Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 5.08 - The Hearing: Partnership

Chapter 8
The Hearing

Casper: (*reading aloud*) “Chapter Eight “The Hearing”

Harry gasped. He could not help himself. The large dungeon he had entered was horribly familiar. He had not only seen it before, he had been here before. This was the place he had visited inside Dumbledore’s Pensieve...”

I'm Casper ter Kuile--

Vanessa: And I'm Vanessa Zoltan—

Casper: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

Vanessa: Casper, in just a few hours I am leaving for Concord, Massachusetts for the Little Women pilgrimage.

Casper: Is that why you have this enormous camping gear and tent with you?

Vanessa: No, that is a figment of your imagination ‘cause we’re staying in a very nice hotel. But it is why I have this musket.

Casper: (laughing) For the historical reenactment!

Vanessa: (laughing) Exactly!

Casper: (laughs)

Vanessa: So this weekend we are gonna be doing reading, writing, and walking with Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women and it’s gonna be a writing based pilgrimage instead of a reading based one. So we’re gonna be doing a lot of spiritual exercises based around writing, and those exercises are based from the books. And so if that sounds like something that you would enjoy doing, you should stay tuned ‘cause we are going to be announcing our next pilgrimage in just a few days. So go to readingandwalkingwith.com, and you can sign up for our newsletter and be the first to find out when we launch these pilgrimages.
So Casper, we are very lucky today to be joined by Lauren Taylor. Lauren is the co-author of *The American Healthcare Paradox*. She has her B.A. and Master’s in public health from Yale University, her MDiv. from Harvard Divinity School, and is currently a Ph.D candidate at Harvard Business School. And for those of you who remember Handsome Rufus from our end credits from season one and from our Twitter account, Lauren is the owner of Handsome Rufus with her wonderful husband, Shane. And she also happens to be one of my favorite people in the whole world. Lauren, thank you so much for making time to be here.

Lauren: It’s so fun to be here. I’m an avid listener.

Vanessa: So Lauren, you are gonna tell us a story on the theme of partnership today. When we put this as the theme, I was just like, Don’t worry, I know exactly who we should ask! and texted you before they said yes.

Lauren: It is a favorite topic of mine.

Vanessa: So why don’t you please tell us a story?

Lauren: Perfect. So during my first year of divinity school, I started studying what I thought was a very cool partnership in Ghana between a group of medical professionals, psychiatrists, and psychologists at a pentecostal prayer camp. By way of context, prayer camps are institutions usually in rural parts of the country. They’re usually run by a prophet or a prophetess. They have quasi-pentecostal charismatic Christian roots, and often they serve as makeshift providers of psychiatric care. People will drop loved ones off there and ask the prophet to heal them, often leaving them there for months or years at a time. The camps serve this function largely because there simply isn’t capacity or access in the formal psychiatric sector that we all might wish there was. By last count, Ghana has something like twenty-five psychiatrists for a population of 25 million.

The partnership between the doctors and the prayer camp was agreed upon on the basis that both parties were committed to improving care for people living in the camps by distributing medication. So the partnership starts, and the way it works is that the doctors, who generally live in the capital city, take off to the prayer camp every Friday. The prayer camp sets up a little clinic space, and the doctors screen people who have been living there with mental illness, give them formal diagnoses (often for the first time), and distribute the medication.

Then one Friday the doctors start to notice a really concerning trend. Many patients who were on medication present for evaluation with nausea, muscle spasms, and rigidity. The doctors recognize these as side-effects of the medications. They’re common in people who are not taking
the meds on a full stomach as prescribed. The doctors ask the prayer camp, What’s going on? and realize that the prayer camp has been putting people on forced fast. These fasts hold particular theological significance because of a handful of biblical passages in which Jesus suggests fasting to people in the text who are described as lunatics. The doctors, as you can imagine, are outraged and demand that the camp ceases these fasts. In response, the prayer camp says, No way, this is essential to who we are and it’s key to our identity, and why should we be the ones to change when you have no intention of doing so? And this is when the veil really fell from my eyes and my conception of partnership changed dramatically. The physicians had no intention of changing. They were there to try and serve and improve the living conditions of the patients, and in their view, the prayer camp staff were a means to an end.

I’ve thought about this case for a really long time, and I think there are two things that have stood out to me. One is that for it to be a true partnership, which I think is a really high bar and really rarely achieved, the relationship has to be an end in itself. Meaning the physicians could not go in expecting to their “partners” and think that was going to work as a true partnership. The second thing is that in real partnerships you have to be open and willing to change and be changed by virtue of the relationship. You have no idea what your partner is going to ask of you or give to you, but it’s in part of that surrender that I think we encounter the divine.

Casper: Lauren, I’m so struck by that story, and I feel like that picture is so vivid. My initial response is like, Well, screw the prayer camps, like, these patients need the best medical care they can get. They’re like, listen to what the physicians are saying, but then, you remember that there is only twenty-five psychiatrists in the whole country, and actually, these prayer camps are kind of important care providers for families who otherwise wouldn’t be able to cope necessarily. And so the way in which that relationship is necessary and also super complicated, I don’t know, feels very familiar. (laughing) With any relationship that you have where you’re like, Yeah, this is a partnership, but I actually I just want you to do what I want.

Lauren: Totally.

Casper: And that doesn’t always work out so well.

Lauren: Yeah.

Casper: (laughing)

Lauren: And I think, you know, as much as I hold partnerships in high regard and have these really high standards for partnerships, I think there’s plenty of spaces in life where partnership is not the right mode of relationship. It should be a joint venture, it should be a joint alliance,
something where we look and say there’s a Venn Diagram and where our interests overlap, great, and where they don’t, we choose not to be in a relationship anymore. I think a lot of things are called partnerships that are not really partnerships. We all like the idea. We like the concept that we’re equals and we do things together, but really when you dig in, it’s a very high standard to say, I am in this with you and for you regardless of what you can do for me.

Casper: And I’m willing to be changed by that relationship that we’re in.

Lauren: In ways that I cannot predict.

Casper: Yeah.

Lauren: Yeah.

Vanessa: So my question, Lauren, is can it be a partnership and then not a partnership and return back to a partnership? You know, I’m even just thinking of marriages where it’s a real partnership and then one person gets really sick, and so like one person has to be the caregiver and therefore has more power in the relationship, and one person has to allow themselves to be cared for. Or friendships where you’re really partners in a lot of ways and then there’s some distance between the two of you and you find each other again. Does there need to be that purity in order for it to be a partnership?

Lauren: Yeah, I don’t think the purity is workable in real life, right? I think the idea of partnership as I’ve kind of described it is almost a platonic ideal. It may not exist in real life, but we’re constantly striving for it, and that striving is a good thing. So I don’t think you can ever get away from it entirely, but I think really smart philosophers, theologians, just kind of our most thoughtful people, continually come back to this idea that to the extent that we can see relationships as an end in itself and try to understand people on their own terms and respect them on their own terms, that’s how we get closer to the holy, the divine, the numinous.

Casper: That really struck me that you ended your story with that idea that a real partnership can bring us closer to the experience of the divine or the sacred in some way. How do you think that works?

Lauren: I think it’s in encountering people as they are and not in instruments to your own ends, that you really have to grapple with all the complexity and messiness of the human condition. It’s one thing to set a strategy and say, I need them to play this part in my life; it’s another thing to try and accompany them and make a relationship work on it’s own terms. I mean, I think this is what a lot of great thinkers have been trying to tell us. Like philosopher Martin Buber made
this key distinction between an I-It relationship and an I-Thou relationship where an I-It relationship was encountering someone as an instrument for your own ends, and an I-Thou relationship was encountering them on their own terms then actually letting the boundaries between yourself and them ultimately sublimate. That has always stayed with me because he’s holding out an ideal by which we are so tightly coupled, we are in true partnership that we fully recognize that our fates are linked, and so I’m not again trying to use you, trying to accomplish something that I have, but we’re working together to accomplish what are ultimately joint goals. And you can’t get away from the fact that their joint goals.

Casper: This is fascinating ‘cause I think this chapter we’re about to talk about is full of examples of both. But it’s actually making me think differently about how Dumbledore and Harry are engaging so I’m looking forward to talking about that.

Vanessa: Me too! I have more patience for Dumbledore after listening to Lauren.

Casper: Lauren, I’m so glad you came in to share this story and so grateful for all the wonderful work you do in the world.

Lauren: It’s my pleasure! I can’t wait to hear your reflections on the chapter.

Vanessa: So Casper, now that we’ve heard about Lauren and the amazing stuff that she does, why don’t we recap a children’s book?

Casper: Shall I go first?

Vanessa: I mean it’s your turn to so, yes (laughing).

Casper: Oh, okay!

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, GO!

Casper: So Harry walks in and he’s like, oh my god, I’ve been here before. This is where the LeStranges were condemned in the Pensieve memory experience. Um, and he sees a big chair and it’s got chains on it, and then he just sits down on it, and they just like, rattle, it’s like a little chain shimmy. Um, and there is the Wizengamot and there’s like fifty people and there’s this like shadowy figure Dolores Umbridge and there’s Susan Bones. Also you get great name reveals like turns out Percy’s middle name is, not Isengard, it’s Ignatius. Anyway, um, he starts giving evidence. Fudge says blah (buzzer sounds) Dumbledore shows up and Figgy does great.
Vanessa: (laughing) I like it that when you read the opening sentence at the beginning of the episode, the first part of your thirty-second recap is just the opening sentences of the chapter.

Casper: There’s so much of it that it’s just amazing.

Vanessa: It is a (whistles) chapter.

Casper: It’s a short chapter but it packs a punch, and I love that it’s all one scene.

Vanessa: Yeah. Yeahyeahyeah.

Casper: Such great writing. Okay, are you ready?

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Okay, here we go. Thirty-second recap starting...now!

Vanessa: Harry is there defending himself against Fudge. Percy is like, definitely on the dark side. Mrs. Figg comes and says I saw the thing (Casper: Dementors) dementors, and Harry cast a Patronus, and everyone is like, oh my god you can do an embodied Patronus? and straight up crushes on Harry. Dumbledore shows up and he can conjure a chair and he’s like no big deal and basically manipulates it to protect Harry from the fact that he probably would’ve been found guilty. Because of Dumbledore, he’s found innocent and then Dumbledore goes off.

(buzzer sounds)

Vanessa: I love it when we do $30,000 Pyramid version of thirty-second recap where you fill in the blanks for me.

Casper: (laughs) We make a good team!

Vanessa: And then this kid named...HARRY

Casper: Harry!

(both laughing)

Vanessa: And his mentor called…
Casper: (laughing) Hagrid! No! Dumbledore!

So Vanessa, let’s talk about partnership because when we first chose this theme, I was like, huh, what an interesting idea. Let’s see where this shows up. And actually, I found it all over the text. Where do you want to start?

Vanessa: I think let’s start where Lauren led us with Dumbledore and Harry.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: When I was reading it, I was like, this is not a partnership. This is a caretaking relationship. This is a grown-up showing up and doing what needs to be done in order to protect a child. But it’s not a real partnership in any way. But in listening to Lauren talk, I do think that Dumbledore is willing to be changed by Harry. I do think Dumbledore cares about Harry, and he just has more context than Harry, but I think as much as you can be partners where there is a huge power imbalance, Dumbledore is trying.

Casper: What’s so interesting is throughout the chapter, we keep hearing these references to how Dumbledore isn’t looking at Harry. I mean, the closing sentence of the whole chapter is “and without looking once at Harry, he swept from the dungeon.” And so I was reading it kind of like you were saying, not seeing a partnership. It feels very instrumental to me and at this point the reader does not yet know exactly why Dumbledore is avoiding eye contact, but we as experienced Harry Potterians do. It feels a bit like Dumbledore is using Harry. You know, like he’s using him as a means to overcome Voldemort, and so I really felt like there wasn’t a partnership. Can you tell me more about where you think it is?

Vanessa: Yeah, I think even just in the conjuring of a comfortable chair sitting next to Harry. Dumbledore could remain standing. Dumbledore could formally address the committee and then leave. He could have sent a letter. Any number of things. Given the fact that he is afraid that if he looks at Harry, Voldemort will be able to see him and interact with him in some way, he’s doing everything he can, you know, to use the language that Lauren used, to accompany Harry, to walk with him. He stays for the whole trial.

Casper: But I think he knows he is the only person that can stand up to Fudge at this point. I don’t think he is accompanying him because accompaniment would be an arm around the shoulder or a cup of tea after the dungeon moment is over. He clearly cares for Harry and this is a tactical move to not allow himself to lock eyes with Harry, but Harry doesn’t know that. I think that’s so heartbreaking about this, that even if from Dumbledore’s perspective, he is in partnership, for Harry it doesn’t feel like it.
Vanessa: Yeah, that obviously is really important. I do think there is certain things and certain times that you can’t explain something to someone. Even in adult partnerships, right? Sometimes there just isn’t enough time in a crisis. And so I wonder if part of the reason that it’s not a partnership is that Harry doesn’t trust Dumbledore. He doesn’t have any self talk of, Dumbledore must have his reasons.

Casper: Which he used to do a lot and that’s really disappeared here. That’s so interesting.

Vanessa: Because right, if you’re rude to me, I wouldn’t immediately assume that we were no longer friends and partners. I would be like, oh something must be going on. Or if you called me up and said, I need you to do this, I wouldn’t be, oh, Casper is instrumentalizing me right now and I’m only a tool. (Casper laughs) In these gaps where we communicate, I would assume good intentions.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: And so we would stay in partnership. And there isn’t that happening. I’m not blaming Harry. I’m just saying I think Dumbledore is doing more than I originally thought.

Casper: Well, what’s so interesting is that because they have not had any contact over the summer, when things like this happen, they have a moment of brusqueness or rudeness, Harry reads it as rudeness. He’s like, Dumbledore doesn’t care for me because you know, he’s just showing up to protect me, nothing more.

Vanessa: And let’s not forget, again, that Harry is still very much dealing with this trauma, right? And so he feels completely isolated and this is somebody who he has put on a pedestal, who he believes that he has a special relationship with, and is getting no evidence of that special relationship. I mean, and of course it matters that both people in a partnership feel like they’re in a partnership. I mean, it’s sort of absurd to think otherwise, I guess. There’s no one on high who’s like, No no, you’re in a partnership if you don’t feel like it.

Casper: There are moments, gosh I can’t remember, this was probably from one of those online clickbait articles on “How 80-Year Marriages Last” and something like that. There was this older woman who said, “In life and in partnerships especially, don’t be afraid to be the one who loves more.” And I just thought that was so true about how every partnership will have ebbs and flows, and there will be times when one is investing more than the other or however we can think of it. And to make a partnership last that long, you have to be willing to be the one who’s not fully understanding why or who is showing up anyway. It’s unfair to us that Harry is a fifteen-year-old in trauma, but I think that’s something I’ve really tried to remember in my relationships,
romantic and friendship and work relationships, that there will be times when it does feel not fully reciprocated and you show up anyway or whatever it is. So even though in this moment, you know, we can look at it and see this disconnection, we know that actually they’re going to reconnect again. In fact, Dumbledore’s very specific about Fudge not having judicial authority over Hogwarts students, so you know he’s even making space to say, This courtroom is not where I’m going to do my work with Harry - we’re going to have a chat later kind of thing.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: The other partnership that I want to talk about in this chapter is this intense relationship between Fudge and Dumbledore. Like, it’s electric.

Vanessa: (laughs) It’s intense.

Casper: There’s so much going on beneath the words, that’s what I really love.

Vanessa: Yeah, point us to where you want to start.

Casper: I mean, Dumbledore is inciting Section 7CA300 of every Wizengamot law. He’s clearly engaging the Wizengamot beyond Fudge. He has a direct question to Madame Bones. He’s just constantly undermining Fudge’s authority in a way that can never be said to be blatant, but nonetheless is (laughs).

Vanessa: Right, and what he’s doing is remind Fudge that technically, they are in partnership. Technically they are two leaders who care about being law-abiding and are technically on the same side. Dumbledore is strategically trying to manipulate Fudge out of his punishing Harry mode and is trying to remind him, No no, we’re on the same side, right? wink wink. You wouldn’t want to be on the opposite side of me. I’m on the side of justice and doing this right. I’m on the side of dementors not being in random suburbs. Aren’t you on the same side?

Casper: Aren’t we? Wink wink, nudge nudge.

Vanessa: Yeah, exactly. So to some extent it feels as though Dumbledore, even though they are not in partnership in the divine way Lauren was pointing us to, Dumbledore is constantly strategically reminding Fudge that technically we are in partnership. Technically we work for the same team.

Casper: Yes, completely agree with you. The thing that feels like such a missed opportunity is that Fudge has this incredible amiability and is clearly an effective political operator, frankly in
ways that Dumbledore isn’t even though Dumbledore is the more powerful wizard. And throughout the chapter I was thinking, Oh my goodness, what would be the scene in the wizarding world if these two were in that kind of divine partnership that we were referring to. Neither of them want Voldemort back, and yet here we are, engaged in this time-wasting dangerous situation where no one is winning. And the whole conversation really moves away from Harry and the Dementors to be this much bigger question for the Wizengamot of do you stand with Fudge or do you stand with Dumbledore? And it feels like we’re at this kind of tipping point in the Ministry and in the wider wizarding world where Harry is being marginalized, Dumbledore is being dethroned from various kind of high orders and everything else, and this chasm is starting to emerge within mainstream society. One group is saying Voldemort is back and we have to get ready, and the other group is saying no no no no no, we don’t want to engage with that or Harry is making up lies or whatever. And at this point, at the beginning of the book, the answers fall in Dumbledore’s favor, but we know that soon is going to fall very differently.

Vanessa: I think that you see those alliances forming. The sort of teams that are building are: it’s Fudge v. Dumbledore and then on Team Fudge we have Percy Weasley and Dolores Umbridge…

Casper: Who we meet for the first time in this chapter.

Vanessa: Yes, we have to talk about that! And then we have Mrs. Figg and Harry in the other corner. Like, a squib and a kid.

Casper: But there’s also, I mean, he wins the vote in the Wizengamot, so there’s still a number of, there’s some witches in the back who wave as he comes in. And also Madame Bones, it seems, is swayed by his arguments.

Vanessa: It feels like those people are open, right? They’re not on a team yet, they’re not in partnership. They are to hear a case be argued and vote on the side of justice.

Casper: Well, I think more than that. I think none of them resigned in protest when Dumbledore was stripped of his honors and his Wizengamot membership. This is why I’m starting to think, is Dumbledore an effective partner in the world because people who are really beloved and trusted colleagues, if they get fired for no reason, you would expect to see more of a fuss be put up.

Vanessa: But in Trump’s America, do you still believe in that? We see all the time the compromises that people are willing to make, saying “Well it’s really unfair the way this person is being treated but it’s better that I’m in Congress than somebody else. And at least from the
inside I can be making these arguments.” And I don’t think necessarily that people are wrong. We need good people on the inside even when terrible things are happening, right? To each their own. We need a dog in every fight on this. But how would it benefit the Wizengamot if all of the people who sort of believed Dumbledore walked out with him?

Casper: So much of this is about whether Dumbledore, and really whether about Harry, is to be believed. And I think what’s powerful, we’ve talked about this before this year, more and more people are sharing their stories, where once you get more and more of these voices accumulated, it becomes nearly impossible to reject with any sort of credibility. So I get that’s what I can imagine is more and more people saying “I stand with Dumbledore, I believe him. Even if this information is very confusing to me and I don’t quite understand, I trust the integrity of this human being.”

Vanessa: Yeah, certainly nobody is trying to get that news in the paper.

Casper: Right. I guess what I’m saying is I feel like the Wizengamot is no longer a neutral institution. No one has complained that they’re in a dungeon with fifty people for a small boy who has used magic illegally. No one is questioning the process and they should be.

Vanessa: Well, I want to push back. We don’t know if there are people behind the scenes who are questioning the process. We don’t know if the two witches in the back were like, Why the heck are we moving this three hours earlier? And are there under some sort of protest and are there, and thank goodness they’re there because they are able to vote in Harry’s favor.

Casper: That’s true.

Vanessa: But they certainly aren’t vocally getting on the record and doing it in any way that we see, and I think that matters. I agree with you. We just don’t, we don’t know the protests that are happening behind the scene.

Casper: That’s true. I mean, even the Wizengamot as an interesting idea of partnership. The idea that you’re trialed by a jury so that there’s this idea that justice is administered through partnership in some way. I’m not sure it quite fulfills what Lauren was talking about with a true partnership, but there’s some sense of a collaboration that’s needed, right? It’s not an individual sentence. And that’s a kind of a way of having a safety check on perhaps one person’s worse impulses.

I like that idea of partnership being a check and a balance in some way. I feel like that happens in my life all the time. Like if you’re working on a team and you’re like, Let’s do this wild and
ambitious idea, and your partner’s like, Well, I love your courage and remember we need to do this this and this before Friday. And you’re like, Oh yeah, okay. Maybe that’s just me.

Casper: So Vanessa, we have been looking forward to this moment for quite some time because in this chapter we meet Dolores Umbridge.

Vanessa: She’s terrifying. And apparently, I had forgotten this, she really looks like a toad.

Casper: And then she had some of the best dialogue in the whole book.

“I’m sure I must have misunderstood you, Professor Dumbledore,” she said with a simper that left her big, round eyes as cold as ever. “So silly of me, but it sounded for a teensy moment as though you were suggesting that the Ministry of Magic had ordered an attack on this boy.” She gave a silvery laugh that made the hairs on the back of Harry’s neck stand up.

She’s terrifying.

Vanessa: She is terrifying, but isn’t she just playing Dumbledore’s game? Dumbledore has set a tone of this passive-aggressive “Oh dear me” and she’s just meeting Dumbledore where he is.

Casper: She’s like, You wanna play? Oh I’ll show you how to play.

Vanessa: And it’s so sneaky what she’s doing right now because the Ministry didn’t order it, right? She did, not on Ministry orders, illegally, right? We’re gonna find out much later in the book. But everybody in this room is playing that game. Fudge is saying “It’s not our fault that the time moved” when of course it’s his fault. Dumbledore is throwing around all of these half-fibs. Mrs. Figg says she saw the Dementors when we all know she didn’t see the Dementors. She felt the Dementors, she knows they’re there, but she says she saw them. She did not see them. A partnership in a true way can lift you up. This is mutual degradation.

Casper: What I do want to pick up on, Vanessa, is your point that Umbridge is responding to Dumbledore’s tone, and I don’t think I had seen that, which I think is a little sexist of me.

Vanessa: I think the only thing that I feel for her is the fact that she is using the very old tactic women often feel like they have to use of pretending to be dumb. Dumbledore is playing a similar game. He says, “I’m sure you’re doing this unintentionally,” but he doesn’t say, “I just don’t understand.” And Umbridge does this thing of like, “I must not understand what you’re saying.” And as somebody who has had to use that tactic in her life in order to assuage the ego of
men who are saying ridiculous things, I just felt for her in that moment of having to degrade
yourself in order to try to get what you want out of an interaction.

Casper: Right, that makes sense. How do you think she’s gonna react to losing this vote? Like,
what’s happening between that relationship between her and Fudge after losing?

Vanessa: She’s like, Dumbledore can’t be trusted or controlled. We have to send me into that
school. I had not thought of that until you asked me that question, but this is the inciting incident
and why she goes to Hogwarts.

Casper: Wow.

Vanessa: You’re a genius.

Casper: Oh, I just asked the question. You answered it.

Vanessa: Can we, let’s talk about Percy. Percy in this moment breaks my heart. He’s given so
much dignity, right. He’s given power and respect and is being treated as if he’s a member of this
very high body. And you can just see how much it means to him. It breaks my heart. It BREAKS
my heart. It feels like he’s turning to the camera, and you can see that he’s sold a pound of flesh
in order to get that puffed-up feeling.

And Dumbledore isn’t making eye contact with Harry. We know it’s for good intentions, and
Percy can’t make eye contact with Harry either but for this reason of shame and misguided pride.

Casper: I think partnership comes into it in some extent because he is looking for the kind of
relational investment that he hasn’t felt maybe at home. And you know, Fudge is using his
correct name. His old boss didn’t even know his name, but Fudge says, “Weasley, can you go
and open the door and get Mrs. Figg?”

Vanessa: And we hear his full name. He’s given his actual full name.

Casper: Yes, and I love that we find out that his middle name is Ignatius, which reminded me of
Saint Ignatius who is always known for his ambition. So it really connected the dots for me. It
just feels like Percy is in this striving mode and where he’s getting rewarded is where he’s
growing. And what we focus on, we become. Where we place our attention is who we become.
He’s placed his attention on his ambition and his willingness to discard his familial relationships,
where for most of us, so much of our true partnership really lies. And he’s getting caught up in
this very sad situation. And harmful!
(*musical interlude theme plays*)

Casper: So Vanessa this week we’re continuing with Lectio Divina, and I have found two very short sentences which I am going to put together.

_They were big. Big and wearing cloaks._

Step one: Narratively, where are we in the chapter? What’s happening in the story?

Vanessa: This is one of my favorite moments in the chapter. Dumbledore has brought Mrs. Figg forward as a witness defending Harry, that he was being attacked and therefore he had to do magic even though he was outside of the bounds of school. And she is describing what the Dementors look like to offer as evidence that she saw them. And she does a really bad job describing them.

Casper: Perfect. So as we think about the second step of Lectio, what are the allegories that come to mind of other stories or images or songs or poems that come to mind.

_They were big. Big and wearing cloaks._

Vanessa: Only really obvious things are coming to mind, like the things that I think of that wear cloaks. Things like the Grim Reaper, monks we often think of as wearing cloaks. But a cloak in the way that it was conjured for me in this sentence is something worn by divine presences or by mysterious ones. You can hide in a cloak. In *Princess Bride* they want a wheelbarrow in a cloak in order to create this magical burning image that scares everybody and creates this big enough distraction that they can storm the castle. So I think of cloaks as looming large. That’s what came to mind for me. What about for you?

Casper: Interesting that you say monks and kind of celestial figures. I was really thinking of legal figures, and actually thinking of the Wizengamot, whom from Harry’s perspective they are big and wearing cloaks. I don’t think he’s reliving the Dementor attack by looking at these wizards and witches, but there’s something about the danger and the physical size of these people sitting high up. This space is designed to intimidate the witnesses and the accused, right? And to elevate and empower the judiciary. We haven’t really talked about what an awful move it is to put this whole scene in this dungeon. I mean, from the beginning you’re assuming guilt. Harry is being completely flustered. I just feel like what happens with the Dementors is being mirrored in what’s happening with this trial process. Unexpected, weighed one-sided in terms of power.
Vanessa: He’s sitting there thinking he might not ever be happy again.

Casper: And he’s rescued by Mrs. Figg.

Vanessa: (laughs) Yes! Is is! It is the Dementor attack all over again! Mrs. Figg….

Casper: I love her.

Vanessa: I also was struck by the word “big” and I can’t quite make meaning of it. But it obviously made me think of Hagrid.

Casper: I mean, what Hagrid is so beautiful in doing is that he shows big does not have to mean frightening.

Vanessa: Right.

Casper. Right. I mean, this is what he does with his animals. He takes things that would be dangerous and makes them safe. He takes fear and he turns it into love.

Vanessa: Well, he tries to.

Casper: (laughing) Well, yeah, sometimes he succeeds.

Vanessa: Sometimes he succeeds.

Casper: His kind of archetype in the book is to take fear and turn it into love. So how about step three? Here we’re invited to think about what memories we might have from our own lives or experiences we’re reminded of by these short phrases.

They were big. Big and wearing cloaks.

Vanessa: I remember how big things seem to me when I first get there. The way that New York seemed big and completely terrifying to me when I first moved there, when I was 23. And then eventually you know the subways, you know your ways around, and it’s a false intimacy, but it becomes smaller to you once you know it. And that feeling again, I remember when I arrived at Harvard thinking, “I don’t belong here and this place will never feel comfortable to me. There will not be a day when I walk through this yard and tell myself, I belong here.” And then it was just a couple of months later, and I never just sat around and was like, “Boy, do I belong here.” But I certainly wasn’t conscious of the fact that I was at this historic place where just a
generation ago, women weren’t really allowed, and two generations ago Jews weren’t allowed. It’s making me think that things seem big when you don’t know them and they sort of get smaller as you get more intimate with them. What about you, Casper?

Casper: I love that. That’s really cool. This is a completely random memory, but that’s where my brain went so I’m sharing. When I was at the Waldorf school that I went to, the Steiner school as a kid, all the teachers would be involved in putting on plays, especially around Christmas. And so in the play, they would wear these costumes, and it was sort of the same costumes every year because it was the same play every year. And so there was this excitement as a seven-year-old of “which character is our teacher playing this year?” ‘cause they would rotate. I’m just thinking of how, from that young age, you’re looking at these adults who are dressing up in these cloaks and they seem big and it seems far away. And now that I’m 31, I’m like “Oh, imagine getting together with your colleagues to dress up and do a play for kids.” Like, that both sounds fun and also, like, kind of weird, especially if you don’t like each other and you still have to work together. I’m just thinking about how, when something is a performance, you experience it in one way as an audience and it can be this magical thing. But when you’re making it happen, you see all the “Oh you missed your line” or “I spilled ketchup down my cloak which is supposed to be Mother Mary”. Just the hilarity of being behind the scenes.

Vanessa: So I remember in fifth grade, I was in one class, and my best friend, Kim, was in another class and there was a shared door. Sometimes, if the teacher had to go to the bathroom or something, they would open the door and say to the other teacher, “Can you sort of keep an eye on my class while I run to the bathroom?” And I always assumed the two of them were good friends, and I found out twenty years later that they hated each other. But you just assume adults... Like anything big and far away, you assume a sheen to it, that it must be done in this big, beautiful way. Then when you get big you’re like, Oh no that is not how that works. But yeah, as a kid, you were just like “That is so nice that they’re best friends”. Because my best friend was in the next room, I just assumed they were best friends.

Casper: (laughs) So finally, stage four. So this is when we have to ask ourselves “What is the text trying to tell us?” What message can we find in these little snippets of text?

They were big. Big and wearing cloaks.

Vanessa: What it called me to was to remember when I think something is too big that being intimidated by it doesn’t help. Harry, when he was faced with the Dementors, has to stay hopeful in order to cast a Patronus, and Harry in front of the Wizengamot has to hold onto his truth in order to fight as well as he can against it. So I think thinking of things as too big is a way to keep yourself small, and so I feel called to the next time I feel like I don’t deserve to be part of that to
sort of say “Well, why not?” That’s not too big, and remind myself of the times in my life in which... I so remember looking at the second graders and thinking they were so big and I’m now bigger than most second graders.

Casper: I think what you’ve just said is so wise. When I think of something as really big it doesn’t mean that I’m really small.

Vanessa: What about you? What do you feel called to?

Casper: Mine is totally random.

Vanessa: Yay!

Casper: I’m very inspired by Jonathan Van Ness from Queer Eye.

Vanessa: Aren’t we all?

Casper: Aren’t we all?

Vanessa: His Emmy look...I also had a dream where he and I were friends.

Casper: Okay, so the look is where I’m going with this. I’m famous for loving capes, and I own a couple of capes because I love capes. But I hardly ever wear them. The thing is, Jonathan wearing high heels just with the cute t-shirt and jeans outfit. I’m like, Why don’t I do that? I wanna wear high heels. And it’s like, how ridiculous that a couple of inches under my heel has all of this to say about my gender performance and how people are gonna look at me. And I’m like, yeah, these Dementors are wearing super cute cloaks. And I wanna wear super cool heels. And I think that the text is trying to tell me that I should.

Vanessa: I mean, I don’t think you should, but only because they’re uncomfortable.

Casper: (laughing) I think I just want to stand in them for awhile then learn my lesson.

Vanessa: No no no. I am super supportive of you wearing heels.

Casper: I know.

Vanessa: I’ve recently given up wearing heels. You start!
Casper: Perfect.

Vanessa: Someone on this podcast should always be wearing heels.

Casper: Do you have size 10 ½ feet?

Vanessa: (laughing) I have size 7 in girls. Which is size 5 in mens.

Casper: (laughing)

This week’s voicemail is from an anonymous listener.

(*Voicemail beep*)

Anonymous: Hi Vanessa, Casper, and Ariana. First of all, I would like to keep my name to myself as I’m gonna be discussing the nature of my job in public service, if that’s alright. I’ve been reading through the early chapters for *Order of the Phoenix* with y’all and in the introductory chapters of the book, something jumped out to me, especially when they mentioned the Ministry of Magic being opposed to the Order of the Phoenix yet Arthur Weasley, Tonks, and Kingsley are parts of both. And see, this resonated really hard with me as earlier this year I took a job in my state-level Republican party. Now full disclaimer, I’m a queer leftist. I’m not a Republican at all. But when I took this job, I viewed it not as like spying and infiltrating the Republican party, but hopefully as a moderating voice in conversations and decisions I’ll be having from inside the organization. So I’d be lying if I said I didn’t have any future political ambitions this might help. As I’m in this job, I see true atrocities and what I do view as evil from upper levels from the Republican party, and that while I only work at the state level and not the federal and I’m mostly just a staffer, I tried to take this job for good reasons. But how complicit am I in having these atrocities happen? And I bet that’s something that Tonks, Arthur, and Kingsley deal with. Especially with Tonks and Kingsley as they’re Aurors and enforcing the laws of the Ministry of Magic that is work against the good of all. I don’t know where the line is between trying to be an enforcer for good or for furthering the cause of something both bad and larger than one person. I’d like to end this voicemail with a blessing. I’d like to bless Tonks, Arthur, Kingsley, and anybody else who, like me, is working for an institution or a business that they might not agree with and that is doing terrible things. That we’re trying to make a difference. Thank you all for this podcast. I love it so much. It literally brightens my whole life in these dark times.

Vanessa: So the way that some of the sausage gets made for this podcast is that Ariana picks our voicemail before we come into the studio. We listen to it together in the studio. We had no idea
that this voicemail was coming. Casper, when we talked basically directly about this, how complicit the witches were in the back are in what’s going on in the Wizengamot, and yeah, thank you so much for that great voicemail and for your beautiful blessing of Kingsley and Tonks. You know, I haven’t thought about how hard walking that line is for both of them.

Casper: Yeah, thank you so much. And you know, it makes me really appreciate Kingsley and Tonks who are within a system that is so implicated in evil, but actively doing something in the Order of the Phoenix to try and undo it and are actually using the information they have on the inside to help the outside, and using the information that they have from the outside to kind of deter the inside. Which that must not be easy.

Vanessa, it’s time for us to offer a blessing for someone in the pages of this chapter. Who are you going to bless this week?

Vanessa: I would like to bless Mrs. Figg for lying. She’s a terrible liar (Casper laughs) and lying is often wrong, but she is lying about details but saying something true. She is 100% sure that there were Dementors there and she has to sort of give this patent lie in order to make the rest of what she’s saying sound true. And she’s doing it for such a good reason, right, she’s protecting Harry from being unjustly convicted. And so I just want to offer a blessing for someone who is willing to put themselves in danger, she could get in trouble for this, and just see the bigger picture of “it’s important for me to lie in this moment”. Basically, a blessing to liars everywhere. (Casper laughs)

Casper: Well, and the fact that she is a squib who’s demeaned even as she’s giving testimony. That shows her courage.

Vanessa: Yeah. She wears her slippers to court, which --

Casper: Good for her.

Vanessa: Be comfortable. What about you, Casper?

Casper: I do really want to bless Dumbledore in this chapter. Everytime I re-read these books I find my reaction to him shifting, and this chapter is such an amazing testament to his foresight and to his skill. The way he navigates this whole conversation to be really a judgment on the Ministry and the failure of Fudge. I just appreciate that strategic insight that he has, but also that with these difficult circumstances which Harry does not at this point understand, he’s doing everything he can to support Harry and that moment with the chintz chair, I just, I love him for that. So a blessing for Dumbledore and for anyone who is doing the best they can even when to
others it doesn’t look like enough. And giving testimony against evil. That is so necessary right now.

(*theme music begins*)

Vanessa: You've been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and leave Casper a review on iTunes so he knows he is loved. You can also send us a voicemail to harrypottersacredtext@gmail.com. We hope to catch you at one of our live shows or in Florida at our live weekend extravaganza. Why did I make it sound spooooooooky?

Casper: Spoooooookyyyy.

Next week, we will be listening to Chapter Nine, "The Woes of Mrs. Weasley" through the theme of willpower. This episode is produced by Ariana Nedelman, me, Casper ter Kuile, and Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl. Thanks to the anonymous voicemail contributor this week, for the amazing Lauren Taylor for sharing her opening story--

Vanessa: Wooooo!

Casper: to Julia Argy, Amanda Madigan, and Bridget Goggin, and of course, the beloved Stephanie Paulsell.

Vanessa: Who?

Casper: We’ll see you all next week!

(*theme music ends*)

Casper: (singing) I can show you the world,

Vanessa: Can you?

Casper: (singing) Shining, shimmering, splendid,

Vanessa: Is it?