beginning with a commentary on how readers engage this post-apocalypse story during our own pandemic times, click [here](#).

## Movies

### ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, pts 1 and 2***

The final films in the Harry Potter series. See notes above in book listing.

### ***Mary and Max, 2009 feature film written and directed by Adam Elliot and starring Philip Seymour Hoffman***

Spanning 20 years, "Mary and Max" tells of a pen-pal relationship between two very different people: Mary Dinkle, a lonely eight-year-old living in the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia; and Max Horowitz, a severely obese, 44-year-old Jewish man with Asperger's Syndrome living in the chaos of New York City. The movie chronicles many personal thresholds – Mary's passage from adolescence to adulthood, and Max's from middle to old age – and a bond that survives much more than the average friendship's ups-and-downs. .... Both hilarious and poignant... in a story about friendship, autism, taxidermy, psychiatry, alcoholism, where babies come from, obesity, kleptomania, sexual differences, trust, copulating dogs, religious differences, agoraphobia and many life surprises. (adapted from Rotten Tomatoes' synopsis)

## NOTES ON PERFORMERS FEATURED IN THE SPOTIFY [MUSIC PLAYLIST](#)

### **"Knockin' on Heaven's Door", The Persuasions**

The Persuasions were formed in Brooklyn in 1962, singing a cappella under corner streetlights and in subway corridors. Their style combined gospel, soul, early rock and jazz into melodic five-part harmonies. Since being discovered by Frank Zappa, The Persuasions have recorded 25 albums to date. Jerry Lawson chose most of their material and created 99% of their arrangements in addition to producing 23 albums over the decades including tributes to Frank Zappa, The Beatles & The Grateful Dead.

### **"Stomp!", The Brothers Johnson**

The Brothers Johnson were an American [funk](#) and [R&B](#) band consisting of American musicians and brothers George ("Lightnin' Licks") and [Louis E. Johnson](#)

("Thunder Thumbs"). They achieved their greatest success from the mid-1970s to early 1980s, with three singles topping the R&B charts ("[I'll Be Good to You](#)", "[Strawberry Letter 23](#)", and "[Stomp!](#)").

### **"Inbetween Days", The Cure**

The Cure are an English [rock](#) band formed in [Crawley](#), West Sussex, in 1978.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> The band members have changed several times, with guitarist, lead vocalist and songwriter [Robert Smith](#) the only constant member. The band's debut album was [Three Imaginary Boys](#) (1979) and this, along with several early singles, placed the band in the [post-punk](#) and [new wave](#) movements that had sprung up in the wake of the [punk rock](#) revolution in the United Kingdom. Beginning with their second album, [Seventeen Seconds](#) (1980), the band adopted a new, increasingly dark and tormented style, which, together with Smith's stage look, had a strong influence on the emerging genre of [gothic rock](#) as well as the [subculture](#) which eventually formed around the genre.

### **"Know", Nick Drake**

Nicholas Rodney Drake (19 June 1948 – 25 November 1974) was an English singer-songwriter. Although his music did not find a wide audience during his lifetime, he gradually achieved wider recognition and is now considered among the most influential English singer-songwriters of the last 50 years. Drake signed to [Island Records](#) when he was 20 years old and released his debut album, [Five Leaves Left](#), in 1969. By 1972, he had recorded two more albums: [Bryter Layter](#) and [Pink Moon](#). Neither sold more than 5,000 copies on initial release.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **"Landslide", Dixie Chicks**

Dixie Chicks are an American [country music](#) band composed of founding members (and sisters) [Martie Erwin Maguire](#) and [Emily Erwin Robison](#), and lead singer [Natalie Maines](#). The band formed in 1989 in [Dallas, Texas](#), and was originally composed of four women performing [bluegrass](#) and [country music](#), [busking](#) and touring the bluegrass festival circuits and small venues for six years without attracting a [major label](#). After the departure of one bandmate, the replacement of their lead singer, and a slight change in their repertoire, the Dixie Chicks soon achieved commercial success, beginning in 1998 with hit songs "[There's Your Trouble](#)" and "[Wide Open Spaces](#)".

### **“Not Cause I Wanted To”, Bonnie Raitt**

Bonnie Lynn Raitt (born November 8, 1949) is an American [blues](#) singer, guitarist, songwriter, and activist. During the 1970s, Raitt released a series of [roots](#)-influenced albums that incorporated elements of blues, rock, [folk](#) and [country](#). In 1989, after several years of critical acclaim but little commercial success, she had a major hit with the album *Nick of Time*. The following two albums, *Luck of the Draw* (1991) and *Longing in Their Hearts* (1994), were multimillion sellers, generating several hit singles, including "Something to Talk About", "Love Sneakin' Up on You", and the ballad "I Can't Make You Love Me" (with [Bruce Hornsby](#) on piano).

### **“Some Other Spring”, Billie Holiday**

Eleanora Fagan (April 7, 1915 – July 17, 1959), professionally known as Billie Holiday, was an American [jazz](#) singer with a career spanning nearly thirty years. Nicknamed "Lady Day" by her friend and music partner [Lester Young](#), Holiday had a seminal influence on jazz music and [pop](#) singing. Her vocal style, strongly inspired by jazz instrumentalists, pioneered a new way of manipulating [phrasing](#) and tempo. She was known for her vocal delivery and improvisational skills.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **“Are You Out There?”, Dar Williams**

Dorothy Snowden "Dar" Williams (born April 19, 1967)<sup>[1]</sup> is an American [singer-songwriter](#) specializing in pop folk. [Hendrik Hertzberg](#) of *The New Yorker* has described Williams as "one of America's very best singer-songwriters."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **“The Happening”, The Supremes**

The Supremes were an American [female singing group](#) and a premier act of [Motown](#) Records during the 1960s. Founded as The Primettes in [Detroit](#), Michigan, in 1959, the Supremes were the most commercially successful of Motown's acts and are, to date, America's most successful [vocal group](#)<sup>[1]</sup> with [12 number one singles](#) on the *Billboard Hot 100*.<sup>[2]</sup> Most of these hits were written and produced by Motown's main songwriting and production team, [Holland–Dozier–Holland](#). At their peak in the mid-1960s, the Supremes rivaled [the Beatles](#) in worldwide popularity,<sup>[2]</sup> and it is said that their success made it possible for future African American [R&B](#) and soul musicians to find mainstream success.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **“It Comes and Goes”, Johnny Cash**

John R. Cash (born J. R. Cash; February 26, 1932 – September 12, 2003) was an American singer, songwriter, musician, actor, and author.<sup>[4]</sup> He is one of the [best-selling music artists of all time](#), having sold more than 90 million records worldwide.<sup>[5][6]</sup> His [genre](#)-spanning songs and sound embraced [country](#), [rock and roll](#), [rockabilly](#), [blues](#), [folk](#), and [gospel](#). This [crossover](#) appeal won Cash the rare honor of being inducted into the [Country Music](#), [Rock and Roll](#), and [Gospel Music](#) Halls of Fame.

### **“To Love Is to Bury”, Cowboy Junkies**

The Cowboy Junkies are an [alternative country](#) and [folk rock](#) band formed in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1985 by Alan Anton (bassist), Michael Timmins (songwriter, guitarist), Peter Timmins (drummer) and [Margo Timmins](#) (vocalist).<sup>[1]</sup> The three Timminses are siblings, and Anton worked with Michael Timmins during their first couple of bands. John Timmins was initially a member of the band but left the group before the recording of their first album.<sup>[2]</sup> The band line-up has never changed since, although they use several guest musicians on many of their albums, including multi-instrumentalist Jeff Bird who has performed on every album except the first.

### **“I See the Light”, Cracker**

Cracker is an American [rock](#) band led by singer [David Lowery](#) and guitarist [Johnny Hickman](#). The band is best known for its gold-selling 1993 album, *Kerosene Hat*, which includes the hit songs "Low" and "Euro-Trash Girl."<sup>[1]</sup> Cracker mix influences and sounds from [rock](#), [punk](#), [grunge](#), [psychedelia](#), [country](#), [blues](#) and [folk](#).

### **“Stay by Me” Annie Lennox**

Ann Lennox [OBE](#) (born 25 December 1954) is a Scottish singer-songwriter, political activist and philanthropist. After achieving moderate success in the late 1970s as part of the [new wave](#) band [The Tourists](#), she and fellow musician [Dave Stewart](#) went on to achieve international success in the 1980s as [Eurythmics](#). Appearing in the 1983 music video for "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" with orange cropped hair and wearing a man's business suit, the [BBC](#) states, "all eyes were on Annie Lennox, the singer whose powerful androgynous look defied the male gaze".<sup>[1]</sup> Subsequent hits with Eurythmics include "There Must Be an Angel (Playing with My Heart)" and "Here Comes the Rain Again".

