

## Deepening Our Comfort with Uncertainty by Kristi Nelson

You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith, and hope.

~ Thomas Merton

I used to put myself to sleep by repeatedly reciting a little mantra that helped me transition from active days to hopes for a calm mind at night: “There is nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to know.” Guiding myself into greater comfort with not knowing was always helpful in reassuring my mind that it could truly rest and take a break from trying to plan and figure everything out. It seemed that where my mind could lead, my body would follow, and so I could slip into the sweet embrace of sleep.

In our daily lives, there are endless forms of uncertainty — far more things we cannot know than know. Objectively, this could be cause for great delight, wonder, and surrender. We could be relieved and appreciative that we do not have to perpetually hold onto the steering wheel, captain the ship, drive our lives. There is much to discover that can surprise us, so much to which we can gratefully yield, so much permission to let go of our need to know or control what will happen. And yet when we experience the presence of true uncertainty in our lives, it can be rattling. It goes against the conditioning most of us have internalized that not knowing is threatening — that it must be hidden or overridden, solved or resolved, as quickly as possible.

For everyone alive now, and for everyone who has ever lived, we are united in the fact that life invites us to show up again and again into mystery. There are no guarantees — only exquisite unknowns. We do not know exactly how or when we will die, and there is no single formula for how best to live. We do not know how life is going to unfold — in the grand scheme and also in its minutiae — and we cannot be in charge of most all of it. This freedom from control can either shrink our perspective to the size of a clinging fist or deliver us readily into the gaze of the cosmos, depending on how we approach life in the moment. Much of our freedom depends on cultivating greater perspective about being with uncertainty, however and whenever we can.

When we practice grateful living, we create a welcoming space for the surprise of uncertainty, knowing that it arrives naturally in each of those moments when we truly take nothing for granted. Without expectations, life is one surprising unfolding after another. The exact nature of the surprises that arrive in our lives is not up to us, but the nature of our response to surprise is ours and ours alone. Each time we let go and welcome life instead of holding onto our ideas about it, we receive reinforcement for our willingness to surrender to vastness rather than trying to resist it. The rewards of this shift are ever-available to us and make the risks ever-worthwhile, as they deliver the gifts of greater ease, resilience, and joy. As we meet the uncertain world with a more grateful,

trusting presence, our inner life and spiritual life are unfathomably enriched. As Br. David Steindl-Rast says, “Deep trust in life is not a feeling but a stance that you deliberately take. It is the attitude we call courage.”

It seems we could benefit from learning to bring more of the intentions and prayers we use to guide ourselves to sleep at night to help guide us in how to be truly awake to our days. At night, we soften into the impending unknown of sleep by encouraging our minds to be fully in the moment, to let go, to trust, to surrender. Perhaps if we allowed ourselves to remember this practice of release — that there truly, often is nothing to know — in the fullness of how we live out our days, we might find ourselves more available to life, and life infinitely more available to us.