Harry Potter and the Sacred Text

(Introduction music plays)

Female voice 1: Hi Casper, Vanessa, and Ariana.

Female voice 2: Hi Vanessa, Casper, and Ariana.

Male voice 1: Hello Vanessa, Casper, and Ariana.

Female voice 3: Hi Casper, Vanessa, and Ariana.

Female voice 4: Hi Casper, Vanessa, Ariana, and the entire team.

Casper: I’m Casper ter Kuile

Matt: I’m Matt Potts

Casper: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text, an owl post edition.

Welcome back to the hot seat, Matt.

Matt: Thank you.

Casper: Last time, you were in conversation with Vanessa during Owl Post and now we get to outshine her (Matt laughing breathily), because she’s away and we’re here.

Matt: That makes me nervous. (Casper laughing) I don’t, I don’t know how I feel about...I’m happy to be here, let’s just say that.

Casper: What our listeners don’t know is that Matt, you were my field ed supervisor for the podcast that I did before Harry Potter and the Sacred Text was even a glint in Vanessa’s eye.

Matt: That’s right. And in fact, I think an alternate history would be that the glint was in my eye (Casper gasping) and I suggested it to you...

Casper: What?!

Matt: ...during our supervision. Yes. I’m pretty sure that’s what happened.

Casper: Oh my gosh! Is that where the idea came from?
Matt: I’m fairly certain that’s what happened. Well, I recall speaking to you about it, and maybe Vanessa had already spoken to you about it. But I remember actually even saying “You need a second person, or third person, maybe Vanessa.”

Casper: Whoa.

Matt: I think it’s mine.

Casper: Friends. Wow. This is a breakthrough. Thank you Matt for this wonderful podcast project. (Matt laughing heartily) I’m glad to have you back.

Matt: (Matt laughing) It’s good to be here.

Casper: So, today I wanted to talk to you about tradition. And, tradition is a word I used to really resent. Matt: Really?

Casper: Yeah, I thought tradition was all bad, it was old, it was stupid, it excluded people I cared about. Tradition was something really negative. And then, in part because you were my teacher, I’ve really become a fan of tradition and I’ve actually changed what tradition means in my brain. So I want to explore that theme of tradition today. Because I think it’s really important for us to think about as we do *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* where we’re doing very traditional reading practices like Lectio and Havruta, but we’re doing it with a very untraditional text in *Harry Potter*. (Matt mm-hmming) And I want to talk about the ethics of tradition: when can you borrow something, when should you not? When can you claim tradition? What parts of tradition can you leave behind and still have it be authentic? All of those kinds of questions.

Matt: You said you disliked tradition because it’s old and bad and excluded people. And I guess I would say, I don’t remember what I said when I spoke to you during our supervision, but I guess I would say: Yes. (Casper laughing) It is old and bad and excludes people. But I guess I think of tradition as a process. (Casper hmming) Tradition tends to be used by people who want to wield it as a bludgeon, as if it’s one thing that never changes. And if you notice something different then I’m going to take my tradition and beat you about the head with it, so that you do not change anything, right?

But, instead, if we think about tradition as this vast resource of possibility (Casper mm-ing) Whereby we try to envision what meaningful change could look like. How we could be honest both to our ancestors, to our memories, to our past, but also be open and aware of our present and what we envision for the future. Also open and aware of the people who maybe our traditions have excluded that we want to welcome. So instead of thinking of tradition as a static thing which keeps people out. Which is the way it’s often used, especially by people who call themselves “traditionalists.”
Casper: Yes!

Matt: Right? I think we can think of tradition as this field of resources by which we can link ourselves to other human beings in other times and places. And also use that to reach out to other human beings who are outside of our purview, togetherness, community, whatever.

Casper: So that's the key reframe in my brain. Which is, Oh, I always saw tradition as something static. As something that could never change; that was walled up; that was beyond my grasp. And it was made for a different time. And exactly like you're saying, I'm now seeing is as this kind of river which is always moving. And therefore tradition actually encompasses change. A tradition cannot live unless it's changing. And one of my favorite quotes I read about this recently was from Thomas Merton, the great Cistercian and twentieth-century monk and writer. And he talked about the different between tradition, in that river sense that we've just been saying, and convention. Which is when we do what we've always done or what our parents have done or our communities have always done. And convention kind of loses that fire at its heart. That beating aliveness. And so, for example, if you do walk into a church or a synagogue and you see what people are doing and it just has that dead feeling, which, frankly is largely my experience. I'm like, “Oh, that's convention.” But when I think of the way that you or Stephanie or other people that I really admire who are still within a lineage and who have a religious identity, the way that they talk about or teach or engage with text, for example, that's actually very traditional, even though it looks very different from what you might expect.

Matt: You said earlier on, how do we know which changes are authentic? If tradition is a source of change, not just a static thing, as opposed to convention. If it's this kind of river, to use Merton’s analogy, this river flowing, how do we know which changes are authentic ones. That’s a really good question and a difficult one. One example I use again and again, in teaching and in conversation, is the notion of marriage. (Casper mmming) So, one thing that we can observe, kind of historically and factually, is that what marriage means in human culture has not existed as a consistent kind of form of life across centuries, time and place. So how do we know that everything...that two things or that three things or any number of things count as a marriage? So there’s this philosopher who I’m really interested in named Jaques Derrida. He has this argument about, sort of, recognizability. And he uses the analogy of a signature. So if I sign my name it’s never the same twice, but it always means me.

Casper: Yes.

Matt: So, there’s something about the rite itself has to be recognizable, the sign has to be recognizable to those who encounter it, for the meaning to be carried.

Casper: And so, this is what we saw with marriage equality, when gay couples would show up, wearing the whole tie and the boutonniere and it was like, oh, this is a wedding. And it felt, you could feel the love, you could feel that sense of intense beauty and connection that you would
expect even when it was a straight couple. And before we saw that with interracial marriage, for example.

Matt: Exactly. And, I would say it’s more the love than the boutonnieres.

Casper: *(Casper laughing loudly)* It shows my importance on the aesthetic. *(Laughing loudly)*

Matt: *(Matt laughing)* That’s right, that’s right. But this is the thing, right, that this relationship is recognizable as a marriage. It starts to clue us in to what is actually at the heart and core of what we mean when we say marriage. And in fact, my own religious tradition has been involved in these debates about this for many years and I’ve just always believed that we Christians would come around to marriage equality.

Casper: Right.

Matt: Because it is so obviously recognizable as what we think a marriage is. And even the people who oppose it, the kind of fervor of their opposition speaks to their knowing that it is so recognizable. *(Casper laughing)* This is so obviously a marriage, I have to oppose it for other reasons.

Casper: Yeah.

Matt: And so this is what I mean about, sort of, what is the thing that is recognizable. The other thing I was going to respond to in what you said before: When you walk into these religious communities, the Anglican churches of your youth, and it feels completely dead to you, someone in that church, it may feel completely alive to them. *(Casper mmming)* And so, if we think about religion as a system of meaning making then it, some scholars have thought of it as analogous to language. And if you think about how language works, how the meanings of words change over time...

Casper: Wow..

Matt: Right, we cannot really speak to each other unless we inherit a language which is not our own.

Casper: Oh my god, that’s genius!

Matt: On the other hand, our actual use of the language means that our words keep developing and coming to new meanings. If you ask a linguist and you can follow the tradition, or if you listen to a history of the English language podcast you can see documented the way meanings have changed over time. The way meaning moves, through usage, in human culture.

Casper: And new words are invented.
Matt: New words are invented.

Casper: Shakespeare famously invented ten thousand new words.

Matt: Exactly. The reason those new words work is because there is something in them that is recognizable. There is something meaningful. And so we can think about, and some scholars have thought about religion in this way. If it is a meaning-making process then it also has the same sort of attachments to prior usages but also, openness to new usages.

Casper: Wow, that's really beautiful. And I love that idea of religion as a meaning-making system. That's what ritual is about, that's what having a calendar is about. In which, you know, moments like...today is the Fourth of July, for those of you listening in the US. And this is now a tradition in America that celebrates independence from (Casper clears throat), can I say, the best country in the world, (Matt laughing) the United Kingdom. I will not say that, we have the most to atone for. But there are these traditions that emerge that give us the sense that, oh, because I celebrate this thing that makes me this kind of person. Whether that's a nationality, whether that's a religion, an ethnic group, or all sorts of different things. So, to what extent, if we take that theme of a religious tradition is something that helps you make meaning, can we look at civic celebrations like the Fourth of July or, in England, Remembrance Day or Queen's Day in Holland. Whatever national festivals people have. Do we have something like a civic religion?

Matt: I'm going to answer a different question and pretend that you asked the one that I'm going to answer.

Casper: (Casper laughing loudly) That's the greatest trick in the academic's book.

Matt: I think something like a civic holiday, like the Fourth of July. What that can do for us is help us, if we have this understanding of tradition that we've been talking about. What that can do is help us think, ok, what does the Fourth of July mean? Or, what do our celebrations convey to us about what it means? And what should it mean? You said your country has the most to atone for. I think we're giving you a run for your money, (Casper laughing) especially lately. And I think that, for example, if you look at contemporary Fourth of July celebrations, they are highly militaristic. They celebrate freedom, the celebrate, sort of, the violent conquests of peoples for the sake of freedom, and fireworks, right? That's communicating something about what we say America is.

Casper: Yeah, that's right.

Matt: So, if we have this tradition of a Fourth of July celebration. And then we have all the resources of the history of this country. And all the resources of what we think this nation is or should stand for, what other highly traditional, in this case, celebrations could we imagine?
Casper: Yeah.

Matt: What other forms of observance could we imagine? Which would be absolutely faithful to our American tradition, but which would lift up the things which would actually bring other people in. Which would honor people who are presently not honored by the way we commemorate the day.

Casper: Like, what if the tradition on the Fourth of July was that you had to have strangers cross the threshold into your hold?

Matt: Exactly, exactly.

Casper: Like, what if that was the key celebration, rather than a sort of parade with...guns.

Matt: Exactly. (Casper laughing) Right? We tend to observe on that day wars, especially, you know, the Revolutionary War. Fought by white men who owned slaves. Right? This is our celebration? Is that what we really think is most honorable about our tradition? Right. We are limiting ourselves when we think all it is is...militaristic marching parades with marching band music. Right? There are other things we can do.

Casper: So, maybe this will be my final question which is, I really love that imagine of tradition as a resource. That this is a place which all of us have inherited to some extent and that all of us have the permission to reach into and draw something out to our lives today. If you look at the Christian tradition, to go back to a kind of religious context, what are some of the resources and tradition that you would invite all of us, but perhaps especially those listeners who are Christian, to reach into and bring into their life today?

Matt: I don’t know that this is actually a resource that your listeners could or should use. But, a great example of why I think thinking about the tradition in more capacious terms can actually be liberating.

Casper: Mmmmm

Matt: For most of Christian, much of Christian history, at least the last 900 years, the death of Jesus has mainly been understood to be a punishment.

Casper: Mmmm

Matt: Right? That sin carries a blood price and Jesus had to pay it and etcetera.

Casper: It's a downer.
Matt: Yes. All really kind of gruesome. At best gruesome stuff, at worst stuff that can be manipulated by power to...to...

Casper: Right, to enthrone suffering.

Matt: Enthrone. That’s a great phrase. Enthrone suffering, valorize the pain of vulnerable people, right? In the fourteenth century there was a woman named Julian. Actually, she wasn’t named Julian, but she’s known as Julian of Norwich now.

Casper: And she lived in Norwich.

Matt: And she lived in Norwich. And she wrote this beauti- she’s my favorite Christian thinker. (Casper Mmm-ing) She wrote this beautiful thing. It’s tough getting into, this is a fourteenth century text, it’s a lot of like Black Death type stuff going on, right? But it’s all about, sort of, love.

Casper: Mmmm.

Matt: Just, what if this whole thing didn’t mean punishment but just meant love. And, it’s just this long meditation on the, kind of, infinite capacity for us to be loved (Casper Mmm-ing) and to love others. And she was sort of forgotten and ignored, mm, for at least three or four hundred years. She didn’t get a lot of attention until like the nineteenth, twentieth century. And I think to myself, what if instead of...In the eleventh century this guy Anselm proposing this idea that our suffering had to be paid for in pain. What if instead the dominant idea within Christianity for the past 900 years had been..Love. Right?

Casper: Mmmmm.

Matt: But that person is still part of the tradition. Even if that hasn’t happened for 900 years, Julian is an important part of the Christian tradition. And, when I lift her up as a Christian theologian, which I do, other Christians don’t get to come at me and say, “That’s not traditional!” Because I get to say, “No, actually she’s absolutely traditional.” She’s been here for 900 years. We just haven’t been listening. You aren’t traditional enough if the only voice you’re listening to is this small select group of theologians. So, I’m a Japanese Christian as well, I have Japanese ancestry. This is something that’s happening is much of the Christian world. In Asia, in Africa, in South America, people are saying “Well, why do we just have to use your resources for Christian theology? Why can’t we use our resources and our voices?” That’s actually not less traditional. It’s more traditional because we’re all part of this tradition. (Casper Mmm-ing) So, unless you want to have, go read Julian of Norwich, that’s not actually a resource you can use. But it’s a way to think about how asserting tradition is always sort of a boundary drawing exercise. And most of the people drawing those boundaries are trying to keep people out, not let people in.
Casper: Mmmm. So one of the things I find most fascinating about our podcast listening community is we have a lot of people listening who are not religious in any way, you know, but are just in- who love Harry Potter and are interested in reflection and, and treading the text in the way that we do with the practices that we borrow from religious traditions. I’m curious how you would, like, where is that capaciousness line, right? Where’s that line of what counts as religious practice? For our listening community, as an example, like, if we’re doing a Pardes practice together, are we doing a Jewish thing together? Like, does that make us kind of Jewish? If we’re doing a Lectio practice together does that make us kind of Christian? Like, where is that line? Is it just about what I want to identify myself with? Or is there a claim from tradition on me? Which is kind of like, whoa! You know, like, it’s not one way traffic, like there’s a conversation.

Matt: The question about whether or not you are jewish, (Matt laughing) right? So, no. (Caspering laughing big laughs) That’s my first answer. I mean, one of the things about these various religious traditions is they each have their own definition and conception of what identity is and what counts, right?

Casper: And a very, within the Jewish community, for example, very different ideas of what those boundaries are or what those markers are. So, it’s not a stable, one definition kind of thing.

Matt: That's right. So, if you’re taking up the traditional practices of another religion it becomes very complicated to start identifying with that religion or arrogating that religion for oneself. Especially when we’re thinking about marginalized religious traditions, traditions that are outside the kind of hegemonic power of Christian discourse, right?

Casper: Right.

Matt: So, I would be just uncomfortable just making those identity claims in general. One of the things I would say is that western Christian culture is highly ambivalent about the place of the sacred. There are long traditions of...I mean one could go all the way back to like the first and second century and see Christian people saying over and over again the place of God is not within the walls of the church, or not exclusively there, it’s actually out in the world.

Casper: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Right. And so you have a figure like Martin Luther who’s this very important reformation figure who takes...he writes this discourse to fathers and says, you find the word of God washing your children’s diapers, (Casper mm-ing) so go do it. (Casper mm-ing). There’s this idea that the world is the place where the holy visits us, so just go be in the world.

Casper: Right. John Calvin wants to tear down the walls of the monastery so that God is not kept within these small buildings but is out, for everyone.
Matt: Exactly.

Casper: It’s a very democratic impulse in a way.

Matt: It absolutely is. And so, again, I would not want to decide what counts as Christian and what doesn’t. But there is within western Christian culture this idea that the secular is sacred.

Casper: Mm-hmm. So let’s take one example, right?

Matt: Sure.

Casper: When we do Lectio Divina together, the fourth question that we ask one another when we’re reading *Harry Potter* is “what is the text asking of you?” Now, the original teaching of that practice, when we go back to Guigo the second in the twelfth or thirteenth century, his way of phrasing that question is “what is God asking you to do through this text?” And so, are we being *traditional* when we’re changing the way that we’re asking that question? Kind of taking God out it? Or, are we doing something that takes away the tradition and saying actually we’re doing a new thing. We might still *call it* Lectio, but like, actually it’s not the same. Where does that land within that continuum?

Matt: I think you just have to be comfortable just like not having the answer to that question, right?

Casper: *(Caspering laughing loud belly laughs)* That’s how I’ve lived for the last four years, so...

Matt: Yeah. Because we meet people in the tradition, in Christianity, for whom the practice becomes unrecognizable once you remove God from it.

Casper: Mmmm.

Matt: Right? There are other people within the tradition for whom the practice remains incredibly recognizable, especially if that fourth question has to do with “how do I love the world better?” Right?

Casper: Yeah.

Matt: Which, for any Christian worth his or her salt, must be exactly what “What does God want me to do?” means.

Casper: Mmm
Matt: Right? And so if the efficacy or the movability of tradition depends upon its recognizability, then whether or not tradition counts is always going to be a little bit in the eye of the beholder.

Casper: Yeah.

Matt: Right? I think that the ethical question for oneself as one takes up these traditions is: Okay, I am the one beholding the tradition, who does it bring in? Who does it leave out?

Casper: And I think that’s why, for me, it’s felt like a traditional question. Because, you know, when we do our live shows we’ll have people come up to us after the shows, which is my favorite part, cuz you get to hear, you know, how everyone does this text reading at home. And what the podcast means to them. And what I love is that the way we phrase the question of “what is the text asking of you?” allows for the folks for whom that word God is really dangerous and challenging, like it was for me for most of my life. Like, that is just a word I wouldn’t have used. And it allows for the people for whom that word is a balm and a power and a joy. And when I ask that question they can still hear that word God in there if they choose to. And so, that’s the test that I hold ourselves to. Like, can everyone across that spectrum choose to and successfully engage with the practices as we pass them on…

Matt: That’s right.

Casper:....in the same way that we’ve been taught them. Now, there’s always going to be folks, I think, who are left out to some extent and that’s, that’s the work of tradition, right? Is to continually grow who can be part of it.

Matt: And I think that’s right. And I was gonna actually say that as well. That, there is no human vision which is infinite.

Casper: Mmmmm.

Matt: Right? Like, however far our tradition reaches there will be people who fall outside it, right?

Casper: Yeah.

Matt: And I think that tradition also has to have both, kind of, courage and humility. The courage to say there are those outside our tradition and so we need to be courageous enough to think again, let go of things, to bring other people in. But also the humility to say that, you know, other traditions will serve others better.

Casper: Mmmmmmm.

Matt: And we should honor those traditions and the people they serve.
Casper: That's beautiful.

Matt: And it's okay for us to be different and just to do the best we can.

Casper: My favorite phrase to describe that is “We're for anyone but not for everyone.” *(Caspering laughing big belly laughs)*

Matt: Exactly. That's right, exactly.

Casper: Right? It's really up to you if you want to join.

Just before we start our voicemails I want to make sure you all know that in a few weeks you’re gonna hear the first episode of Hot and Bothered the new podcast from Vanessa and Ariana and the whole Not Sorry Productions team. It'll be in this feed, just the first episode, on the sixteenth of July. But go and subscribe to it now wherever you find your podcasts. The podcast is called Hot and Bothered and it's all about romance novel writing as a sacred practice. It's gonna be amazing.

So, Matt, it's time to open our mailbag with all sorts of Owl Post messages. And the first one is from Rachel who's responding to our episode on inheritance, which kind of touches on some of these themes of tradition. Let's take a listen.

*(beeping voicemail tone)*

Rachel: Hi Vanessa, Casper, Ariana and the entire team. My name is Rachel and I just listened to the Book 5, chapter 33 episode on inheritance. I was so struck by this theme and it's something I think of often. I really struggle with the inheritances I've been given by my ancestors, because a lot of them I don't really want. I inherit white supremacy and racism. I inherit sexist and homophobic Christian doctrine and values and the impacts of those. I inherit the affects of generations of child sexual abuse. As a queer woman I know that many of my ancestors would not be proud of me. Sometimes it's easier for me to focus on the women in my family knowing that I might be living the life that they couldn't live, and that is making them proud. But, the women in my family have also perpetuated a lot of violence themselves, so, that's difficult too sometimes. So I'm not out to my extended family and I've had significant distance from them because of the abuses that occurred. So it's hard for me to think about inheritance as anything but a burden and a weight. And even though I plan on having many more years ahead of me, there's a finality to these inheritances, because at this point in my life I don't intend on having any children.

I love what you said, Vanessa, about one of Neville's inheritances being a sense of purpose. And I wanted to tie that with the idea of the inheritances we receive from our chosen family. When it's hard for me to feel a sense of purpose or pride from my blood inheritances I think
about those that I’ve received from the black and brown trans women who made it possible for me to be who I am today. I think about the strength and courage of queer and trans folks in the past who built community in the shadows in order to be themselves. And dreaming of futures of liberation and pride. And I think of the statistical reality that I do have blood ancestor who were queer and trans and who are cheering me on from wherever they are. I hope to one day be more at peace with my complicated inheritances from my biological family. And maybe they can be more integrated into the inheritances from my chosen family.

I would like to offer a blessing for those who are struggling with this as well. May we continue to strive to be more like Neville who is using his inheritance to make his parents proud. Or Hermione, who is taking her chosen family’s inheritance to fight for justice and peace. Let us also consider the Mariettas and the Percys and even the Dracos, who struggle with the inheritances, good and bad, that they’ve received.

Casper: Wow, Rachel, I so appreciate this beautiful voicemail and also just the incredible resilience and courage that I hear in your story. And I love that you point us to inheritance is not just from our families, that we get to choose who we inherit from. Right, the strength and the wisdom and the leadership of people who maybe are not our blood relations but are our soul kin, perhaps. So thank you for saying that.

And, as difficult as it is, I think, and this is not to excuse or in any way negate the true horrors of white supremacy and homophobia and all the challenges that you listed, but there is something in you and your story which enables you to share this powerful testimony that you just did. That allows you to speak across lines of suffering in which people perhaps can hear you, who otherwise would not have heard an invitation to transform those inheritances in the way that I hear you transforming them. So, all I can say really is thank you for interrupting that ycycle and for offering a new inheritance, even if perhaps not to your children, but certainly towards us in this moment and to, I’m sure, so many people in your life who are grateful for that. So. Thanks for that beautiful voicemail.

Matt: Yeah, I also want to reaffirm your challenging reflections upon the problems and difficulties and, and tragic histories of inheritance. One of the things that I was thinking, as Casper was speaking, is inheritance is a way that the past tries to make a claim upon the present and the future. (Casper mmm-ing) And that is a past that we can either accept or reject.

Casper: Oh, I love that Matt.

Matt: Even when people kinda, leave wills, it’s the past trying to exert an influence on the present and future. But we have the, eh, the choice to either accept or reject that past. And also, as it sounds as if you are already doing in really commendable ways, to embrace a different present and choose a new future. And that’s really beautiful and important, so thank you.

Casper: Mmmmmmm. Our next voicemail is from Emily.
Emily: Hi Vanessa, Casper, and Ariana. It’s Emily calling from Aberdeen, Scotland. I’m recording this after listening to you most recent episode with the theme of inheritance. And in the episode you briefly mention how Harry and Hermione are growing up. They’re starting to be seen as adults. The Centaurs, at least, talk about how they’re no longer foals, as they say. Eh, but then later on Vanessa then argues that they should be at least partially excused for their kind of entitled attitude towards the Centaurs because as children they have a right to believe that the adults are just there to help them. This is something that I’ve noticed throughout your podcast. You both often emphasize the fact that the trio and their classmates are children. I think to more easily forgive them for their mistakes and helps condemn those who don’t really support them. Um, and I think that’s definitely right. I mean, when you’re younger you’re still figuring out how to live in the world, which is hard. Um, but I find it interesting that this is the first time, really, I’ve heard you mention holding Harry or the others to the standard of an adult. I think it’s important that we realize that most of our characters are sixteen at this point in the series. And, it’s made me wonder at what point we start treating children as adults. You know, where I come from, sixteen is the age when you can vote in some elections, leave school, live alone, start a family even. I’m definitely not saying that sixteen is when you become a fully formed adult. I think that the fact that adulthood is placed at different ages in different cultures really only proves that it’s a gradual process. But I would hope that to make some of these big decisions you’re held to the same moral standards as an adult. So, yeah, I’m just wondering your thoughts on the transition from child to adulthood. I’m sure it’s something we’ll have to think about more in books six and seven. It’s certainly something I’m thinking about my own life. You know, I’m nineteen, legally an adult. I left home when I was seventeen, but I still feel like a child in so many ways. And lastly, I just want to thank you for the podcast. It’s been a real comfort to me in stressful times and I’m looking forward to hearing you every week. Byeee.

Casper: Emily, I love this question! It’s so good and coming from the UK as well, like, I totally get what you’re saying where there’s these different age boundaries, right? And one of the things that I think about a lot is how we have lost some of the traditional markers of the stage of life where you’re a child and the stage of life where you’re an adult. Which would often depend on the readiness of the individual. Right. If we think about those ritual moments in different cultural and religious contexts, there might be a coming of age ceremony and so it allowed for that gradual process and it allowed for that personal difference. And I think that’s something that’s really missing in our world. Not I don’t know if you can create national laws around, like, have you gone through your adulting process? And, okay, now you’re ready to vote. But, there is something, maybe just like you’re saying, kind of in your own life you feel hurled into a stage of life which maybe none of us have really been prepared for, right? And that is why so many of us, I’m thirty-two but I feel like “adult-ing” is still really hard! Right? Like, doing your taxes for the first time is super stressful. And there’s just a lot of ways in which we haven’t really found a way to prepare one another for those things in our culture. I don’t know, Matt, what do you think?
Matt: I think that’s right. I also think that, and this is not to diminish the reality of human development and that sort of frontal lobe develops through adolescence and so forth, right? But, much like you, I’m a little bit older than you. I’m sort of Generation X, not quite Millennial, right? I’m forty-two and I still feel like what has made me an adult is not that I feel like and adult, it’s that people treat me like one.

Casper: Right.

Matt: And that started happening in my early twenties. And I don’t really feel any different on the inside than I did, I mean, I get more back aches that I did maybe, but I don’t really feel (Casper laughing) developmentally, emotionally any different. It’s just people treat me differently. So really, it’s this age group where the Harry Potter characters are is the point at which this starts to happen. And where, not universally and not in everything, but we start to get treated more like adults in some situations. We start getting accustomed to what that treatment feels like. It doesn’t always feel good, right? But one thing it makes me think about is the way that this treatment is unevenly distributed among different peoples.

Casper: Right.

Matt: We are more willing to treat as children those who come from positions of privilege than we are to those who do not. Right? Especially, I mean, white people, to be frank. Yeah.

Casper: Absolutely. Absolutely and I think that would maybe be my answer EMily. Even if any age or any moment is gonna not work for everyone, the least we can do is be consistent about if we’re allowing you to drink then we’re allowing you to vote. If we’re gonna enable you to die for your country then you should be able to vote. So that there’s consistency in terms of that age range, but also as you’re saying Matt, that we don’t treat some people’s children as children and some people’s children as adults.

Matt: That’s right.

Casper: That there’s a consistency and a fairness across those markers. Our next voicemail is from Ariel, whose husband I met way back in 2014.

(beeping voicemail tone)

Ariel: Hi Casper, Vanessa, and Ariana. My name is Ariel. I just listened to the episode blessing Molly Weasley and I had some thoughts that I wanted to share with you. Because, like Molly Weasley, I am a knitter. For me knitting is a sacred practice. It is also a form of self care. And I have always suspected that it is the same for Molly. When I knit something for someone that I love I think of them as I make the stitches. It is a way that I cultivate compassion and gratitude. I weave my love for them into the shape of the wool. And I have always felt that hand knitted
items carry a magic with them because of this. Knitting for my loved ones is a way for me to wrap them in warmth and protect them as they walk through the world.

As we know, this is in alignment with Molly’s every action, but especially with the Christmas sweaters. We will see a moment, in Book 7, that could easily go unnoticed. When Harry pulls on layer after layer of Molly’s sweaters to keep out the cold when he and Hermoine are living in a tent hunting for horocruxes. I think that during this time, when Harry is in such an extreme and desperate moment in his life, he carries the protection of two mothers. Molly is knitting for the revolution and she is keeping them safe and warm in a very real way. And I want to bless her for that.

Thank you for this podcast. My husband and I always listen to it together while I sit up in bed and drink coffee and knit, first thing in the morning. And we love sharing that special time together.

Matt: That you Ariel for that lovely voicemail. One thing that it brought to mind for me was the idea of attention and how just the act of paying close attention to a thing in the world is itself prayerful. There is a thinker named Simone Weil who spoke about this who said that to give your full attention to something is an act of prayer and that actually all the world around us is sacred it’s just we usually aren’t paying enough attention. So, to develop a practice whereby you attend to something closely and patiently and lovingly. And through attention to that thing, in patience and love, give forth your attention to others through these gifts of knitted goods that you deliver. It’s such a lovely practice and such an important one. So thank you for, for the sharing of your gifts with those you love.

Casper: That’s great, Matt. I really love that. And also because, you know, you mentioned two mothers Ariel. Obviously, Molly with those beautiful sweaters and Lily. But I’m also thinking, perhaps not the love, but certainly the protection of two other mothers are going to be so important for Harry. Petunia, of course, who we’ve talked about, in all the problematic ways, but nonetheless her welcoming Harry into her home. And then at the end of Book 7, Narcissa, who is willing to, kind of, risk the wrath of Voldemort to protect her own son and therefore also Harry. So I’m just suddenly seeing, as you’re knitting that wool together, I’m also kind of seeing these other mothers showing up in the books, being knit together around Harry in all these different ways of protecting him.

Matt: Our next voicemail is from another Rachel.

(beeping voicemail tone)

Rachel: Hi Casper, Vanessa, and Ariana. This is Rachel from Brooklyn. I just finished listening to your podcast on Book 5, Chapter 32 on the theme of redemption. And you were talking about how Ron had matured and learned some lessons. Um, and mentioned that that’s how he eventually is able to become a worthy partner for Hermione. Um, and it reminded me of a story
from my own life. When I was a teenager there was this boy who had a really big crush on me. And I thought he was really dorky and I wasn't interested and he told me that he had a crush on me. And I behaved pretty badly. I led him on, I didn't really tell him I wasn't interested. And I did a bunch of, overall, silly teenage stuff. And we stayed friends and about three years ago we actually started dating. And six months ago today, we got married. And, I think that our relationship works, in part, because I've matured. And I've redeemed myself from my bad behavior. But more importantly, I think our relationship works because my husband has had this really amazing ability to forgive. And really love and accept me for who I am today, without holding against me that things I did or said fifteen years ago. I feel really supported to change and I think I've learned from him how to support and love the people in my life to grow and change. So, even though Ron does grow and learn and redeem himself, I want to offer a blessing to Hermione and to my wonderful husband for accepting people for who they are in the moment and not who they were when they were a dumb kid. So, thanks so much for the podcast. Love you guys. Bye-bye.

Casper: Rachel, I love this. And my two rules for successful marriage are, well maybe there’s three: snuggles, talk about everything, and constant forgiveness. So, you have at least one of those already nailed down. I love that idea of both the generosity of spirit in, kind of, changing and learning a different way of being with someone else, but also the other person’s capacity to forgive and see you who you are for today. That’s wonderful, I’m so glad you got married, congratulations.

Matt: Yes, congratulations Rachel on six months of marriage. One of the things I was thinking about as I was listening to you speak. You know, often we think about redemption as undoing the past and erasing that past. (Caspering Ooo-ing) And what I really love about the way you told your story is how it wasn’t about erasing a past. It was about incorporating a past into a future full of new possibilities, full of new love. That has to be more, I think, what redemption and forgiveness actually is. Where we are honest about what the past was and what it’s hurts were, but also where we take it into our lives and it becomes, opens up into new possibilities for life and love with one another.

Casper: That really goes back to what we were talking about with inheritance as well. Would you say a word about how inheritance and redemption conspire or like, the role of forgiveness when we do inherit something that has caused pain.

Matt: One thing that’s interesting is how financial terms govern the way we talk about these things. Inheritance is a financial term. Redemption’s a financial term.

Casper: Really? Where does redemption come from financially?

Matt: Well, like, when you redeem a...redeem a...loss.

Casper: A check!
Matt: Redeem a check. Whatever, right. And when you think about that, money is not a great way to think about our past hurts and our past lives. *(Casper Mmm-ing)* Right? Because, you can pay a debt and it’s gone. But, hurts that you’ve either caused to someone else or that have been visited upon you aren’t so easily erased. When we think about redemption and inheritance maybe in personal and relational terms, then we shouldn’t be thinking about erasing the past or undoing or paying debts. We should be thinking about, how do we take this thing which cannot be erased forward with us into a new life, into a future which is full of possibility and love.

Casper: Mmmmm. Our final voicemail today is from Mike.

(*beeping voicemail tone*)

Mike: Hello Vanessa, Casper, and Ariana. This is Mike from St. Augustine, Florida. I’m a newlywed and, as you might imagine, I have love on the brain right now. And I wanted to talk about love and the Harry Potter series. One of the main reasons Harry Potter is so important to me and, I imagine is important to other people, is because it shows the power of love and that love can triumph over hate. Something I think is especially true and important to remember right now. However, having just reread the series, I realize that none of the characters say “I love you” in the books. In fact, there are only two times someone explicitly says “I love you.” In the last book when Harry comments on Dudley’s goodbye to him he said, “It was like an I love you coming from Dudley.” And in the sixth book when Hermione forgives Ron he says, “I love you, Hermione,” but in a joking, friendly manner. Though it is clear Hermione enjoys this. But all of the other mentions of love are told second hand. Primarily Dumbledore telling Harry how much his parents loved him. Or, they’re part of an internal dialogue where Harry is thinking about his love from someone else. While I understand it’s a book and perhaps it’s better to show rather than tell, it really bothers me that the characters never say I love you. Perhaps it’s because they find themselves in a way and in difficult situations, but if anything, that’s all the more reason to say it. So, I just wanted to end this message with a blessing for anyone who finds it difficult to say I love you to the people they care about. It is so important to tell the people we love that we love them. So that everyone out there who’s having a hard time or who’s struggling, I love you. And to the team at *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, I love you too. Thanks, y’all.

Casper: Mike, that is too cute! Oh, I so appreciate that and it’s so true! And why don’t we say that more to each other? It’s absurd. I remember my dad, when I was, maybe I was fifteen or something. My dad went on this kind of, like, course to, kind of, learn about compassion and it’s called the Hoffman process. It’s a wonderful thing, if you want to send parents on a transformative experience. And he came home and I remember the first thing he did when he came home was say “I love you.” And it wasn’t that he didn’t say that often, but it was such a, such a striking memory for me. And so I love your invitation for all of use to just be reckless. Well, not perhaps reckless, but certainly capacious, to use a Matt word, in how much we tell people we love each other. That’s wonderful, thank you Mike.
Matt: Thank you Mike, for your voicemail as well. I, my family is a big...a family that likes to verbalize our love for each other a lot. But one thing that’s interesting - because I’m Japanese and actually Japanese people don’t say I love you and I’m actually wondering if that’s an affinity between English and Japanese culture. (Casper laughing) This, sort of, covering up of emotions. There’s a documentary that came out a few years ago about survivors of the tsunami in Japan. There’s a man who set up a phone booth in his backyard and, and people could come to the phone booth and make phone calls.

Casper: Wow.

Matt: This phone booth was, it was connected to nothing. They could come to the phone booth and make phone calls to their dead loved ones. And what was so heartbreaking about these recorded phone calls is that these family members never said “I love you.” Like, they would be widowers speaking to a dead spouse in the great beyond saying “Are you cold? Make sure you dress warmly enough.” Like, all these different ways that Japanese people have been cultured to express love just though, like, constant, little, kind reminders to care for yourself. That was the only way they knew how to say I love you. But it also got me thinking that’s also what Japanese people hear when those things are said. So, we should tell each other we love one another. But also we should think about all the different ways we can say I love you to one another without actually saying the words, and do those too, because those really communicate our love as well.

Casper: Mmmm. Show and tell, perhaps.

Matt: Show and tell, that’s right.

Casper: (Casper laughing) Well, to everyone who’s listened to this episode and to all of you who join us on this great adventure through the seven books, we love you. Thank you very, very much for being with us.

(Outro music begins playing behind the speakers)

Casper: You've been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook and join our Facebook group to chat with other listeners about this episode. Come and join over a thousand people who are supporting us on Patreon and leave us a review on iTunes. I read every single one. You can also send us a voicemail and we hope to see you soon at one of our live shows. We'll be in New York City on September 9th, DC on November 7th and St. Louis on December 19th. We are taking two weeks off over the next two weeks, but fear not. We will return for season six, reading The Half-Blood Prince and we’ll start on July 25th. This episode was produced by Not Sorry Productions. Our executive producer is the wonderful Ariana Nedelman. Our associate producer is Chelsea Ursin. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl. And we are part of Nightvale Presents. Thanks to everyone who left us a voicemail this week. To Julia Argy, Maggie Needham, Stephanie
Paulsell and thank you very much to Matt Potts for being with us. We’ll see you all in a few weeks. Bye everyone.

*(Outro music finishes playing)*

Casper: Cuz I would, I still have never done the sacred practices that we do with the Bible.

Matt: Really?

Casper: And it would be really interesting to do it and just see what would happen. Spinoff podcast *(Matt laughing)* reading the Bible as a sacred text!

Matt: Reading the Bible as a sacred text!

*(sound of slow clapping in the background)*

Ariana: Woow, what an idea.

Casper: That would be wild.