



Episode 26: Robert Corman:
Wisdom for Spiritual Travelers
Thursday, April 2, 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're not. You're being moved. You're not singing; you are being sung. You are not praying; you are being prayed, prayed at the speed of love. I'm Janet Connor, *Prayer Artist*, and you have arrived at speed of love timing to the 26th episode in my new podcast, *Praying at the Speed of Love*.

Perhaps you listened to any of the 270 conversations I had on my previous show, *The Soul Directed Life*. I closed it not because it wasn't successful. People were really rather upset with me for closing it. They loved it, and I loved doing it. But when *Prayer Artist* arrived, prayer took over. Prayer changed everything. And as a *Prayer Artist*, I was called to create a whole new kind of podcast devoted to one sacred, precious, magnificent topic: prayer.

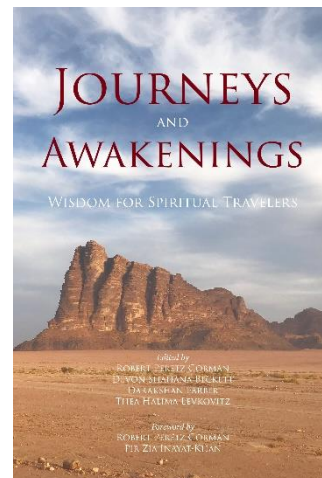
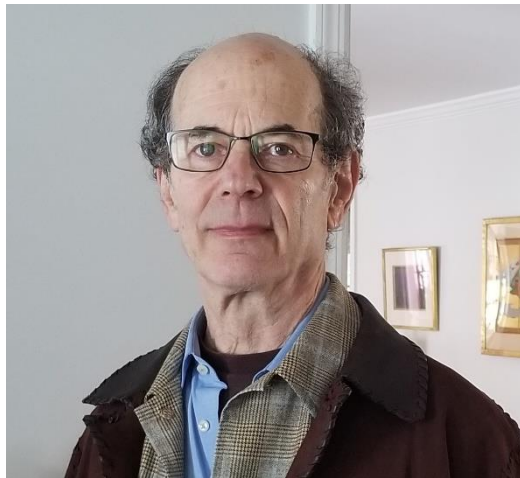
Now, prayer is not exactly your typical conversation on radio shows or podcasts. But isn't it the subject we're all so hungry for right now? Prayer. Everywhere I look, people are hungry for prayer. But when I say prayer, when you say prayer, when we say prayer, we are not talking about that tiny, tight, constricted box that all of our patriarchal religions have stuffed it in. We're talking about real prayer, original prayer, mystical prayer, prayer that is both forever ancient and yet, paradoxically, always brand new in the moment. This is real prayer, living prayer, breathing prayer, dancing prayer. This is the kind of prayer that your bones recognize because it's ancestral. This is the prayer that fed our hearts, sparked our creative imaginations long before patriarchy.

Patriarchy is actually an aberration in the history of the universe, the history of the earth. It's not that long lived. And it is coming. It is coming. It is coming to an end, not in our lifetime, but it is coming to an end. And so this silent call for a new kind of prayer that is an old kind of prayer, the reason we feel this and we feel it in our guts is that it is prayer that is going to lift us out of and beyond patriarchy. It's prayer that's going to show us how to create a new world, a new inclusive world, a world that makes love visible, makes love visible for everyone.

Because isn't it obvious that patriarchy makes suffering visible, unfortunately, for everyone?

So here we are at the 26th episode, and the timing of this particular conversation is beyond perfect. I can't plan these things. Who could have planned the timing that right now, around the world, we are all being asked to... the euphemism is "shelter in place." Some governors are using the language locked down. I'll take shelter in place. Sounds a little sweeter. But the point is the world is changing, and it's changing because of this tiny, tiny, tiny, little microscopic life form called a virus. What we are about to talk about in this conversation is the food, the mystical food, the prayer food, the truth food, the wisdom food that we all need to consume right now to move through this astonishing experience and come out of it ready, equipped to create a world that makes love visible.

This conversation is also a little bit different if you've listened to any of the previous 25. Typically, I have one guest and that guest talks about her or his personal prayer life. Well, today I do have one guest. We are having one conversation with one person, Robert Corman, but as the editor of a book called *Journeys and Awakenings, Wisdom for Spiritual Travelers*, a new and very important... talk about perfect timing for this book coming from Monkfish.



Robert is, of course, going to share his personal mystical prayer story, but he's also going to give us a peek into the deep mystical awakenings in the lives of a few of the incredible authors in this compilation. Listen to the title again: *Journeys and Awakenings, Journeys and Awakenings*. I think we're on a journey of awakening right now. Monkfish couldn't plan this; Robert Corman couldn't plan this. If you've ever written a book, the copyright right now, it might say 2020, but the author, the editor worked on this thing for 1 year, 2 years, 5 years, 10 years. How could you possibly plan that the moment that this book enters the

world is the moment that our hands are all out saying, "Uh, please. Yes. Help me with this journey of awakening that we are all on right now"?

I'm reading this book really, really slowly; really, really slowly. Now, that's a compliment. That's a compliment because I find that when I can't rush through a book, it's my kind of book. I have to digest, and I have to sit outside in a marriage of deep soul reading and deep soul writing, slowly, slowly integrating. And then I find that something I read stays with me in the night, and I'm awakened in the middle of the night. It happened last night because of this book. I'm awakened in the middle of the night, and there's that food again, carrying me deeper into my journey of awakening. And I find myself as I read chapter after chapter, I'm just tumbling. You can kind of see me falling through space madly in love with authors I never met before.

So this conversation is going to be food for you. There is some dollop of wisdom, a little spoonful of love hovering in the air right now, waiting to enter your heart. So let us begin this conversation with Robert Corman the way that we begin all conversations, taking a breath and listening to the voice of the Tibetan bowl. She is asking you to awaken your invisible ears that you may hear what wants to be heard. And at the precise moment I'm saying that... I doubt the camera microphone is picking it up, but a red cardinal is right outside the window going, "*Chirp, chirp*. Pay attention. Yes [laughter]." That's never happened before. It's a second story window, but she's in agreement. Open your invisible ears.

[the bowl rings]

She's still affirming, "Open your invisible ears." That's never happened before, but then this conversation has never happened before. I want to introduce you ever so quickly to Robert Corman because this is his first time on the show, and it's the first time I have had a conversation with him.

He is a member of the board of advisors of the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom. We're going to talk about that. He's also the president of an organization called Applied Concepts, which offers executive coaching and whole systems thinking. Isn't that exactly the place we're in right now? We need to not look at this situation, this problem, this border. We need a whole system. Isn't this amazing? This minuscule little virus is calling us all to pay attention to the entire ecosystem. He is also chairing an organization right now called A Growing Culture. Now, this is interesting. It's an NGO that is building an online agroecology knowledge base for global farmers—once again, the entire world. How perfect is that? How perfect is that for this moment in time? And selfishly, I'm interested and I know you the listeners are interested in this, he's a practitioner of nondual Kabbalistic

healing and a student of several shamanic traditions. He joins us from his home in Morristown, New Jersey. Welcome, Robert.

Robert Corman Thank you. Janet, what a wonderful welcome to this whole book and to me, so I'm grateful for the program that you have and the heart and love that you bring to it. So I bow to your deep, deep intent in helping the world in the way that you are.

Janet Conner Thank you. I'll tell Sophia you said that. That's the name of the Divine Feminine for me, and she's pretty non-negotiable [laughter]. It's like, "You will be a *Prayer Artist*. You will create this podcast. You will offer prayer intensives. You will do this. You will do that." I'm just obedient. I go, "Oh, okay."

And that's one of the things that's so utterly adorable to me about this book and the Seven Pillars because of that magnificent... is it Proverbs 9? "Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her Seven Pillars." That's my Sophia, so I'm really ecstatic to have this conversation with you. What do you say we open with some prayer? You want to do that for us?

Robert Corman Well, I'd be honored to, especially in the context of the world that is dealing with such an unexpected fear that the coronavirus presents. And hopefully, this aspect of our world will be behind us quickly, but it is a major opportunity for us. And so what I think I'd like to do is share something that I often offered in workshops that I used to do on what I called engaging wholeness. And so I think this might set a tone. It hopefully is not too long, but it's a kind of a prayer and a meditation and it is a poem. And I think I'll just go right into it and ask any listener to just relax and see where it takes them.

It's called "Open Deeply to the Love."

Open deeply to the love you draw from your own sacred traditions.

Feel what arises in you as you receive that love.

Feel its texture.

Open deeply to the sweet scent of your most favored ancestor, alive or not.

Commit the vibration of their presence to be with you.

Open to the place you discovered within you when you were not afraid of being lost.

Permit yourself to feel your groundedness in this unknown place.

It belongs to you.

Open to the quiet of the most caring embrace you gave another in need.

Feel the kindness and the strength that arose in you when you were there for them.

Open to the unafraid person you sometimes see looking back at you in the mirror.

Know that this is the multi-colored, wondrous truth that is always available as an

ally on your path.

Open to this space within that gives a home to the beauty in you that is seen and unseen.

Allow it to remain a place that you can go to in wonder.

Open to your highest ethic and feel its living vibration in your cells.

Welcome your capacity to draw from the wisdom that resides within you.

And open to the wise one always alive and ready within you.

Feed it and trust it in your days.

Janet Conner That's beautiful. That is truly beautiful, and the line that grabbed me was, "When were you not afraid of being lost?" Because right now, people are feeling lost, not sure what to do, but if we can open that... because we all had that moment, probably when we were little kids. Remember when you were not afraid of being lost. It isn't that you were not lost but not afraid of being lost. It was the adventure. That's a profound... so as someone who writes these kinds of they look like poems but they're prayers, how was that given to you?

Robert Corman Well, it is a fascinating little story, Janet. I actually had written... as you notice, there are couplets here. I wrote the first line of each one, and that was the poem. And when I had the little group sitting in Rockaway, New Jersey... I don't remember how many there were, but it was a wonderful group. And I said, "Let's reconvene, and I'd like to start with this kind of meditation," but something happened as I proceeded. After I read each line, I spoke a following line in the moment, and it was in the moment that I trusted that I would find something. And I kept doing it all the way through until it was done. And happily, my friend, dear friend, Vicki Mulligan, had recorded it, and I was able to capture it. And there's, there's the story. I wanted folks to open deeply to the love that is all around us, all the time. And even not love holds loving it in its own way as well. So I think that's the rendition I'll stick with of how this came to be.

Janet Conner Well, it made me think of Rumi spinning around, right? The words just come. The words just come, and luckily somebody wrote them down, right?

Robert Corman Yes, exactly. And one of my beautiful inner tools is to remember wonderful short quotes, and I remembered one that fits with what you just said. And that was something from Miles Davis, the great trumpet player, who was once asked, "Miles, how do you do that?" and he said, "It's easy, man. I just get out of my own way." And so to me, this was always an encouragement, a trusting, a trusting of something beyond myself that is not beyond myself at all. It is resident in me.

One of my teachers, Jason Shulman, used a word years ago, and he was the person involved with this nondual Kabbalistic healing and still very much is a

great teacher of that and other things. But he used the word "indwelling," and I really appreciated that. So what is it that is indwelling in us is something that I think so many of the authors in this book are really allowing to manifest. And that to me is the blessing in their lives and in turn, because it's now a collection, in anyone who chooses to find stories in here that speak to them.

Janet Conner Oh, and they will [laughter]. It's a smorgasbord. You can just sort of show up and get your mystical food every day. So we are going to dive into this book because this book is such important food right now, but I can't skip over the first question that I always ask everybody. And this is turning out to be... I didn't know this was going to happen when I first... because I am obedient. "Okay. If you want me to ask everybody about their prayer life as a child, all right, I'm going to do this. No one's ever done this before. This is not your normal run of the mill conversation on the radio. I'd just like to point that out, Sophia. But I'm obedient, so okay." Well, it's turned out to be the richest question. How did you pray as a child? How were you taught to pray?

Robert Corman Well, I love the question because I hadn't ever entertained the question for all my years, so your question brings me to a place which is quite a blessing unto itself. So here's what I'm drawing in my memory as I sit here. I wasn't taught to pray. I was shown something that was prayer, and I didn't even know that's what it was. So the doorway of my tradition was Judaism, and I remember the day and the days, usually on a Friday night, when there was a lot of talk and back and forth, but there was a moment when the candles were lit that my mother would take her hands and put them in over the lights, the lighted candles, and say nothing. She would bring her hands up to her face and quietly keep them there for a period of time.

And this was really a bit of a mystery because I don't know what she was doing as a young child. But what she was doing was speaking to me in a way beyond my self-awareness at the time, which was teaching me something about silence, teaching me something about the nature of being present in the moment for a real, purposeful relationship to the giving of light, which is what the creation story is all about. And it's the story at the heart of Judaism and the patriarchal religions, but it's also the heart of all of humanity, the rising of the sun, the lighting of a candle, all one thing. So for me, Janet, early prayer was really understanding the subtlety of the way of learning about myself because she wasn't saying what I should do. She was showing me an option that really spoke to me.

And I must tell you this little thing that you're going to love. When you said there were cardinals outside your window, I got the chills because my mother was only all about cardinals, and so she really was always seeing them and buying pictures

of them. And so I'm very touched that you had that experience, and the synchrony of it is... I think the word comes from moving like silk. It just happened in a lovely way. So thank you. Thank you for the question, and thank you for sharing your experience outside your window.

Janet Conner Well, and thank you for telling us that she was all about the cardinals because now it makes perfect sense. It was she that was saying, "I'm in this conversation. Here we go. I'm kicking it off." And my father was all about cardinals, and in Wisconsin, he'd schlep out in his galoshes in two and a half, three feet of snow to feed the cardinals. He was all about the cardinals. And then when he died—and I'm here in Florida, for heaven's sake—immediately, a red cardinal at the dining room window screaming at me until I'd go to the window and go, "Hi, Dad. Hi, Dad."

Well, then, several years later, my mother died. In all of those years, I had never—I don't know if I just wasn't paying attention—I had never seen the orange female. Only the red cardinal would come. So one day, I'm at the dining room window saying hello to Dad. "Hi, Dad. Thanks for coming. I'm here. Everything's fine." And I put my hands on my hips—I don't know why—and I said, "So where's Laurene?" my mother's name. *Whoosh*, orange cardinal on the branch. I went, "Well, hi, Mom, Laurene." And they always show... always since then. They're never separate. They're always a pair. So it's my parents and your parents. Isn't that a hoot?

Robert Corman It is. It certainly is. Yeah, yeah. Thank you for sharing that as well.

Janet Conner Well, and it plays into what this conversation is all about. One of the articles in the book is about—and I think it's the one that you're particularly enamored of—that the world, it's alive. It's a living organism. And this is integral to my mystical life is that the world is a who. The world is alive. The cardinals are not an accident. The snakes are not an accident. The ospreys that scream at me... I'm in conversation. I'm having a conversation with all of them because we are one organism.

And so these stories about, oh, the dead child appears as a dragonfly, the dead parents or grandparents as birds or cardinals, on one level, we can go, "Oh, how cute," right? But at a mystical level, it's simply that they're alive, that everything is alive, and everything is in communion with us. So how perfect that your mother brought that mystical awareness into the conversation at hello, at hello. So there's one more thing about it, and then we really are going to dive into this book. But when I read your bio and nondual Kabbalistic healing, I said to myself, "I don't know what that is, but I want to know." So what is nondual Kabbalistic healing?

Robert Corman Well, you were actually talking about it in so many words just now when you're talking about all things being one. It's things being one meaning that they're not two. There's a number of songs that speak to this in so many different cultures, and we're talking about a universe, not a multiverse. And it's appropriate word because there is not only a mystical basis for that, but there's a scientific basis. And I love the fact that the integration of our awareness is about something that allows us to be whole.

The I-Thou notion is a very rich notion. But it's also clear that we are all part of one thing, and we are a glorious example of a uniqueness at the same time. And there's nothing inconsistent about that. So the nondual is a word which captures that reality; however, it's sometimes difficult for us to hold that space. In fact, most people don't hold that space. And even if you can, it's not something you necessarily are going to manifest in every moment of your life. Rather, there's awareness; there's a mindfulness. All of these words that are getting real traction these days are all about finding unity. Finding unity in our own presence with ourselves is a very good beginning point because if we can, we have a capacity to be there for others, so nondual is about that.

Kabbalistic really comes out of... I guess the ancient word would be translated into something close to the word "receive, to receive." So how do we receive the realities that are our life? How do we sit in the space of the fact that... and this is at the heart of the work—again, I mentioned his name earlier—of this beautiful, beautiful soul named Jason Shulman. He's also in the lineage of, I think, Shin Buddhism, and a great, wonderful teacher who really created an understanding of the Tree of Life that has been both ancient but, in his own way, he found a way of framing it for those that were interested in learning. And what it does is take a look at the Tree of Life, which is not simply a tree. It lights up with the soul and spirit of all of life, and it has what are called Sephiroth. And each one has an aspect of how life manifests, not only in the world but in ourselves, and the more you can learn about how they sit in relationship to each other, the more you feel a groundedness of your own being.

So Kabbalistic healing really comes from the work that one can do and eventually reach a point where you can say, "I can be with another and help them sit in their own truth and their honesty and their pain and their joy, and help them see that it's all one thing. It's not about getting rid of this aspect of my limitation and becoming perfect. It's about being the perfectly imperfect, wonderful soul that we can be." And when we have that, we have a capacity to be a blessing and a prayer to ourselves and those around us.

So one can find more about that by the way at Society of Souls, Jason Shulman, or just take a look at nondual Kabbalistic healing. And there have been thousands of students who have been all over the world who have learned about that, and I certainly recommend it, so.

But you asked me how I came to that. I really was very hesitant to sit at anybody's knees and learn from them, but then I realized that teachers also needs students. And it is a gift to have students, and I had been a student of other people well before I met Jason, including Jean Houston and Joseph Campbell, both of whom I had the opportunity to spend time with particularly in the late '70s. And for me, they helped me open up as well.

So for around 12 years I was fortunate enough, in the serendipity of my own life, to have met through a friend a shaman who lived in New Mexico and who had drawn his intuitive focus from the matrilineal orientation of some of the Northern Mexico tribes. And he himself was partially Indian and partially what they call "Canuck." His roots came out of Canada, but there he was. And I spent 12 years kind of as an apprentice, learning about the macro understanding from the shamanic viewpoint of the earth. And so he would refer to the earth as Her, and we are of Her. The first words he ever said to me, Janet, were, "We come from the dust of the road," and the scientists confirm it. And there's no reason not to understand the beauty of that when you really can appreciate what is in the soils of this planet, how rich and how glorious it is.

So I spent many wonderful years engaging in understanding the difference between *this*, and I pound my hand with my fist, and *this*, where I run one hand just next to the other. And one is maybe more the forceful, martial and the other one is the sensual. We are sensual beings. We have a sensorium. We are very capable of appreciating the beauty that's here, but we're also, because of this sensorium, very capable of being frightened. And so we react both ways, and it's a good thing. I'm not criticizing either side. But it's a good thing when you think about it because we need to be able to be... fear is holy too.

There is a moment when it's a good thing to have because you know you have to run or you know that some part of you is in danger. And we are capable of being responsive and being seated in the moment at the same time that things come up that are difficult. And that is exactly what we need now, is it not? So I think I've answered those two components of the question, and maybe we'll circle back at a point in time if it seems appropriate.

Janet Conner But I'm so grateful where you brought us because that's exactly where we are right now, acknowledging worry, fear—it's real—but then asking ourselves, "Is there a way," I love the gently rubbing your hands together, "Is there a way to

respond in gentleness and kindness and prayer and connection with one another, assuaging one another's fears?"

So this book, I started with your introduction, and you talk about, opening sentence, that this whole thing is built on the inspired collaboration with the founding of the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom. Now, I love the sound of that because of Proverbs 9, but what is the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom?

Robert Corman Well, the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom, actually, as you mentioned when you read Proverbs 9, "Wisdom has built her house. She has set up its seven pillars. She has prepared her meal and mixed her wine. She has also set her table." There is an understanding of the role of wisdom in our lives that came to a wonderful seer, prophet, wise person named Hazrat Inayat Khan.

Hazrat Inayat Khan was a person who beautifully understood so many traditions and basically saw the links between them all. And while his doorway was the beautiful, rich, mystical understanding of Islam, he saw the connections across them all, and eventually... and one can Google him and learn a lot more or go on to the website of the order that came out of his creation, actually, and I'll share that with you in a moment. But what he was so interested in doing was in seeing the common ground, the beauty of sitting in the wisdom that can come out of this place, out of life, out of being with nature, out of being with the other, out of being with the flora and the fauna, and out of being with himself in deep, deep clarities that would come to him.

And I am not a member of his order, although my beloved colleagues who were my co-editors were and are, but I have had the pleasure of meeting his son, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, and sitting and learning from some of the lessons that he taught up in upstate New York at a place called The Abode of the Message.

But it's his son, the wonderful teacher, Pir Zia Inayat Khan, who was really responsible for creating the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom as an organization. And he did that in partnership with others, including Brother Wayne Teasdale, who's a great ecumenicist, and also the culturally creative, rich, brilliant mind of William Irwin Thompson, who is also one of the authors in this book. And together they saw that they can create online a house, kind of a virtual house that can capture the wisdom, of course, across many traditions and through many insights. And so they created it around 13 or 14 years ago.

And that is the ground out of which grew, oh, over 150 contributions from across the planet of writers who were willing to go deep into their own stories. And these are not writers who all fit into a neat category. They were from across the beautiful landscape of human interest and discipline and culture and geography,

and that made for a wonderful gathering of information and a wonderful series of standalone pieces that were selected in part to create this book.

Janet Conner Thank you for sort of filling in where these articles came from, and now that's such a confirmation of my gut response to them, which is, "These are my people." These are very deep. You read it, and you have to stop after a couple paragraphs and stare off in space and take that concept in. Chew on it, come back, reread that article again and again and again and again. It's absolutely gorgeous. So did it come to you to... how did it become this book?

Robert Corman Well, before I answer that, I liked what you were just saying, Janet, because tasting it. Well, going back to Proverbs 9:12, right?

Janet Conner That's right! It's a feast. That's right. It's her meal [laughter].

Robert Corman There's nothing to rush through when you're sitting and taking this space for yourself to be with yourself, and to open up to yourself and the world around you, and to feel the oneness of it, and then to eat and see where one passage or another might take you. And that's what I think the book offers up, so you're exactly the kind of exemplar that we had in mind of how someone might enjoy the book.

So around four years ago, I joined the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom, having visited a loft in Manhattan where there was going to be some beautiful music by Yuval Ron, one of the authors in the book. And I hope to include some of his music at some point in in this conversation. But what's most important is that he also had there a couple of dervishes, who were going to spin and spin. Now, if you've never heard of a whirling dervish, it's a wonderful thing to experience and to observe because there is a great level of mysticism that occurs in the space that they create. And I think it's already there, but they're making it more visible. And they are embodying the mystical wonder of it all.

And it was from that moment that I was able to get an invitation to come back to The Abode—I had been there 30 years earlier—but to come back to The Abode in New York and meet with a few people. And it was at that context that I got invited to sit and talk with the people who were the board of House of Seven Pillars, and I was invited to join the board. So we wondered where we were going as an organization and how we might harvest the richness of all of these writings. And truth be told, we created certain criteria for a book, which is described in the preface here, which is really about what could serve to really evidence the lovely and powerful writings here that would be more evergreen and stay available for people well through time?

And so the four of us, my dear friends who are also on the cover of the book, Devon Shahana Beckett, Darakshan Farber, and Thea Halima Levkovitz, we spent close to three years, basically, going through and vetting all of the writings and deciding which ones we would select. And we learned how to wonderfully communicate with each other. We learned how to hear more deeply what each of us saw in different writings. We learned how to let go of some of the writings that we couldn't include, and we eventually decided that we had reached the point where, as the old expression is, the penny dropped. And there we were with the collection. And then we, of course, went to all of the authors and received their permission to put it into the form of a book, and here we are today with the great, great help of Monkfish and Paul Cohen, the great publisher there and his fine staff. We were able to work on it.

But I should say—and I can't really show you, but perhaps later and in some other fashion, I can show you the cover—the cover is a piece of synchrony that really manifested in the course of all of this. So Darakshan Farber, who has a blessed life of traveling the world on a constant basis and kind of a pilgrim of all of the sacred spaces around the planet, he found himself in Wadi Rum, the Wadi Rum of Jordan. And there, in his wonderful way, he took all the beautiful photos that he could, and one of them was of the place known as Seven Pillars Mountain, Seven Pillars of Wisdom Mountain. And it was at the very time we were looking for a cover. So even the cover of this book has the spirit of the book. It became the cloak for really holding the space of the spirit of the book, so we felt really excited by that as did happily the publisher.

Janet Conner And the cover will be in the transcript so people can see it, but thank you for telling that story because I didn't get it. And sure enough, there's seven. You can count the pillars. This is incredible. So I want the listeners to get a wee taste of just some of these beautiful, beautiful articles, and there was one—I think I've now re-read it five times—"Wisdom and the Way of Self-Awakening" by Lee Irwin, who I had never heard of. So I want to read a paragraph or two to the listeners, and then you tell us a little bit about this.

"The topic of wisdom is a deep and difficult subject because, as a limited human being, the scope and depth of wisdom exceeds my grasp. I cannot start from a position of authority because wisdom, whom I will personify as feminine, knowing she is so much more, cannot be contained by the authority of any personality or subjective state. For me, Wisdom is a Mystery—W capitalized, M capitalized—Wisdom is a Mystery inseparable from the sacred ground of being from which we all come, and in which we live and breathe and coexist. And I would add unto which we return.

"I am reminded of an image from the ancient Egyptian world, a larger than life-size statue of the goddess Isis, carved from black stone. She sits on a throne veiled, with the ankh, the symbol of life, in one hand and flowers, the symbols of luminous beauty, in the other. On the front of the base is carved the following, 'I am everything that was, everything that is, that will be, and no mortal has yet dared to lift my veil.'"

Now, if anybody is listening with their invisible ears, they're hearing... you can't miss hearing this repetition: what was, what is, whatever shall be; what was, what is, whatever shall be. I think it appears somewhere in a prayer practice of every tradition, and raised Irish Catholic, I hear that. I recognize that. I know this. And it seems like the whole world is awakening finally to the fact that the goddess, starting with Inanna or Isis, is the, the, the goddess. And what our various patriarchal religions, whatever languaging, whatever rituals, whatever they add on is still, when you take it away... like all the Black Madonnas, that's Isis holding Horus. It's all so ancient and so gorgeous and so beautiful and so new.

So you can imagine at that moment, I'm going, "Who is this Lee Irwin guy?" And I've underlined—I'll show the picture when we do our little Facebook promotion video—I have underlined almost every sentence in this article. I'm just in love with it, so tell us a little bit about this article.

Robert Corman Well, this is a beautiful example of the principle that underlying all insights is the realm of creation that makes them possible. And it is this that gives us a capacity to have openness to the unknown and to the unknowable. All human faith traditions, as you say, come out of that. And Lee Irwin is a scholar and professor in the College of Charleston in South Carolina, and he is a world-renowned student of the cross section of traditions that really make up contemporary spirituality. So he really has this wonderful capacity to draw upon all the world of traditions, much like the exemplar of that, Hazrat Inayat Khan, and his son and grandson, Pir Zia.

So he is a great scholar of the world of esoteric thinking, and he's actually a board member of—you'll like this—The Sophia Institute. So his many books are out there if one googles Lee Irwin. But there's a lot that he writes about the awakening spirit and the importance of that, about the capacity we have to really draw from above and from below all that we can, and so he has this commitment to the spirit of being the visionary that each one of us can be for ourselves and those around us. So I'm grateful for this particular writing, and I'm so glad it had such a strong presence in your discovery of the book.

And it's interesting when you spoke about the is, was, and will be. There's in the sacred Jewish prayer, the Shema, which you probably have heard of, I'm sure, a

very powerful presence of that because it's all about the One. And when oneness is defined by the ancients, they talk about something that is and was and will be as the wholeness of things, and that is where we are. So there is no present, no past. In one sense, of course, we're present, but we can be open to the wholeness of things. And the Shema is about wrestling with some of that and trying to learn how to be in that and trying to learn how to be in it, not necessarily perfectly, but just the engagement of life from that space, from that stance is a holy endeavor. And so I think of Lee Irwin as somebody who really appreciates that kind of description as much as any other.

Janet Conner He has a line that's really powerful for the moment we're in right now. He's talking about chivalry. You had said how he kind of weaves everything. I mean, the Tree of Life, it's all in just... what? Four pages? "Wisdom requires chivalry, a surrender of pride in knowing, deep humility, a willingness to not know, not see, not comprehend." Now, think about where we are right now [laughter]. Do you know? No. I mean, the answer to everything is "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. What's going to happen? I don't know." So this sentence is like leaping off the page, so a willingness to not know, not see, not comprehend.

All right, so that's a little scary right now, but then listen to his next line: "Then the loving heart can be informed in service and devotion by what next is needed." And that's what we all are wondering. "Okay, I don't know. What's coming next?" So get out of your own way, right? Admit, "I surrender. I don't know. I'm letting go. I have no idea how to live sheltered in place [laughter]. Everything is closed." None of us know, but he holds out such beauty. "Oh, this is a good thing. Let go. You don't know. Surrender. Let your pride go. And what's next is needed can finally speak to you."

And then I leap ahead. This also just, oh, I could just cry listening to this. He writes, "As I give myself to wisdom, she gives herself to me." That's my life. That's my life. As I give myself Sophia, she gives herself to me. I mean, that's the book, there you go, in one sentence. As we give ourselves to wisdom, she gives herself to us.

Robert Corman Right. Yes. And this particular chapter has that feeling of the grand overview of the book because it is speaking at the broadest level, and yet it still comes down to the grounded capacity we have to sit with it. I like this particular portion here where he says... and this is the positive capacity to know that you are with your own Self in wisdom. He writes, "As wisdom flows into our lives, every person becomes an embodiment of sacred potential, every individual a medium of possible insight," and it goes on from there. I don't want to belabor it, but it's a wonderful way. But I like that line.

It reminds me of another piece in here, which I'll just throw in as a nugget because it's a beautiful piece, and it's by the wonderful singer and teacher of sound, Bisan Toron, who writes "Thoughts on Mysticism in the Voice." And she talks about the finding of sound in the mystery of one's mouth and one's body, and it says, "Mysticism of sound is play." And so it's good to be lighthearted, and this is not heavy subject necessarily. There's joy here. And it's important that someone not approach a book like this or anything with a knitted brow but rather with openness to themselves because they will show up if they allow themselves to, like Miles Davis getting out of his own way.

But I loved her last line here, and I would encourage... if I had 10 things to say about this book, this one line is one of the things I would probably think about when she says, "What I find astoundingly beautiful is that the potential miracle of sound springs from the decision to abundantly feel in oneself an impulse and the desire to make oneself known. This is what makes a sound resonate in undeniable clarity. One sees the sound, and then the sound somehow sees itself." And so I'm reminded of the piece you just read because it does that same thing, and here, instead of the scholar dealing with these broad, glorious insights, we're dealing with the individual discipline of, in this case, the singer.

And the book is filled with that, as you know so well. There's the dancer; there's the musician; there's the streetwise social worker; there is the biochemist and the astronomer, people who are all looking at things from their own point of view. But they're all human. They're all here, and they are all willing to share their story. And that's what I think is so wonderful. Obviously, I'm biased, but it's wonderful because there is here an opportunity to quench one's thirst for wondering what it is about, what their own tradition is, or what their own discipline or work is because this book covers so much of that.

Janet Conner Yeah, wisdom sets a hell of a table [laughter]. And the tree chapter, "The Mystery of Trees," I mean, the title alone kind of makes you go, "Oh, I want to know about the mystery of trees." This is so astonishing. I will be... I don't know when it's going to happen because I'm not in charge. I don't know when I can possibly sell this house and move, but it's very clear that I am intended to move to the fertile, black soil of the Hudson River Valley. And the first time I became aware of this, I could feel a tree. There's a tree. There's a tree that has my name on it. She wants me to live under her. I need to be near the trees. And I grew up in Wisconsin. We got trees. I'll show you a tree. Those are trees, and I missed that here in Florida. I can feel the trees in the Hudson River Valley calling me, so tell us a little bit about this magnificent woman, Diana Beresford-Kroeger, "The Mystery of Trees."

Robert Corman Well, I don't want to scoop the writing itself because she tells her story of her childhood as an orphan in Ireland and the fact that she was one of the few remaining members of people who understood this relationship between plants and spirit and as a child was encouraged to teach this and learn it. She lives in Canada. Diana is actually a world-renowned scholar of the relationship between the plants of the earth, particularly trees, and the giving of life to all of us. So she is a medical biochemist and botanist with a remarkable capacity to merge traditional and ancient world insights with Western scientific understanding.

So I would say that taking a good look at her work is a wonderful opportunity for anyone who hasn't heard of her, and her books include a whole host of great titles, everything from *The Sweetness of a Simple Life* to *Arboretum Borealis*, which it's not just metaphor, as you'll see in the writings. She's been named one of the world's renowned scholars by the Royal Geographic Society. And so I could go on and share her bio, but just to give you a sense of the chapter itself, I mean, this was one of my favorite chapters. I know you were going to ask me that later, but I don't want to say, "That one." But we don't know how trees do what they do. She has really unveiled that a little bit for us.

She writes, "I would ask you to right now just stop breathing and see how long you can support yourself. Now, the oxygen that you are breathing comes from trees and the invisible global forest of the ocean, and they both hold hands with one another. Trees do something quite extraordinary, and even as we are speaking, they are doing it, which is to make both the waveform of light and the straight line form of light dance in an extraordinary molecular dance that produces energy in a thermodynamic reaction that produces food. This is the source of all the food we eat!"

And I had to go back and read that a few times because of that exclamation point, how much we are dependent on these trees and what they do. And she shares elsewhere that the cloud that you sometimes see above a forest... I used to think that was a cloud, but it's not. It's the vapors that come up out of the trees, and those vapors are what are so life-giving to us and to everything in the forest, as well as to something far away.

Take that notion of the hand held between the ocean and the trees and listen to this wonderful line, "But the tree is awfully clever, and I will talk about the wonderful redwoods in the west coast in California, as they do something quite extraordinary in the upper canopy. They produce aerosols up there to pull in water vapor so that the sperm can swim along the tiny sheath of water and fertilize the ovule." This is basically a very fertile and vital planet being, and that's what I was drawing from the shamanic world, that this is a living organism that is something

that we are greatly fortunate to be a part of, not a separate from. And everything about us is made up of this.

Elsewhere in the book, there are people who talk about the 98% of us, the great percentage of us that's water. And elsewhere, the remarkable fact that for most of the history of this planet, we haven't been here. But for a very tiny percentage of time, here we are, and we have something we can refer to as intelligence. Well, the trees have had intelligence. How do we relate? How do we sit in wonder with them? And they are our partners, as is all of life.

But you know what the difference is? And this goes to my own story, I guess, Janet, but the difference is... and I actually wrote this down somewhere recently. I am not the stone that I can throw across the pond and try to make it skip. I am the one that can throw it. But that stone is also part of this place, but I was given life. The mushroom that pushes itself up through a crack in the concrete is going for life, and it's going for its life. So for me, when I read Diana Beresford-Kroeger's piece, it felt like a balm because wherever I was at that moment, it felt like a balm, and Shakespeare called it "a balm for hurt minds."

And so right now, I think her plea in here is that we take care of this place because we have such power to do so, but we also have that frightening power to not do that. So yes, you've pointed to this particular chapter in the book, and quite honestly, this chapter of all the chapters has been picked up in a variety of magazines already. So I'm grateful that it is so well appreciated.

Janet Conner Yeah, when you look out the window now at a tree... she talks about how smart they are, and the sound they make, and the song they're singing, and the fact that they are the most astonishing organism on Earth. I mean, trees, they're just completely changed when you read that article, and you find yourself wanting to just throw yourself on your knees in gratitude for the Amazon. So I've told you a couple of my favs. How about you? You want to talk about one of these for the listeners?

Robert Corman We just did talk about a few but, yes, certainly. I can almost just open it to a chapter and just start talking. Yeah, I'd like to focus on two. One is a chapter called "Belonging to Life: A Reflection on Movement and Meditation" by Robin Becker. This came to the book in a different way than any because we had actually thought of including one of Robin Becker's pieces. When I called her and talked to her about it, she said, "You know, I've just finished a piece, and if you want to, you can consider that," and I said, "By all means." And my colleagues, Darakshan and Halima and Shahana said, "Well, let's look," and we loved it. And it was this piece called "Belonging to Life." And I pick it here for us, Janet, for a particular reason and that is that it is an example, like many of the chapters, of the

emergence story of the writer. So they're not all sharing, "Here's the wisdom I now see." They're giving you their story, which we can always relate to. Story is where we come from.

And she shares her early childhood and her desire from a child to be a dancer and a nurse. But she never became the nurse as she says, but she became very interested in healing. And what she learned about the body and about movement and about the flow of all of life—what has come to be referred to in her piece here as a continuum and actually a proper noun known as the Continuum, which relates to her work—is how the physical body is something that you can meet. And if you really appreciate deeply what it's made of... it is made so much of the water and of mineral, and as it moves, it is relating to the flow of all of life because there is nothing alive that isn't filled with those kinds of fundamentals, those essences.

So what she shares is her epiphanies and her insights into not just dance, but she's speaking about the primary movement of life when she's talking about dance. And she talks about living systems as a result, and I'll read this one portion here. "We often overlook the fact that the movement of water itself has shaped all life forms, from our development and fluid environments of our mother's womb to the arcing shape of trees, meandering rivers, curved stones, unfurling plants, and a wave-like landscape of mountains. Western culture tends to emphasize static form and facts. The perspective of a continuum or Continuum is that all form is the result of movement. All form is the result of movement. The entire living universe is a process of fluid movement."

And I take this to mean many things, but one of the things that it meant for me, which is why it's one of my favorite chapters, is the fact that life, its challenges, its glories, its sadnesses, the sitting in an unknown or sitting in something that's changed from a known to something else like we are today has a fluidity to it. And it is on that kind of arc or that flow that we sometimes plant anxiety when we could plant just openness. It sometimes has us remember a great sadness when it could have us in that flow, give us the opportunity to say, "Why is that coming up now? Let me think about that." And speaking of which, my puppy, Sasha, just [inaudible].

Janet Conner [laughter] That's perfect. Hello, Sasha. Hello, Sasha. As all of these chapters, there's sentences that just *choo*. Well, the one I've underlined five times is, "After years of exploring movement, I have come to think of the body as a living library of a person's entire lifetime. The highly sensitive responsive capability of liquid crystalline substance within us carries the memories and imprint of all our experience." So when you look at me, you're seeing 72 years plus a year in my

mother, so 73 years of history. And of course, we started in water; we are water. Yeah, water just has a whole new glorious meaning thanks to Robin's article. So we have time for one more. What do you want to talk about?

Robert Corman Okay. Let me think for a second here. Yeah. So I'm going to pick one which... I mean, I mentioned Yuval Ron, but I think the flow of things here will take me to another one because the music is going to be something I think people are going to want, especially when they hear it tucked into our conversation. But there is an understanding that we are afforded here in the chapter by Christina Solaris; it's entitled "From Vision to Action: How We Can Fulfill Our Call to Higher Service." And this one spoke to me in ways that I felt very much at home with because of my own path. I started out as a lawyer, actually, Janet, and began to do a number of other things after seven years, and here I am doing something in my third or fourth career, depending on how you count.

But "From Vision to Action" begins with a kind of prayer, which I think is an appropriate one to end with. It says, "God: please use me. Let me be an instrument. Let my life be for something. Reveal my purpose to me." And there was what they call a *nigun*—a *nigun* is a repeated song over and over again that I don't know if Jason Shulman had come up with it, but that's where I learned it—asking for the Lord, the Great Spirit of all life, to bring forth and reveal my purpose to me.

But what Christina does is take us through a series of understanding about the quest that we're all on; the quest we are on, on this planet Earth; and that reaching, that connecting to that oneness, that unity; and that we need the vision to get there. We need the strength to say to ourselves that, as she says, "We may have great visions, but are we truly ready? We may be yearning, but are we fit to fulfill them? What does it take to go from visualization to actualization?" And what that spoke to me about, and I think it's about this whole chapter of hers, is largely about the importance of not just seeking to become enlightened, not just finding this as a goal, but having purpose behind it as well. And the engagement in that regard is one of the reasons why I've stayed very, very active in some international issues that you mentioned earlier.

But what she really says that I think is really beautiful—and I think I have it over here somewhere to share—she says that, "Those who have had glimmers of unity consciousness, who have cultivated it and are establishing themselves in the Supreme, have an inkling that this is just the beginning of a deeper mystery, where we not only merge with the infinite but begin to fully function from it." And that's very important because the traveler is going to meet up against moments, the spiritual traveler and the traveler, and may they be one and the

same. But whatever it is, how do you show up in the moment? What is responsibility from this place of oneness?

To me that is a crucial moment of insight for each of us to come to and to try to work toward and manifest as we see what is right action. And the more we do that, I think we are stronger and we are really aligned with creation because creation, like that mushroom coming up through, wants to manifest in beauty. So the principle that I work from quite often and I think almost all of those in the book work from is that creation never stopped. The moment of creation never stopped. So how do we manifest in it, not just to feel like we've come to holiness, but to also be one in action like you and your program? That is [crosstalk]—

Janet Conner She really clarifies that. The sentence once again that I've underlined a gazillion times, that leaps off the page, that takes me back to what I said when I opened the show, that we're here to make love visible, here's how she articulates it. So she's basically saying what's no longer tenable. We can't just be looking for our individual enlightenment anymore. She says, "We are coming full circle. And as we step into divine embodiment, we realize that in order to fulfill our callings, we must truly be living examples of divinity made manifest of radiant health, wellness, blessing and peace. We are called to become examples of what divinity could look like actualized in form. When we cultivate this overflowing embodiment, we grow into a state of being and having more than enough so that we can begin to be a blessing to others, too." Isn't that the point?

It isn't Janet alone on her meditation cushion, experiencing communion with the divine. She asks me every morning when I do my anointing, she asks me one question, "Are you willing to make love visible?" And every morning I have to stop and think, "Shit. Am I? This is big. Okay. Okay." But then when I say yes, then I can proceed with my day.

This is the divine today in the trees, in the water, in this wacky experience we're having with a virus because a virus is a life form too, right? It's a mushroom pushing up, and we're all being asked to be divinity in... oh, what a magnificent book. Thank you so much to everyone that contributed and you and your co-editors that spent four years bringing this beautiful gift to us, *Journeys and Awakenings, Wisdom for Spiritual Travelers*. Wonderful book. Thank you. Beautiful.

Robert Corman Well, and thank you, Janet. Thank you, Janet. There's a wonderful time I've had here with you. There's actually a chapter in the book for children, which I think is really a wonderful thing to mention as we go off, and that is, just as a teaser, called "The New Story for Children," someone who translates everything

we've talked about into understanding for children, both the spirit and the science. So I'm grateful that we had this time together.

Janet Conner So on the Show Notes page—and I've been taking copious notes—there will be links that Robert talked about and more information about the book and a transcript and gifts. So what can people expect when they click on Prayer Bag 26? What's going to be in there?

Robert Corman Well, there will be two things. There'll be some quotes from across the book that are as rich as some of the ones that we both had the pleasure of reading, and also, I think, a few other references to places that you can go. I mentioned earlier the wonderful work of The Inayati Order, inayatiorder.org, and that is the organization that really created the opportunity for the book to come into being. But I think that would be one of the citations that I can include that will serve people well, and others that I alluded to will be there, side by side.

Janet Conner I'll make sure all those links are on the Show Notes page. Well, wisdom has built her house, and we've had a pretty incredible party at her feast table. And I highly recommend to everyone in the *Praying at the Speed of Love* community share this conversation with your friends, get your own copy of *Journeys and Awakenings*, enjoy the Show Notes, the transcripts. Thank you so much, Robert, for your wisdom, for this work.

I always read one of my prayer-poems as a little gift at the end, and I have a lot of them that speak to some of the deep mystical wisdom that your authors have talked about. But Sophia didn't want me to do that, and I never planned on reading this particular prayer-poem. I thought it was just a cute little thing that happened to me one spring day, sitting outside, but suddenly, as we're all in lockdown, as we're all stuck in our own backyards, I realized, "Wait a second. There's a lot more going on in this prayer-poem than I realized." So it feels appropriate for our locked into place, doing nothing time.

And it is called "My Nothing Day."

On my calendar there's nothing scheduled for Tuesday.
Nothing. A whole day. A whole empty day.
I turn my to-do list face down on the desk,
and whisper, "I'll see you tomorrow."

But not today.

Today, I'm going to relish my nothing day.
No thing is going to grab my attention.

No thing is going to fill my head with noise.
No thing is going to burrow its way into my mind.

I'm going to sit outside and stare at the foxtail palm's horse-long fronds.
I'm going to laugh at the jasmine bouquet still clinging to the tippy-top of the
telephone pole after the power company cut it down once, twice, three times.
I'm even going to fill the bird feeder and announce to the squirrels it's Christmas.
I'm going to sit and listen.

I'm going to listen to the cardinal pair scoping out the scene,
the squirrels racing across the fence,
the breeze frazzling the palms,
the osprey demanding: look at me, look at me, look at me!

I'll listen to the clouds' synchronized swim across the pastel sky.
I'll listen to the sun shadow-dancing with my feet.
I'll even listen to the chomp of the garbage truck two blocks away.

There's so much to hear.
The downbeat of the air conditioner, the staccato of the blue jay, the high hum of
the bees.

Everyone has a voice in this choir.
Everyone is heard.
Even me.

Maybe I'll read a prayer or two.
Maybe I'll even write one.

Or maybe I'll just sit here reveling in this, my nothing day.

Robert Corman Wonderful.

Janet Conner And now we all have nothing days [laughter]. Thank you.

Robert Corman Thank you.

Janet Conner Have a wonderful nothing day.

Robert Corman You as well.

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.