

# The Poetry of Vulnerability

Vulnerability Resources including podcast, blog, guided meditation & videos  
[www.yourmindfulcoach.com](http://www.yourmindfulcoach.com) (look for Cultivating Wholeheartedness and Mindfulness, Courage & Vulnerability links)

David Whyte Audio Interview with Krista Tippett on *On Being*  
<http://www.onbeing.org/program/david-whyte-the-conversational-nature-of-reality/8560>

*Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words* book by David Whyte  
<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/24108839-consolations>

*Clear Mind, Wild Heart* audiobook by David Whyte  
<http://www.soundstrue.com/store/clear-mind-wild-heart-4823.html>

Awakening Rights, by Mark Nepo

We waste so much energy trying to cover up who we are when beneath every attitude is the want to be loved, and beneath every anger is a wound to be healed and beneath every sadness is the fear that there will not be enough time. Our challenge each day is not to get dressed to face the world but to unglue ourselves so that the doorknob feels cold and the car handle feels wet and the kiss goodbye feels like the lips of another being, soft and unrepeatable.

The Way It Is, by William Stafford

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread.

But it is hard for others to see.

While you hold it you can't get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread.

Start Close In, by David Whyte

Start close in,  
don't take the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first thing  
close in,  
the step you don't want to take.

Start with the ground you know,  
the pale ground beneath your feet,  
your own way of starting  
the conversation.

Start with your own question,  
give up on other people's questions,  
don't let them smother  
Something simple.

To find another's voice,  
Follow your own voice,  
wait until that voice  
becomes a private ear  
listening to another.

Start right now  
take a small step  
you can call your own  
don't follow someone else's heroics,  
be humble and focused,  
start close in,  
don't mistake that other for your own.

Start close in,  
don't take the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first thing  
close in,  
the step you don't want to take.

What If I Knock, by Danna Faulds

What if I knock  
and nothing happens?  
What if I knock  
only to have to the  
door slammed soundly  
in my face?  
What if I decide to wait until  
I feel courageous and  
worthy, and that day  
never comes?  
What if I knock and the  
doors opens?  
What if I'm invited inside,  
welcomed, embraced,  
no trace of judgment  
Anywhere?  
What will I say?  
What if the biblical promise is real  
and every knock-  
no matter how timid  
or bold- opens a door  
whether I know it or not?  
What if the door has  
been open the whole  
time, while I dithered  
and doubted at the  
threshold, while I  
waited and paced?  
What if I lived from  
the premise that I'm  
already inside?

The Swan, by Rainer Maria Rilke and translated by Robert Bly

This clumsy living that moves lumbering  
as if in ropes through what is not done,  
reminds us of the awkward way the swan walks.

And to die, which is the letting go  
of the ground we stand on and cling to every day,  
is like the swan, when he nervously lets himself down  
into the water, which receives him gaily  
and which flows joyfully under  
and after him, wave after wave,  
while the swan, unmoving and marvelously calm,  
is pleased to be carried, each moment more fully grown,  
more like a king, further and further on.

The Well of Grief by David Whyte

Those who will not slip beneath  
the still surface on the well of grief  
turning downward through its black water  
to the place we cannot breathe  
will never know the source from which we drink,  
the secret water, cold and clear,  
nor find in the darkness glimmering  
the small round coins  
thrown by those who wished for something else

The Parable of the Trapeze, by Danaan Parry from the book *Warriors of the Heart*

**Turning the Fear of Transformation into the Transformation of Fear**

Sometimes I feel that my life is a series of trapeze swings. I'm either hanging on to a trapeze bar swinging along or, for a few moments in my life, I'm hurtling across space in between trapeze bars.

Most of the time, I spend my life hanging on for dear life to my trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries me along at a certain steady rate of swing and I have the feeling that I'm in control of my life.

I know most of the right questions and even some of the answers.

But every once in a while as I'm merrily (or even not-so-merrily) swinging along, I look out ahead of me into the distance and what do I see? I see another trapeze bar swinging toward me. It's empty and I know, in that place in me that knows, that this new trapeze bar has my name on it. It is my next step, my growth, my aliveness coming to get me. In my heart of hearts I know that, for me to grow, I must release my grip on this present, well-known bar and move to the new one.

Each time it happens to me I hope (no, I pray) that I won't have to let go of my old bar completely before I grab the new one. But in my knowing place, I know that I must totally release my grasp on my old bar and, for some moment in time, I must hurtle across space before I can grab onto the new bar.

Each time, I am filled with terror. It doesn't matter that in all my previous hurtles across the void of unknowing I have always made it. I am each time afraid that I will miss, that I will be crushed on unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between bars. I do it anyway. Perhaps this is the essence of what the mystics call the faith experience. No guarantees, no net, no insurance policy, but you do it anyway because somehow to keep hanging on to that old bar is no longer on the list of alternatives. So, for an eternity that can last a microsecond or a thousand lifetimes, I soar across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not yet here."

It's called "transition." I have come to believe that this transition is the only place that real change occurs. I mean real change, not the pseudo-change that only lasts until the next time my old buttons get punched.

I have noticed that, in our culture, this transition zone is looked upon as a "no-thing," a noplac between places. Sure, the old trapeze bar was real, and that new one coming towards me, I hope that's real, too. But the void in between? Is that just a scary, confusing, disorienting nowhere that must be gotten through as fast and as unconsciously as possible?

NO! What a wasted opportunity that would be. I have a sneaking suspicion that the transition zone is the only real thing and the bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void where the real change, the real growth, occurs for us. Whether or not my hunch is true, it remains that the transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honored, even savored. Yes, with all the pain and fear and feelings of being out of control that can (but not necessarily) accompany transitions, they are still the most alive, most growth-filled, passionate, expansive moments in our lives.

*We cannot discover new oceans unless we have the courage to lose sight of the shore.*

-Anonymous

So, transformation of fear may have nothing to do with making fear go away, but rather with giving ourselves permission to "hang out" in the transition between trapezes. Transforming our need to grab that new bar, any bar, is allowing ourselves to dwell in the only place where change really happens. It can be terrifying. It can also be enlightening in the true sense of the word. Hurtling through the void, we just may learn how to fly.

Unconditional by Jennifer Welwood

Willing to experience aloneness,  
I discover connection everywhere;  
Turning to face my fear,  
I meet the warrior who lives within;  
Opening to my loss,  
I gain the embrace of the universe;  
Surrendering into emptiness,  
I find fullness without end.  
Each condition I flee from pursues me,  
Each condition I welcome transforms me  
And becomes itself transformed  
Into its radiant jewel-like essence.  
I bow to the one who has made it so,  
Who has crafted this Master Game.  
To play it is purest delight;  
To honor its form--true devotion.