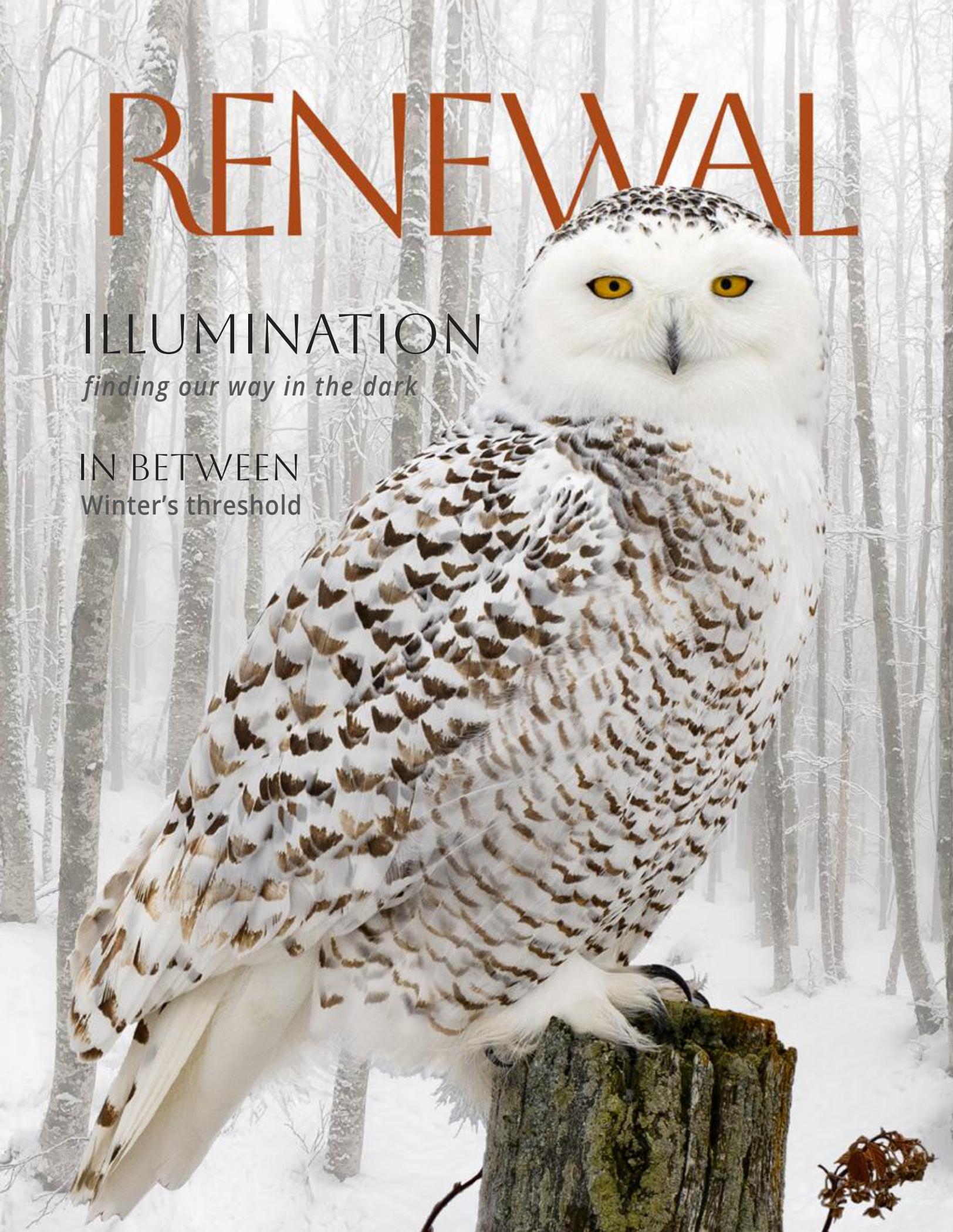


# RENEWAL

A snowy owl with bright yellow eyes and brown and white mottled feathers is perched on a mossy tree stump in a snowy forest. The background is a dense forest of thin trees covered in snow.

ILLUMINATION

*finding our way in the dark*

IN BETWEEN  
Winter's threshold



# ILLUMINATION

**4**

THIS MONTH'S THEME:

## ILLUMINATION

*A Solstice journey into darkness to discover the light within.*

**18**

SACRED SPACE:

## CANDLES

*A universal symbol of the inner flame, candles bring sacred fire to any setting.*

**26**

TOOLS FOR THE JOURNEY:

## MOON CALENDAR

*Attuning to the rhythms of nature brings us into sync with the life|death|rebirth cycle.*



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## RENEWAL

*a monthly e-zine for your soul*

Editor: Constance Mears

Proofreader: Mary Beth Conlee

Images: David Becker, Ashley Ibarra,  
Jozef Klopacka



There is always  
**light.**

If only we are  
brave enough to see it,  
if only we are  
brave enough to be it.

Amanda Gorman

It's only 3:30 pm here in the Pacific Northwest, yet the daylight is fading fast. The room where I write has gradually darkened and I'm left with a choice: adjust to the darkness—feel it descend, feel the engulfment that true darkness brings, notice first the inconvenience, then the existential fear of not being able to “see”—or I can get up and turn on the light. I admit to “flipping the switch” without even thinking. Of course we just turn on the light, *because we can*.

I couldn't write about illumination while sitting in the dark, now could I? But then, what if I did? What could I discover about light by exploring, even embracing, darkness? Something about that paradox intrigued me.

In this issue, I invite you on a journey into the three phases of transformation.

1. **SEPARATION** | in this case, from light, which can feel like a “micro-death.”
2. **LIMINALITY** | the in-between, not this, not yet that (not Fall, not yet Winter).
3. **RENEWAL** | the return, the integration of what we discovered while in darkness.

It's perfectly fine to flip through the pretty pictures, too. For some, though, this issue of RENEWAL provides a portal, a Quest, a journey worth taking. The convergence of a new moon—a dark night combined with the shortest day of the year—gives us a rare threshold.

I know I'm bucking the current to suggest you slow down, especially with that cute little flip, flip, flip noise when you scan. That's OK. This journey may be meant for just one of you. And if that's you—I see you, even in the dark, your soul craving a deeper story, a new chapter... renewal.

The dark night of the soul comes just before  
**REVELATION.**  
When everything is lost, and all seems darkness,  
then comes the new life and all that is needed.

- Joseph Campbell

# dark night of the soul



life | death | rebirth  
life | death | rebirth

○  
INITIATION INTO MYSTICAL UNION

YOU CANNOT  
THINK YOUR  
WAY OUT OF  
WHAT BINDS  
THE HEART.

Nox Obscura Animae

## PHASE ONE

# The new moon + the shortest day of the year gives us a moment, a portal to explore darkness

in the sky, the world, and in ourselves.

*We need to sit on the rim  
of the well of darkness  
and fish for fallen light with patience.*

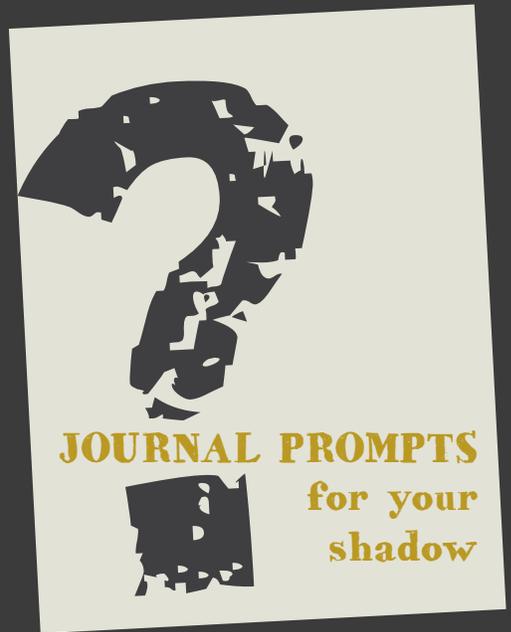
~ Pablo Neruda

Most people go out of their way to avoid sitting on the rim of the well of darkness. Yet, according to Carl Jung, the mystics, and most of the poets, what we resist persists.

The rhythm of life, of nature, of our own unfolding is: life|death|rebirth. Every day, we are shown this cycle by the arc of the sun—its brilliance, its descent into darkness, and its return at dawn. Again. And again. And again.

Every year, the seasons show us that same cycle. Attuning to nature recalibrates us to the rhythm of life, death, and rebirth.

As beings born of nature and of spirit, we are part of that cycle as well. In part one—December—we descend into darkness with a profound opportunity to rekindle and tend to the light within us.



1. What part of your life feels “in the dark” right now? Like the moon, when light illuminates one area of our lives, another area moves into the shadow.
2. Choose one quality you abhor in others. See if you can find a subtle form of it in your own behavior. For instance, have you ever felt overwhelmed and forgot to put on your turn signal? Like that, but go deeper.
3. What is the biggest lie I tell myself?
4. Ask Fear and Courage to share their points of view. Listen. Take notes. Negotiate a way forward that doesn't abandon (or shame) the part of you that feels fear.

# Ritual of Darkness

Spend one (uninterrupted) hour  
sitting in darkness.

No phone. No book.

No candle.

No kidding.

Stars? Sure.

Go fishing  
for fallen light.



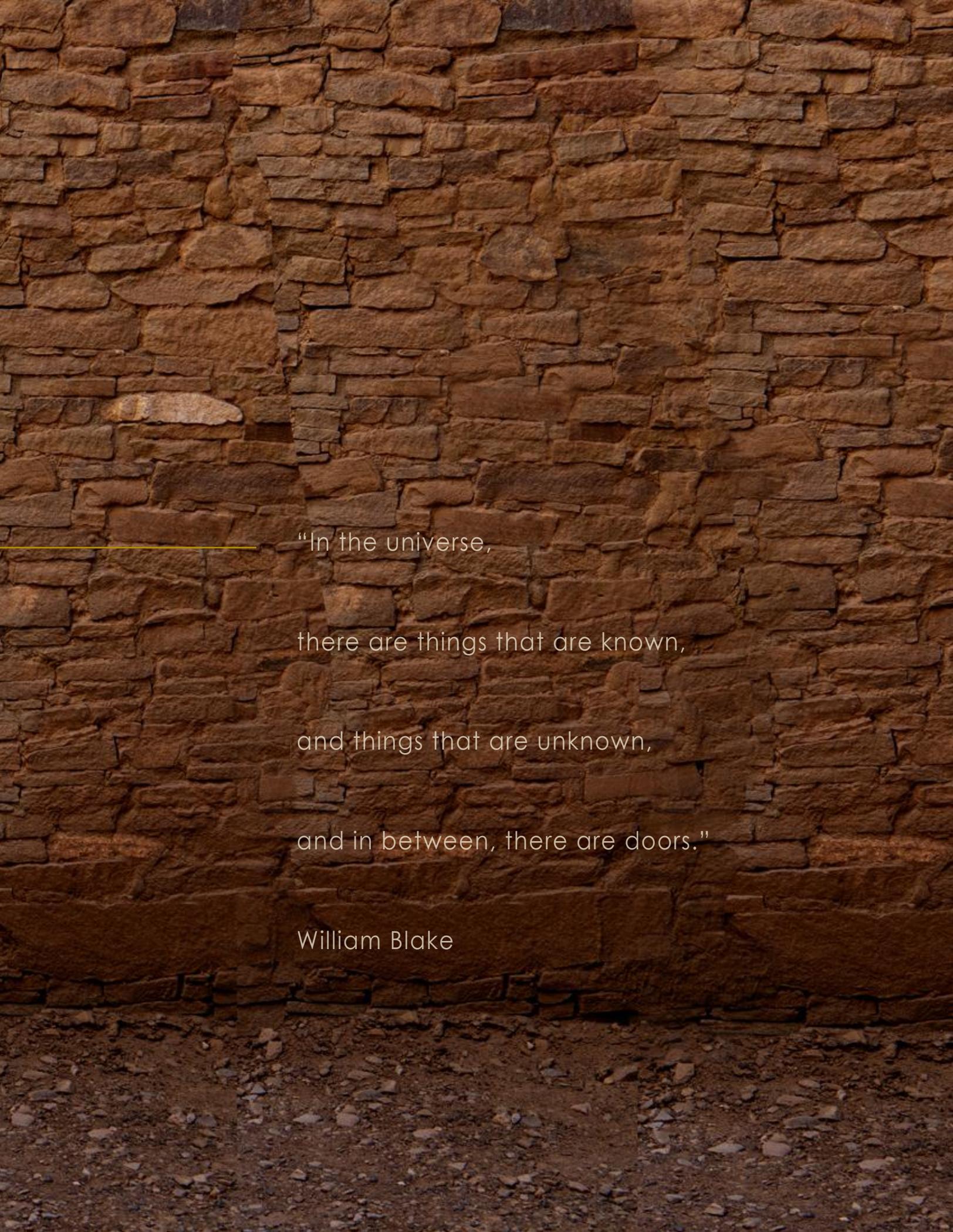
For 30 minutes, let darkness be  
a tomb. For the next 30 minutes,  
imagine you are in a womb and  
a new you is on its way, bringing  
a fresh supply of light to the world.

# DARK

He watches the language change and knows exactly what it is doing. The dark side has been turned into a marketplace where pain is mined like ore and sold as insight. People are urged to dig for what disgusts them, to confess what should have remained private, to believe depth lives only in the worst moments of their lives. It sounds brave. It feels intense. It is mostly noise. Real darkness is not theatrical. It does not announce itself. It is internal, quiet, often unremarkable, and uninterested in being understood by strangers. What people call dark is usually where beauty was interrupted early and never allowed to finish growing. Desire that was shamed. Anger that was punished. Tenderness left without protection. Curiosity that frightened someone with authority. Handled with care, these things soften. Dragged into the open for display, they harden. Beauty inside the dark is not spectacle. It is density. Soil holding seed. Night holding temperature. Stillness where movement remains possible without panic. Darkness does not need to be conquered or exposed. It needs containment. Attention without obsession. Recognition without narration. The healthiest people do not excavate themselves endlessly. They notice patterns. They stop repeating them. They move differently without announcing why. Some truths remain quiet because quiet keeps them intact. Pop psychology calls this avoidance. Maturity recognizes it as discernment. There is nothing holy about unearthing everything. Some roots grow best underground. Some knowledge becomes poisonous once it is turned into identity. Beauty is not lost in the dark. It is preserved there. The ones who understand this carry it the way the earth carries night, without apology, without explanation, knowing that not everything hidden is broken and not everything revealed is wise.

read more from  
[Christopher J. Hensel](#)





“In the universe,  
there are things that are known,  
and things that are unknown,  
and in between, there are doors.”

William Blake

PHASE TWO

# Liminality

*I literally picked out five different quotes to go here, because—empty space! As it turns out, this compulsion to fill a void is a better example of the resistance to the liminal phase than any of the quotes I found.*

# The in-between

In *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage* (Turner 1967), Victor Turner describes the middle phase of a Rite of Passage as liminality. No longer this, but not yet that, a kind of no-man's land where all we are certain of has turned to dust.

We are left stranded on a kind of existential bridge between...

“Between what?” the ego wants to know. Where are we headed?

Holding space in the liminal phase, before we know what's next, requires trust in the universe, the creator, the divine—it requires trust in the Mystery.



In the bird world, liminality looks like flocks of geese standing in fields “wintering.” Wintering is a verb that looks a lot like doing nothing.

Wintering is about holding space for:

right timing

more clarity

spaciousness

rest and rejuvenation

dormancy and dreaming

the space between breaths

gestation

# HOW to REST

1. Get away. This can be a part of the separation of phase one. Changing our familiar setting and activities, whether that's intentional or by “accident,” activates change. (That's why we take vacation and go on retreats: to kickstart a cycle of growth.)
2. Give yourself permission to not be helpful. To say no when it doesn't feel right.
3. Spend time on something unproductive or frivolous. Do an activity for the joy of it. Let go of the focus on “getting somewhere.”
4. Connect more deeply with art and nature.
5. Cultivate replenishing solitude.
6. Take a break from anything that causes us to feel overwhelmed.
7. Take time in an environment in which we feel utterly safe.
8. Wander, putter, noodle.

## PHASE THREE

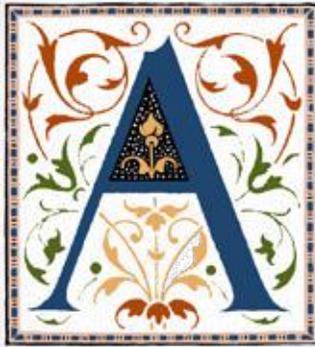
# ILLUMINATION

Finding our way out of the dark



*Wisdom is the call back into movement, whether in the form of a powerful dream, a synchronicity, or an intuitive pull felt in the body. Wisdom, also known as Sophia, often makes her entrance at our lowest point—when we are filled with anguish—to lure us into the life that is beyond our symbolic death. All of this suffering, she says, is leading you to your next becoming.”*

[Toka-pa Turner](#)



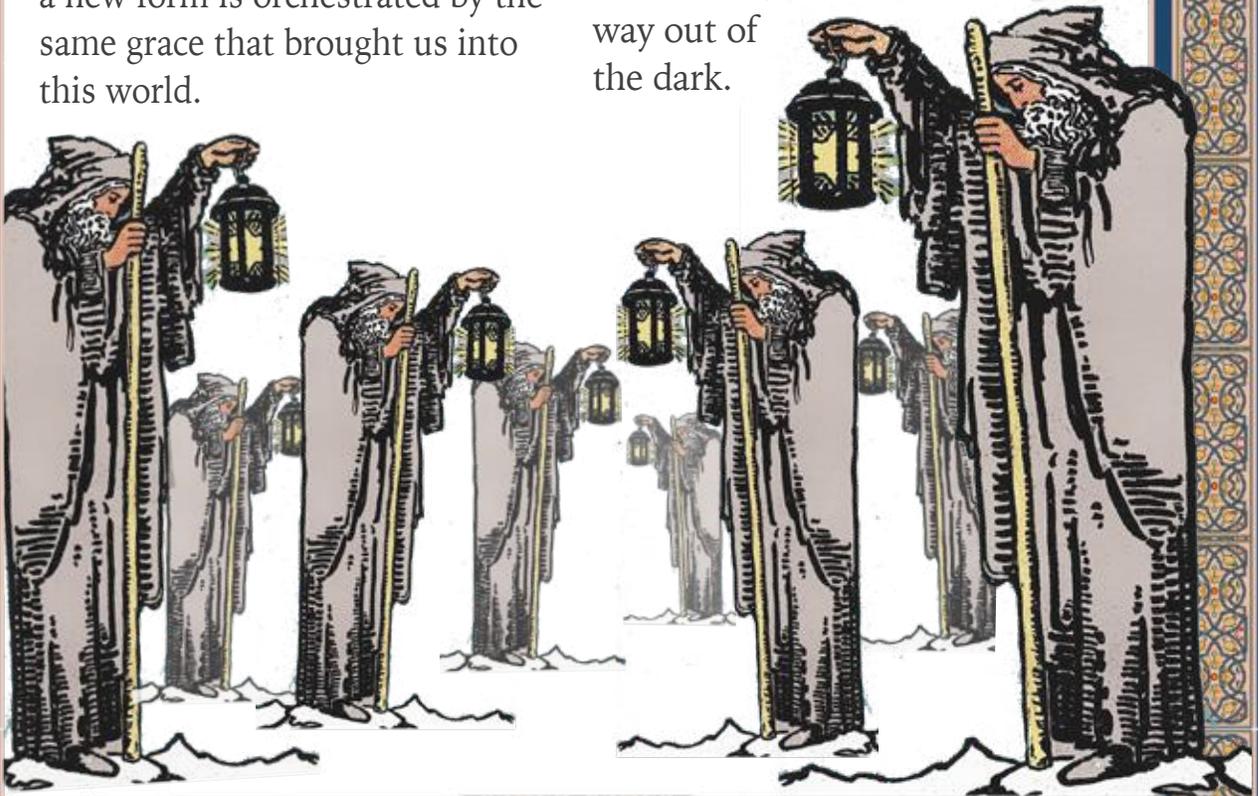
fter the end of the old life, but before the new one appears, we must make

our way back to some kind of form, although it may have little resemblance to the old self.

I once believed there was a secret passageway that others could show me. My experience, however, has been that rebirth/renewal into a new form is orchestrated by the same grace that brought us into this world.

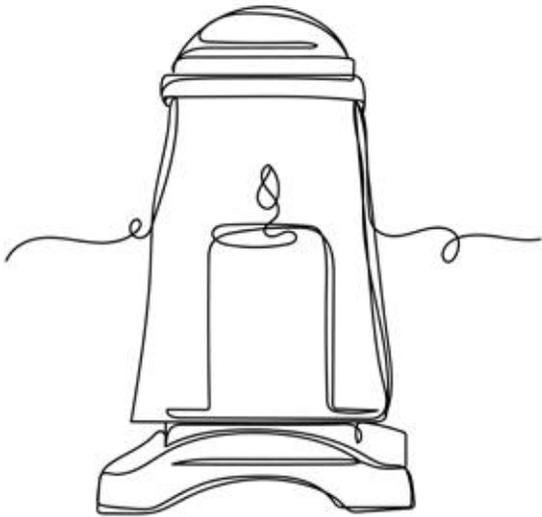
We re-emerge as beginners, which is one of the reasons humans are less willing to go through the renewal process later in life. Often we only become willing when we have already lost what is most valuable to us. Grief initiates us into phase one of darkness.

If we can muster the courage, if we can withstand the ego's loss of control and the liminal stage of not knowing, we may find that our inner light has been rekindled. With this illumination of Wisdom, we can find our way out of the dark.



# Be a Lamp

“Be a lamp or a lifeboat or a ladder. Help someone’s soul heal.” — *Rumi*



**Gift:** To Illuminate, Inspire

**Qualities:** Bright, steady, low maintenance and safe (not given to the sparks and sputters of drama).

## BRIGHT

In what area of your life can you be a shining example? Patience? Courage? Kindness? Light-heartedness?

A person travels many roads throughout their life. You can be a light along the way—right where you are, with who you already are. Your light doesn’t have to light the whole world. Your light doesn’t have

to light someone else’s whole journey. If you hide or neglect your light, it will be missing on someone’s path—maybe at a crucial crossroads. Your small light in the darkness may help someone find a missing key that will open doors for them. It may help them find their glasses so they can see.

Your small lamp may be the bright spot in someone else’s life. Whether you are a flashlight or a lighthouse, your light can be aimed in a way to be of service.

## STEADY

I once lived with a man during a stormy period in both our lives. Next door, a single woman came and went, rode horses, had tea on her deck. Her porch light came on every night at the same time. Even though we never spoke, she was a steadying influence just by being herself, by holding course.

Keeping a regular schedule: You can help create serenity and reduce stress for others by being someone they can count on, by being on time, doing what you say. Be trustworthy. Consider creating rituals—

morning and evening—that will auto-charge your light. Without saying a word, your wattage says: All is well.

### ***Low maintenance and safe***

Being a lamp requires mindfulness: to check the wiring, fill the oil or recharge the batteries. Ground yourself. Be a stable source that doesn't add havoc. Offer your light freely.

## **HELPFUL**

What is your purpose? How can your light be of service to others?

### ***Ambient***

Ambient light is fixed, and therefore adds serenity to a situation. Heading into an awkward, tense situation? Bring a bright smile, a positive attitude. Folks who haven't mastered their light force often shine their bright lights in other's faces, trying to illuminate another's shortcomings. "Can't you see how wrong you are?" their light shrieks. Ambient light says, "Let's look at this situation calmly, without being harsh."

### ***Accent***

Accent light shines a spotlight on something beautiful or truthful. It

pulls focus away from the mundane and highlights that which deserves our attention.

### ***Direct***

Directional light is also known as task lighting. If you are going to shine a bright light, do it to help others fulfill a specific task. Illuminate a tricky aspect of life for another.

### ***Campfire and constellations***

Ancient stories are filled with people traveling, often at night. Sharing your campfire's warmth and light can be of great comfort to a fellow sojourner. It asks us to be vulnerable to scammers and thieves, but provides the magic of a soulful intimacy that can only be shared by strangers passing on the road.

### ***Warning lights***

If you've seen trouble, volunteer for a shift as lighthouse keeper, warning others of what you yourself have experienced. Offer your light in all directions, without judgment or prejudice. And don't take it personally if someone ventures further, ignoring your sound advice. The point is not to control others, but to illuminate their way, so they can make better choices for themselves.

SACRED SPACE

# CANDLES

FOR PRESENCE & PURIFICATION



Image: Jozef Klopcka

Born into the world of atoms and eyesight, we humans like metaphors—images of things to help us grasp the unseen. There is probably no “thing” more universally used across religions, across cultures, across time than the candle. The wick, the flame, the fuel.

We can trace its lineage back to beyond-ancient times when fire held villages together, drawing them closer in the dark months—to cook, share stories, to pray for mercy and maybe some rain. Gathering around a communal fire became a kind of ritual.

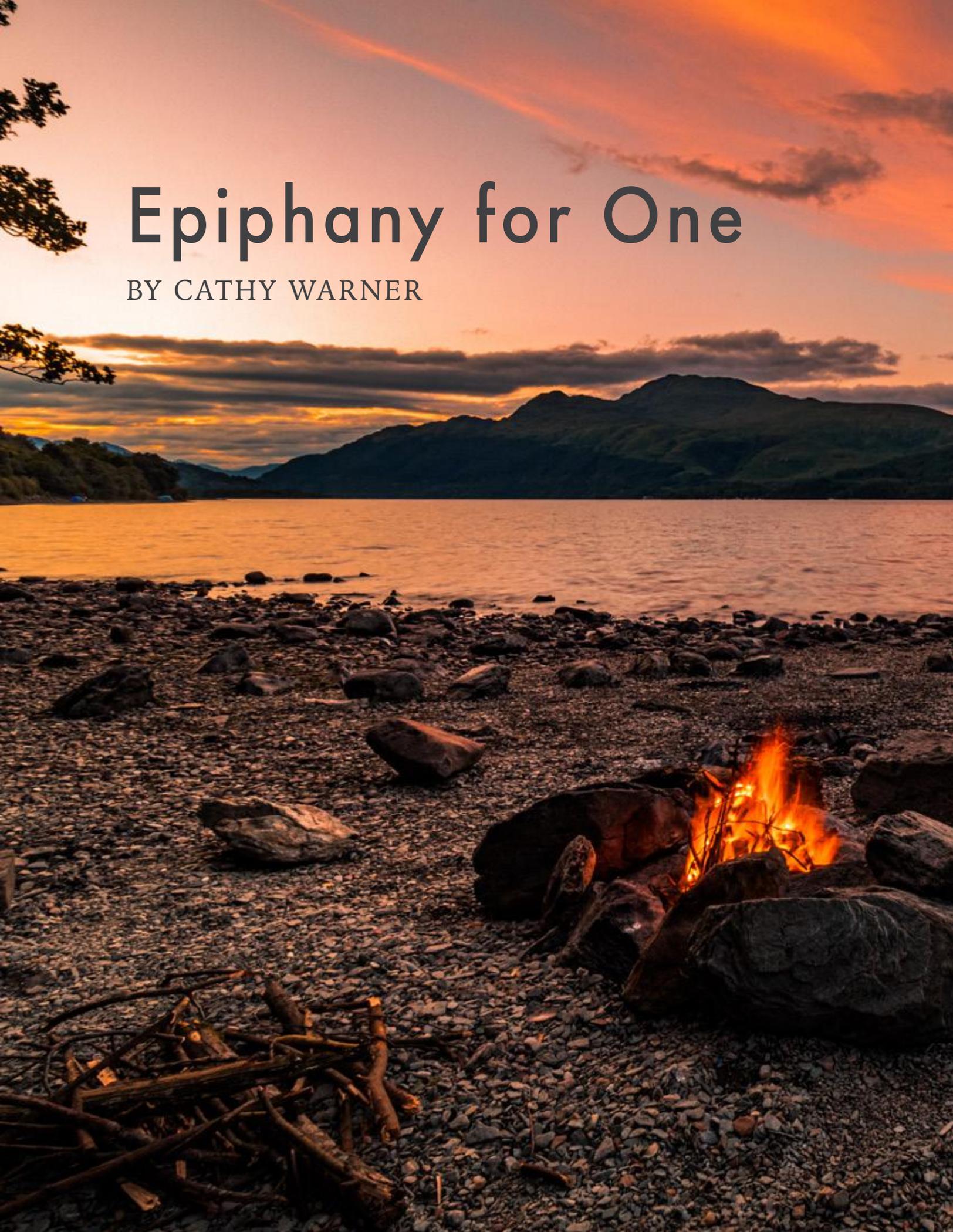
Over time, and through lore and myth and doctrine, invocations accompanied by fire had a gravitas that elevated them to the realm of the sacred.

The sauna, the sweat lodge, and the funeral pyre all use fire for purification.

Candles, second cousins to the bonfire, still symbolize connection to the divine and the inner flame.

Consider lighting a candle each night, not as holiday decor, but as a reminder to slow down, go within and connect with your inner light.



A scenic landscape at sunset. In the foreground, a campfire with bright orange and yellow flames burns on a rocky shore. The fire is surrounded by large, dark rocks. In the middle ground, a calm body of water reflects the warm colors of the sky. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a sky with soft, orange and pink clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

# Epiphany for One

BY CATHY WARNER

Shush we say to the one  
with her to-do lists.  
Sit with me in silence we ask  
so we might listen to...  
what exactly?  
A still small voice?  
An inner knowing?  
If only we had studied  
the stars our journeys  
would unfold almost unnoticed  
illuminated by twinkling  
nocturnal maps requiring  
attention. Instead  
we of the busy now  
travel by boisterous day  
tethered to phones  
whose chimes call us  
not to prayer  
or contemplation  
but herald our frenzied rhythms.  
Today we ask the clock  
to still her busy hands  
to leave the dishes and clothes

unwashed, the bills unpaid,  
the dogs unwalked. We offer  
her a match, and together  
set aflame the ought tos  
and outcomes that too often  
accompany us.  
Today we slip into our boots  
as we watch embers  
burn down to ashes.  
Our feet search not  
for an epiphany to unearth  
and announce to acclaim  
but a posture to inhabit  
as we step amid glowing coals  
to find the message meant  
for our mouths alone.

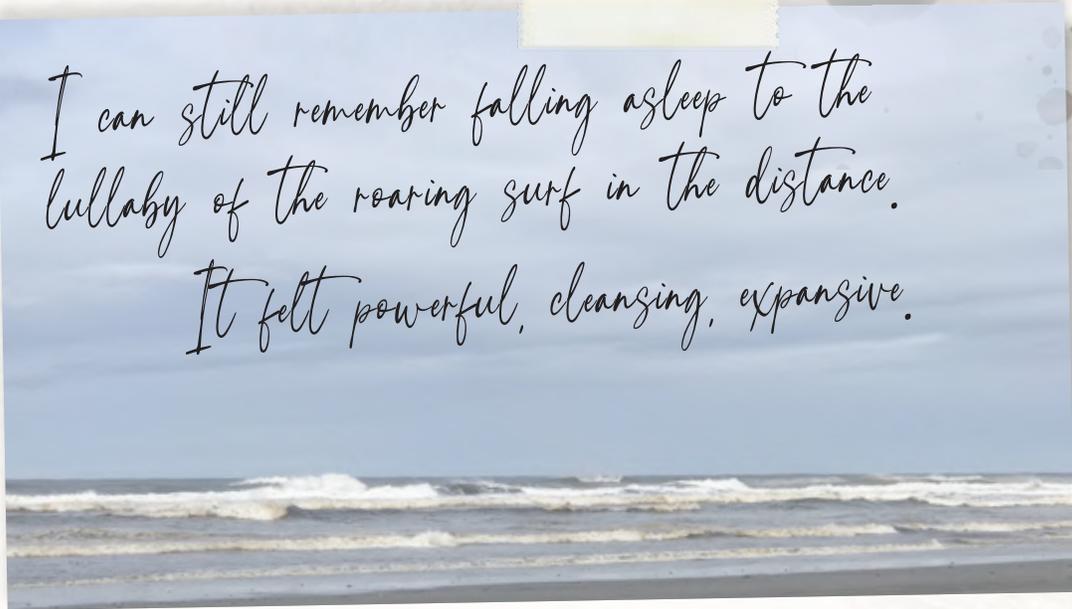
“Epiphany for One” appears in Cathy Warner’s latest poetry book, *Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*. [This collection](#) weaves poems, photography, ancient scripture, and personal experiences.

<https://www.cathywarner.com>

Find her on [substack here](#).

## work in progress

I can still remember falling asleep to the lullaby of the roaring surf in the distance.  
It felt powerful, cleansing, expansive.



The coast is calling... Last March I drove to Seaview on the Long Beach peninsula for a week-long artist's residency with 30 other artists.

The theme was Embers and so I created a Ritual Nest about the Phoenix who rises from the ashes. I learned so much from the process and met a ton of inspiring artists.



This week I filled out the application for the 2026 Arts' Week at SouWester Historical Lodge and Vintage RV Park, one of the coolest and quirkiest places I have ever experienced.



I thought I knew exactly what I would create, but I got a completely different vision as I filled out the app: a large low-walled Nest on the beach(!) that people can enter into as a place to call in their Dream for the Earth. While I'm there I intend to write a poem a day, one for each of the 7 rivers that feed the local estuary. This vision feels exciting... and daunting!



Quirky with a capital Q.  
And SO creative!!!



[Check out their video!](#)

# So I got an idea...

Why not create a more intimate artist's residency for 12 women ready to be the Artist of her own Renewal? Not a "workshop," but a curated Peer Residency for Soul-Tending.



*The medium is your life*

Here's what I'm imagining:

First, a long heart-to-heart chat with the ocean. IT's big. And it listens.

Next we'll spend time listening to ourselves, and then, in circle to each other.

Each woman will create a personal-sized custom-designed nest made from whatever shows up. It's like a scavenger hunt for adults.

Next we'll each craft a Vision Egg, IT's like a vision board, only collaged onto a paper maché egg. Bits and pieces of the Dream overlapping to create a workable vision. It's messy. You'll love it. You'll hate it. It will make you feel alive.

What's your ideal habitat? A party bus? A quiet single? A room in the historical lodge? cabin?

Flying solo? Coming with your BFF? A mother/daughter reunion?



Before you leave, you will take one small leap of faith toward getting that Dream off the ground. Nothing dangerous. But scary, for sure. (I'm facing my fear of Karaoke in the Red Bus). Do I want to sing on Broadway? No. Do I need to heal my throat chakra that's shut down from being shushed? Absolutely.

CURIOUS?



# Solstice Rituals

AT HOME ALONE OR WITH LOVED ONES

## 1. HONOR THE DARK

Experience the Ritual of Darkness from page 8. Thank the dark in the sky, in yourself, and in the world for its presence and the opportunity to bring more light.

## 2. JOURNAL

Pull out a journal and write what is ending for you and what might be beginning.

## 3. LIGHT A FIRE

Whether that's a bonfire or a bank of candles or a single flame, honor the Sun's gift of return with sacred fire.

## 4. MAKE A WREATH

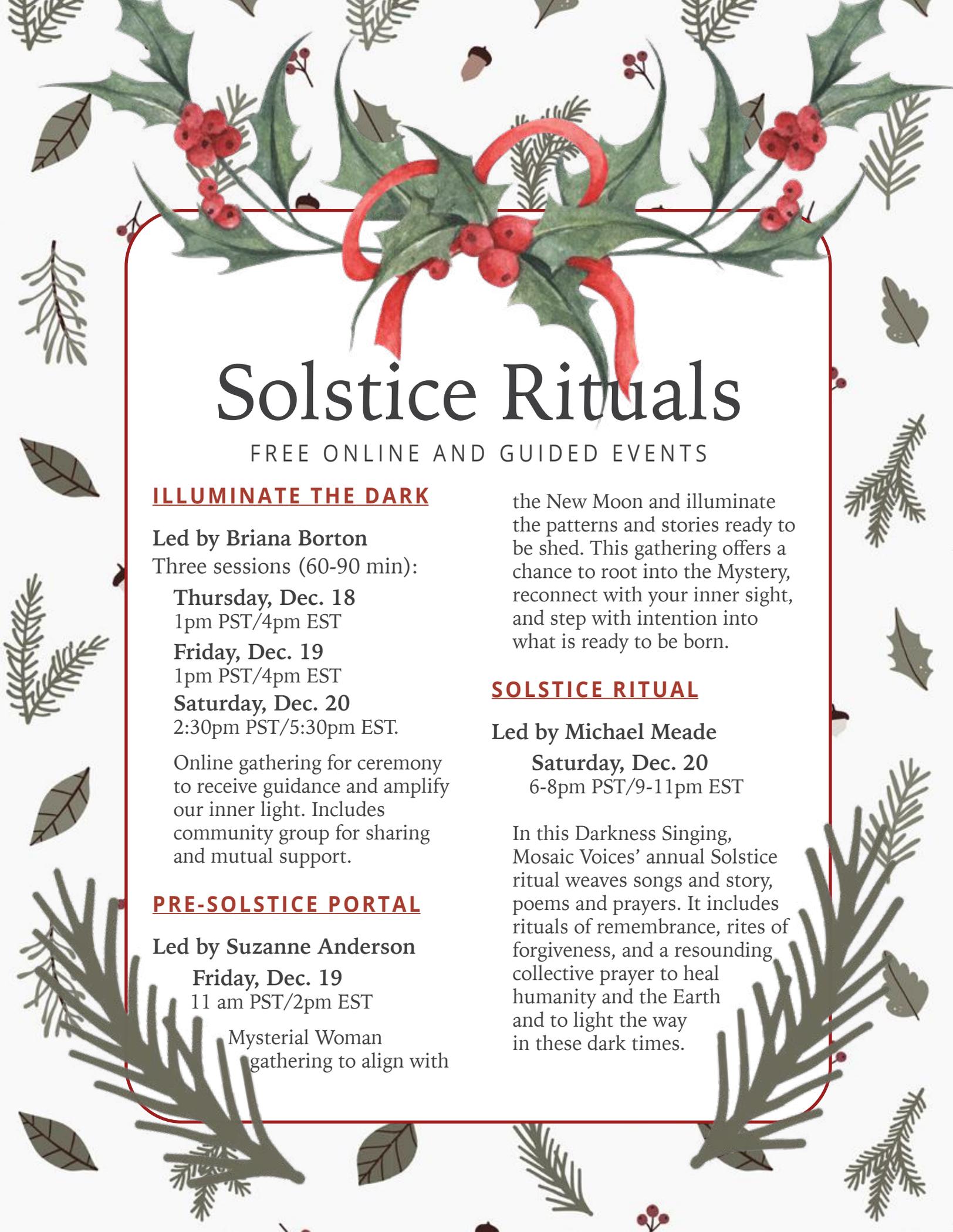
A wreath is a symbol of the cycle of seasons, the cycle of life|death|rebirth, and a tribute to the abundance and diversity found in nature.

## 4. CREATE SOMETHING

Whether it's a pine cone mandala or a gingerbread house or a yule log, creating is participation with the life force.

## 4. SIT FOR A SPELL

Get cozy, fix a warm drink, and settle in. Tell or write a story, play music, play a board game. Unplug, slow down, and be.



# Solstice Rituals

FREE ONLINE AND GUIDED EVENTS

## ILLUMINATE THE DARK

Led by Briana Borton

Three sessions (60-90 min):

**Thursday, Dec. 18**

1pm PST/4pm EST

**Friday, Dec. 19**

1pm PST/4pm EST

**Saturday, Dec. 20**

2:30pm PST/5:30pm EST.

Online gathering for ceremony to receive guidance and amplify our inner light. Includes community group for sharing and mutual support.

## PRE-SOLSTICE PORTAL

Led by Suzanne Anderson

**Friday, Dec. 19**

11 am PST/2pm EST

Mysterial Woman  
gathering to align with

the New Moon and illuminate the patterns and stories ready to be shed. This gathering offers a chance to root into the Mystery, reconnect with your inner sight, and step with intention into what is ready to be born.

## SOLSTICE RITUAL

Led by Michael Meade

**Saturday, Dec. 20**

6-8pm PST/9-11pm EST

In this Darkness Singing, Mosaic Voices' annual Solstice ritual weaves songs and story, poems and prayers. It includes rituals of remembrance, rites of forgiveness, and a resounding collective prayer to heal humanity and the Earth and to light the way in these dark times.

2026

# Lunar Calendar



○ Full Moon    ◐ Last Quarter    ● New Moon    ◑ First Quarter

January



February



March



April



May



June



July



August



September



October



November



December



I've never designed a universe.

I'm not sure I would have imagined a massive network of orbs, all circling at different speeds.

The idea to make planets round was pure genius. Imagine for a moment, they were squares. Transitions, like day to night or winter to spring would be abrupt and clunky, like someone flipping a switch. How would a moon in the shape of a cube affect the tides?

Because of the round shape, transitions feel gradual. We get to experience the nuance of dawn, a thin glow on the horizon. We get to watch the sunlight dissolve as one by one, the stars reveal themselves.

The curved shape ensures that life moves in cycles. It provides familiar patterns and indicators—leaves falling in Autumn, birds nesting in Spring, the moon waxing and waning in phases.

We stand at the threshold of a new moon, a new season, a new year. It is a momentous occasion worth marking. We have an opportunity to stand under a starry sky and be overcome with awe. To experience pure wonder. That is a gift you can give to your self. It's a different kind of Black Friday.

By Sunday, we will have crossed the threshold as daylight begins to increase by two minutes each day until mid-June (here in the northern hemisphere, at least).

The interplay of light and dark, warm and cold, life, death, and rebirth continues. Not one of us humans is in charge of how this unfolds.

So caught up in our dreams and dramas, we forget that we are all dancing together on a pinhead in a vast cosmos.

Here's to another go around the Sun.

# RENEWAL

Coming next new Moon

**JANUARY 17, 2025**



## STILLNESS & STORY

If you'd like to share an image for SACRED SPACES, please email me at [constance@constancemears.com](mailto:constance@constancemears.com).

FIND me here: [constancemears.com](https://constancemears.com)

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