



Episode 28: Phil Cousineau—

The Art of Pilgrimage

Thursday, May 14, 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. Now, that's a pretty funny thing to say right now because it's true. None of us are moving [laughter]. But nevertheless, even when you're inside your own home, walking from room to room, the truth is you are not moving; you are being moved. This is a radical, 180 degree different understanding of being alive. 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.

Welcome. I'm Janet Conner, *Prayer Artist*, and you have arrived at perfect timing—I like to call it speed of love timing—to episode #28 in *Praying at the Speed of Love*. This, my new podcast, is dedicated to very unusual, very intimate conversations about prayer, a topic that not a lot of media is interested in talking about. But I'm talking about real prayer, deep prayer, body prayer, mystical prayer, original prayer.

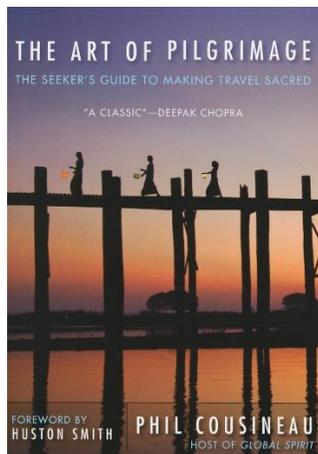
And when I say original prayer... that's such an interesting word, "original," because it means simultaneously both, well, way back when, "originally," and at the same moment, anything an artist creates is original, right? And so in one word prayer has these two wings of being forever ancient... I'm madly in love with prayers that probably go back to Paleolithic times, the Labyrinth, the Rosary, which has nothing to do with any patriarchal Christian religion. It's ancient goddess worship. I love these old prayers, and yet in the moment that I pray them, you pray them, any of us pray them anywhere in the world, they're completely fresh, brand new. That's actually how I know a prayer is real and alive is that although it could be very, very old, ancient, in the moment I pray, my heart just *pow*. My body flies open, and that prayer is alive in me in that moment. Well, that's what *Praying at the Speed of Love* is all about.

So the timing of this particular episode, episode #28, is almost frighteningly perfect because right now we are in a global quarantine. Sheltering at home is sort

of a sweet way of putting it, locked down, grounded. There are other words for it. But whatever it is, everywhere around the globe... and as far as I can tell, this is the first time that everyone, simultaneously aware of one another through the internet, every single one of us everywhere is now in a global quarantine.

Well, the lockdown started for me in Florida in March, some countries a little earlier, but we really realized, "Whoa, nelly," in March. And in April, fairly early in April, I was awakened in the middle of the night, which is normal for me, and I clearly heard in my left ear... and when these things happen, it's because, "Oh Janet. You're missing it, so we're going to wake you up in the middle of night and tell you." But listen to this. I clearly heard, "It's not a quarantine. It's a pilgrimage," and I immediately in the dark rolled over and wrote that on the yellow pad of paper that's always within arm's reach. And in the morning, I looked at it. It's not a quarantine. Surprise. It's a pilgrimage. "Oh," right? It's a pilgrimage.

And you know who immediately popped into my head? My guest today, Phil Cousineau, and his gorgeous, gorgeous, important book—came out originally in 1998—*The Art of Pilgrimage*. I shot out of bed, went to my bookshelf, and even though I haven't looked at this book for years, instantly, my finger touched it. I saved it because I guess I knew on some level, my soul knew, "You are going to go on a global pilgrimage, Janet, and you're going to need this book in 2020."



Right now, of course, nobody's traveling, right? Well, not on cars, not on ships, not on planes, but, oh, are we traveling. We are all on a global pilgrimage inside our bodies, our homes, our relationships, our houses, our souls, and even our whole world. The whole world is traveling inside, and so on this giant shared pilgrimage, my guest today, Phil Cousineau, is here to help us start walking. We're going to start walking, not out the front door, but deep within—the most sacred pilgrimage of all.

In this conversation, I know even though not a word has been spoken that there is something waiting for you. There's some nugget of wisdom, there's some dollop of love, there's something important that wants you to remember, and it's all hovering in the air right now, waiting to enter your heart and transform your world. So let us begin this conversation listening as we always do to the voice of the Tibetan bowl, as she calls us to open our ears, our invisible ears, that we may hear what wants to be heard.

[the bowl rings]

Well, she's a little emphatic. I think that might be the loudest she's ever been. That was not a gentle call. That was a "wake up right now and listen to Phil" call.

So I just want to tell you a few sentences about Phil. He is, and any of you that have his books know this, an award-winning writer but also a filmmaker, a teacher, an editor, a travel leader—it's kind of a long list—storyteller, host of *Global Spirit* on PBS, which, okay, is in hiatus at the moment. His fascination from childhood with art, literature, and culture shot him out of the cannon from his home in Michigan to places like Marrakesh, Iceland, Amazon, all these sacred places, searching for what the ancients called—now, listen to this; I think this is such an important phrase for now—"the soul of the world." I think that's what this global quarantine is about. It's an invitation to find in every one of our hearts the soul of the world.

Phil has written 35 books—which I've got to admit kind of annoys me; I've written seven and thought I'd done a good job [laughter]—35 books including, oh, some treasures I adore: *Stoking the Creative Fires*—that's a necessary on everybody's shelves—*The Hero's Journey*, *The Oldest Story in the World*, and of course our focus today, *The Art of Pilgrimage*, and so many more. We are so blessed that Phil joins us from his living room in San Francisco. Welcome, Phil.

Phil Cousineau Thank you, Janet. Thank you. It's good to be walking together.

Janet Conner It's an interesting new view of the term "walk," isn't it? So we usually begin with some kind of prayer, blessing, meditation. How do you want to kick off this conversation?

Phil Cousineau Well, since I consider myself a word man as well as a traveler and editor and writer and so on, the words are important to understand here. There can be a lot of misconceptions even around the word "pilgrim" or "pilgrimage." It is redolent at times of monks piously walking, hooded, with their cowls, chanting your Gregorian chant. It can be pious, and as Edwin Bernbaum, who wrote one of the great books ever on mountains, *Sacred Mountains*, reminded me that not everyone on a pilgrimage is necessarily devoted. Often, it's by rote. A R O T E,

do you remember that great old word? And so pilgrimages, as I look at it, is compressed into two notions: attention, deep, profound soul attention, and intention. Why did you leave home? Why are you walking in the first place?

So travel itself... it's fun to go through the words on this. "Travel" comes from an old word, *travail*, because travel up until about the mid-19th century was very dangerous. There are some estimates such as that of Anthony Burgess, famous for *Clockwork Orange*, who wrote a wonderful book on the grand tour, who said roughly 50% of the people who left home before the 19th century never returned. Travel was so dangerous because of food, disease, plague. Many pilgrims went on pilgrimages in the middle of a plague for goodness' sake, which would behoove us to remember right now. Exploration is about going someplace new, foreign [inaudible], some place people have never been before, so we have to be careful about using the words.

"Pilgrim" goes back to the Latin *per agrum*, and it means to get off the bus, off the train, off the plane, out of your living room and walk through the fields, *per agrum*. It means putting the sole of your feet to the soul of the world, so it's sacred. We are walking in the footsteps of somebody or something that we deeply revere. So we are walking in the footsteps, and it could be to Chartres Cathedral, as we were talking about earlier, Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall. It could be going to Machu Picchu, or it could be going to Emily Dickinson's house in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Why? Why are people compelled to do this? There's an old principle that says many of the issues that we need to resolve can be resolved at home or maybe by talking to a friend or going to a therapist's office. But throughout human history... and I would go back to 60,000 years ago if we include the Australian Aborigine Walkabout, which I do consider a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is the journey you can't take. You are at a crossroad. You feel the double negative there? We are at a crossroad, and the answers that we once found maybe from our own dreams or from local input, the priest, the minister, the rabbi, the Imam, simply aren't working anymore. And that's when the call comes out, as in the hero's journey, as in the call of a poet. The call to the soul says, "We need to go to a place that may have the answer that we can't find at home."

And the words that we use are quite important here. We've already been talking about walking. Well, Henry David Thoreau has a short, glorious essay on walking in which he advisedly uses one of the loveliest words in the English language, "saunter," because that's the pace that he felt he wanted to use on his walks around Walden Pond. Saunter suggests even in the melody of the word that we slow

down, we smell, we listen in a way that we might not at home because we are so busy with everyday issues.

And where does the word "saunter" come from? *Sante-terre*, the Holy Land. To saunter goes back to the time when people from all different sites around Europe would walk roughly, if you were healthy, 20 miles a day. That would have been an easy pace, about eight to nine hours of sheer slow, attentive walking to go to Rome or Jerusalem, one of the holy cities. So to saunter is deep in our genetics. It's deep in the soles of our feet, you might say. We saunter when we go to someplace that we as an individual or we in the collective believe is holy.

Janet Conner This is thrilling to me to hear you talk about the word "saunter." Right outside my front door is one of those Rails to Trails—the train tracks became a walking trail—and my little block is even called the Ozona Trail. So I can just step out of my front door with my mask and walk down this trail. Half the side is for bicycles and people on the roller skates, and the other side is for people walking.

And I've lived here for 20 years, so I've had a 20 year experience of people rushing past me. They're flying, and the guys on their bikes, they're racing. They're flying past, and I'm, I guess, the little old lady walking. Now, I'm actually praying the entire time. I am sauntering. And I'm conscious of, "Everybody is walking faster than I am," and I've tried sometimes, thinking, "You know, you'd get a little more exercise, Janet, if you went a little faster." And then I say, "Screw it." No. My feet want to go *ba-ba-boom, ba-ba-boom, ba-ba-boom*. So when I go out tonight in my mask, saying my prayers, and people are flying by, I'm going to send them consciously, "We need more sauntering here, people. Start sauntering."

Phil Cousineau Two different purposes. It's fine to run, jog, to hustle for the body. But the soul often cries out for its own pace, and the pace of the soul is slow, simmering. I remember my grandmother used to say, "Phillip, simmer. You're talking too fast. You're moving too fast." So sauntering is walking for the soul.

Janet Conner I love your grandmother, "Simmer down, Phil."

Phil Cousineau Grandma Dora. I write about her in many, many of my books. Yes.

Janet Conner So how did you become the pilgrimage guy? How did this happen?

Phil Cousineau A brief preface to this is that I grew up in probably one of the last households in America that read books out loud together.

Janet Conner Oh, we are jealous.

Phil Cousineau We had one of those probably five foot tall Philco televisions in the Fifties and Sixties, which broke one day. My father tried to fix it. He couldn't. He was

frustrated. He kicked it down the stairs into the basement and then turned around and boldly announced, "Philip, Rosemary, Paul, Nicole, we're going to read together out loud as a family from now on." And we did. It's remarkable when I look back on it, but Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights were all devoted to family reading, the classics. We read Homer, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*. We read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and then the modern classics, *Moby Dick*. We read Mark Twain, and that in itself was wonderful, a tremendous gift, but later I realized that my father had a kind of pedagogy in mind.

He was a self-educated scholar, if you will, working every day at Ford Motor Company in public relations, but every night he read the classics. And so it occurred to him that if we were going to read *Moby Dick*, which would take us about a year, of course, everybody reading a page a piece every night, then we would celebrate at the end of the reading of a book by going to the place that inspired it. So we drove in the old Ford family station wagon from Detroit, Michigan, all the way out to New Bedford, Massachusetts, to the house where reputedly Melville wrote *Moby Dick*. We did the same thing when we read the Greek classics. My father would find out about an art exhibit about the Greeks at the Toledo Art Museum or Cleveland or New York, and we would drive there.

So what does that mean? It means it got into me that, as much as I loved books, I also needed eventually to see the thing with my own eyes, and that is the spirit of the traveler. You can hear what they used to call travelers tales in the pub, in the taverna, at the crossroad, but the traveler is as... Reinhold Niebuhr, the great theologian, said, "Poets are pilgrims, and pilgrims are poets," and the crossover, the overlay between the two is deep, devoted attention. It's a desire to see something for yourself. And that's the birth of me as a writer, traveler.

I love to write and to read, sometimes a book a day. It's mad. I'm always working on three or four books at once. But the other part of me says, "This can be empty calories," if you will, "Empty calories unless I go to the place myself." Not just see it but then feel it, and that's what made me, even when I was young in my twenties, a much different traveler than everybody else. I was reading poetry, the myths, the legends, plus the history every place I went all around the world.

So by the time... what was it? 1997, I saw in the New York Times Sunday Travel Section—what they used to call a bullet piece, two or three lines, highlights from the news about travel around the world—the prediction that in three years, the year 2000, travel was about to overtake the armaments industry as the number one business in the world. This is in a sense the invocation from the Old Testament about someday turning swords into plowshares. It's even become an axiom in our language. That is roughly what happened in the world around the year 2000.

So, of course, being a good reporter, I did some research on this and found something that completely surprised me. Besides travel becoming cheaper, easier, and safer, pilgrimage was on the rise in every major religion. From the Muslim world to the Jewish world to the Christian world, people were going on old fashioned, bona fide pilgrimages more than any time since the Middle Ages. But then this became the key to what makes my book, *The Art of Pilgrimage*, different, I believe, than the others and that is that the word itself, in the concept and the practice, was beginning to bleed over into secular life.

So there are scientists who will take a great deal of time... [audio cut out]. Albert Einstein came up in one year with three of the greatest ideas in human history. There are people who, until the quarantine, would travel every day here to Silicon Valley in California. Why? Because the whole world of computers has become mythic, mythologized, and those whose lives have been transformed and believe there is something holy or sacred in this world want to go to the garage where Hewlett-Packard symbolically began the Computer Revolution.

What do all these things have in common? A belief that my spirit is draining. Something is wrong. Something's not quite right, like in the old Jim Morrison, in The Doors' song, "Something's wrong. Something's not quite right." But if I go to this place that has informed, in that deep sense of the word informed, me in my love of religion, art, science, sports, theater, whatever it might be, I will be recharged, rejuvenated, revitalized. That is the heart of pilgrimage to me. So it's not an empty exercise; instead, it is a rejuvenating exercise for mind, body, and soul.

Janet Conner Which is an astonishing concept at this moment when the world is desperate to be revitalized. So in *The Art of Pilgrimage*, I didn't get very far rereading it. I'm in the preface from Houston Smith, and he says, "Pilgrimage is always an inward journey." And then a few pages later in your intro, you write, "*The Art of Pilgrimage* signals the skill of personally creating your own journey and the daily practice of slowing down—we'll add the word "saunter" there—and lingering, savoring—that's one of my favorite words—and absorbing each of its stages. This is a book of reminders and resources literally designed to encourage what Buddhists call mindfulness, and what Ray Charles—got a little Doors, a little Ray Charles—calls "soulfulness," the ability to respond from our deepest place."

Well, that seems to me, in this global pandemic, it's like a mirror. Even though you wrote that paragraph how long ago, it's like you're describing right now, that if we lived this as a pilgrimage, we could create a better way of living together, mindfully, soulfully, and learn how to respond from our deepest place. Are you sort of surprised at how important this book is right now?

Phil Cousineau That's a very good question. Thank you. I recall when I would be interviewing my dear friend Houston Smith, one of the great religions scholars in the world, and I would ask him something, and he would say, "Ah, I recognize a good question because I've never been asked this before [laughter]." So that's in this territory.

With that in mind, actually, the aspect of the inward journey was the intention all along. One of my other boyhood heroes, besides Al Kaline and Ray Charles, was John Muir, the adventurer, walker, one of the founders of the modern ecology movement, when he said, and I'm paraphrasing, "And every time I believed that I was walking out into the world, I came to realize I was walking in." That brings up as well a dear... [audio cut out] ...sacred sites around India. We come back to the studio, and I interview Pico, a terrific show. So I encourage your listeners to please go to globalspirit.tv, to our website, and look at a few minutes of that.

On the way to the airport, when I'm driving Pico Iyer back to the San Francisco Airport, we happen to be talking that he had just been in Los Angeles with Leonard Cohen, the great Canadian songwriter, and Pico was there to write the liner notes for the collected works of Leonard Cohen, of course, a great honor. And at one point, Pico was bewailing the fact that he wasn't traveling as much anymore, and he was wondering if he really needed travel because he had something like a million frequent flyer miles in his account. And Leonard Cohen told him... oh, and Pico added, "And I'm not quite moved anymore as I used to be as a younger man when I was traveling," so Leonard Cohen tells the great travel writer Pico Iyer, "Pico, if you want to be moved more, move less."

And I find that's a marvelous way for us to think about what's happening now, that we may not physically be able to get on a plane, on a train, take that long Jack Kerouac-inspired trip across Route 66, but we can travel inward. And by that I mean we can begin to plan not a bevy of trips, but perhaps the one trip that we can't can't take. This is a time to think about traveling less but traveling more intentionally, and also perhaps traveling in a way that might help other people.

Janet Conner So in the old days, in those religious pilgrimages, I mean, I can visualize those monks you were talking about, but even the non-monk people, they put on a robe of some kind, right? There were special clothes to show that you're a pilgrim. They wouldn't carry much. Never mind suitcases on wheels, they'd have a very light satchel. They'd say some prayers to set off. They'd have a walking stick, or at least that's the picture I have in my head. And they're headed towards some sacred place, Mecca, wherever.

On page 14 of the book, you say, "The journeys all begin in restive state, in deep disturbance." Well, we've got that down, don't we? Deep disturbance. So help us

now travel more by traveling less—God bless Leonard Cohen—by acknowledging the deep disturbance. But now what? How do we set off on this inward journey of less?

Phil Cousineau Again, being someone who is a word catcher, someone who loves words and believes they're vitally important, the word "disturb" or in that sense "disturbance" originally meant to be thrown out of orbit. So Isaac Newton used the word. We have been thrown out of orbit. The planet, us in our daily lives, we are out of kilter. There are many colorful expressions to describe this; however, we can use this to our advantage.

Think about the notion of Yeats and the still point—"We are at the still point of the world." This is our chance to find what the still point is. We have been moving so much that, often when we do travel as tourists or travelers or pilgrims, our souls are still at home. We're out there in the world, halfway around the world, but we're not totally present. If you've gone to any of the major tourist sites, like Fatima to Jerusalem, Stonehenge, Easter Island, in a strange way many people who are there aren't quite there, to play with Gertrude Stein's old phrase.

So this is a chance to reorient ourselves in that way. It's a chance to go back to our travel journals, our diaries, to go back through our souvenirs, our mementos, our photographs and begin to look for a pattern, and ask ourselves a pretty vital question. I would call it a pilgrim's question: What was I looking for? Did I find it? Where should I go next that would help me go back onto my spiritual or psychological path? These are moments now of quietude. It's going to be some time before we are allowed to travel again. It also encourages us to travel more wisely.

In the past—and I devote the first couple of chapters in *The Art of Pilgrimage* to this—it was believed that we were changing, you might say, our own gravitational force by going on a sacred journey. Well, how do you do that? Well, you demarcate the zone. You go to your religious advisor, a priest, a rabbi, an imam; these days, maybe your psychotherapist; or in my case, very often I would call my father when he was alive, and then my grandfather because my father died first, and then my mentors, Joseph Campbell, Houston Smith, and others. And you might ask literally for a blessing if you have that kind of relationship, but also if you were to ask for advice from someone you deeply respect who has been a traveler or even has gone to the place where you are headed, and you say, "What do you recommend? What should I see?" I even refined that question to ask, "What is the soul of Paris? What is the true Portugal?" if I'm going to Lisbon. Get real about it, as we used to say on the streets of Detroit. This is a way to begin to reorient yourself from your daily secular life to the sacred life of the pilgrim.

And then there are a number of rituals: lighting candles, beginning to pray to the ancestors, changing garb, thinking about what we're wearing in terms of its symbolic value, finding a beautiful journal. I like to take handmade leather journals with me. Take some artwork, not just a camera, but I encourage people, even if you've never drawn or haven't drawn since you were in school, take some pastels, take some drawing pencils. Why? Because you don't need to pretend that you're versioning Leonardo da Vinci, but this simple act of taking out a pencil and paper helps us, helps you—it helps all of us—begin to focus again. And focus is where the pilgrimage takes you deeper and deeper into yourself.

Janet Conner It's been a while since I took a group on a deep soul writing journey, but we went to Oaxaca, Costa Rica, and the Blackfeet land in Montana last decade. And I don't think I had any instructions on this—I just instinctively felt to do it—but I brought a big box of colored pencils and really nice, thick sketch paper and passed it out and suggested that people make a mandala every single day, any image, any word, any idea, any color, any feeling. I now have these precious mandalas, and I can take one look at this 8.5 by 11 circle with these funny little sketchy stick men and I'm there. I'm in Oaxaca. I'm there in the rainforest in Costa Rica. I'm right there instantaneously. So I just wanted to say a big amen to this idea of capturing it with your own hand, and then looking at it later, not just to remember but to actually return and see it again and maybe see it more deeply. Maybe something that wants to be seen and remembered surfaces through your journal entries, through your little travel mandalas, through your sketches, and returns to you. It returns to you. So while you were talking—

Phil Cousineau That's lovely.

Janet Conner Well, and I don't know why I did it, and I must say not everybody on the groups did it. But it meant the world to me, and I like looking at them. And you're reminding me to get them back out right now while I'm on my internal... because let's all go back to Oaxaca!

Phil Cousineau Sorry. I'm losing you.

Janet Conner Yeah, the sound is going in and out sometimes.

So while you were talking about the now, I'm wondering if this experience I'm having is an experience you're having. In my own pilgrimage here at home in a little, tiny town in Florida—and I'm calling it a radical pilgrimage of transformation—I am finding big changes in my life. I need almost frightening amounts of sleep. I slept 11 hours last night. And then when I wake up in the morning, I need to go outside, and I mean I *need* to go outside and just sit there with my books and my journal, in deep soul writing and staring off at space, sometimes for four hours. And so by the time I finally come in the house, I still

have to get something done. I have to record this show. I have to prepare my prayer intensives, but I can only do one or two things. That's it. And then I need to go for my little saunter, my slow, sauntering prayer walk, and you what? I'm just madly falling in love with my life like this. So I'm curious. What's happening in your pilgrimage? Are you finding that you're living differently and maybe falling in love with it?

Phil Cousineau Well, that's wonderful. Curiously, the image that comes to mind when you are describing your drawing exercises is that of the word "contemplate" or "contemplation," which originally meant to build a temple within yourself, within your own soul, cone-temple. When we're deeply contemplative, we don't need to go necessarily to the church, the chapel, the synagogue, or the shrine. We can build a temple within ourselves by carving out our depths, which in a frenetic life is almost impossible to do. It's one thing after the other, and our inner life then takes a hard blow from that because we're not paying any attention to it.

So that's what I find myself doing as well. I've had to cancel 50 or 60 lectures around the country, three tour pilgrimages I was about to lead to Italy, Paris, and Greece. So I'm not traveling out there in the world, but I'm traveling more inside every day because I'm writing. I'm completing my next two books. I'm also writing a great deal of letters so a tremendous amount of correspondence, and as you just said, I'm being still far more often than I have for years. We have a lovely redwood deck on the top of our house. I can go up there and look out over San Francisco to the Golden Gate Bridge.

And like you just said, I can... what's the line, St. John of the Cross was it? "I lose myself in order to find myself." That's one of the purposes of sauntering, of contemplation. We lose ourselves for a while. We lose track of time. We lose sense of our body even for a while. But in the meantime, we are carving out something important in our interior life, and that is: Why am I here? What is my real purpose? And those are questions that we tend not to get to. Do you remember the great line by Mark Twain? "The two important days in your life are the day that you were born and the day you found out why." I've loved that notion for many, many years, and this is the time, during the quarantine, to find out why.

Janet Conner So maybe that's the... you tell or Houston Smith tells the story about when he goes on his pilgrimages, he finds he needs to take a stone back, and I did have that experience with my son when we went to Alcatraz years ago. He was just in grade school, and we snatched a stone and brought a stone back from Alcatraz. But as you're talking about this incredible question that Mark Twain said, okay, "The two most important days are the day you were born and the day you found out why," I wonder if that's the stone. Every single one of us, it's a stone that's waiting

for us to see it and pick it up and take it home. What would our world look like if everybody knew why individually we were here?

Phil Cousineau That's the challenge. Besides surviving and taking care of ourselves and the people very close to us, that is the question. Now, the world as always will respond in two different ways. One is we will find new ways to distract ourselves, and you're seeing that on the internet already. But we don't have to worry about those people or that intention. We should focus on ourselves and our loved ones right now, with one exception. As we are contemplating this question about why—why am I here, what is my talent, as in the Old Testament, what is the gift—we can think also about contribution.

When I teach writing, for example—you have mentioned my books, *Stoking the Creative Fire* and *The Oldest Story in the World*. These are two books I use when I'm teaching creative writing or art appreciation. For many, many years, for decades, I've more or less focused on inspiration and perspiration, being open to the ideas coming from the gods and the cosmos, but also learning how to work hard and stay with it, stay with it, stick to it-ness as they used to say. But over the last few years, maybe in preparation for a time like this, I've added a third ingredient to this teaching rhythm of mine, and that is I ask my students or my writing clients, "What kind of contribution can your writing make to the world?" All right. You need to express yourself. That's wonderful. On some level, I think everybody should be writing, singing, and dancing every day. Great. But if you have more talent than just self-expression, where does it go? How can you help somebody else? Where will this book or this screenplay or this series of exposés for your hometown newspaper... how can it actually help people?

At first I was doing this just for adults, but I also occasionally give talks in high schools, even junior high schools, and now I'm using that question with the kids. And guess what? They absolutely love that question. It's just that no one has asked them it, at least in that way. So I'm asking that for people who are traveling inward right now during the quarantine.

And remember the word "quarantine" originally referred to the 40 days in which a ship had to stay in the harbor if it came from a place with the plague. It had to stay there for 40 days to make sure that everybody was disinfected. So we could think of this time in our homes as being on a ship in a harbor with the seagulls singing behind us and the wind blowing through our hair. There are creative and healthy, salubrious ways to think about the quarantine without always focusing on number one, us, us, us and, "Now can I focus on myself again?" instead coming out of this, "How can I help somebody else now?"

It could be writing letters to people in rest homes. It could be ordering books from your favorite bookstore. It could be writing up your old travel stories from your travel journals, anything that we can do to help others, which by the way is also an aspect of pilgrimage because the pilgrim never... in my research, in any culture, the pilgrim is always traveling not just for herself but for somebody else, someone in the village, the family, the parish. In all traditions, there was always a notion, "Would you please pray for me on your walk to Rome? Oh, could you take some money and give it to a poor person in Allahabad in India?" In a deeper sense, the real pilgrimage is when we're traveling for ourselves and for someone else who we deeply love.

Janet Conner Well, that explains why instinctively when people ask me to pray or tell me about something that's happening with them, I've just begun to say, "Well, I will carry you when I go on my rosary saunter." I now know to call it a saunter. "When I go on my ancient goddess rosary saunter tonight, I will carry you." So this really is a pilgrimage.

Phil Cousineau Yes. That's really beautiful. I even recommend when people are going to take one of my trips or pilgrimages to Ireland, to France, to Italy or Greece, in my last letter to the people who are traveling with me, I will say "Ask the people in your private circle is there anything you could do for them, anything you could bring home for them. Is there a prayer that you might be able to take with you that you could pray at that sacred site?" What that helps to do is begin to turn your mind. I think of it... you know that wonderful word "heliotropic"? It means the turning of flowers to the sunlight, heliotropic. There's a psychotropic movement in us. Psyche originally meant "soul" in Greek, so "psychotropic" means the turning of the soul to the light. You could call it God's light, the light of the Divine, whatever you like, but I believe that happens in our moments of darkness.

During this pandemic, we are in a moment of crisis, darkness, but there is this psychotropic movement that is very natural. It's not woo woo. It's the most natural thing in the world, where the soul in us is turning and searching for the light, even for the divine light if that's your persuasion. And that divine light, it could be community even on the internet these days, it could be a private relationship with God or the gods, or a deep relationship with ourself, maybe that we haven't had for a long time. That would be in my daily prayers for people. Find out where is your soul longing to turn right now that will lead you on your inner pilgrimage during the quarantine.

Janet Conner That's the great question. Where is my soul wanting to... finish it?

Phil Cousineau Where is my soul turning for the light right now?

Janet Conner Turning for the light. I'm going to put that in our Show Notes. What a great question to reflect on and take into deep soul writing. So prayer, this is the love of my life, so when you said, "And the day that you find out why you're here," I went, "Woo-hoo! I remember that day." So what could we do together now? Do you have a poem, a story, a prayer, anything that you could read to us, lead us in right now so we get a little, tiny taste of this psychotropic journey within?

Phil Cousineau That's a wonderful way to ask it, Janet. I love the way you just articulated that. Yes, I do. I selected a piece from one of the two books of hours that I created in the 1990s. This was a way that I could honor the books of hours that I grew up with when I was a boy in Detroit, in a French-Irish world outside of Detroit, where we went to mass six days a week if you can imagine. And so prayer was deeply, deeply embedded in me on a daily level, but then as I grew older, I began to find the parallels, the overlaps between prayer and poetry, which Emily Dickinson said, "Prayer is night descended upon thought." Isn't that lovely?

Once in a while, I'll go back to traditional sacred writing, but never a day or nary a night goes by when I don't read a powerful poem or an extract by Thomas Merton, someone like that, because that is my psychotropic move. It helps me reorient if it's been a dark day, a melancholic day, a sad day, a tragic day. A poem, a prayer will help reorient me. So my books of hours were a collection, like in the old days, the canonical hours, the seven canonical hours during the day in which the bell would ring in churches all across Europe. And I think this was a reflection of a kind of Zen infatuation that the church must have had during the Middle Ages, where the bells would ring every hour, and the purpose was to take a breath, take a moment, reorient, allow your soul to move towards the light, think about God, think about your family, think about the local nuns and priests, whatever it might be. I think we can do that today with poetry or music, which is where we get a lot of our prayer and our poetry today.

Out of my second book of hours, called *A Soul Aflame*, I have a magnificent short passage I'd like to read from Nadia Boulanger, who was a choreographer, someone who worked in dance, in theater, one of the great teachers of the 20th Century, and one of the most beautiful writers about what I think of as the overlap between body and soul—deeply devoted to the health and the beauty of the body but also concerned with the forces in the soul. So here's a short paragraph from Nadia Boulanger.

"So what is it, this force which makes saints, heroes, geniuses, which makes people pursue their destinies all the way to the end? It seems to me that attention is the state of mind which allows us to perceive what has to be. It is a form of the vision experienced by the great mystics on days when they were granted a

profound concentration. I have the impression that the more I try to think of the essentials of music, the more that they seem to depend on general human values. One comes back always willy nilly to the great words, 'Have you or have you not received grace?'"

Janet Conner Oh, well, there's the great gift and this time—the grace.

Phil Cousineau And you notice how pilgrim-like that was because I think that's what people on pilgrimages, both sacred and secular, are searching for—some kind of visceral contact, not a theoretical connection, but a visceral contact with this great force that animates the souls of mystics but also poets, scientists, people who are deeply, profoundly engaged with the world. And this is also palpable. This will be one of the great challenges of the world as we go forward in terms of sacred travel, pilgrimage, and so on because touch itself, which we are being told not to do now so that we survive as an individual but also as a species, was for millennia at the heart of pilgrimage.

One of my formulas through the years was that we are slightly out of touch at home, and we go on these sacred journeys to get back in touch with ourselves, with the world. And that is why so many of our pilgrim photos, for example, the sacred wall, The Wailing Wall, in Jerusalem shows people touching the wall. Or in Buddhist temples, a pilgrim's touching the bones of the great monks, the Buddha, for example, or in secular places, going to the house of Shakespeare in Stratford-on-Avon and touching the desk on which he purportedly wrote his letters and plays. Get in touch. How do we get back in touch if we can't physically touch the world or touch ourselves? Well, we can do it through prayer, through music, through conversation, and through our dream life.

Janet Conner That is such a magnificent juxtaposition of that term "to get in touch" because everything in this conversation has been about getting in touch with who am I, why am I here, what do I have to offer the world, what is this really all about. So we are getting in touch without touching.

Phil Cousineau That's the challenge, isn't it?

Janet Conner Yeah. Well, and I find my sitting outside... and you know what's happening when I sit outside? I'm getting in touch with my own tiny, tiny... and I live in a townhouse. This is a miniscule backyard, but the funniest thing happened just the day before yesterday. I'm sitting outside. I'm doing my deep soul writing, deep soul reading, deep soul praying—it's sort of a mush for me; the one leads into the other—and I'm staring off in space. I'm just sitting there, not really actively thinking about what I've been reading, just staring off in space, and I hear this wee, little sound, tiny, tiny, tiny, little sound. And I look around. I can't see

anything. And I get up, and I walk over. And I still don't see where's this tiny sound, and finally I noticed. I've lived here 20 years. This sound has been going on for 20 years, but I finally noticed. The little grasshoppers that aren't full-blown, three-inch lubbers yet—they're still black with a yellow stripe down their back—they are eating, thank you very much, one of my plants, and I was hearing them bite and chew. It's always been there, but because I've been busy thinking even when I'm sitting outside, I haven't gotten in touch.

So then I asked myself, "Well, wait a second," and I began to listen. And also for the first time I noticed that the male squirrels and the female squirrels—I don't know if they're screaming at one another or communing—but they have completely different voices. The male voice is significantly lower, and they answer. He says, "*Chirp, chirp*, whatever," and she answers. And this is going on and on, and then I looked around. I went, "Wait a second. In my little 30 foot by 20 foot, what else is happening here?" and I watched the lizards make love. There's an exciting world in my own backyard that I'm getting "in touch with."

Phil Cousineau Years ago, I was lecturing with the great Jungian psychologist Robert Johnson, and someone in the audience was talking about the absurdity of modern life in which we are out of touch with those natural moments that you are just describing. And this person in the audience was bemoaning the fact that we have lost the ability to listen to the world outside, and Robert, in his wonderful manner, said, "I just noticed I was paying attention just now to the word you used, 'absurd,' which is Latin for not listening." Isn't that marvelous?

Janet Conner I didn't know that. Absurd is Latin for not listening. So the world that COVID-19 has allowed us to finally notice is absurd.

Phil Cousineau That's right. That's right [laughter].

Janet Conner And now she is inviting us to go deep inside and listen to what really, really matters. Whether you're physically here or following Phil, someday... you will be taking us on tours again someday, right?

Phil Cousineau Yes. We've simply postponed this year's tours for exactly one year. So April 2021, going to sacred Italy, and then I'm leading writers' retreats in Paris after that, spring of next year, and then next fall back to Greece. So we will be back on the road. It will be different. Travel will be different in the future, but we will continue to deepen our travels, right? We can do that for now.

Janet Conner Well, and when we travel again, my sense is if we have taken advantage of this radical opportunity for the internal pilgrimage, if we come out with the ability to listen, the ability to see, the ability to pray, the ability to be open to grace, the answer to some of the most important questions of our soul, if we know how to

turn heliotropically to the sun, to the light, to the truth, think what it's going to... imagine what now putting your feet on the street of Paris, putting your feet in a temple in Greece. I would imagine that it will be... because all my senses will be wide open, I think I will see and hear and feel in a deeper way, right?

Phil Cousineau With a more profound sense of gratitude.

Janet Conner Wonder. Yeah, on wonder, which of course, we're just right back in the Torah, right? Isn't it all about awe and wonder?

Phil Cousineau There you go. That's the beginning of philosophy and deep travel.

Janet Conner Is awe and wonder. Well, I'm in awe of this conversation with you. I know we've had a couple of glitches where the sound cut out, but it's a glorious... you really have helped us go on a radical pilgrimage of transformation. So in addition to this gorgeous conversation—and I've been taking copious notes for our Show Notes page—you and your publisher also have a gift for us. So when people come and click on Prayer Bag #28, what are they going to find?

Phil Cousineau The first couple of chapters, I've been told, of *The Art of Pilgrimage*, a bit of a teaser for the rest of the book. But I would also like to donate a copy of my book *Prayers at 3 A.M.*, which came out also in the 1990s, because I've been a night owl burning the midnight oil all my life, and those are the hours in which we tend to be ruminative, meditative, contemplative. So I hope those books help inspire people.

And also maybe I'll toss in a few of my travel postcards as well. I think it's very important—we go back to that operative phrase again—to be in touch with each other, and the simple act of writing a postcard takes on a great magnitude right now because it's not just an email. If someone sends us a card, handwrites a card or God forbid an actual letter, it means someone has taken time out from their lives. They have focused; they have concentrated on you, and that can go a great deal in the modern world. John Keats once said, "The soul lies naked in letters." He didn't say email; he said letters [laughter].

Janet Conner Well, I can so speak to letter writing as an intense spiritual practice. Some of the listeners know that in 2013 and 2014, my son was a political prisoner, a political prisoner—I want to emphasize that—not accused of anything but sent to prison in order to coerce him to name the names of other activists in Occupy in New York. And once again, nobody told me to do this, but I began to send him a handwritten... and the instructions on sending. To send a letter to somebody in prison is complicated. I mean, it's really complicated, and you have to do it just so or the letter gets tossed.

I sent him a letter every single day for 253 days, and the one day of the week I hated was Sunday because there's no mail. So he'd get two when eventually those arrived. Well, he was suddenly, unexpectedly released, and I think they've shipped him a box that you... a prisoner has this... all your possessions are in one tiny, tiny box, and they shipped the box to his attorney's office. And his attorney's receptionist, who had spent six years in prison for environmental activism, got the box, and he called Jerry and said, "Do you want me to open this box for you?" And Jerry said, "Yeah, sure. Go ahead. What's in it?" Well, the guy started crying, and he said, "This box is packed full of letters from one person," and he said, "I have to tell you, Jerry, nobody gets a letter every single day." So it was meaningful to Jerry, to my son, but it dawned on me that that was probably the most important spiritual practice of my life for that eight months, writing a personal letter every single day. And we have completely lost the art of it.

Phil Cousineau Maybe that story can help revive the practice. There could be a book of those 250 plus letters, *Letters to My Son*. Think of it in the spirit of Rilke's famous book *Letters to a Young Poet*.

Janet Conner Or *Letters to Olga*. Do you know that book by Vaclav Havel? When Jerry went to prison, he said, "Get that book," so I got it out of the library. And when Vaclav Havel, who eventually ended up becoming the president of then Czechoslovakia, but was imprisoned by the Communist regime, he sent her a letter... I don't know if it was every day or not, but it became a book. Oh my goddess. *Letters to Olga* by Vaclav Havel. It's a treasure.

Phil Cousineau I'll look for it. I love collections of letters. I deeply believe in the practice. That could be the practice... let's challenge our listeners today. Write a letter or a postcard every day to somebody. You have time people. You have time. It is a way to—again, think about the beauty of the language here—it is a way to stay in touch.

Janet Conner Right. And it's physical. You have to physically pick up a pen and to write it, and they have to physically hold it in their hand. Therefore, we are in touch.

Phil Cousineau That's right. That's right. I wrote an essay years ago about the ancient tradition of the soul coming from God or the gods at the moment of quickening, 40 days in the womb of the mother. And the soul comes in through the top of the head, which is why we have a whorl, W-H-O-R-L, a whorl at the top of our head, that little spiral of hair, but also whorls in the bottom of our feet and also in our fingertips. And ancient belief was this is where the soul comes in and out of the body. So if we physically touch a pen; physically, you put a stamp on a letter; physically put the letter in a mailbox, there's a bit of our spirit going from us to

the person who receives that letter. This is a genuine way of staying in touch with each other.

Janet Conner That is a magnificent call. In our pilgrimage, let us stay in touch with physical letters, and I can speak... Jerry said those letters meant the world, the world. So yes, and the first letter I'm going to write is to you, Phil [laughter], in gratitude for this glorious conversation.

So if you're listening and you're not at janetconner.com, pop over to janetconner.com/28. If you forget the number, just come to janetconner.com and click on Podcast, and you will see not only the recording, Phil's pretty face, covers of the book, get a transcript, links to Global Spirit, links to his website, lots of goodies to turn this conversation into staying in touch, the Show Notes that'll have all kinds of actions that we can take together. And then click on the Prayer Bag and get these wonderful gifts, and do follow the link to get your own copy of *The Art of Pilgrimage* because coronavirus is inviting you on a pilgrimage.

Well, I always end these conversations with a small gift of my own. I call them prayers. You might call them poems. To me, they are one and the same thing. And this prayer came to memory for this conversation because I wrote it or received it... I really don't like to say I write these because they come in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning, and they come fully formed. All I have to do is type them up. And it was right after reading one of my all-time favorite novels, *The Night Train to Lisbon*, and so this German professor, a philosophy professor, suddenly, after decades of teaching, meets this strange woman, drops his career, leaves his apartment, and immediately gets on the night train to Lisbon. And I'm not quite sure why, but this prayer came out as a result.

It's called "Memory."

A moment that isn't noticed,
isn't attended to, isn't seen,
floats past unfulfilled,
small, insignificant and gone.

And as I read that, I'm going, "Wait a second. That's the life we've been living—
rushing and missing all of these small moments."

But a moment that is noticed,
is attended to,
a moment you turn your eyes to see, to probe, to cherish...
that moment expands.

It starts small, but then
it grabs more of your eyes
more of your attention
more of your notice.

And it expands
spreading its cloak over everything
until there is no other moment
and never was.

This is the one time,
the only time,
the only moment,
the only important moment.

And it is full.
It is pregnant with life,
with possibility, and with love
always, always with love.

And there is no other time.
there never was
and there never will be
this is the moment you never ever want to forget.

And yet
and yet

It will recede
as all moments do.

It will fade from memory
and dissolve back into the river
to return to you another time.

Phil Cousineau Beautiful. Thank you.

Janet Conner Thank you, Phil.

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.