“Chapter 2: Dobby’s Warning. Harry managed not to shout out but it was a close thing. The little creature on the bed had large, bat-like ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls. Harry knew instantly that this was what had been watching him out of the garden hedge.” fades out

[Casper]: I’m Casper ter Kuile

[Vanessa]: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan

[Casper]: And this is *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*. Before we start, Vanessa, big exciting news!

[V]: I know.

[C]: We had big exciting news last week, because we’re a part of the Panoply network.

[V]: Woo!

[C]: This week we’re announcing a live show!

[V]: I know!

[C]: Ladies and gentlemen, a live show! You can come and join us and be with us as we record a very special episode of *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*.

[V]: It’ll be at the Middle East in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a hometown show for us. It’ll start at 7:30pm on Tuesday, January 24 [2017].

[C]: You can buy tickets and find more information on our website, at harrypottersacredtext.com. Tickets will go live for presale at noon Eastern time on the 2nd of November [2016] and will go on sale generally at noon Eastern on the 3rd of November. So make sure you go to harrypottersacredtext.com and join us as we record a very special episode, hopefully with you with us.

[V]: We’re so excited to meet all of you! So yay!

pause

[Vanessa]: There’s all this new stuff in my life because of the podcast. There are stickers, and there’s new stationary, and there’s just, there’s stuff that comes with running this small project. And homebase for the podcast is my apartment. My apartment’s small, so I bought a small set
of drawers to, you know, manage all our podcast stuff. And I love to pride myself on the fact that I am pretty handy. I can, like, put things together, and I manage my life by myself. And I tried to put together this set of Ikea drawers for three hours, by myself, and made literally zero progress. I would put something up, and like snap it in and then when I did the next step, it would fall. Eventually, I decided that this was not going to go well. So, I live with twenty-four Harvard students, some of whom are theoretically quite bright. So I asked some of them to join me. And six of them, with total alacrity and joy and hilarity, joined. And we hung out, and we had so much fun! And really, just the two engineering students did it, and it even took them over an hour and was really frustrating, but it ended up being this really joyful, fun thing. And it just reminds me that as soon as you let go of control and your sense of identity, so much good can come. I had wanted to conquer this set of drawers; I had wanted to control this evening, and as soon as I let go of that, this beautiful thing happened. And I was reminded of that in this chapter because everybody is trying to control everybody, and it just fails miserably every time. Dobby’s trying to control Harry by like, withholding letters, and Harry’s trying to control Dobby and get him quiet. And Vernon is trying to control Harry by locking him -- it works zero percent of the time. And so there has to be a time in which stepping up and taking ownership and controlling things is worthwhile, but in this chapter, I think we see how control is an illusion and as soon as we let go, good things come.

[Casper]: Oh Vanessa, we are so similar. As one control freak to another, I feel your pain. And I’m glad that it worked out.

[V]: laughing Ikea furniture is hard.

[C]: You know what else is hard? A Thirty-Second Recap!

[V]: Not for me! Usually. It was last week, for whatever reason, but I’m going to do better this time.

[C]: You’re back on your A game?

[V]: I am.

[C]: Alright, here we go. 3, 2, 1, go!

*Ticking clock sound*

[V]: So Harry walks into his bedroom and Dobby is sitting on the bed. And he’s like, “I don’t know who you are,” but Harry’s very polite to Dobby and Dobby is very moved by the fact that Harry is very polite to him. Dobby tells Harry, “You can’t go back to Hogwarts.” And Harry’s like, “Shh, there’s a really important thing going on downstairs.” And Dobby is like, “I’ll be quiet but you can’t go back to Hogwarts and by the way, I’ve been stealing your letters.” And Harry is like, “What? Ron and Hermione do love me?” And then he’s like, “But I’m going back to Hogwarts,”
so Dobby crashes Petunia’s pudding, which ruins the whole deal and then an owl delivers something and --

_Buzzer sound_

[Vanessa]: I didn’t even get to the fact that Ron comes to get him.

[Casper]: Well, you know, it really is a minor detail.

_Laughter._

[V]: I think in some ways I pity you for doing so poorly last season. I’m throwing in.

[C]: This is just like your gift.

[V]: Yeah. You’re welcome. On your marks, get set, go!

_Tick clock sound_

[C]: So the person who was on the bed is Dobby. Dobby’s a house elf for a family that we don’t know yet. Um, and, um, threatens to, tells Harry that he’s in danger and needs to stay at home, shouldn’t go back to Hogwarts. And then, um, there’s a, Dobby, uh, oh God! Um, Dobby, pudding, smash, letter from Hogwarts saying you’re not allowed to do, letter from Ministry of Magic saying you’re not allowed to do magic. Um, Vernon’s like, “Oh my god, I’m going to lock you up.” Locks him up. Harry is being fed through a cat flap. It’s horrific! And then goes to sleep and suddenly has a dream and there is Ron Weasley with a car!

_Buzzer sound_

[Casper]: _long exhale_

[Vanessa]: It didn’t look good at the beginning --

_Casper laughter_

[V]: -- which brought me a lot of joy, and then you pulled it back together, you jerk.

[C]: I turned it around.

[V]: You did. Everybody, go online and vote for Casper one last time for the season at harrypottersacredtext.com.

[C]: Are you coming back next week with an A game?
[V]: I’m coming back next week with it prewritten. I’m going to cheat.

Laughter

[Vanessa]: So Caspar, the most obvious place of control in this chapter is that Dobby is trying to control Harry. He’s tried all summer to manipulate Harry into not wanting to go back to Hogwarts and now he’s trying to just tell Harry, “do not go back to Hogwarts.” I’m wondering if sometimes control is therefore a good thing? Dobby has really good intentions with his attempt at controlling.

[Casper]: Yes, it’s such an interesting question because Dobby has been preventing access to the letters that Ron, Hermione, and Hagrid have been sending, trying to influence Harry to make him not want to go back to Hogwarts. And we, you know, we think kind of kindly of Dobby in this situation because we know he’s trying to do it for a good reason. But in terms of what he’s doing, stopping letters from getting to Harry, that’s exactly the same as what Vernon was doing in the opening chapters of Book 1. And we can read a difference in terms of why they’re doing it. Vernon, you know, doesn’t want to be pulled into the magical world which is a frightening, unknown world for him, and Dobby doesn’t want Harry to be hurt. But I feel like there might be another reason somewhere there. What do you think?

[V]: I think that Dobby associates Harry with hope. We know that Dobby is being oppressed by his owners and we find out later that those are the Malfoys. And we know that Harry, in beating Voldemort, has sort of helped take some of the power away from the Malfoys. So I think that, you know, Dobby doesn’t want to see sort of a hero of his get hurt. And there is that mildly selfish intention there. We know that Dobby is different from most house elves; that he really prizes his freedom and so this beacon of hope is at risk.

[C]: I mean, this is interesting to me because it might be that Dobby sees Harry as a strategy for Dobby’s own freedom, you know, down the road, but he doesn’t want Harry to die because he’s worried that his own freedom is at stake if Harry is lost.

[V]: Just sort of a beautiful idea, right, that our freedom is bound up in one another?

[C]: But the opposite of that, that he’s going to imprison Harry because he’s in prison himself, which is not ideal.

[V]: So, all of these actions sort of out in the world that we admire, what is the line between what is control and what is activism? Or what is control and what is trying? The only thing I can think of is that with control you’re not admitting vulnerability; you’re not inviting other people into the conversation. If I was trying to control someone to fall in love with me, I would manipulate them somehow and be willing to lie in order to get them. Whereas if I wanted to have a real relationship with someone I would, like, tell them about my feelings, right? But we try to control
each other all the time. If I take my dating analogy further, you try to look your best on the first few dates, and you put your best foot forward, and all of these things are an attempt to try to control one another. And I’m wondering where we cross a line into oppressively trying to control somebody else.

[C]: I think you’re right, Vanessa, and I think the difference between control and that kind of influence or trying to, you know, show the best side of yourself is also about the power dynamics that are in the relationship. You know, Harry knows he’s not allowed to do any magic, and Dobby has this ability to do magic and won’t get the blame for it, as we see. And so there’s something about, you know, if you’re exercising control over someone else because you have more power, that just feels different to me than if-- There’s something in that in which I want to explore. In the same way that Vernon is exercising power of Harry because he’s older and stronger and, you know, owns the house and all that kind of thing.

[V]: And Harry is trying to exercise control over Vernon by saying “I can do magic in the house,” right?

[C]: That’s, that’s his counterweight. But I think we can’t blame Harry for that in the same way that we can blame Vernon for exercising his control because he has more, he has more power. And I think that’s why your note on activism is so interesting, because often, you know, activism takes place where someone who has less power is trying to exercise the strands of influence that they have over the more dominant power. That to me feels less about, you know, controlling or manipulating, but really just survival and trying to, you know, make the most of a difficult situation.

[V]: So we like control when we’re punching up but we don’t when we’re punching down. Right? When you’re sort of using your control to keep someone down, we’re anti-control. But when you’re trying to take down a bully, or rise yourself up through control, it’s something that we respect.

[C]: It’s like, I can’t blame you with the Ikea furniture because Ikea has control over you with bad instructions and not enough of those little turny things that you need.

*Vanessa laughter*

[V]: Casper, I love where this is going. And it makes me think about the Ministry of Magic because the Ministry comes in and exercises control. They end the evening, right? They ruin the evening for Vernon - we’re not getting a second home in Majorca, everyone - and they punish Harry for doing magic, even though Harry didn’t really do magic. And something that is so interesting to me is that Harry has accidentally been doing magic his entire life, and so if he accidentally did magic here, the Ministry is suddenly punishing him now? And so to me this speaks to me of the arbitrariness of control, of sometimes you run a red light and there’s a camera and it catches you, and sometimes you run a red light and there’s a police officer and
they catch you, and sometimes you run a red light and nothing happens. Right? And I feel like, there’s just an arbitrariness to the success of control. And I think the fact that there’s always that optimism that it might work this time is sort of what keeps us going and trying to control things even though it fails like 99% of the time.

[C]: I want to reflect on what you’re bringing up with the Ministry of Magic, in the fact that this is happening in a private home, this is a domestic space.

[V]: A Muggle home.

[C] A Muggle home!...where this feels like it’s a real infringement, really, of people’s rights. We know, surely, that underage magic is not allowed to happen. Surely they could tell that this is house elf magic first of all. But secondly, this reminds me of the kind of email snooping, you know, infringing on people’s personal rights to freedom, potentially, in a way that kind of reminds me of Stasi Germany or something.

[V]: There are all sorts of illegal things that kids can do in the house that would be inappropriate for the police to be, like, surveilling on, right? So I understand that there has to be some regulation of underage magic, but I also think I agree with you. It’s completely disturbing, the extent to which the Ministry is trying to control this. And the haphazardness and the lack of precision that they use. If you are going to invade someone’s home as the Ministry of Magic, you think that you would try to be able to tell the difference between house elf magic and child magic.

[C]: And also if you’re trying to help build a culture of responsibility, this kind of, “let me fire off that email straight away,” without even asking what the context was, maybe someone was in danger, right? There’s no sense of process about trying to figure out what happened, how do make sure that we have a different situation next time? I think that’s the bit that riles me up most about institutions of power, it’s that there’s no curiosity about context.

[V]: This really is speaking to me of the conversation, the national conversation we are having around policing, especially around juvenile policing. But also what you just said, I think, goes back to our original question. I think you’ve sort of solved it for us, Casper, which is that control with curiosity is helpful, and control where you think you know everything is not. So if you are trying to control the choices that your child makes, but are curious and doing it in dialogue with them, trying to nudge them in a certain direction, I think that that is helpful. But if you are trying to control someone, on high, without any curiosity, I think that is when it becomes just objectively troubling.

[C]: Absolutely. And you know what I love about that point, Vanessa? It’s that Harry models that exactly in this chapter. You know, he sees this completely unfamiliar creature suddenly in his bedroom, is like, “What on earth is going on?”
[V]: I would have been like, “Get the heck out!”

[C]: Absolutely!

[V]: “Who are you? Get out of my house!”

[C]: And he is so conscious, not only to ask “What are you,” no no no, he says “Who are you?” because he’s curious.

[V]: In that moment, it’s, like, amazing. He’s like, “I wanted to ask what you are but that would be rude. Who are you?” Right, it’s like an amazing moment of self-awareness.

[C]: So even though Harry’s attempt at control fails, there’s a relationship underneath it now, which means that there’s an opportunity for something useful to come of it in the future.

[V]: Right, so curiosity is a necessary element of control. Even when the control part fails, the curiosity part is going to pay off.

[C]: Exactly.

[V]: I don’t think we can leave this section without talking about the worst control that the Dursleys enact on Harry, which is saying something, which happens in this chapter. They literally lock him up in this room. They put bars on the windows. They only are feeding him, like, very little. They only let him go to the bathroom twice a day. I mean, it’s just… The level of control that they are enacting, it is an attempt at total oppression. Then, in, like, such stark juxtaposition to that, we see Harry, who is just embodying humanity. He has so little food, and he still splits it with Hedwig. And in Judaism, there is a rule that you are always to feed your animals before you feed yourself, and there are two reasons for the rule. One, is that it’s a long-term investment in yourself. You feed your animals first because even if you’re hungry today, in the long run, those animals are going to feed you and your family and your community. And the second reason why you do that is simply for humane reasons, right? You have to make sure that your animals can eat; they are innocent; it’s not their fault that you’re hungry, right? So you always feed your animals first. And Harry, I think, is feeding Hedwig for exactly those two reasons. One, to maintain a long-term relationship with Hedwig, and two, just because he can’t stand to watch Hedwig starve, even though he himself is starving. I just think there’s so humanity in Harry, which just shows to me that even when people are totally trying to control and oppress you, that the human spirit finds ways out of that.

[C]: Yes and it’s amazing that he has so little control here in the Muggle world, or, actually, at Hogwarts in the magical world, and yet still makes space for exactly this kind of generosity and kindness. And even though this world is oppressing him, in a way, his little zone which he can control is one of goodness and kindness.
[V]: I love that. It speaks to me of, sort of, the inability for total oppression of one another. That it’s something that’s really hard for me to grapple with. I have a resistance to saying that people who are imprisoned in any way still have the ability to fight oppression in their minds and hearts because I want to so validate their suffering, that I don’t want to say, “But they can keep their spirits strong.” But we do see that fact again and again, that the human spirit finds ways to triumph in places of oppression. And I just think that there’s something so beautiful and so human about saying, “I still control my heart and my mind, even if you control my body.”

[C]: Let’s keep track of that, because that question is not going away.

[Casper]: Vanessa, there’s one more thing I want to point out, which is that control doesn’t just happen over others, but there’s so much self-control in this chapter. I mean, everyone from Petunia and her fake laugh and how she’s kind of presenting herself to the Masons; how Dobby controls his emotion when he meets Harry Potter and Harry is so generous and allows him to sit down, like, he’s overcome by emotion. And, perhaps most interestingly, how Harry has to control his own emotion when he thinks of Hermione and when he thinks of Ron. In the text it says, “But he stopped quickly because thinking about Hermione was painful.” And so you can see him kind of managing, controlling his own emotional state as he encounters things that are painful. And so I just don’t want to lose sight of that because that’s an element of control that I think so many of us are living with every day, of controlling the things that are happening on internally.

[Vanessa]: I wonder -- and I don’t have any answer; this may just be a final wondering -- is that if self-control can also be negative, unless you are trying to control yourself with a little bit of curiosity. Like, “Why am I avoiding this thought? Is it because I’m really hurt by her?” Like, right? I wonder if even self-control could be benefitted by curiosity.

[C]: I love that. I’m going to try to keep notice of that when I, when I’m controlling my emotions. Like, “What’s, what’s behind that, Casper?”

[V]: “What’s actually going on here?”

Casper laughter

[Vanessa]: Self-chaplaining.

Music cue.

[Vanessa]: So Casper, usually we randomly pick a passage, but this week there was something we didn’t get to in our theme. So I’ve picked a sentence for us to do for Lectio. Are you okay with that?

[Casper]: Yes.
[V]: Aw, you’re sweet! I’m totally cheating. pause So the sentence is, it’s almost at the very end of the chapter: “People goggled through the bars at him as he lay, starving and weak, on a bed of straw.” So Casper, can you tell us where this is in our Stage 1 of Lectio Divina, what is literally happening here?

[C]: So we’re at the end of the chapter, and, um, Harry is sleeping. He’s dreaming, and he’s dreaming that he’s kind of in a zoo, that people are watching him, that people are goggling at him through the bars. And the bars, of course, are also on his window. So we’re partly in dream state, partly in reality in Harry’s bedroom. The next level is to think allegorically. So what are the kinds of images, or you know, other words or stories that this sentence reminds you of. “People goggled through the bars at him as he lay, starving and weak, on a bed of straw.” What do you see allegorically happening?

[V]: I see two things allegorically happening. The first is that it reminds me of Slaughterhouse 5, where there are aliens who look at humans in a zoo. Which, you know, when I read that for the first time, it was like a revelatory metaphor for me, of sort of who is looking at whom, and, you know, who is oppressing whom. So one, allegorically, it reminded me of that. But then, I mean, a little boy on a bed of straw really reminds me of Jesus in the manger.

[C]: Oh wow!

[V]: Do you not…?

[C]: Oh I hadn’t thought of that. I was thinking about fairy tales, you know, about princesses being locked up in a tower…

[V]: Ooohh…

[C]: And you know, all they have is straw, and particularly --

[V]: Rumplestiltskin?

[C]: Yes, exactly! Rumplestiltskin, who turns straw into gold. But I hadn’t seen that Jesus comparison, who also is, you know, starving and weak. Gosh, that’s cool.

[V]: What else do we see allegorically?

[C]: I mean, the other thing that I’m remembering is that Harry goes to the zoo in Book 1, of course.

[V]: Mmm hmm.
[C]: And has this really interesting interaction with a snake, who is, again, Harry is curious, right? He’s you know, sort of like, “Where did you grow up?” and like --

[V]: “Do you miss Brazil?”

[C]: “Do you miss Brazil?” And he's like “I don't even speak Portuguese.” But again, here, Harry is being reminded of that zoo experience maybe, of being oggled at, just like people watch animals in a zoo.

[V]: I’m sorry, this is the most exciting Step 2 conversation we’ve ever had, because traditionally in *Lectio Divina*, the allegories can refer to other parts of the Bible. And we are getting to the point where we have so treated *Harry Potter* sacred that we are about to do this! We’re in Chapter 2 of Book 2, but this is reminding us of Chapter 2 in Book 1 --

[C]: Whoa!

[V]: Where Harry has so thoroughly empathized with the snake that the glass literally vanishes between them. They are like, the same, right? And here, I feel like that is so indelibly impressed upon him, that he is now dreaming as if he is the snake, as if he is also a creature in a zoo.

[C]: I’m tingling, Vanessa.

[V]: And we’re going to find out so much more about Harry’s relationship with snakes in this book, in *Chamber of Secrets*. We find out later in this book that he can speak Parseltongue, which means he can speak to snakes, and anyway! The allegory is to Harry! It’s back to Harry. What’s so interesting is that this is a nightmare of Harry’s. If Harry was locked in a cage… Harry is a very resistant person, right? He would be resisting this in some way. And so I think this is Harry’s worst nightmare, is that eventually he would just give up. Eventually, being just starved and alone, he would just lose the desire to fight. Which I think goes back a little bit… This is sort of answering my thought from earlier, which is I have this resistance to believing that the human spirit can persevere. And I think that Harry’s biggest fear is that he will be abused to the point that he can no longer do it.

[C]: His spirit breaks, yeah, and he just lies there, starving and weak. *pause* So let’s go to Step 3, Vanessa, which is thinking about how the experiences in our own lives map on to what we’re reading here. So: “People goggled through the bars at him as he lay, starving and weak, on a bed of straw.” What does this remind you of from the experiences you’ve had?

[V]: So, I fast once a year as a part of the Jewish tradition to fast. And, you know, I’m not religious in any sort of traditionally recognizable way, but this is very important to me. Like, this is a very important tradition that I really enjoy being a part of. And part of it is because I like to be reminded that around four o’clock, I become incapable of being kind. You start fasting around six thirty at night, and so it takes me about twenty-two hours. And I am incapable of
coherent thought. I am incapable of generosity. My blood sugar just drops so low that everything that I pride myself on being gets taken away from me. And that exact moment is why I fast. It’s to remind myself that there are forms of oppression that make being your best self hard. And it’s a way to be grateful for the rest of the year that it’s a choice that I do that to myself once a year, and most of the time I get to walk around with the opportunity to be my best self. So that’s what it reminds me of, just the power of that ritual of fasting. What about you, Casper?

[C]: You know what this reminds me of, Vanessa? Is when I’m sick and I’m not at home. Particularly with like, a stomach bug and I just, you know, lying there on straw, which is uncomfortable at the best of times and weak and starving. You know, I haven’t been able to eat because I’ve been throwing up, or, and I remember this experience as a child where I’d get sick and I was on holiday. Or I remember one time I was at a friend’s house, and you know, I was too sick to go home so I stayed overnight. And I just... It was hard... Not like, being in my own space with people who loved me. Even though, you know, wonderful friend, wonderful friend’s parents. It just wasn’t the same. And so I’m reminded in this short passage of the, just the extra layer of discomfort when we’re sick and we’re not in our own place. Just like Harry is not at Hogwarts, which now, at this point, is his home. So, yeah. Ugh. Poor Harry.

[V]: So Stage 4 of Lectio. What does this sentence call you to?

[C]: Will you read it for me one more time, Vanessa?

[V]: Yes, my love. “People goggled through the bars at him as he lay, starving and weak, on a bed of straw.”

[C]: Ooh, gosh, you know what that immediately reminds me of? Is pictures of people who live in poverty. And the way that it’s presented to me to look at, you know? Like, I’m thinking of adverts of, you know, the traditional ones where people have flies in their eyes. I’m thinking of the kind of famine in Ethiopia in the 80s. Just those images, which, they certainly pull at my heartstrings, but they’re so demeaning for the people who are presented, maybe sometimes without permission or all sorts of other ethical quandaries. So it makes me not want to goggle at people who are suffering. I don’t want to look away from the pain, but I don’t want to goggle at it like Harry feels goggled at in this sentence. How about you, Vanessa? What does this, this fourth stage of Lectio call you to do?

[V]: Casper, what you said was so beautiful, it distracted me from thinking of something I’m called to! Can you read it for me one more time, please?

[C]: Yes! “People goggled through the bars at him as he lay, starving and weak, on a bed of straw.”

[V]: Thank you for reading it again, because I, I was just picturing myself laying on the floor there, and I think that being looked upon is something I feel very acutely, by being a
congregational leader and by living with students, and being a young-ish woman in both of those spaces. I feel like eyes are on me a lot, and it's something I really grapple with. And every time I preach, I think, "But will I look better in heels," but I want to be someone who's modelling that women don't have to wear heels. But rather than feeling oppressed by that, I want to try to live into that opportunity, and relish the fact that... maybe I'm modelling that I'm a complex person who sometimes wants to straighten my hair and sometimes wants to wear flat shoes. It's actually an opportunity to be my best and most complex self.

[Vanessa]: Casper, after going through this process, do you feel like you have any new thoughts about control?

[Casper]: What I'm thinking about is the choicefulness that we each have. You know, in the way that Harry shows curiosity as well as a desire to control. You know, in the ways that we thought through with this Lectio experience, you know, my reflection that we have a choice to look or goggle and we have a choice to look with respect and curiosity. So I'm thinking about actually that control can be a great thing as well, because it's about having the choicefulness about how to approach something. And that is a gift. And so I'm thinking about...yeah, about the benefits of controlling how we approach life. We don't have to just let it happen. We can choose how we engage our experience in some ways.

[V]: Yeah, and there's a real duplicity to control. If you have the instinct to control too much, actually, that instinct is controlling you, and it's because you don't have control, right? That's so interesting. I love that.

[C]: How about you, Vanessa? Are you thinking about control in any other way, thanks to our sacred practice today?

[V]: I think what I'm really coming away with is a new inspiration for the extent to which we can control our hearts and our minds. I often feel like a victim of circumstance, like the person who is walking slowly in front of me is messing up my whole day because I'm going to be late. But, like, I am capable of controlling those emotions. And you know, if Harry can still be kind to Hedwig under this duress, I can still arrive to a meeting in a good mood even if I get caught behind a slow walker. So I'm being called to try to control my heart more.

[C]: Thanks, Vanessa.

[V]: Thank you.

[C]: This week’s voicemail is from Mishal Tanenbaum.

Beep sound effect.
[Mishal]: Hi Casper and Vanessa. I want to start by thanking you for taking this project on, and for treating it with so much respect and mindfulness. It's been such a treat to hear you speak of Harry's journey with so much thought. My relationship to Harry is different than most and I think it'd be good for you to also think about. I lost my father as a months-old baby to a terrorist attack. It was a bombing in Buenos Aires, my hometown, that took 85 lives. Growing up, I knew about it but I didn't fully understand it until I grew much older. It was around age 10 that I heard the word “murder” be associated to his death. Before, I was not sure how bombs worked. It's weird growing up knowing what evil has done to you and what strangers' hatred has caused for you. It's weird growing up missing someone that you've never met. Harry's undying love for Lily and James reassured me that it was okay for me to miss my dad, even though I had never met him. It was okay for me to mourn the loss even though I hadn't been aware of it when it first happened. It is okay for me to still struggle with it and to have some PTSD still in me, even though it's been 22 years and again, I never met him. I feel a weird connection to Harry due to the nature of our losses and your invitation to take that connection seriously has been so healing and soothing for me. It's also led me to see Harry's grief with very different eyes. It must be so difficult for him to navigate this world in which so many people he's never met know so much about his parents and remember them so clearly and still grieve for their death. And he just has to take their word for it. When I found out some stuff my dad had said and done that goes totally against what I believe in, I thought of Harry watching James bully Snape. It was so comforting knowing that James Potter wasn't perfect when it came to admitting to myself that my own dad wasn’t either. It deepened my connection to this story and this character and I’m so grateful I had that anchor when everything else I thought I knew was falling apart. Thank you for your words and time. Please keep working on this beautiful project. I appreciate it so much.

[Vanessa]: Mishal, thank you so much for that beautiful story. I think you’ve really helped us humanize the depth through which Harry is constantly grieving for James and how his grief has to not just take the form of missing his father, but also of constantly adjusting as he gets new information as to what his perception of his father is. Thank you so much for enriching all of our readings of these novels through sharing your story.

[Casper]: Thank you.

[Casper]: Vanessa, it's time to offer a blessing for someone we've encountered in the chapter. I want to offer a blessing for Dobby. He is taking such an enormous risk, you know. He is leaving the house in which he is enslaved. He is willing to risk the harm of others and probably going to harm himself in order to try to warn someone who he has never met, but who he respects so much and who loves, even at a distance. And I think Dobby kind of represents the part in all of us who wants to reach out, and wants to do the right thing, and is brave and courageous and willing to take the risk that it will take to do that right-but-difficult thing. So I just want to bless everyone who’s listening for that little kind of Dobby part in all of us, who’s just wanting to reach out and help. How about you, Vanessa?
[Vanessa]: I would like to bless Petunia, for a very specific moment. She spends all of this time creating this beautiful pudding. And she puts it on top of the refrigerator to, like, make sure it’s safe. That is how much she prizes it. In fact, she was even working on it in the first chapter of the book, right? Like, she is really working hard on this pudding. And then Dobby breaks the pudding. And there’s a moment where she reaches into the freezer and takes out some ice cream. And I just think that that shows such emotional fortitude. Right? She does not break down into tears, which I’m pretty sure I would, she just reaches out for the ice cream. And I want to offer a blessing for people who rise to their best selves when they have a clarity of purpose. She has to be a good hostess, and a good hostess does this thing, and that is what she does. And I think she must have had to swallow just such a bitter pill in that moment. And so I want to say a blessing to women everywhere who have to swallow those bitter pills just in order to get things done. So thank you, Petunia.

[C]: Amen.

[V]: A-woman.

*Music cue, plays in background.*

[C]: This has been *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*. Thank you for listening. Next week we'll read Chapter 3, The Burrow, through the theme of curiosity. Remember, you can still book your ticket to see us in our very first live show in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on Tuesday, 24 of January. Find your tickets at harrypottersacredtext.com. Please subscribe and review on iTunes or wherever you find your podcasts and follow us on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook. And if you have a voicemail to share with us, please send it to us at harrypottersacredtext@gmail.com.

[V]: This episode has been produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and me, Vanessa Zoltan. Our social media coordinator is Jenn Stark. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl, and we are part of the Panoply Network.

[C]: Thank you to Mishel Tanenbaum for sending us this week’s voicemail, to Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, and to Stephanie Paulsell. We’ll see you next week.

[V]: Bye!

*Music cue fades out.*

[C]: I’ve one more thing. I’m just going to try this. I turned it around, like Bonnie Tyler in the “Total Eclipse of the Heart.”

[V]: *laughing* You just looked up and starting singing that song.
[C]: *singing* Turn around…

[V]: *singing* Every now and then

[Both]: *signing* I get a little bit

[C]: Something