

Dancing with Words, Dancing with Wisdom Show 40

Dr. Janet: Today I have the most amazing woman as a guest. She has done so many things in her life, that I know we won't begin to have time to talk about them all.

However, let me just mention a few. First of all, she's an award-winning poet. That may be one of the focuses today. How did she get into this, and what happens during that process of writing poetry?

She's an international educator. She has many years of experience in the care and nurturing of students. She is a pioneer in the home education movement. She really is an exceptional educator. She's been a strong advocate for alternative education in both the United States and abroad.

She's the creator of the Mentoring as Mooring Systems, which integrate student and colleague issues and concerns with the mentoring works of philosophical and literary authors. We may get into that a little bit today, too.

She's a frequent presenter worldwide on the role of women in the ancient world and I think also in the modern world. She's an international award-winning published poet.

She's the business owner of Constantina's Soul, an eclectic fashion entity that integrates -- she's all about integration -- Asian fabrics with the art of clothing design.

She's a certified yoga and psychoneuroimmunology instructor. She holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Ubiquity University, and, within that, the Wisdom School of Graduate Studies.

Welcome, Constantina. I am so happy to have you on the show.

Constantina: Janet, this is an absolute delight. This is something that I wanted to experience with you for quite a long time.

I wanted to mention that your beautiful, lyrical voice is something that is so reflective of so many wonderful things within you. Thank you for that incredible introduction. I don't know if I quite live up to it, but it was wonderful to hear my life a little bit.

Dr. Janet: You do live up to it. Of course, supporting one another is how we shift the consciousness of the entire planet from this "power over," "power under," "power against" into a "power with" dynamic.

Constantina, tell us a little bit about how your life has evolved. You were born a naïve baby just like all the rest of us, but your life has taken you into some amazing places. Let's talk specifically about how it took you into poetry.

Constantina: I'll be happy to do that. I had a very interesting experience. I am a first generation Greek-American. I was raised in a tribe of immigrants from Greece. It was a very unique psychological experience. I attribute most of my mental health to the fact that I was raised in a tribe, and when there were issues at home where you thought you needed support, you could always run to someone.

One of the main focuses of my young life as a child, since we were Eastern Orthodox, was iconography. I can remember connecting with the large icon of Mary in regard to the Divine Feminine. So, the Divine Feminine has been a huge part of my existence, from birth really, in a visual way and through a visual perspective.

I ended up doing the usual things, going to school, got married. But I did something a little unusual. I have nine children, I'm the birth mother of them, and I spent 30 years at home, raising those children and educating them. It was a little bit different.

Right now, I travel a lot and do a lot of things, but I want everyone to know, the first 30 years, I barely got out the door to the grocery. My life, in that regard, was a little different from most people in my field.

Dr. Janet: So, what suddenly changed?

Constantina: I think that 30-year period, Janet, was an incubation time. In that incubation period, there was a growing toward expression of something, that desire to come through me as it does any creative individual. It was into poetry. It is the accumulation of all that has been incubating within us over a period of time that desires expression in words.

We are the channels for that. We are not the writers. We are the channels of something from somewhere else.

That is how I view poetry. It's a very personal, intimate experience that we share with others. We don't do that with things. But in our writing, we offer a window to our own Soul with the hopes that we are able to then nurture and enter into the Soul of the other. That has been my experience as a writer.

Dr. Janet: So, it's something that you just somehow have to put down into your own words at a particular time in your life. Do I understand that correctly?

Constantina: Yes, you do. Personally, like many people, I have found in an experience of challenge, injustice, trauma, pain, all these things we go through, that there is that impetus for that something within to come through. In that coming through, it developed my consciousness even a little bit more. I can look at and see how did this particular situation and the words that came through enable me to enter into "Power with" an individual or a circumstance or a challenge rather than feeling there's "Power over." Poetry is a great resource for me in regard to coming to and establishing "Power with." I know that you are a great advocate of that in terms of human relationships.

Dr. Janet: Well, ultimately, "Power with" is going to change this planet. "Power over" and "power against" and "power under" do not work. We have seen that over and over and over again. There are certain ways of using words that actually enable us to step into "Power with."

We're going to start this segment with a poem that Constantina wrote. I would like to ask Constantina to read it, and then we can talk a bit about it. It's called "Icon of the Holy."

Constantina: Thank you, Janet. I will begin and go right into the first verse.

Icon of the Holy—Constantina Ann Clark

I
If you cannot
feel
the depths
of your essence
flaming up
passionately
from the kingdom
within
while your spirit
storms the gates
of the citadel
and your soul
shines a dark light
lobbing arrows
out into a world
that rarely listens,
then you are no poet,
nor will you

ever be.

II

If you cannot
write
without tears
dropping
upon the page
with every
remembrance
of the continual
sorrows
and worldly
betrayals
grieving the loss
of innocence
that was
wrenched
from your young soul,
then you are no poet,
nor will you ever be.

III

If you cannot
caress
the pain
exquisitely ripping
the fabric
of the mind,
relinquishing control
over your heart,
slaying your spirit,
stabbing
with deep
surrender,
soul-slain
in the hidden
recesses within,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

IV

If you cannot
love
the world
completely,
with all its
insanity,
caressing it,
as the struggles
of millennia
fall full force
upon you,
clutching
at your throat,
choking,
asphyxiating with
power,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

V

If you cannot
scream out
in mourning
at word
of every death
that ever comes
to pass
upon the earth,
wailing
with grief,
shrouded
in shades of black,
enveloped
in total darkness,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

VI

If you cannot
carry
contradictions
hidden within
your heart,

secretly,
silently
bearing them
with heaviness of spirit,
creeping
along the backbone
of consciousness,
sinking, sinking,
endlessly sinking
in the quicksand
of the human
enigma,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

VII
If you cannot
hold
within yourself
both light
and darkness,
inner sun
and shadow side,
embracing them both
as long lost
lovers,
consumed
by a violent
passion,
unfathomable,
devoured by all
that is raging,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

VIII
If you cannot
take
the hand
of suffering
kissing it,
bowing with respect,
wrapping pain
about you

as a cape
tormented in the wind
whipping violently
around your innards,
thrashing
your soul and spirit,
then you are no poet
nor will you
ever be.

IX

If you cannot
relinquish
the love
of your life
to unseen
trauma
fraught with future
shock,
sorrowing
in the unknown,
languishing
from afar,
lost
in distant worlds
surrounded
by empty
sunless skies,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

X

If you cannot
savoringly
sip eroticism
in the present
absence of faith,
while drinking
from the chalice
of myth,
seeking out
the gods and goddesses
of passion
unbridled
by the tendrils of

ecstasy,
clinging
to tempestuous
energies,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

XI
If you cannot
bind
yourself
to the currents
of life
as they ebb
and flow,
fiercely
casting yourself
on both high tide
and low,
gasping
in the undertow,
drowning,
refusing the life raft,
then you are no poet
nor will you
ever be.

XII
If you cannot
expose
your inner being
to the agony
of loss,
dastardly defeat,
gladly prying open
tightly clenched hands
releasing souls,
desperately unhindered,
forsaken
but finding your way
silently
as you stumble
upon the stones,
then you are no poet,
nor will you

ever be.

XIII

If you cannot
abandon
the desires
of your heart,
dreams disbanded,
hoped for unions
dashed
against razor rocks,
shattered,
hopelessly broken
violently
into unsalvageable
fragile pieces
irreparable
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

XIV

If you cannot
look out
softly
into the distance
and remember
without guile,
reaching within
and offering up
purity
from a heart
unsullied,
desperately destroyed,
experiencing transfiguration
silently,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

XV

If you cannot touch
the compassion
to be found
in heaven
greeting

the separation
to be found
in hell,
binding them up
as one blessing
sanctified
with the experience of sin,
then you are no poet
nor will you
ever be.

XVI

If you cannot salve
your open wounds
with understanding,
cauterizing them
with silent weeping,
healing them
with contradictions,
emoting
secret spells
working magic,
spinning
webs of radiance,
then you are no poet,
nor will you
ever be.

XVII

If you cannot suffer
agonizing sacrifice
upon the altar of ashes,
smoldering,
with heathens
dancing
upon your grave,
screaming
revealing that
you
were no saint
after all,
while your icon
of the holy
glows defiantly within,
then you are no poet,
nor will you

ever be.

Thank you, Janet, for that opportunity to share.

Dr. Janet: Wow! I don't even know what to say about so many of the words you used in that poem. Tell us a little bit about what that process was for you and why you had to write these words down.

Constantina: We are all very complex individuals. We don't often get to see the inner landscape of a person. There's so much going on within that we're not acquainted with in even our closest relationships.

I think the inner radiance of each one of us, if we could look into it, would probably reflect all of those experiences that I shared. I do believe that we all have within us an Icon of the Holy. I do have the experience and the understanding that as human beings, it is divine indwelling and it is divine light, and that's where we live within that Icon of the Holy. That is how I live and not always the way I would wish, but that's my desire.

Dr. Janet: Thank you. That was absolutely fantastic.

Constantina, you just read an absolutely amazing poem. I was sitting here circling some of the phrases that you used, which are so deep.

Let's talk a little bit just about the title, "Icon of the Holy." What does that mean to you?

Constantina: As you know, Janet, I come from an Eastern Orthodox background, and iconography and art is a very essential part of that spiritual experience. In my taking a look at my inner expression and actually my inner landscape, from the time I was very young, I was aware that there is an icon, a very holy light, a dwelling place within humanity where the organizing principle of the universe, the Logos, dwells within us and desires and seeks expression through us, so that we may also be partakers of this divine nature—whatever you wish to call it.

Philosophically, in ancient Greece, and historically, the Logos was the organizing principle of change that also ordered the world and everything in it, and had the power to regulate the birth and decay of things in the world. That is how they looked at it in Greek philosophy.

In Eastern Christianity, they incorporated the Logos, within their spiritual understanding of Christ, as he being the individual who embodied the Logos.

Other Eastern philosophies have a similar understanding of the Logos in terms of it being the organizing principle of the universe, of the cosmos, and of change as well.

Having that understanding, I was aware from a very early age of that actual icon within of the Holy, which is the Word or the Logos.

Dr. Janet: Does this manifest in the same way with every individual? Or is it different for each individual? Or both?

Constantina: I recently heard an individual ask me that during my dissertation. I told him that there is no way that it could manifest in the same way with every individual, because the Logos, the Divine organizing principle, meets us in our individuality, in our own wildness, in our own freedom, in our own Eros, in our own passion. We are all different in that way.

I think that there is no doubt that with that understanding, any organizing principle of the universe, we'll have a very intimate awareness of that. I do believe that that expression of being a partaker of Divine Nature is individual in every single person.

I like to tell others when we're talking about this concept — in Eastern Orthodox it's called Theosis where we partake of the divine nature, the Icon of the Holy — I like to tell them it's not rocket science. It's just being open to the embodiment of so much of everything.

Think about that for a minute. "So much of everything." I think the Logos, the Divine, is absolutely, so much of everything as the principle that organizes and orders the Cosmos. Well, think for a second of being so much of all of that. That really does express the possibility for human beings. I do believe it's different in everyone.

Dr. Janet: How do we get there?

Constantina: I think that in the getting there, we first have to realize that *It is* there. In Western culture, particularly in Christianity, there was an emphasis on redemption. It was believed that we needed to be redeemed from basically who we are as human beings.

In Eastern Christianity, and we'll take Eastern Orthodoxy, for example, there's a different focus. It's the emphasis that we need to become divinized partakers of the Divine Nature.

From the Christian viewpoint, what you ascribe to, the Western or Eastern view, will depend upon how you get there. Now, if you are not Christian and you ascribe to another spirituality, there are also avenues of how you may arrive at being partakers of the Divine, say, for example, of compassion, of loving kindness. But everyone, regardless of their spirituality or lack thereof, is imbued by virtue of being human and being a conscious being, has within them the Icon of the Holy. It's just that not everyone has entered into that awareness.

Dr. Janet: Is it about keeping an open mind, and, as the Buddhists would say, always being in Beginner's Mind, where you are simply open to learning, open to new experiences, open to new ideas?

Constantina: When you are in the energy of this clothing or putting on of the Divine Nature or the expression of the Icon of the Holy within, there's no doubt in my mind that you are open to the expression and ideas of everyone with a patience that is beyond our usual ability.

I think that's one of the expressions within us that reaches out to others when we are seated firmly in the Icon of the Holy, our willingness to be so patient, to be so open in our hearing to others so that we're hearing through that Icon of the Holy and our hearing isn't that first reaction, which often is an expression of people vying for power, as you know.

In regard to accessing that Icon, I think that what happens there are circumstances and situations and teachers who are put in our path that open that door. I don't think it's something that we have to really strive and work for.

Dr. Janet: I agree. Often it is a letting go or a surrender into "what is" rather than trying to reach a goal.

Constantina, just going back to this Icon of the Holy, there was so much in this poem as you were reading it. I was circling some of the phrases that popped out for me.

"Grieving the loss of innocence that was wrenched from your young soul, the pain exquisitely ripping the fabric of the mind." To me, that's such an interesting phrase because, yes, our minds are so powerful, but we use them in such destructive and disruptive ways if we aren't really conscious of the words that come out of our mouths.

"The contradictions hidden within your heart, secretly, silently, bearing them with heaviness of spirit." It seems to me that a lot of what the spiritual path is about is resolving the contradictions and integrating the contradictions.

"Endlessly sinking in the quicksand of the human enigma." It is a human enigma, but it is possible to put together the pieces of what I call the "Human Truth Puzzle" and step out on the other side with great clarity and Presence and Awareness of everything that is going on around you.

"Both light and darkness." Yes. "Devoured by all that is raging." Yes. "Bowing with respect." Yes, but bowing with respect to what? To your own Soul, to the Souls of others, and to an Energy that we cannot either objectify or conceptualize?

"In the unknown." The unknown is really scary for us human beings, but that is ultimately when we move into Soul space, where we must function, guided by whatever -- I like the words "Power greater than myself" -- we believe in, if we do.

"Experiencing transfiguration." I think that probably perhaps has to do with the concept of Theosis that you were talking about experiencing here.

"The experience of sin."

"Working magic, spinning webs of radiance" with words and they are not self-righteous words. They are artistic words that connect. It makes me think of Indra's web.

"You were no saint after all, while your Icon of the Holy glows defiantly within."

Do you want to talk about any of those particular words? Pick one.

Constantina: Yes. Sure. I want to mention that one of the most wonderful mentors I've ever had in my life is Rilke. Most of you are familiar with Rainer Maria Rilke, a German 20th century poet.

I want to let everyone know that my expressions are never mine alone. They come on the hearts and shoulders and souls of those whom I have benefited from so much.

One of the things that I want to say to everyone in regard to what Janet just shared from that poetic work, this is pretty much my motto in life. Rilke said this himself and I'm going to read this to you. It's called, "Go to the Limits of Your Longing." This is not my work. It's Rilke's.

He said, "God speaks to each of us as he makes us, then walks with us silently out of the night. These are the words we dimly hear."

Now, "dimly hear," those words are, in my mind, a reference to the Icon of the Holy. Rilke never said that, but he understood it.

He goes on to say, "You, sent out beyond your recall, go to the limits of your longing. Embody me. Flare up like a flame and make big shadows I can move in." Now, this is the Icon of the Holy. This is the Word and the Logos. This is probably my life motto.

"Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final. Don't let yourself lose me. Nearby is the country they call life. You will know it by its seriousness. Give me your hand."

That "Give me your hand," Janet, that Rilke expresses here is the Icon of the Holy, the light that lights every human being that comes into the world, inviting each human, male, female, child, adult, into the experiment of living within the Icon of the Holy so we can flame up like a flame and make big shadows that the Logos, the Divine, the Word can move in, here, on this planet.

I wanted to share that with you because we're often so afraid of terror. We love beauty, we may not understand it, but terror is often absolute horror. The worst of things can happen to us. But when we embrace both beauty and terror, the Icon of the Holy flames up within us and moves our consciousness into the next step of evolution for us as individuals. Without the terror, for some odd reason, it's very difficult to flame up.

Dr. Janet: I can't agree more.

Constantina, let's shift focus a bit to another poem that you wrote that I think is deeply eye-opening. It's called "This Time When I See You." Would you read that for us, please, and then we can talk about it.

Constantina: Yes, I will. I would like to say before I read it that we do not live in the Icon of the Holy purely within ourselves. As human beings, we're engaged in relationships constantly. We are not in that experience of the Icon of the Holy. We are not positioned to be walked over. But we are equipped through the Icon of the Holy to draw a line sometimes, and that line goes this far and no farther. This is what that poem is about.

This Time When I See You – Constantina Ann Clark

This time I will equip myself
With a legion of strength
To surround me,
Angels
In shinning plaited
Skirts of sparkling steel

Grasping sharpened spears
With golden orbs
Held firm
In outstretched palms
Accompanying me
On either side . . .
This time when I see you.
This time I will be
A mighty warrior
Equipped with Wisdom
At my right hand
And the Oracle of Delphi
At my left
To guide me,
Whispering warnings
To beware
The tender heart,
The fiery eyes
That cry out recognition
When meeting mine . . .
This time when I see you.
This time I will stand
With a shield of Light
Between your radiance
And mine,
To block the
Effervescence of our souls
That splays out
In a vast array
Of meteor showers
Falling into
The fertile ground
Of our familiarity
And taking root
In one another's
Essence . . .
This time when I see you.
This time I will be
A watchful huntress
Riding high upon
The watchtower of
My passions,
Looking out upon the
Wolves encircling
The castle of my being,
Showing no compassion

To the hungry thieves,
Who lie in wait
To steal my heart,
Deliberately pulling
Out my bow,
Reaching back
Into my quiver
To find the perfect
Weapon,
And with exquisite
Measured aim,
This time I will release
The golden arrow,
To find its
One true mark . . .
This time when I see you.

Dr. Janet: How did that poem originate? What was your process? What was your experience?

Obviously, this is about a relationship and a relationship where perhaps at some point you went into it lovingly, willingly, openly, with an attitude of loving and giving, and suddenly your trust was somehow betrayed. Do I read this correctly?

Then with that betrayal of trust, you became more aware and more cautious, and you were not willing to allow that betrayal to happen to you again. Moreover, you were willing to draw a line in the sand and say, "this far, no farther."

That's where I think we get into something that the Buddhists would call "right action" and Christians would probably call "ethics" or "morality." We're talking here about conduct that impinges on another person's Icon of the Soul. Do I read that correctly? If not, please correct me.

Constantina: No, you did a wonderful job of describing that. I think that particular poetic work is every 21st century Heroine's Journey. None of us is born knowing how to integrate relationships within our consciousness and then have them be birthed in a "Power with" type of a scenario.

I know that I have yet to meet a woman in my experience who has not had the challenges of giving so much. In that giving, we cease to protect ourselves. The Icon of the Holy is a marvelous source of wisdom and protection.

I know, myself, I've not always sat at the seat of that light and taken the greatest care over my well-being as I should have and not knowing this as a young woman.

It's something that we learn as we experience many of the things that I shared in the Icon of the Holy in that work.

We should not be ashamed of that. We should be very compassionate toward ourselves. Most of us, almost all of us, except those who are truly saints and spiritual masters, and even they would say they don't know what they're doing.

I remember that that was one of the things that Christ himself spoke when he was offering forgiveness, that they don't know what they're doing. I don't know what I'm doing and you don't know and we all don't know.

That is why the Icon of the Holy is such a wonderful organizing principle that's operative within us that we can access in order that we can have at least a little bit of wisdom in how we deal with our pain, how we deal with our relationships that are almost always convoluted, especially long-term ones.

The ability to draw a line and say "You'll go this far and no farther" is an aspect of our care over ourselves that unless we have that, it's impossible to love our neighbor. Because we have to be able to love ourselves in order to truly love another, and that means drawing the line. We are made in the image of this organizing principle.

If that's the case, then respecting the well-being and the treatment of that that lives within us, the Icon of the Holy—and hopefully we're radiating that out to the world—is an imperative.

It's a part of that journey, Janet, that you are exploring so marvelously in regard to the Heroine. How do we become the Heroine? Well, it's through going through terrifying experiences, because without that impetus for not just growth but dabbling and drowning in the horror, we usually don't have anything more than what we began with.

Dr. Janet: But we see it for the first time.

Constantina, let's talk just a little bit about how important it is to care for ourselves first. I agree with you 100%. Until we have compassion for ourselves, love ourselves, care for ourselves, we cannot have compassion for others, care for others or truly love others without some kind of superiority attitude. Do you have anything else to say about compassion?

We can talk about the Heroine's Journey. The Hero's Journey or the Heroine's Journey. They are two very different journeys.

Constantina: Yes, they are.

Dr. Janet: Actually, I'm going to be going into the Heroine's Journey next week.

Let's talk about self-care and how important that is, and how until you have that you can't really give to anybody else.

Constantina: Yes, that is exactly true. As I mentioned earlier, I'm the birth mother of nine children, so I know how easy it is to lose ourselves in the care and nurturing of everyone else.

When we lose ourselves in that way, it's very sad, but we also lose contact with our Icon of the Holy because we're so scattered and we have not reached into the essence of what we really need to do. That's, first of all, take care of ourselves.

I think just because we're not taking care of ourselves in just physical day-to-day things, when things come up in relationships, we have established a pattern of not taking care of ourselves in the normal day-to-day, and then we allow things to creep in that should not be there in the first place. But again, with a focus on everyone else, as opposed to ourselves, things begin to slip and deteriorate relationally.

I think that until we are really moving into a space within us where we are integrating our own well-being, at the very least at the same level as we take care of everyone else's, we will not be entering into Beauty. That's another thing that's very important to me is Beauty and how the reflection of the Icon of the Holy within is all about Beauty. It's also about freedom and the wild nature of that Icon of the Holy.

As you know, Janet, I did my dissertation on John O'Donohue. He reimagined basically the Logos of the work for 21st century Western world. That's something for another chat with you. But if we are not taking care of ourselves, we are not accessing beauty in a way that is our birthright.