

Episode 22: Dawna Markova—

Living a Loved Life

Thursday, February 6, 2020

[music] *You are not moving, you are being moved.  
You are not singing, you are being sung.  
You are not praying, you are being prayed  
Prayed at the speed of love.*

Janet Conner You are not moving; you are being moved. And therein, in just that phrase, is the gate. That's the gate to the mystical world. You are not moving; you're being moved. You are not singing; you are being sung. You are not even praying; you are being prayed, prayed at the speed of love.

Welcome. I'm Janet Conner, and I am blessed, honored, and terrified to say that I am a *Prayer Artist*. And you have arrived at speed of love timing to episode 22—pay attention to that number—episode 22 in this, my new podcast, *Praying at the Speed of Love*.

I said goodbye to my previous show despite hundreds of thousands of people listening to it, *The Soul Directed Life*, because I needed to create this podcast so that we could talk about something that isn't talked about: prayer. But I don't mean prayer as we know prayer, prayer as our patriarchal religions have described it. I'm talking about original prayer.

And original is such an odd, interesting, evocative word because you hear original. It means first. How did we pray before the patriarchal religions? But original also means brand new, newly created by, *da da*, artists. And both things are true at exactly the same time. Original prayer is forever ancient, and yet, at exactly the same moment, it is always and forever brand new. That's what I think mystical prayer is. It's living; it's breathing; it's dancing. It's prayer that feeds our hearts, sparks our imaginations. It's prayer that is lifting us, lifting us out of patriarchy.

You remember I mentioned that number 22? I always pay attention to the numbers. Thanks to my friend Emma Kupu Mitchell in Hawaii, I'm really paying attention to numerology. I'm not a numerologist, but I care. I notice. I pay attention, and I do not think it's an accident that this show today is number 22. What is 22? It is a master number, and it is the master number of four. What is

four? Structure, foundation, the building blocks of a way of being, a new and more substantial way of living together in peace, in harmony, and in love. So why is it so cool that this is number 22? Will you look at the calendar? We're in the year 2020. No matter how you slice it, it's a four. And you can see the two two's in 2020. This is a decade, a year, a divine calling to create a new structure.

We can look at 5,000 years of patriarchy and notice that that structure has not been... what's the right word? It hasn't been helpful. Under patriarchy, suffering is just so bloody obvious, and it has to come to an end. And so in this 2020 year and 2020/4 decade, we're called to create a structure of love.

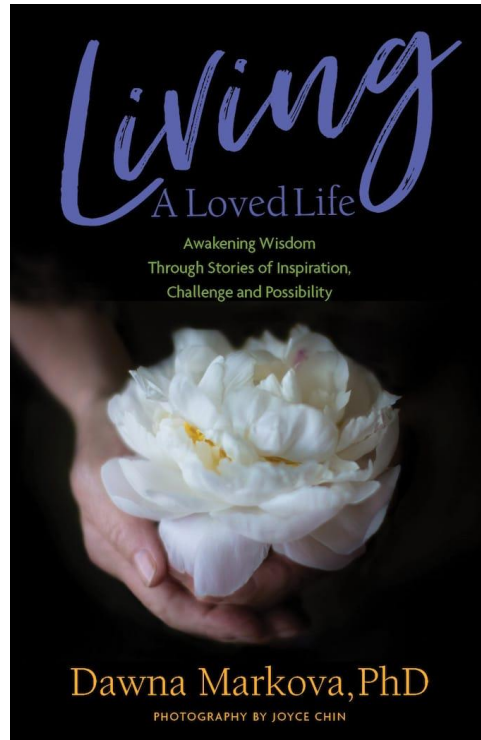
What do you say we make love visible?

So who's the perfect person to talk about these ancient ways of divine communion that are forever ancient and always new? One person, Dawna Markova. Dawna is an author you have cherished for years, 18 books worth of years. She's the woman—even if you don't remember her name, but I'm sure you do—she is the woman who called us not to die an unlived life [voice cracks]. See? You can see how I feel about that right away. The very phrase, "I will not die an unlived life," that's a call every one of us recognizes. This is a woman who called us also to offer random acts of kindness, in other words, make love visible—she was a little ahead of the decade—and a woman who showed us that every single child is unique, has unique gifts, and very unique ways of learning. So are you wondering—I'm wondering—where did such a wide range of radiant wisdom come from? That is what you're about to learn in episode 22.

In this conversation, there's something waiting just for you, just for your unique heart, your unique soul, your unique body. There is a nugget of love hovering in the air, waiting for you. So let us begin this conversation as we begin all conversations listening as the voice of the Tibetan bowl calls us to open our invisible ears that we may hear what wants to be heard.

[the bowl rings]

She's just singing and singing and singing and singing and singing. I think she's very happy to be a witness to this beautiful conversation. We are so blessed to sit in prayer, to talk about prayer with Dawna Markova, who is blessing the world with a new book—listen to the title—*Living a Loved Life: Awakening Wisdom Through Stories, Stories of Inspiration, Challenge, and Possibility*. Dawna joins us from her home in paradise, Maui. Welcome.



Dawna Markova      Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Janet Conner      So what do you say, Dawna, that we open with a prayer? Everything you write, as far as I'm concerned, is a prayer. They're all treasures, but you know the one, the one. I mean, I started crying just mentioning it to you. Would you bless us by reading "I Will Not Die an Unlived Life"? We want to hear it in your voice.

Dawna Markova      It would be my pleasure.

I will not die an unlived life  
I will not live in fear  
of falling or catching fire.  
I choose to inhabit my days,  
to allow my living to open me,  
to make me less afraid,  
more accessible,  
to loosen my heart  
until it becomes a wing,  
a torch, a promise.  
I choose to risk my significance,  
to live so that which came to me as seed  
goes to the next as blossom  
and that which came to me as blossom,  
goes on as fruit.

Janet Conner And Dawna, I don't know if you're aware of it, but as soon as you started reading that, the chorus, the birds, they're all singing. They're all affirming it. I mean, I said you live in paradise, and you do. But it's been quiet until you started to read.

Dawna Markova Yeah, yeah. There's a branch of a beautiful tree actually... this tree starts with a P. I can't think of the name. But when I used to live in Florida, where you are, they had trees like this too. And when you and I started talking, the birds came. The Java sparrows and house wrens filled the branches, so they are with us.

Janet Conner They are singing. They're praying. I took a group to Oaxaca in 2010. It was my first travel group to bring people who were deep soul writing. I had never been to Oaxaca before, and there was this cacophony, I mean, just wild, loud noise all night. And our tour guide said, "That's the cicadas." I mean, they were so loud that they'd keep you up, the cicadas. And he said, "The cicadas are praying for rain, and when the rain comes, they've done their job. And they will be silent." And that made such an impression on me. "What?" I think that was the beginning of my sort of waking up to the world is alive. Everything is conscious. Everything is in communion. And so that was just such adorable confirmation that the birds are coming to pray with us.

Dawna Markova Yeah. They're right here.

Janet Conner So this podcast, this unusual podcast, is all about prayer, personal, intimate, real conversations about how we were taught to pray as children and then how our prayer lives have evolved. Now, I didn't really know what was going to happen. This is episode 22. So for the last 21, I've noticed this pattern that there's something that happened in the person's childhood that they weren't conscious of at the moment when they were 5, 6, 7. And yet, that seed was planted, and it has really blossomed into the mystical lives that they're living today. But when I read your book, I went, "Yeah. I don't think it's a seed, people. It's the whole blooming story." And it's all because of your precious, precious grandmother. I've never loved a dead person so much in my life [laughter]. So you've got to introduce us to her. You say she's the co-author of your book, and she's a ghost.

Dawna Markova That's right. That's right. Well, I have never thought of her as a dead person, even when people told me, "I'm sorry to tell you, but your grandmother is dead." And I said, "No, no. That's not possible." So I'll tell you about her. I'll read you what I wrote about her because it took me a long time to condense the love I experienced with her into words, so.

"My grandmother was a midwife and a healer. She sat with people as they entered the world and as they left it. She never set foot in a school and could neither read nor write. I haven't included her name on the title page because I never really

knew what it was. I just called her Grandma. Others called her Ma or Dora or by her husband's name, Michael's wife, as if she were his possession.

"As I am writing to you about her, she becomes alive again. A tiny woman with a fierce will. In the late 1800s, she ran across Russian potato fields to escape the Cossack soldiers who had killed her first two children and her brother during a pogrom, an attack on Jewish villages. She and my grandfather escaped to New York by boat, traveling in steerage. Driven by that indomitable will to foster life, she gave birth to eight more children in a two-bedroom apartment on the fifth floor of a brick tenement in Hell's Kitchen.

"One of her feet was planted on the spiritual side and the other on the pragmatic. But to talk about her in terms of one side or the other is inaccurate because Grandma was always braiding. She was braiding things together people, their resources, and the challenges of their lives so that they would be inspired to love their existence. Her prayers went something like this: 'May Willie's ability to make money help Sammy, who has to sleep in a cold car because he can't afford to pay his rent. May they both love the life they are living. May they each live the life they love.'"

Janet Conner She is just too beautiful for words, and you bring her to life, you bring her to life. So she taught you to pray, and you do talk about how she kept Shabbat. So did she pray in Hebrew, in Russian?

Dawna Markova Well, my grandma talked in several ways. She spoke this language that nobody really understood because it was like a quilt. It was a pastiche of Russian, of Hebrew—she prayed in Hebrew, that she did—a little bit of Yiddish, some kind of talk that was like market talk that she must've learned in the market, and then some kind of talk that was Sephardic because I think before they were in Russia, her parents came from Spain. So nobody could understand her. Didn't matter who was listening.

But with me, she always put her hand on my forehead when she talked, or she put her hand on my heart. So I listened through my skin, and I understood through my skin. And I didn't understand Hebrew. I recognize the rhythm because she would rock back and forth and her hands would go like this. They would move up and down, like dance, as she was praying. And so I listened through my skin, so I could understand her.

It wasn't rote. She said the same words again and again, but they never felt the same to me. It depended upon what was going on that day, that moment in her life. So prayer was very alive.

Janet Conner Well, and that is the entire premise of my understanding of original prayer. It's forever ancient, so I can practically hear her saying... I mean, how old are those Hebrew prayers? And yet, as you were listening through your skin, it was brand new, forever new.

Dawna Markova Mm-hmm.

Janet Conner What a confirmation. You've made me so happy!

Dawna Markova Good, good.

Janet Conner Well, you're sitting there alone, being awakened in the night, hearing things, taking your notes, deep soul writing, praying, walking. And I say these things. I write these things. I put them out there. But how glorious that your grandmother is affirming and confirming. She's laughing right now going, "Oh, you finally noticed. Yay [laughter]."

Dawna Markova She told me that I would meet kindred. Once in a while, I would meet someone who was... the word in English is "kindred." And she said, "You'll know them because either they or you will turn gold around their edges."

Janet Conner In other words, she was seeing auras.

Dawna Markova So it was her way, and she said, "Listen and pay attention to that person because either you are supposed to help them live love, or they are supposed to help you do that." So I felt like you and I started talking, and it was like, "Oh a kindred, kindred. Ah, okay. Good. I'm home."

Janet Conner Gold around the edges. Woah. What a woman. I love her even more. So you said that she was a midwife.

Dawna Markova Yes.

Janet Conner Okay. So now, here we are on page 15 of *Living a Loved Life*, and you're describing yourself. This is the best bio I've ever read, so I want to read it to everybody.

"I am a midwife as my grandmother was, but of possibilities within and between people. I've lived many incarnations in the past seven decades: as a teacher, psychotherapist, researcher, and organizational fairy godmother." How's that for the greatest title of all time?

"When I have to fill out a form that asks for my occupation, I write, 'professional thinking partner.' The Latin root of the word "professional" is *profere*, meaning to profess faith." Okay. I never... this, to me, is a big deal, the etymology of that word. So professional means to profess faith.

"I profess my faith by being present with others in such a way that what was broken can be made whole again. When I think in partnership with someone..." That is just the best phrase. I'm stealing this. I sit with you. We are going to think in partnership. I keep digressing.

"When I think in partnership with someone, I listen deeply enough to hear the question his or her life is asking." Now, this is a stop what you're doing, underline, stare off in mid-space, let those words digest... I guess I could feel your grandmother's hand on my... okay. I'm listening to you now through my skin, the skin of my eyes. "I listen deeply enough to hear the question his or her life is asking."

Now, I went a little nutty reading that because I have been in love with questions for 22 years. I had this very different life. First, I taught deaf kids. Then I became an administrator. Then I ended up at CNN and created the hiring program for CNN and that led to being a head hunter for a Fortune 500 company. Not me, not this world whatsoever.

But the universe was very good to me, and I went through a violent divorce. And in that violent divorce, stripped of absolutely everything, I began to have a conversation with the divine on the page. And pretty quickly, I realized that you can sit there and whine and tell your story till the cows come home. Nothing changes until you ask a question, and if you will ask a big, scary, deep question... just one tiny example, this question changed my life: what have I been unwilling to see? I just say to people, "Just start there. Just start there. What have I been unable to see... unwilling to see, not unable, unwilling to see?"

So I have just adored questions, and I realized that when you ask a question like that in communion with the divine feminine, with the divine, then not only does this guidance come, ideas you couldn't come up with on your own under any circumstances, but like trickling on them, on this river of—I do see it as gold—comes the grace to live that guidance.

And so when I read what you said about questions, and then you open the book by saying, "These are the three big questions." Would you give us, everyone, the three questions?

Dawna Markova      Well, I have to preface it because, for me, what I learned from my grandmother is that, which is very much like what you're saying, that questions are a sacred threshold. And when I was growing up, they kept skipping me from one grade to another, and we kept moving around. So every time we moved someplace else, they would skip me, so I was the youngest, smallest one always

till now. And so the way I got there was I learned that when someone asked you a question, you figure out the answer. So I got there by being "smart."

But with my grandmother... simultaneously to all of this, I was spending, for most of it anyway, every Friday with my grandmother. And with my grandmother, she taught me that there are two kinds of questions you can ask. One is a question that proves how smart you are, and it leads you to an answer. But the other is questions that open your mind. That's why I think of it as a sacred threshold. So you're at a doorway. If you answer it, the doorway closes. If you don't answer it, and you do something called wondering, the doorway opens. Now, in school and in graduate school, wondering was considered a disorder, a deficit, and they had all kinds of labels of what kind of deficit.

But, in fact, from my grandmother what I've learned, on the other side of wondering, if you can hold the question like that bowl that you were ringing and live in the question and stay loyal to the question no matter what, then instead of an answer, what comes to you is a knowing.

Now, staying loyal to a question is not an easy thing to do. So the questions that midwived the book for me was: how do I find a way to live a life I can love?

Now, I've had cancer six times in my life, and so that became a very relevant question to me. It wasn't fluffy, airy, fairy. It was, "Well, if I've got three months left, how can I still love the three months I have?" And doctors were wanting to fill my body with chemicals and do all kinds of weird things that were the right answer. And I kept coming back. I put my hand on my heart, which is what my grandma always did, and I would take what I call a sacred pause. And a sacred pause is when someone asks me a question or when there's an impulse I have, I put my hand on my heart, and I feel for the sensations in my body. And then I follow those sensations as if they are a response, not an answer, but a response.

And so a lot of the healing that I've experienced through the six various times my body has been cancering have come from waiting and wondering what those sensations mean. So this question of "how do I live a life I can love?" was another one of those open questions that wasn't just for one moment. It has guided me each time my body's been cancering and through the times that it hasn't been. So that was question one.

The second question was: how do I help make it possible for those who will come after me to do the same, to live lives that they can love? And that question was one of the important midwives for this book because the stories in this book are my legacy to my son and to my daughter-in-love. I won't be leaving them a lot of money or a lot of things, but I will be leaving them these stories because the



stories are a passing on. My grandmother called it a *zava'ah*, and I didn't know what that meant. But it is what experiences helped you learn the values you have in this life? So that's what I passed on to David.

The third and last question was: how do I remember, as in re-member, put together again, all that has been torn in half? And we are living in an age of tearing in half, either or. So how do I remember what it's like when those two halves come together? How do I find a way forward? Those are the three questions that guided the writing of this book for me.

Janet Conner And they're so evocative. I mean, there's no answers. There's only those responses. You have to feel your way. It's like that famous quote by Rilke that you just need to live the questions, live the questions. I gave that book, *Letters to a Young Poet*, to my son on his first day of college, and I said, "That's what it's all about. Just live the questions. Not get the stupid answer that gets you an A."

So in your work, how do you work with people to help them hear and identify the question their life is asking in that moment, or maybe do we all have sort of the one question, the big question? I'm so curious about this, if everyone has their own sacred, unique question.

Ta-Nehisi Coates talked about this in his book *Between the World and Me*. I'm botching the title. But as I was reading his book, he's telling his son—here we are passing on all our legacies to our sons—that it's really just about finding the question that you're living. Now, is that the same as what your grandmother called the promise? Is your question and your promise related or kind of the same thing?

Dawna Markova Well, I'm going to bring you to the promise the way my grandmother taught me. I have great respect and honor Ta-Nehisi Coates, but I like to talk from my own experience. And language boxes sometimes, and you can't put love in boxes, so.

But other kids' grandmothers would pinch their cheeks or hug them very, very tight. Now, my grandmother never did anything like that. In fact, there were very few times she hugged me. She would always when she greeted me and say goodbye, she would look at the end of my fingers, and she would look at the little line and the little patterns on my fingers and kiss each one. And that was her greeting and that was her saying goodbye. And what she said to me was, "Life makes a promise to the world the moment you were born, and never before and never again will there be another such as you. You are unique. You're one of a kind. You're a miracle. In all the history of human beings that ever was and ever will be, there will never be another such as you."

So another one of my teachers, Milton Erickson, had me memorize my finger prints, and I was such a good student when I met him that I literally did. I spent a whole month drawing my finger prints with a magnifying glass and memorizing. And he didn't want me to know my fingerprints. He wanted me to know what my grandmother knew: that I and every person I have ever worked with is a one-of-a-kind miracle. We don't need words, fancy words, like respect. All you need to know is that never before and never again will there be another such as you. Period.

So the question is: what is that promise that life made the moment I was born? To me, that's the sacred question. That is the threshold. It has no answer. Although at 77, I can look back at the patterns of my life, and just like you look at fingerprints or any other pattern, I have a clear sense of what the promise was because I'm an old lady or an elder, depending upon the moment. So I have a clear sense of what the promise was. And then finding the promise is no big deal, but living the promise is a bigger deal. So that's what I have to come home again and again and again, like coming home back to that promise. What was the promise that life made when this person was born?

Janet Conner When you say that, I'm visualizing a newborn baby and everybody circling around the baby and chanting that, singing that. Seeing that baby as, "What is the promise, the uniqueness that you are bringing into the world?" And it's easy for us to do that around a baby, but you, me, everybody listening, how precious to ask yourself that again, to remember that again.

Like a birthday. My dear yoga instructor's coming tomorrow. We have special yoga in my home, and on the birthday, the person lies down. They let us know what words they want to take in for the year. And we put our hands on their body, and we start chanting those words. And that's, I think, a way of talking about the promise of the year.

Dawna Markova Yeah. My son is now 53, and I think I'm not finished with him because I haven't done as good a job as I would like helping him to live in wonder with what his promise is and how he finds it and how he lives it. So he's very successful. He's mostly very happy, but he still keeps saying, "Well, I don't feel like I'm quite there. I don't know. This isn't what I'm really..."

But I think part of it has to do with living with me as his mother, who's always been so purpose driven that the only way he could differentiate was to not be able to find his promise. And he now is going through what's called individuation, which means finding his fingerprints for himself. So I can't tell him anything, anything, but I can be in the same state of wonder with him that I have to be with

myself when I ask a really challenging question to myself, one of those threshold questions we're talking about.

And wonder is easier for me when it's someone that hasn't lived inside my body, come through my body, and that's my ultimate challenge. That's why I wrote this book because he rolls his eyes when I begin to tell a story. And other people pay me to tell stories. He just rolls his eyes, so I had to put them in a form... this is the form that was most palatable to him. Reading, he reads all the time. So that's a diversion or a detour but not really. It's not just so simple as to find the promise and live the promise. It's a mystery. It isn't something you ever master. It's a mystery.

Janet Conner Well, and I have such empathy for him. You said he's 53. It was certainly true for me. I don't know that it's universally true for everybody, but I was well into my... my life had to just disintegrate around me in my fifties in order for me to say, "Yeah. Well, maybe I should stop chasing." And now I have language for that that patriarchy was saying, "Okay. You have to be a success, and you have to have the title. And you have to have the money, and you have to have the pretty house. And *da da da*." And you're just like a little hamster. "Okay. I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this. And I'm really successful." And the more successful you get, the more miserable you are [laughter]. And so I'm, today, at 72, very grateful that my world went to hell in a handbasket, and it gave me the opportunity to ask big questions and to wake up.

But it is so funny. I mean, these boys chose us for their mothers [laughter].

Dawna Markova I think what you went through—and I went through a similar experience—my grandmother would call that... how would you translate it in English? She would call it "straightening by fire, a straightening by fire." So I think we all have to go through a straightening by fire. It's an annealing. And some people go through these annealings, these straightenings by fire, over and over in their life. Some people have them all at one time. And they're big, and they're huge and so forth. That's the way that I did it.

But I think that this staying loyal to your questions... my license plate is NMW, and that stands for "no matter what." And I have quilted and embroidered pillows that say "NMW." So no matter what, I will continue to wonder. How can I live the promise that was made the moment that I was born, no matter what? It's very helpful to me. It's very helpful because the questions we're talking about, they are mystery, and you don't answer mysteries. They're riddles. You live in them. They have nothing to do with mastery. You can have mastery in a whole different domain and still, like my son, not really feel like you know what your promise is or you're living true to your promise. And that's fine. I mean, it's a mystery.

Janet Conner It's why we're here. You're sort of the living embodiment of my next question. But it's such an important thread in the book, and that's story. And it's not an accident that you live in Hawaii where talk story is a mystical, social, cultural... I never even heard of talk story until I interviewed a woman who lived in Hawaii. And you tell... every single chapter is a story. So is it story that makes you a midwife? Talk to us about story.

Dawna Markova So I'm taking a breath because this is so important to me. Story is connective tissue, and it's connective tissue for the soul or the spirit or whatever you would, the heart. It doesn't matter what language you put on it. And the way that I know a good story is the way that I know a good question. When I say "good," I don't mean good or bad. I mean a question that is evocative. What most people do when they hear it is they start to think about times when. That's the weaving beginning to happen, and stories are meant to connect us one to the other. And so there's different kinds of stories.

There's ruts stories. You hear it over and over and over and over. And I'm listening to the news and the politics, and those are ruts stories. They remind you of your parents arguing, only instead of mother and father, we're going Democrat, Republican. It doesn't matter what you call it.

There are always stories of domination, and I don't think in terms of patriarchy. It's just not a word... the word got like chewed up bubble gum for me, so I was using it too much. But I do think Riane Eisler, this brilliant author, uses the word domination. And I think of it as thinking strategies we use. And if the intent of a story is to dominate... that's one possibility.

There are different stories that connect, and the other side, the opposite truth to domination is partnership. That's how Riane defines it. And so does a story that you tell, is its intent to connect or to partner with? In Hawaii, when we moved here, talk story, you meet somebody in the store, and people don't rush because they can't. I go to the store. I went this morning to get carrots and broccolini, and I saw somebody who lives down the road from me. And she started talk story, and she began by talking about how she was just diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. And then she talked about her aunt, so it's like weaving this...

And so things go slower because you can't just get the things you want in the grocery store. It's a connection being made that weaves together like a spider. It weaves community together. And so I invited that lady to come over for tea next week, and we could talk story together because I told her that my body had been cancering six times. And she said, "Well, it's funny. I've spoken to healers and doctors and nurses, but I haven't really spoken to anybody who's been through cancer. And I don't go groups." She's not a group kind of person. I said, "Well,

come have tea with me, and we'll talk story." And we'll trade stories. You don't talk stories at somebody. You trade stories back and forth.

And since we're going through all this impeachment stuff right now, I keep thinking, "This is like my mother and father arguing when I grew up." And those are dominating stories and dominating questions. They're asking questions that are dominating questions. Who's right, and who's wrong? And then they're telling dominating stories. Whose story is more convincing than the other one's story?

Stories are as old as people are old. They drew stories on cave walls. They asked questions, and with the fire behind them, they would draw stories. They are part of how our brain thinks in partnership, and between 80 to 90%—that's not totally accurate, but it's very, very close—of our brain is developed to what's called a social network around this part of our brain, the whole sides of our brain. And so we are meant... we're Homo sapien sapiens. Sapien is "wisdom." So we are the species that is meant, not once, but twice, to find wisdom together with each other, to connect with each other.

Now, that was a long, maybe off the subject, but it feels very relevant to me right now because I've been having these arguments on television and public radio and every place else. I'm bathed in it. I'm surrounded by this argument, and I grew up in that argument. And so it requires me to ask questions that make me wonder, "What would be possible? What could be possible?" And when I talk story to this woman and she comes for tea, we'll wonder about what could be possible.

Possible means... the Latin root is "the ability to use one's..." it's translated as power, but I think that is a dominating word. I think it's "the ability to use one's influence." I think that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to influence one another. And we know enough now, at this time, to know that we influence each other with every breath. You and I, if we're in the same room together, we're breathing the same argon molecule. I mean, we are constantly influencing each other even if we pretend we don't. We're on the other side of the room or the other side of the argument. We are influencing each other in every moment.

We're trying to quarantine ourselves from a disease that's happening on the other side of the planet—and we can't make the walls big enough because we're constantly influencing each other—instead of joining together and figure out, "What are we going to do about this? How can we do this? What can we do that will help all of us?"

Janet Conner When you were talking about story, I began to see prayer as story, right? Those original prayers, when we were in our early Homo sapien sapien, right, and we are somehow looking at women, "Oh, that's the goddess." I mean, it was a story,

right? Prayer in its essence is the story of me in communion with the story of all of us in communion with the divine, whatever that/who is. So that's an interesting little window that prayer is story.

Dawna Markova Well, as you say that, I look at my hands, and I have the ends of my fingers crossed. And here's a church. Here's the steeple. Open the door, and here's all the people. What I think of as this sacred conjunction, this partnership, between questions and stories... and to me questions are the prayer, and stories are the response, not the answer, but the response. And the response arises from wisdom, the wisdom of our collective lives put together when we partner with each other.

So we've been through lots of epidemics in the world and Ebola and SARS and all of them. What's the wisdom that we know that we can bring together? What are the stories of healing that we know that we can bring together with this big question, this big wondering? What are we going to do? How are we going to live in this question when we are so close and interwoven now with planes, and how are we going to keep it away? Or what if we don't keep it away? What if we find a way to bring together our stories of healing and success and our questions of wonder? To me, that's the prayer, but that's just me.

Janet Conner It's a beautiful... questions are the prayer; stories are the response. I will be deep soul writing and reflecting on that for a long time. Questions are the prayer; stories are the response.

So there's another thread in your book. I want the listeners to get a real sense for your grandmother, for you, and the exquisite structure of this book, *Living a Loved Life*. And this grabbed me so. You're just a little kid, and you're getting scolded for not paying attention. And you actually pay attention to that language, and you say to your grandmother, "So do you have to like... is there a price [laughter]? What do we have to pay for attention?" And as I read that, I went, "How come I never even asked myself that?" And she teaches you what attention really is, so would you talk about the beauty of attention?

Dawna Markova Yeah, yes. To me, attention is the ultimate gift of the Homo sapien sapiens. It's how we get from being Homo sapiens to Homo sapien sapiens. I thought about it as paying because we used to drive across a big bridge in New York to get to my grandma's house, and my father had to pay. In school, they kept saying, "Pay attention," while my mind was off wondering about story.

Anyways, my grandmother's response was this: she said when she came over in steerage on the boat, when she could get up from way down in the bowels of the boat up to the deck, she would watch the ocean, and the ocean was amazing to her

because she lived in a village on potato fields. She had never seen an ocean. And she said, "It was so wide and so deep, *ketzaleh*—which means "darling, little kitten"—who could imagine such a thing existed beyond the potato fields? I watched it day after day. Once I even tasted it on my tongue. It was salty just like tears. Finally, I decided that a person's mind is just like that ocean. Some thoughts float and splash like waves on the surface. Some things sink and go all the way down, deep, deep down to the very bottom."

"But Grandma, if something falls into the ocean and sinks down that far, can you ever find it?" Her explanation comes very slowly. "That's what your attention is for, *ketzaleh*. Thoughts can splash noisily here and there on the top, pulled by whatever grabs them. But if you just let them sink down a little way, they float around. People call that daydreaming. At the very bottom of your mind, though, your attention is wide and silent."

And I said, "Grandma, that's just what happens to me in school when I stare out the window instead of practicing my multiplication tables. But why does my teacher say attention is something you have to pay, like when you cross the George Washington Bridge?"

She holds my hand ever so gently and leads me into the kitchen where she fills up a big glass bowl with water. "Attention is the simplest kind of love, my darling. Maybe your teacher has forgotten how to float down into the heart of her own mind. A lot of grown-ups do. Maybe she's afraid she'll drown in all the feelings she's dropped down there. I don't know why people say you have to pay, *ketzaleh*. Maybe it's because as your attention takes you down, down, down, it's like crossing a bridge into a different world."

Janet Conner What a wise woman [laughter]. You have to digest—

Dawna Markova Yeah. It's no different than what we're talking about because she was talking about wonder, and when I went to graduate school for the first time, I was trying to find... because I loved her so deeply, and she was the first person I ever experienced that very pure kind of love. She never wanted to change me or correct me. And so I went to study the human brain, and I became a cognitive neuroscientist. And at the time—this was a long time ago—I was introduced to a man named E. Roy John, who was using this equipment, and I could actually see... it was called a Q-B computer. It was one of the very first computers, and I could see the brain thinking. And I could watch it change its states of mind, so to speak, literally, change its mind.

And it would go from what we now... it could measure brainwaves, so it would go from now what we call beta thinking, which is "get to the point"... it's what all

the impeachment hearings have been about, beta thinking, except the couple times that somebody cried, and they got tears in their eyes. But it would go from beta thinking to alpha thinking—which is like when you daydream, your brain produces mostly alpha waves—to this bottom of the ocean, wide, porous state of mind—permeable is a better word than porous—that I've been calling wonder. Or we've been talking about it as prayers or living in sacred questions.

And down at the bottom of the ocean—I do a lot of snorkeling—down at the bottom of the ocean, everything is floating and starts connecting. The seaweed and the shells and the fish, it all starts making these connections. And my grandmother didn't know any of that, but I wanted to prove that she wasn't weird and crazy like everybody else said [laughter].

Janet Conner Oh, I think she was just beyond brilliant. So your book is just full of beauty, stories, teachings, and then I turn the page, Dawna, and fall out of my chair because you're talking about your great-aunt Emma Goldman. Now, a lot of listeners might go, "Who?" You just need a little history [laughter], and some of the listeners know the story of my son.

He, just like McCarthyism in the '50s, was sent to a high-security federal prison by a very angry federal judge in an effort to force Jerry to name anarchists in New York in front of a secret federal grand jury. And Emma Goldman is like a hero, and you're related to her. I know that Emma, on the other side, is very proud of my son, and I'm sure she's very proud of her great-niece, if I said that correctly. So what do you know about Emma Goldman?

Dawna Markova Okay. Well, I have to tell you I'm going to read you a story, and then I'll tell you a little bit more. It's called "Unlearning to Not Speak." That's the title.

"I went to visit my mother in her South Florida condo for two weeks, when she was the same age as I am now—so she was 77. It was June 27, her birthday. It was also the birthday of my great-aunt Emma Goldman. But I didn't talk to my mother about Great-Aunt Emma. She would've had a fit. No one in her family spoke about Emma. Most families have someone or several someones they just don't talk about. There were some things about me—hair, eyes, voice, radical spirit that refused to be contained—that reminded my mother of Great-Aunt Emma. Her deepest fear was that I would turn out to be just like her.

"Emma Goldman was a revolutionary born during the late 1800s. She was also an infamous anarchist, who believed in the independence of women—the right to support themselves, live for themselves, and love whom they pleased. She believed in everyone's right to beautiful, radiant things. The words for which she was most often quoted were: "I represent truth and a never-to-be-destroyed



longing for liberty. The ultimate success of a truth depends not on the many, but the perseverance and earnestness of the few." Even as I write these words now, they don't seem very radical, but when I mentioned them once to my mother after seeing Robert Redford's movie about Emma, *Reds*, she reacted as if she wanted to strangle Emma and muzzle me.

"In the 1930s, people could be deported, as Emma was, for words such as those. In the '40s, they could be taken by train to Dachau, as many of our relatives were for saying those words. In the '50s, my parents and I watched Joe McCarthy on our tiny, 10-inch screen television and heard people being humiliated, fired from their jobs, or exiled after saying words like those. Whenever I'd say something my mother considered to be radical, her jaw would tighten, then she'd shake her head and mumble, "You're going to end up just like your great-aunt Emma."

Janet Conner To which I say, "You go, girl [laughter]." But the thing that's so—and I'm just living proof of it—is, okay, there was that litany of things that happened. It's happening right now. My son was sent to prison May 21<sup>st</sup> of 2013. It isn't right. He spent his 24<sup>th</sup> year in prison protecting our right to dissent. It's alive. This is the domination of stay in your lane, and we have to be disconnected, right? She's talking about recreating, or what I'm talking about right now, this new structure in this 4 decade. It's a way of being together. And maybe we don't get burned to the stake for it now, but there are still a lot of people who would like us to shut up and obey and let the dominators dominate. So I just had to... I don't get very many opportunities to bring Emma Goldman into my show on *Praying at the Speed of Love*. I'm just so happy. I can't tell you.

Dawna Markova Yay. Yay.

Janet Conner So we started by saying, "How did you pray as a child? How did your grandmother teach you to pray?" How would you describe how you pray now?

Dawna Markova Well, sometimes it's as much how do I not pray as it is how do I pray. My grandmother's favorite way of praying... she was very kinesthetic in her thinking, and she taught me to pray in what I call hand-minding. So when I make something... when she would make bread, it was a weaving of prayers. So she would take a person on one hank and braid in the resources they had in their life that they had used in another situation or the resources of somebody else they knew and, "May Willie..." and "Help Sammy..." and "May Sammy help Willie in this way, and may Willie help Sammy in that way."

So I make bread every Friday. I don't always make a big braided bread. This book was done as a braid. The stories are all a braid. But hand-minding means I pray when I... I have a pottery wheel out on our lanai, our porch, and I make pots out

of clay because it's earth. And the clay teaches me better than any psychotherapy how to find the center of my being. And the clay is earth, and it teaches me. The woman that came over for tea that I told you about or that will come for tea, I'll sit her on the wheel because once you have centered yourself and the clay, what you have to do next is release your hands. You don't relax. If you relax, the clay goes off center. You have to release. And because I'm 77 and because of my history, I practice releasing a lot. And every time I sit at the wheel, I release.

When I make something, whether it's bread or food or dinner or I do a lot of quilting, I do this hand-minding. So I think of someone I love, and I feel that in my hands. And then I do the stitching, and when my mind wanders, I put it down. This is what she taught me. And then I think of someone I love, and then I pick it up again and stitch. And that's hand-minding.

And we have a big quilt on our bed. I walked the land, and I found all the plants that live on this land naturally. And I made quilted squares of each plant. It took me a long time because each time I'd begin to stitch them, if I would wander and think about what I was going to make for dinner, I had to put the quilt down. So the quilt now and what my grandmother would say was, "Even if that quilt is destroyed, the love that made it can never be destroyed."

So you asked me, and I said, not flippantly, that it's when am I not praying? When I'm not praying, then I need to sit down. And I usually go outside, which is so easy to do here, and I let my mind get wide with a question and I wonder. And until I can find this state of attention that I call presence... and presence is the one who's hearing me think, the one who's seeing the trees, the one who has loved me unconditionally. The presence has been there since... some people call it awareness; some people call it witness; some people call it God. There's many, many words for it, but it's always been there. It's always loved me unconditionally. I don't have to find anybody on the outside that's loved me unconditionally because presence has been there. It's been with me at my worst, for sure. It's been with me at my best. It has never left me, and it won't leave me until I leave this body.

So I sit there till I can find presence again, and it's like sinking into the ocean. And the thoughts are there, but they're like the waves on the ocean. And then I get up and do what I need to do and put love in my hands. And so that's how I pray. That's the most truthful way that I can respond to that question for you.

Janet Conner Well, and you're making me realize... because I don't quilt. I'm not a potter. But my hands, everything comes through my hands because I am writing, not professionally writing, but I always have a pen in my hand. I always have a journal near me, on my lap, and I'm very clear that Janet's not the one doing the

writing. But that piece of that I pick up a pen with love, and the presence that has loved me unconditionally, it's She. And for me, I do use the feminine gender. I figure after 5,000 years of God-He, it's time for God-She. So for me, it's always the divine feminine, but everybody gets to play as they see fit. But that presence, you know what She's doing? She's kissing my fingers like your grandmother did. That's what's going on when we do deep soul writing.

Dawna Markova      When I write, like when I wrote this book, I write with all parts of my mind, except when poems come through. And so I write poems by sitting down. Andy, my partner of 43 years, I think... I have written him a lot of poems for his birthday, for anniversaries, all that. And I just sit down, and I get empty. And I go, "I don't know what I'm going to write." All the waves are going, "I can't write something good. What can you write after 43 years?" And then I get empty. And then my hand picks up the pen as if it has a mind of its own, and it begins to write.

Well, I'll try to tell this story briefly. We've been asking ourselves these questions about, "If I die first, where's the passwords to my computer? And what will Andy do, and where will he go? And where will he move?" And we do it on what we call our Naked Sundays. We take off all our clothes because you can't have very much pretense when you're naked, I mean, especially when you're 77 and 74. And we get big paper, and we write questions on the paper. And then we live in the question.

And so Andy said, "What do you want me to do about the 453 poems I have that you wrote for me?" And I said, "Well, burn them," and he said, "Burn them?" I said, "Yes. Everything else I've written, 18 books, it's all been for them. This was just for you, and it came from a different place. So just burn them and mix them with my ashes or your ashes or whatever." He said, "I can't do that." I said, "Well, you need to do it." He said, "No, I can't do that."

So Andy is a composer and plays many instruments, so he said, "How about if we record, if you read your poems, and I compose music to go with your poems. And we read them and give them as gifts." And I love to give, and so I said, "All right. As many as we can do while I'm still in this body." So that's what we're doing, and the rest will get mixed with my ashes. And we call them Musings, and it's what I'm reaching towards now because I love being in collaboration. So I'm being in collaboration with Andy in a whole new way, and I love being in this state. Poems come through, and I can't write a poem. So I'm creating new poems or editing ones that I wrote 20 years ago, 30 years ago, that definitely need editing and then reading them in the garage, which is where his studio is, and recording them. And he's composing music behind them, and they become Musings, so.

Janet Conner      And you and Andy would let us hear one of those? May we hear one?

Dawna Markova Yes, of course.

Janet Conner So tell us what we're about to hear.

Dawna Markova You're going to have to tell me what we're about to hear because I forget which one I sent you [laughter]. So I truly don't remember. I'm sorry. This is in my [crosstalk].

Janet Conner Well, there are only 453.

Dawna Markova I know. So I don't know. I can look it up, but be surprised.

Janet Conner Actually, this is just the wonder because if you... actually, it's perfect because if you told us the title, we'd be listening to that with our left brains, and we'd be looking for the meaning. What do you say we just all take a very deep breath and step into this gift? And, oh, we are so blessed to get to hear your sacred love songs to Andy now returning to you and to all of us in his music.

[the Musing plays]

Janet Conner What a gift, what a gift.

Dawna Markova I really do forget what I sent you. It just goes into this place, you know? I don't remember.

Janet Conner Well, and now, it goes out to all the listeners around the world.

Dawna Markova Yes, because you can't buy it. You can't buy it any place. That's one of the things that he had to agree to me that it wouldn't be sold. I don't want them sold, so.

Janet Conner Well, then we are so very blessed. So with Andy and Dawna's gift, your second Prayer Bag... so when people come to [janetconner.com/22](https://janetconner.com/22)—that's easy to remember this beautiful episode number 22, the structure of love—you have two Prayer Bags because Dawna's a very generous woman. And in the first Prayer Bag is an excerpt from the book that your beautiful publisher, Mango, has given to the listeners, and in the second bag is the audio clip of this beautiful love poem to Andy.

Oh, oh, what a glorious conversation. So at 77, what's next? Is your grandmother whispering in your ear? What wonder, what question is really speaking to you right now?

Dawna Markova I'm in a place right now of "duh." It's like I've been asking myself, "What's unfinished for me to give?" And nothing has come. "What's unfinished for me to learn?" And a great deal comes that has to do with how can I influence this

rupture we're living through right now? What's in my sphere of influence that I can give, and what's unfinished for me to experience?

And the last question... every Sunday, we do what's called going *holoholo*. *Holoholo* in Hawaiian, at least the way I understand it in my Jewish-Hawaiian, is... the way we do it is we set out in the car, and one of us says, "Turn right," at the first intersection. Then the other one says, "Turn left." Then the other one says, "Turn left again." And we don't know where we're going to end up, and we spent the whole day doing that because it's another practice of being in the unknown. And I want more *holoholo*, and I want to experience more... to write this book, I had to be silent three days a week when I was writing, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. And I loved those days. Oh. And Andy kept silence as well. Our dogs did not do such a good job.

And when it came to publicizing the book, which I'm a beginner at, those days began to disintegrate. So I'm looking forward to experiencing three days of silence, not in a row, again my Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, for no reason in particular. Just to hold silence, not to produce anything. Just to be as fully aware and as fully present as I can in this life that I love so much.

Janet Conner And it's such a mystery, but this has been my experience that when I'm silent with no intention, I'm just, I'm just, that's when, *pshoo*, these things come. When I receive a prayer—and even though they look like poems and sound like poems, I call what is given to my prayers—I can feel it coming. Not that I can set the intention. I can't say, "I want to write a prayer today." I don't have language for it, but there's like a sensation all the way around my body. Maybe it's that grandmother gold thing. Anyway, I can feel it, and all I know to do in that moment is pick up a pen now. And then I simply receive. It's like taking dictation. So I'm seconding your "let's just be quiet, be still, be silent." And then the presence that loves us unconditionally, it's She that will say, "Okay. Well, here's a thought. Here's a prayer. Or here's just that you're held and you're held and you're held and you're held."

Dawna Markova The words that come to me as you're speaking are: "To rest in the place where the prayer is born. To rest in the place where the music is born. To rest in the place where the wisdom is born."

Janet Conner To rest in the place where the prayer is born. To rest... it's a song! To rest in the place where the music is born. To rest in the place where wisdom is born. And then I just have to add rest in the place where love always was, always is, always shall be. World without end.

Oh, Dawna, I love you so much. Maybe I love your grandmother even more [laughter]. I am so grateful you wrote this book.

Dawna Markova [inaudible] [laughter] please.

Janet Conner And the listeners... well, I have to take that back. We cannot call the people who listen to this podcast listeners because at [janetconner.com/22](https://janetconner.com/22)—and if anybody doesn't remember that just come to [janetconner.com](https://janetconner.com) and click on the little [Podcast](#)—I create—I've been taking copious notes while Dawna's been talking—Show Notes, so you get to meet Dawna. You get to learn more about this beautiful book, *Living a Loved Life*. But the best part—I have the best time doing this—is I'm taking, it'll be in a blue prayer box action, here's ways to bring your grandmother and the beautiful wisdoms that you are sharing with us to life in your life. So don't just listen. Come and play so that you bring this into your body. One of the first things I'm going to put on those Show Notes is put your hand on your heart, put your hand, and listen with your skin, listen with your skin.

I am so grateful to you, Dawna. Thank you so much for being a part of this. I am so grateful. It was hard to say, "Okay. I'm going to close this show that's a great success." There were a lot of tears shed. I am so grateful. Not that that wasn't lovely work, but there's nowhere else that we can have conversations like this and really explore the deeper, I don't even want to call it meaning, the deeper truth of prayer.

So the least I could do is give you a little gift, and this is one of these prayers that just arrived. It happened to arrive on February 18<sup>th</sup> of 2018. It's called "Where Are You?" I don't think I've ever read it publicly before. And I always write down the date, even though I have no idea, but I always record the date. Well, when I went to look at it, I went, "Ha ha. Wait a second. I know what this prayer was actually doing." It's called "Where Are You?" and I'm asking the divine feminine, "Excuse me. Where are you?" And one week later, she answered. One week later, she woke me up in the middle of the night and whispered in my left ear, "*Prayer Artist*." But I had no idea that that's what I was asking for.

"Where Are You?"

Where are you?

In this:        my heart  
                  my mind  
                  my body

In this:        my hands  
                  my fists  
                  my toes

In this: my eyes that don't quite see  
my ears that can't quite hear  
my gut that speaks the sacred language no

In this: my wild mind  
my aching body  
my breaking heart

In this: my twisting-turning life  
my crushing choices  
my foolish heart

In this: my attempts to gather  
my necklace of sighs  
my hands in service to what I do not know

In: the dreams that escape me  
the coffee that wakes me  
the earth that sustains me  
the patterns that tease me

Is this You?  
Is this You?  
Where are You?

In this: the questions I ask of you, of life, of the future, of the past

In this: my seeking to find and to be found  
my invisible longing to remember the ancient story that  
brought us here that brought me here

In this: my knowing in a secret place  
that I was You and am You still

In the words that want to be written  
the songs that beg to be sung  
the tears that demand to be shed

In this: my heartbeat still moving,  
my voice still sounding  
my feet still dancing

In this: the book inside me  
the prayer within me  
the grail that is me

In this: my sacred howls  
my prostrate body  
my ceaseless longing

You are  
You are here  
You are always here  
You are  
Right Here  
You are

T. Frantzich This conversation in the mystic with *Prayer Artist* Janet Conner has been rated L.

[music] *You are not moving, you are being moved.  
You are not singing, you are being sung.  
You are not praying, you are being prayed  
Prayed at the speed of love.*