



THE SOUL DIRECTED LIFE ~ APRIL 23, 2015

with Host: JANET CONNER (www.janetconner.com)

and Guest: CHRISTINE VALTERS PAINTNER; Author of 'The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul With Monastic Wisdom'

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JANET: Welcome, welcome to The Soul-Directed Life - the radio show that helps you notice, recognize, and respond to the calls bubbling up from your soul, so you can live a soul-directed life.

And welcome to our exquisite experiment of walking the Medicine Wheel, following the natural rhythm of mother earth's four directions and four seasons. Doesn't seem possible but here we are at the end of June, our third and final month honoring the wisdom of the east and spring.

So, given that this is our last step in the east, I think we'd love to re-cap the calls, the wisdom of the east. We began in April with this theme: The soul wakes from the rest of winter filled with desire to discover its true, whole, sacred self, and hears the call to awaken. Then in May, we took our awakened souls into this theme: The awakened soul begins, or recommits to, a holy task in alignment with its divine purpose and experiences the call to a new beginning.

And then we stepped into June, and this is the theme we have been exploring for four weeks: The energy of spring urges the awakened, energized soul to heed John O’Donohue’s admonition, “you were created to create”, and honors the call to nourish your creative soul.

And nourish your creative soul we are, right now, this hour with my beautiful companion, the Abbess of the Arts, Christine Valters Paintner, author, retreat leader, spiritual director and creator of the Abbey of the Arts Online Community. Christine is a Benedictine Oblate who brings her two great loves - the life of a monk and the creative life – together. The perfect marriage for our final walk in June, to nourish our creative souls. We gather today to talk with Christine about our Soul-Directed Life book club selection for the month of June, ‘The Artist’s Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul With Monastic Wisdom’.

What we are about to hear has the potential to change us, and change us at depth. To help that happen, let’s ask the voice of The Tibetan bowl to call us to listen, and listen deeply.

(ringing bowl)

Christine Valters Paintner is the online abbess for Abbey of the Arts, a virtual monastery offering classes and resources on contemplative practice and creative expression. Her doctorate is in Christian spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and she earned her professional status as a registered expressive arts consultant and educator from the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. She is the author of many, many books, such as *‘The Eyes of the Heart, Water, Earth, Wind, and Fire’*; and our discussion today, *‘The Artist’s Rule’*. Her newest book - and I hope we sneak in a little bit of conversation about it - is *‘The Soul of a Pilgrim’*. Perhaps you’ve read her exciting columns on Progressive Christianity at Patheos.com. In addition, Christine leads pilgrimages in Ireland, Austria, and Germany and you can join her for online retreats at her website. She lives her commitment as a Benedictine oblate in Galway, Ireland with her husband John, and joins us today from Galway. Welcome Christine!



CHRISTINE: Thank you, Janet. I'm so delighted to be with you.

JANET: Oh, I'm just so looking forward to this conversation. I love every word of 'The Artist's Rule', and for the past couple days, I've been spending my mornings in lectio divina reading your newest book 'Soul of a Pilgrim'. Oh, before we get into all those delicious conversations, every guest opens the conversation with some kind of blessing, invocation, or poem - something that calls us into an appreciation for the direction on the Medicine Wheel, east and the spring.

So, would you lead us in receiving the beauty and potential of the spring with Celtic eyes?

CHRISTINE: I would be delighted to. This is actually a blessing for the element of wind. And in book one of 'Earth, Wind and Fire', the elements are connected to the seasons and the directions, so this is the element of wind - it evokes the energy of springtime.

Spirit of Creation, in the beginning you blew over the waters, coaxing the earth up from the depths of sea, inviting all creatures to rise up on their own wings.

Spirit of Renewing Life, you breathed into me in my very first moment. Invigorate me with your gift of energy and newness. Continue to breathe expansively in me, inviting me to a vision to what is possible in my life.

Spirit of Restlessness, stir me from my longing for comfort that so often stifles me. Help me to release in the places that keep me stuck and guide me in the direction you would have me to go.

Spirit of the Great Winds, help me to hear your voice in the midst of the whirlwind of my life. Grant me the trust to hold on while I'm being buffeted by life's storms.



Blessings of wind be upon me. Blessings of spring's blossoming forth. May my sails billow wide. May I breathe deeply, the gift of inspiration. And may I be fully free.

JANET: Amen! Oh, that last image - I don't talk about this very often on the air, but my husband built sailboats. I lived on a sailboat. We sailed in the San Francisco Bay before we moved here, and so when you said, "May my sails be..." I mean, I'm there. I'm on the boat, keeled over. Sailing in the San Francisco Bay, you think you're going to die, you know - talk about wind! And the boat is - there's water coming over the gunwales, so thank you! You really woke me up! I am totally in that blessing feeling the wind of God at my back. Oh, that was lovely.

CHRISTINE: Thank you.

JANET: So before we dive into your books, I think to put them in context, it would be lovely to hear a little bit of your story. I'm thinking back over the two and a half years of guests that have been on this show, and we've had Quakers, we have had ex-nuns, we have had Episcopalian priests. But Christine, I think, I think this is the first conversation with a Benedictine Oblate. I'd love to hear a little bit of your story. How and when did you become a Benedictine Oblate, and at the same time, were you always a creative? Were you always deep in your own creative expressions, and then, when or how did these two come together. So what's your story?

CHRISTINE: Well, I would say that I've been a writer as long as I can remember, from a very young age. My best friend and I used to write short stories in fourth grade about the spy who came after Douglas Evan, the woman spy who is double-o-eight. Writing over the years poetry, and then later in my 20's I discovered the field of the expressive arts, which is a field that is rooted in art therapy, and looks at the arts in terms of process instead of product. So more of a sense of what we can discover about ourselves through the creative process, which really merged nicely with my spiritual journey at the time, which as you mentioned, I'm a Benedictine Oblate, which means that I have made a commitment in 2003 as the lay person who is married and lives in the world, to a particular community at Saint



Placid Priory, in Lacey Washington because I used to live in Seattle. Basically, I made a commitment to live out this Benedictine carazen, this monastic way of life in the world.

And so, it's a beautiful community of people who support me in that contemplative way of being. The two strands sort of wove themselves together, kind of over time. I think when I discovered the monastic path, I realized I've always been a contemplative as well, but I didn't really have the language for it before. I started to realize how much the creative process is so much like meditative practice. It becomes this container for our awareness where we can become aware of all the things that are bubbling up in us and all the thoughts that are kind of clamoring for our attention. So those are ways of paying attention to our inner life, and discovering new things about what's rising up within us.

JANET: I hadn't really articulated in my mind the fact that these two strands are alive in me...until, really reading *'The Artist's Rule'* and realizing, yes I can't separate the way Spirit expresses through creative expression in me and my spiritual practice which sort of permeates 24/7.

But you articulate this so exquisitely, and I love that word 'strands', you know I'm seeing them like the two DNA strands. Create the whole. One of the words in your wording, a word that pops out right at the beginning of *'The Artist's Rule'* is the 'new monk'. You write with such love about this concept, the New Monk. What's a new monk and are we all new monks?

CHRISTINE: The New Monk for me is simply a re-claiming, a deepening of this monastic tradition but for contemporary life. The tradition of oblates and associates and sort of third order of the different names for lay people who have affiliated with different carazens of religious communities. That tradition's been alive for a while, but there is a movement, I think, in the last ten to fifteen years in particular.

Kathy North has broke the cloister walk, I think, really brought it to light because she was a Benedictine Oblate and she wrote about a year of her life with praying with the monks and she was a poet and sort of helped

eliminate that for people. And so there's been this movement, I think, growing, of people who are trying to claim these really rich ancient monastic principles and practices for their life and discovering how it nourishes me as someone who works in the world, is married, has children and is trying to do meaningful work.

And so the new monks is this idea of the monk who lives beyond the walls of the monastery, who lives immersed in the every day, and there is a whole movement now called New Monasticism which is exploring exactly this dynamic. And so I believe that we certainly can all become one, I think we all have an inner monk in us. I do a lot of work with Jungian psychology and archetypes and that kind of imagery of sort of different energies in us, and I think we all have this inner monk within us that longs for spaciousness and silence and presence and sacred rhythms and those kinds of rich practices. And so I would say that – I would encourage anyone who for whom that idea of becoming a monk in the world, resonates to definitely embrace that because it's part of all of us, I think.

JANET: Before I stumbled upon your website The Abbey of the Arts and this concept, the word 'monk' in my mind, was for the boys, and so I used to joke, and then I realized, 'Janet, you're really not joking'. I used to say that I am a nun; I am a nun. Because, first of all, I put on my black yoga pants and my clean white tee shirt every day, I mean, I'm wearing a nun's outfit because all I'm going to do all day is write, and I open my day with prayer, I close my day with prayer, all I want to do is read sacred literature, and I used to joke that I've turned into a nun, which is pretty funny because when I was 12 in Catholic grade school, I wanted to be a nun.

And so - ta dah! - I've turned into a nun. But I didn't have the right concept for it. I couldn't get my arms around it so now I know I'm a New Nun, a new monk.

CHRISTINE: Yes, and I've had people ask about that...aren't women who want to be monks really nuns, and yes, that's true. And the root of the word monk comes from 'monachus' which means single hearted. And I like that.



I like claiming that definition so the monk is the one who is focused on this divine presence in all things and all places and all moments.

So for me, 'monk' kind of claims that name more fully, but I think nun would be a perfect way to embrace that as well, if that resonates more.

JANET: I actually, I like the word monk more; it's more evocative because it isn't grounded down into a personal experience, which so many of us growing up Catholic had, because we didn't have a lot of intimate relationships with monks, I mean you know, the monks were off somewhere, right? We didn't know who they were. We didn't know where they were, but whatever they were doing, it was really great. It was just a wonderful thing, just more serious, exactly!

Whereas, in second grade, there's a nun, you know, and she's trying to teach me to spell. And so, this monk idea is more evocative. You can't pin it down. And so, yeah – maybe I'll have to quit joking about the fact that I've turned into a monk and embrace the fact – I mean, a nun – and embrace the fact that I am a New Monk.

That's what's so gorgeous about your website, is that you invite everybody into this 'inner monkness'.

CHRISTINE: Yep, anyone who's willing to cross the threshold...

JANET: Well, the first online event I did with you was – I'm not going to remember the name, but you'll know, it's the introduction to your inner monk – what's the name of that online.

CHRISTINE: A Monk in the World

JANET: A Monk in the World, there you go, and the emails arrived every week, and I – that's when I began to stop labeling myself the nun.

CHRISTINE: Right.

JANET: Maybe I'm a Monk in the World.



Well, we're going to take a short break, and when we come back, all of us monks and nuns and new monks and old monks and whatever we are, we're going to talk about creating a contemplative practice and sacred space – why? To nourish – don't forget our theme – to nourish our creative souls.

<Break>

JANET: As soon as this conversation is over, listeners, be sure to go to Facebook - [Janet Conner the Soul Directed Life](#) and join the conversation, because Christine's publisher kindly sent me an extra copy of *'The Artist's Rule'* to give to a listener.

So, the way this works is, you pop over, share the contemplative practices that nourish your spirituality, your creativity, talk about how you nourish your creative soul. Ask Christine a question, I'll be inviting her to join the conversation. But participate in the conversation, and everyone who does, their names go on little strips of paper in the Tibetan Bowl, and the Tuesday after the show, I ask the bowl - I don't pick – I say a prayer and ring the bowl and pull out a name and that person receives this sweet gift from our guest.

So come and play at [Janet Conner the Soul Directed Life](#) on Facebook.

Christine, your book *'The Artist's Rule'* is laid out as twelve weeks. And in the very first week, you invite readers to begin to create their own creative contemplative practice. Now, the practice of solitude and silence is – the words alone, my heart just bursts open in love for those two words, solitude and silence. So I 'chewed' this chapter; I ate every word; I loved every word of it. So tell us more, tell the listeners a little bit about contemplative practice and how it feeds the creative life, because so many people talk about the contemplative practices. It's kind of like – you get the feeling, okay this is what you do at eight o'clock in the morning, this is what you do the first thing, this is how you get your day started, but not very many people will weave those two strands together.



So how does contemplative practice feed our creative life?

CHRISTINE: Well, I would start with the gift of silence, and I experience silence as that place it sort of seems like a funny place to begin with creativity, because we think of creativity as sort of the over-flowing and the bubbling up, and yet, our lives are so full...we're rushing, we're so busy, we have no space, no generous margins in our lives to really basically quiet ourselves down and open to another voice that might be speaking in the midst of daily life. And so I often encourage people to have a practice of silence, even if it's just for five minutes a day to rest into that silent space as a way of emptying the mind, but also as a way of connecting to the creative spirit, opening up to a greater wisdom that we might not hear in the rushing noise of our daily lives.

And then, essential to the monastic tradition is this practice of Lectio Divina, which is this contemplative way of reading. And in Lectio you essentially read a text very slowly and savor it and listen to a word or a phrase and then you let that word or phrase and then you let that word or phrase unfold in your imagination and then you listen to the invitation. And for me, as a daily practice of Lectio Divina, I often – often my creative insights and ideas come out of that time of sinking into this...whatever this text is. My husband and I will often pick a book of the bible and we'll work our way through it, just a couple verses at a time. We just finished The Song of Songs not too long ago, and by working through it kind of slowly like that you get just a little bit of a glimpse, and the words that arise often have synchronicities with other things that are happening in my life.

And then in the prayer, the connections that are made, sort of like this time to immerse yourself in symbol and imagination. And then, I would also say, essential to this contemplative life, and particularly in the monastic tradition is this tending of holy rhythms, which I know we'll talk a little bit more about in a bit – but this sense of really being present to the unfolding of the day so that as we move through our daily chores and tasks and so forth we might become aware that there is actually a creator rhythm to the day so we



might be able to tune into our own creative rhythm when we feel most enlivened and when we need the time for just rest and incubation.

And then another contemplative practice for me that's essential to this creative life is walking...which is this practice of very much embodied. I think that's what appeals to me so much about walking as a contemplative practice. This idea of walking without a destination, and so in the practice of walking I can just let it unfold as the Spirit provides, listening, paying attention.

So for me, much of the contemplative practice is about learning how to listen and pay attention to the world around me and what might be speaking to me in the given moment, and all of that then nourishes my creative response. So I'm continually opening up to receive this nourishment that then flows back into the creative work that I do.

JANET: This is exactly what my experience has been, and I have to tell you what a difference your book '*Lectio Divina*' has made in my life. I simply noticed, I didn't have this concept in my mind...I'm sure I heard it at some point in my education, but it was gone. It was no longer a concept in my conscious mind.

It happened one day reading John O'Donohue, reading '*Anam Kara*', and a sentence, you know how rich – I always say he's not a Hershey bar, that man is a [can't make it out] – right? You just have to have one bite and there was just a phrase, it was just a phrase, and I had to stop reading. I absolutely had to stop reading, and I found myself staring off in space, and so what I was doing was chewing, swallowing, eating. And then I found myself whispering out loud and telling my living room this wonderful phrase, and I mentioned it in one of my courses, I think it was a live Soul Vows course. And my dear friend, Katharine Anderson, who is a great creative soul in Charlotte, North Carolina, she said, "Janet, Janet – you're describing *Lectio Divina*. You might want to get Christine Valters Paintner book. And so, of course, I did. You know, that's always that inspiration. The Universe can't get through to you, so your angel tells somebody else, "Listen, will you tell this numb nuts to read *Lectio Divina*."

Of course, then when I read it, I went, my goodness me! I am – not exactly, I don't think St. Benedict would arrive and go "you got it, girl", but in my own way, my own soul was saying, 'here is a way'. And so, I don't think you know this, but I quote you in 'Soul Vows', and encourage everybody to get 'Lectio Divina'. And I share my own nutty, wacky John O'Donohue inspired way. So, yes, thank you, thank you for bringing this concept that once again, you know, we had the idea that all those wacky monks over there that we never see and we never know who they are – they're off doing this thing – but you know, does this have anything to do with me. And of course, it has everything to do with us.

So, here's another fun thing I would just adore hearing you talk about because I find it so creative, so delightful, so fun and such a prayer tool, and that is creating an altar. I – in every single one of my books I say, 'okay, everybody, let's go make an altar', and I have three right now in my home, but that's always a moving number. I absolutely have right beside me my writing altar. I stand in front of it, speak my Soul Vows, say my writing blessing every single day. And I have one for my son because at one point he became a political prisoner. And the first thing my stomach said is we have to create an altar of freedom for him. And then, I created one, just poof! One day because the idea just came in my listening. I created this altar in my dining room with five candles, and before dinner every night I light the five candles and I ask to be a strong container for the work I'm being asked to do.

I love these altars. Just walking past them, my heart goes bum-bump. So, tell us about creating a creative altar.

CHRISTINE: Well I, like you, have a love of altars. And my husband teases me because every time we go out for a walk in nature, I'm forever picking up stones and sticks and shells and all of these kinds of things, and they inevitably make their way to an altar. And the altar shifts with the seasons so that, for me, it reflects whatever season that we're in. It might be the color of the cloth. And I have a little altar on my desk as well, sort of my writing

altar with a couple of stones that I've actually written words on in different retreats that I've been leading recently. And a little pine cone that kind of rolled its way down a hill to me one day when I was in prayer and sort of said, 'take me, let me speak to you'.

For me, the art altar is this way of reverencing the creative act as a prayerful and sacred expression of who we are. And so, we might create an altar as a way of cultivating some reverence for our creative work in the world. Sometimes we might sit down, if we are a writer or a painter or whatever it is and sort of feel this – maybe we're trying to work through a block and we feel this sense of drudgery and we feel this block, and there's something about having an altar that really, for me, honors this sacramental nature of what we're doing, that we're somehow working with elements and objects in the world to create something of beauty and express that.

And so, it's for me remembering that the work is sacred, and remembering my call, that is a central part of who I am. And so the symbols that arrive on my altar, I don't always plan them out, and I kind of let them arrive in my life and then prayerfully add them to the space and then listen to them, listen to what these objects have to say.

For me, a lot of it is natural objects because where I live is just a place of incredible wild beauty but it may be the icons that show up in your life or other religious symbols or other little kind of figurines, sometimes dreams too is another way to honor that. If there are symbols that come up in your dreams and you find figures that kind of represent that, and you can put them on the dream altar as a way of honoring dreams as another connection to the creative life, and if you think about how incredibly creative we are by going to sleep and we concoct these amazing stories if and when we're, you know, deep in that space of rest.

JANET: You're describing an experience I'm having right now. I'm writing my fourth book *'Why Did I Come: Walking the Sacred Spiral Path to Remember Your Soul's Purpose'*.

Well, well, I fall asleep – this went on for about a month, because I guess the Creative Universe knew that I really didn't understand how profound, how deep, how holy this sacred geometry shape of the spiral is. So I'd be falling asleep and I dream that I was walking this sacred spiral and all I had to do was kind of look around, 'oh look, there's a labyrinth...oh look, there's this', and so, in my dreams the book was telling me, 'okay, here's the book you're going to write. Come on, over here, check this out now, do you see that labyrinth, do you see that? Do you see this vertical line, do you see this? Do you see this?

And all I have to do in the morning is wake up and lie still so I can remember my dreams and start drawing them, so I do absolutely consider remembering your dreams, honoring your dreams and a very important sacred creative – it's a prayer practice, I think, because your soul is talking the to you all night long.

CHRISTINE: Absolutely. And in that wonderful non-linear language which is the language of creativity. It's just fabulous.

JANET: Yeah, because we writers – I mean, I do wake up in the morning and hear words. I do. The wildest experience I had, the greatest confirmation of that was waking up one morning and utterly – there was like a choir of very short angels and they sang, "Your soul wants five things". And I just went, 'really? Okay, alright'. And this is what I've done for the rest of my life is write these five books, teach all of these courses of Your Soul Wants Five Things.

So yes, words – but in your dreams, it's images, colors, shapes, and the soul speaks in those exquisite holy – I really find my dreams are so holy. But when people come to my classes, Christine, one of the first – if you want to call it a complaint – as soon as they start Deep Soul Writing, as soon as they start really getting out of conscious mind and slipping into the Theta brain wave state, the first thing they'll say is, 'oh my God, my dreams' ...and I just laugh and say, yeah!

CHRISTINE: Yeah, it never fails, right?



JANET: It never fails, and your dreams are so much richer than your conscious mind. So, no complaining, just ride – those full sails. Your soul is just filling those sails with the wind of dreams, and you just get to go along for this rich, oh, just exquisite...

So, I do want to ask you about the sacred rhythms, but that's going to probably be a little bit longer conversation, so let's hold that till after the break, and pop into – honestly, it's one of my favorite words, but I bet you the listeners are going to scrunch up their noses and go 'what? I don't want to talk about obedience!', but I feel that I am obeying this creative call. So talk to us about obeying your creative call.

CHRISTINE: Well, the root of the word obedience, it really means to hear and to respond. So there's a sense in which obedience is really about listening to something deeper, a deeper wisdom...and then taking the action that, you know, is prompted – is elicited by that. And in the monastic tradition, obedience has a lot of levels. There's obedience to the Abbott; there's obedience to other directives. But ultimately, it's to the Spirit in one's life. And so, for me, this sense of obedience is, 'can I acknowledge and welcome in and then follow through with all the ways that the creative spirit calls forth my gifts for me.

There is a sense of discipline with that. There's a sense of hard work that is part of that that we don't often value. We sort of scrunch up our noses because we think creativity should just be fun, and it is a lot of fun, and it does require showing up every day after day to the page, to the canvas, to the whatever it is that we're doing. So for me, that's the heart of obedience, this saying yes and following through.

JANET: Yeah, saying yes and following through. Somebody posted on my Facebook page several months ago, they said, this is the perfect image for writers. It was the picture of a dog in front of a monitor, in front of a computer, and the words said, "Sit, Stay".

CHRISTINE: Yes, and stability is the other, one of the other monastic vows which is that idea of staying with, and I think obedience and stability go hand in hand.

JANET: So, think what we could learn from taking our dogs to “obedience school”. We need to Sit and Stay. I thought that was a really profound spiritual lesson in this adorable, funny image on Facebook. See, even the angels will even talk to you on Facebook.

We’re going to take a short break, but when we come back, let’s talk about the sacred rhythms, and remember, Christine lives in Ireland where she feels and sees – oh, man! Talk about the Medicine Wheel! I mean, she is living in the grass, in the green, in the beauty, in the wind. I can’t wait to hear about the sacred rhythms of life.

<break>

JANET: Christine, I know all the listeners want to read all your books and find out all about you and come on your all your retreats online and in person. Would you tell us how you can find you?

CHRISTINE: Sure, the website is abbeyofthearts.com . It’s a virtual monastery where we have a lot of resources including a newsletter, which has weekly what I call Love Notes to my monks and artists and pilgrims. We have a free e-course that you mentioned before, The Monk in the World that people can kind of get a taste for what we do. We do some online retreats, mostly for the seasons like Advent or Lent. We also do a number of self-study programs.

And then my husband and I lead a number of pilgrimages in the west coast of Ireland. We do some writing retreats and some other pilgrimages where we explore these monastic sites and immerse ourselves in ritual and silence and Lectio Davina. And then we also go to Germany for Hildegard of Bingen. We just came back from Vienna, Austria, where we also led a pilgrimage on monastic sites there. And then, of course, I have eight books out. My newest one is called ‘*Soul of a Pilgrim: Practices for the Journey Within*’. So I invite readers to check that out if that idea of pilgrimage calls

to you and you don't necessarily have to go on a physical journey to embrace this idea of pilgrimage. And so, the practices are things like packing lightly and hearing the call and embracing what is uncomfortable and unknown, beginning again, and coming home again as ways of understanding...helping pilgrimage be woven into our everyday lives.

JANET: I love – I finished with *'The Artist's Rule'* - next on my desk I'm about halfway through *'Soul of a Pilgrim'*. I love your books Christine. And listeners, be sure to get *'Lectio Davina'*, as well.

The Sacred Rhythms, are they – do they have labels? Do they have time-frames? What are the Sacred Rhythms of the creative life?

CHRISTINE: Well, there's actually different layers to them that I talk about in the book. The first would be the rhythm of the breath, and so there's these four parts to the breath – inhale up into the fullness, the exhale and the emptiness, and that, those four rhythms of the breath are the rhythms of the days, the hour of rising and dawn, the hour of fullness at noon, the hour afternoon/evening and releasing, and the hour of midnight and kind of entering into mystery. Those rhythms of the day are actually reflected in the rhythms of the seasons of the year, and of course, we have beginning with springtime, and that energy. And so, as I was reading my blessing earlier, I mentioned about the connection to the elements, so the sense of springtime evoking this moment of inhalation, and the moment of dawn. The breathing in, the gift of new life, the moment of awakening and so this connection to breath and wind as an element to nurture our creative spirit.

Hildegard of Bingen talks about being a feather on the breath of God. And I love that image of yielding our creative impulses to this greater spirit that's carrying us forth.

And then, of course, moving around that wheel, that Medicine Wheel that you talk about so beautifully, moving from this hour of awakening the creative impulse, the welcoming in the breath of life to this hour of – the season of summer, the hour of midday, the fullness of the breath connected to the element of fire. And the sense of in that part of the creative wheel,

the creative rhythms is this time when our creativity really comes to its fullness, the peak of its fulfillment, the peak of the passions that we feel, like often our creativity when we're in that flow, just feel on fire for the world. And so, there's the beautiful marriage of those images, I think.

And then, of course, the hour of death connected to the season of autumn, also connected to the exhale of the breath. In that autumn and release and the death and remembering this movement towards endings. I think, for me, the second half that I'm talking about, the release and then the emptiness are ones that we neglect a lot in our culture, because we tend to be spring and summer kinds of people, always blossoming into fullness, but this experience of release and the element of water is connected into this hour of the day and this season of the year. And the sense of following the flow of yielding, of surrendering, of – there's a poem by Rilke and he says, "May what I do flow from me like a river without forcing and no holding back the way it is with children."

And the sense of – there are times in our creative life when it's time for us to step back, when it's time for us to let go of a sense of control or desire for outcome. And from this energy of releasing and surrendering and yielding, we move around that wheel to the season of winter, which is parallel to the hour of midnight, and also parallel to that part of the breath, the bottom of the breath when we have released the exhale and we have a moment of emptiness. And in that space is really the space of incubation. I think it's the space of dreamtime because we have completely surrendered our control in our sleep. We have let go of our need to direct things for a time. There's an invitation into mystery, into darkness and unknowing. And for me, one of the great gifts of the creative process is an ability to rest more deeply into mystery and unknowing, to be able to sit more comfortably with the things that I don't know and art has a way of being able to express and hold that tension.

And so, for me this idea of really honoring the seasons of the breath, the seasons of the day, the seasons of the year, and then my own inner creative seasons so that when I reach points of when I feel kind of blank or blocked,

that I might reframe that as being on the part of the creative cycle where I really just need to maybe rest or to let go, or to go for a walk or to release.

And the element connected to the winter and midnight is the element of earth in that sense of really being rooted but also humility in the monastic tradition, recalls our earthiness, and so to remember our own limitations and to find that restorative hibernation time. So winter is actually one of my favorite seasons because I think it's a real season of the monk when we dive deep into let ourselves receive that replenishment and nourishment and come, you know, to be able to come alive again in the springtime of creativity again.

JANET: I'm just thrilled to hear you say that because I pray to the seven directions. I've done that for years. And when I turn to the north, I can't help myself. A huge grin bursts out on my face. I love the north. I see her as the womb, the center of the labyrinth. This is the womb of the Divine Mother. This is really where it all happens. So, I've never timed myself but I kind of fly through my prayers until I get to the north, and I just am filled with this wonder at how the next book, the next idea, the next everything – it's already in seed form. And if I will just be still, then it will come to life in its own perfect time.

Now, in Ireland you get some pretty wild experiences of the north. You've got some pretty wild north weather, right?

CHRISTINE: Yes, I've had to make friends with the wind. The rain is quite happy, but having lived in Seattle, I sort of got used to it, and I actually like the rain. But the wind is fierce. It blows the rain sideways, and I've come to appreciate its gifts, though.

JANET: Well, and sometimes life blows us sideways, so that's a perfect analogy. Oh, I hate to say good bye, but in the next minute we've got to. And so, can you give us just a final kiss, a little Christine Valters Paintner New Monk blessing to send on our way?

CHRISTINE: Yeah, I just wish you the grace to be still, to be open, and to receive the flowering forth that is your birthright. But also to honor those

moments of fallow-ness and incubation and hibernation as fully, and as the space of sanctuary and renewal.

JANET: Amen, amen and amen. What a joy this has been!

This whole month, nourishing our creative souls has been just an utter delight.

We have been so richly fed by the wisdom of the east, so guess what? Now we're ready to step into the south and the season of summer that Christine describes so beautifully. South on the Medicine Wheel is about the emotional life flourishing, the fullness of growth under the warmth of the summer sun.

And so, you want to hear our theme for July? It's this: The awakened, energized, creative soul naturally heeds the call to live from the heart.

Your heart will burst with love next Thursday with Mark Allen, the founder of the New World Library, and his newest book *'The Magical Path'*.

Then, Brenda Michaels, host of Conscious Talk Radio will join us to talk about *'The Gift of Cancer'*, a gift she has received three times, and a gift she has lived through by living from the heart.

Then Loch Kelly will be with us on *'Open Hearted Awareness'*, and our month will close with Cindi Dale, the great chakra guide, on *'The Spiritual Power of Empathy'*. Empathy! I don't think we've had a conversation on the spiritual power of empathy. July is going to be a beautiful heart-filled month!

Would you like to know all the guests and all the themes in advance? Come to JanetConner.com and sign up for the newsletter, and while you're there, you might like to look at my books, including the newest one *'Soul Vows'*.

And, if this month of June just opened to your heart to wanting to fulfill your own creative expressions, there are two summer creativity courses that open in August. The first one for writers, **Plug In for Writers** opens on Monday, August 17th, and the course where we activate all our

'clairs'...clairaudience, clairsentience, claircognizance – that's called **Soul Expression**, and it opens on Wednesday, August 19th. Come, your creative souls are nourished. Bring them to life.

Until next week, may you hear and heed all the calls bubbling up from your soul, and live a fully nourished Soul Directed Life.

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Janet Conner
The Soul-Directed Life

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