What follows is the edited transcript of an Awakin Calls interview with Carrie Newcomer. You can listen to the full audio recording of the conversation here.

Preeta Bansal: Thank you so much. What an honor to be in conversation today with Carrie Newcomer, who is an absolute national treasure. She is a singer, songwriter, recording artist, and educator. The Boston Globe described her as a “prairie mystic” and Rolling Stone wrote that she is one who “asks all the right questions.” She has been called a “conversational, introspective” songwriter who “celebrates and savors the ordinary sacred moments of life”. And Krista Tippett notes that Carrie is “best known for her story-songs that get at the raw and redemptive edges of human reality.”

Carrie has produced an amazing array of work...18 solo CDs, eight collaborative CDs, DVD’s, two LP’s, and has received numerous awards for her music and related charitable activities. She has released two books of poetry & essays, and performed with the likes of Mary Chapin Carpenter, Alison Krauss, and David Wilcox in shows based on spiritual story. She gives proportions of her album sales to charitable organizations. She has also done numerous collaborations with authors, academics, philosophers and theologians.

Carrie was born to an Italian American Catholic mother, and a Methodist father who chose to become Mennonite or Amish. Carrie herself has found her home in the Quaker community. She has had an ongoing, long-term collaboration with Parker J. Palmer, who is a dear friend of this ecosystem, with whom she has co-written several songs and performed a spoken word/music in live performance, including Healing the Heart of Democracy, and What We Need is Here: Hope, Hard Times, and Human Possibility. Newcomer and Palmer also are actively collaborating on The Growing Edge, a website, podcast, and retreat. I had the privilege of spending time with Parker and Carrie and loved them for their deep presence, the power with which they hold profound questions, and above all their Midwestern humor and sensibilities.

Carrie lives in the woods of southern Indiana with her family, from where she is speaking to us today. Welcome, Carrie.

Carrie Newcomer: Well, hello. It’s so great to be on the program today!

Preeta: Yeah, well, we are certainly in the midst of an extraordinary time and I feel like you are just the prophet we need to be in conversation with during these times.

Carrie: Well, maybe just a companion, and navigating through what I think, yes, are really troubling and also opening kinds of times. You know, it’ll be great to have this conversation with you today.
Preeta: Yeah. So, you know, it’s interesting because your craft -- there’s so many crafts that you have mastered, but one of them is as a traveling folk singer, who really deeply feels and channels the energy of people and places that you encounter. And I’m curious, how are you feeling now in these times of physical distance, where I presume you’re not traveling?

Carrie: No, I’m not. All my shows and workshops and retreats have been canceled for the next three months, and, you know, we’ll see from there. So, yeah, it’s been disorienting, I think, as for many of us -- as our routines have been just disrupted in some way or another. And we’ve had a rhythm to my life of traveling and home, and traveling and home, for so many years. It’s a little disorienting to have that rhythm disturbed in such a big way. And I am home -- though I’m grateful to be home and I have to say that my heart is just full and open to so many people who don’t have a safe space right now. And so I’m grateful to be home. I can acknowledge that gift right now. I’m grateful to be with family in the Midwest where it’s almost spring. It’s that moment when you’re just starting to see things green up a little bit, which is very hopeful. So it’s nice that the spring is almost here.

Preeta: Hmm. Yeah. So as you’re no longer getting some of your energy from the people and places you meet as you travel and perform, what is nourishing you now?

Carrie: You know, it’s interesting because I love people and I love my work with people, but I think by my nature, I’m a person who gets a lot of energy from solitude. And so I think if you’re a writer, you’d have to be comfortable with being in solitude for long periods of time. So I’m having some solitude right now and continuing my spiritual practices. I do live out in the middle of the woods, and I make sure that I’m out in the natural world each day, staying in creative community connection right now. I’m looking at my wholeness and wellness right now as very multilayered. There’s the physical wellness -- and moving and making sure you’re eating healthy and sleeping -- and then there’s the spiritual and your community. And, there’s all these different levels -- living space, creativity. So I’m trying to be aware and open to looking at all the things that ground me and all the things that help me stay with my still heart, with my quiet heart, and paying attention to that.

My daughter had this great idea -- my daughter, Amelia, who I think is brilliant (and I’m not biased at all). She had all those ideas of the multi levels of wellness and wholeness. And she got a piece of paper, put out five columns, and then put those five things at the top and then just made some notes and reminded herself of, "here are the things I should be considering" -- you know, with kindness -- you don’t have to do it all every day -- but just to remind herself. And I think it’s a great idea that our wholeness and wellness will work on many levels right now.

Preeta: Yeah, that’s beautiful. And obviously, you know, you talked about nature as one of your spiritual practices you’re able to be in right now. I’m sure some silence is part of that, and I know that community has been an important piece of your spiritual practice. How are you finding community now or are you just trusting that other things are calling you right now to nourish?

Carrie: I’m looking at the creative community right now. Staying in contact--some of that’s by phone. I am doing some interesting Zoom and internet experiences with people. I’ve heard of people getting together to sing as a group together. I actually got together with a
group and we danced together. Some people are doing yoga and meditation together. I think people are looking at community and connection in really creative ways right now. I’ve been doing some walking in the woods with dear friends—at our social distance, the six feet apart thing. Keeping in touch will be important, but also, we’re stopping—which is a really interesting thing. We live in a culture that is almost in perpetual motion. And our lives are in perpetual motion and part of this disruption is that we’re actually stopping... and a lot of things come up in that moment of stopping. You know, to look at it as a type of reflection and really, I don’t know, exploring what comes up when we stop—which can be wonderful-- and also really hard.

Preeta: What’s coming up for you now as you stop from an incredible touring schedule?

Carrie: Some of it is to try and not do too many things at once. You know, I’m a good midwestern woman, a hard worker and I believe daily service is a part of my life. And there’s a crisis going on and there’s part of me that just wants to do and do and do. And part of the challenge for me right now is to breathe, to do my daily meditation, to look at all the things I can’t control. There are so many things we can’t control and so much suffering out there that I can’t change right now, but there are things I can do within my own sphere of influence and in my own life. So, I’m looking at that and how do I do that in life-giving ways and passionate ways. I have a lot of love for the world and the people around me. So, how do I do that with passion and hope and love and at the same time, we’re in this for a long time. This will be a long haul. So, pacing ourselves and breathing and making sure that I’m looking at balance because I travel a lot, I’m on the go. But, it’s been interesting because I’ve always had to balance that. As much as I love to travel and I love people, I get my energy in solitude. I’ve always had to balance this idea of movement and the opening out into the world with coming home and making sure I turn off the phone and have time of silence and time to recharge. I’m used to doing that in another way, but I’m trying to pull that experience into what I’m doing now.

Preeta: Where’s your creativity, and how are you feeling these days? You’ve talked about your music and poetry as a spiritual practice. And just kind of stepping back even before these times, what does your creative process look like?

Carrie: Well, you know, my creative process for songwriting...I do a lot of creative things. I’ll tell you a story. When I was a little girl, my favorite game was a game called “making-something.” You know, “What are you doing, Carrie?” “I’m making something!” I was making little songs, and writing little books and I was hammering things together with nails, and I was cutting paper and I was dancing. I was always making something. And all these years later, I’m still so happy, I’m still so delighted to be making something. Yes, I bring creativity into my life in a lot of ways because it’s such a delight. And I think that as an artist that works. But also, I think that works for everyone. There are creative ways of being a parent, a grandparent. There’s creative ways in all our passions and vocations. But for me personally as an artist, as a songwriter, if you lined up 11 songwriters and you asked them their process, they would give you 14 ways of how they do it. But my process usually works with language first. I’m doing a lot of writing that isn’t songwriting yet. It’s poetry and essays and journaling and flash fiction and sometimes a short story, and then my songs grow out of that writing. I’m always writing and then when it’s time for the song, I sit down and I have some language and some thoughts to pull from. And then the songs and the words come together at the same time when the song happens and they’re kind of informing one another as the song grows. So, that would be my songwriting practice.

I’m feeling very creative right now. I think for most artists there are times when the
creative flow is just almost overwhelming and then there are fallow times when you need

to rest and do that writing and that considering and that watching. One of the jobs of the

poet is to look out the window—you know, just sit and look out the window sometimes. So,

there’s fallow times when you’re not doing products, but you’re actually doing other

kinds of work and experience—inner and outer work—that then speeds the creative

work—the product—that ends up expressing it. And then I would call it, definitely, I have

many spiritual practices, but I would definitely call songwriting my most consistent. It’s

always asked me to be more present, to be more willing to open my heart to the human

condition, to faithfully record what I’ve learned. What I’m learning now, I mean, I don’t

usually write about what I know. I usually write because I have a good question. So,

it’s—writing has asked me to pay attention to the small moments. I write a lot about the

holiness and the sacredness of the small moments and the small acts of kindness—that’s

something that shimmers below the surface of things all the time. If we’re paying

attention there’s something that happens when I’m writing. There’s a focus, there’s a

sense of connection to something. It’s not larger or wider than myself. And when I’m

creating art, it’s like I’m not alone. Whatever it is that shimmers beneath the surface of

things is right there. So, yeah, I would say that my most consistent spiritual practice that

has asked me to go farther and deeper has been my songwriting.

Preeta: That’s beautiful. Can you share with us a story about, maybe a particular song,

and what might have sparked that recognition that led to the words that then led to the

music?

Carrie: Well, I have a song. Because today is the first day of spring where we’re at

the Equinox. I have a song called The beautiful not yet. I was walking around in the

springtime about this time and I was up on a ridgetop and I was noticing that the light was

coming in, in a way that it doesn’t happen any other time of year. There’s no

leaves on the tree so the light is cold and cream and totally unencumbered and you could

feel it. You could just feel that all those seeds that had started in February with just below

the surface of the ground, that the world, the world was almost trembling with the

beautiful, but not yet.

I work with Parker Palmer a lot and he has a beautiful definition of hope. He says that

hope is holding in a creative tension all that is with all that could and should be, and then

each day taking some action to narrow the distance between the two, which I really love.

Here we are between what is and what we envision. Here in the beautiful not yet, and

what we do each day to manifest that. So, I got back from that walk and I was thinking

about this beautiful not yet and what we do in that moment. And then I ended up writing

this song. It’s co-written with a wonderful woman in her twenties, Chloe Grace. And

that was lovely too, cause she was in her own beautiful not yet at the time. So, would you

like me to sing it?

Preeta: Whoa. Of course.

Carrie: Alright, okay. Beautiful not yet.

(Singing)

Spring is humming
Bits of something
A melody the simple part
A song that once I knew by heart
Juniper, wild indigo
Foxglove, lupine, Queen Ann’s lace
Will be coming any day
The restlessness
The quickening
The almost but
Not yet
Muddy boots, last year's leaves
every spring that came before
All they were and something more
The restlessness
The quickening
The almost but
Not yet
Do you see, do you see, do you see it
Take a breath
Oh, the restlessness
The beautiful not yet
There's a stirring
There's sweetness
At the edge of in between
I feel it nearly trembling
The restlessness
The quickening
The almost but
Not yet.

Preeta: Thank you.

Carrie: Oh! Sure.

Preeta: And maybe afterwards we can, for all the listeners on the call, maybe include a link to a recording so they can hear it, you know, not through the phone.

Carrie: Yes. That would be great. Yeah, I sang a song, so I feel better now.

Preeta: That's beautiful. Thank you. You know, as you were singing that and talking about the story of how that came about, I was recalling something I read about one of your principles or one of your many spiritual practices about finding the extraordinary in the ordinary every day. And I'm also struck that so many of your songs touch on social justice themes, encounters with people and kind of speaking to different forms of community. I'm just curious -- what do you think in your early childhood, is there something that might have triggered your ability to be present and connect in this way?

Carrie: You know, it's interesting. I think I've always been a seeker. Two children come into the world and the same family and any of us who have siblings know that you're not the same person. Sometimes they're just night and day, you know? But I came into this world, I think, fascinated with mystery and fascinated with people. And early on, I remember I had a youth pastor who just was a wonderful young guy, just right out of seminary.

And he was very influential, very much connected to social justice issues and working, doing service and reading Martin Luther King, reading Gandhi, reading and looking at spiritual practice, social justice, and service being part of a whole and vibrant spiritual
practice. So early on, this made sense to me. When you encounter something in it and it feels right in your heart when you go, "yes, that makes sense to me." So, there was that early experience.

Later on I went to a Mennonite college and they wanted the traditional peace churches. And right above the gate, if you're walking into Goshen college, the gates leading in, say “Knowledge for service.” (laughs) Let’s just be clear here what we’re talking about. So, everyone who went to this little college actually spent at least one semester, every year, sometimes a year in service, and often in other countries. So me being from the middle of the Midwest, it was a really important experience to be outside of the United States, to really experience another culture, to be in service in a way to really fall in love with people. And how we’re so wonderfully different, cultures are different, but also there’s these beautiful threads that connect us in these really wonderful human ways. Also seeing suffering and saying, “it needs to be part of my spiritual practice”. Being aware of that and doing my own small part. I think that’s something about the crisis that we’re facing right now, the pandemic that we’re facing right now. It’s a window. A lot of us are feeling vulnerable and some people are in a category of high risk who have never been in a category of high risk. I was talking about this with Parker Palmer. He had some wonderful thoughts about it. And, you know, this idea that it’s a window for those of us, feeling so vulnerable, that there are people who are vulnerable every day of their lives because of who they are because of the color of their skin, their race, their religion, their sexual orientation, their gender if you’re a woman. I mean, there’s people who live every day in a category of vulnerability. And, you know, this is a moment for us to take that in, to open our hearts to that. Like, "Ah! I have a little window that I didn’t have before" and perhaps we’ll see things differently. And maybe even do some things differently because of that window. But to get back to your original question there. Yeah, I think it was just a lot of things in my early life that kept pointing me in the direction of a life of the spirit is a life of service. And that’s continued throughout my work as an artist as well. That part of what I do as an artist is also to be in service.

Preeta: How about your spiritual upbringing, and your family, and your own journey?

Carrie: Well, that’s interesting. My mother was raised (she’s from a first generation from an Italian family) Catholic. My father was raised Protestant. His family had Mennonite and Amish roots, but I think he grew up in a Methodist church. So I’m the only Italian Amish person on the planet I think, (laughs) except for my two sisters. Other than that, even though at a certain point they kind of didn’t, they didn’t know what to do with us, we ended up going to a Methodist church for a while, and that’s where I met that wonderful youth pastor. But like I said, I’ve always been a seeker. And early on, even as a teenager, I was reading and really interested in encountering different kinds of spiritual tradition, in idea and thought. When I was at that college, early on, one thing that happened to me when I was ‘on service’ was I took a holiday one weekend and went up to a rainforest community where a Quaker group had kind of created a community there up in the rainforest. And that’s where I went to my first silent Quaker meeting. And again, there are things that happen to you when your heart goes, "Ahh, this is what I needed." There in the middle of a rainforest, sitting in silence with a group of people, it felt right. It made sense. And so when I got back to the States and off and on since then I’ve really continued to engage with and be part of Quaker communities. I’ve never joined the Quaker community. I think Quakers attract non-joiners, which is kind of (laughs) which is kind of a problem.

There’s also a wonderful Buddhist community here in Bloomington and so it’s...
been wonderful to experience that and be part of that at times. I've done tours and trips with India and experienced the amazing spiritual life there. Like I said, I think I'm a seeker, but there's something about the silence that always calls me back. And people say, "Okay, you're a songwriter. You're a musician. You make your life in sound. You go to a silent spiritual meeting? What's that all about?" And I have to say that some of my best language has emerged out of the silence. When I stop and I listen. I think sometimes we talk a lot out into the spirit. But how important it is just to listen. To listen to our inner teacher, to listen to our inner spirit, to listen to where that spirit connects to others and to something greater. Something in the silence calls me back. And that's true to this day.

Preeta: That's beautiful. There's so much I want to ask in unpacking that. When silence, sometimes in the context of Buddhism, entails some form of meditation in the context of Christianity, it may involve contemplative prayer. I'm wondering, for you, do you have a practice? What goes on in the silence, for you?

Carrie: I do have a daily practice. I am a seeker because I do different kinds of meditation, not always one kind of meditation. And so sometimes it is contemplative and sometimes I'm doing the tonglen. I've done work with internal family systems, so sometimes it's that kind of meditation, which is a psychological, almost union kind of practice. But sometimes I just sit and breathe and just follow the breath. Then do a practice, upon occasion. So it's not that I do one kind of practice all the time. But it is coming back to the silence, in one way or another that. And it is important for me.

I have this daily practice and I know when I've missed it. It makes a big deal. I think sometimes folks say, "if I'm not sitting here for an hour, then it doesn't do me any good". It's like, no, just stop and breathe for five minutes. I mean, five minutes? What's that? So just sit & breathe for five minutes. Each day can make a big difference. I have a longer practice, but there are days where in the middle of the day and having a kind of a busy or a stressful day, I just stop and just sit and breathe awhile, follow my breath.

Preeta: When you said that so much of your art and creation comes out of that silence, and it may not be one answer to this, but how does that look for you? Does a whole poem or a whole verse just kind of come flying out that you then transfer to the page? Is it just kind of a feeling that you tap into as you slowly work through what's emerging? What does that look like for you?

Carrie: Wow. What a great question. You're asking such great questions. It's like, wow, nobody ever asked me that before. This is great. So yeah, part of that silence too is that my walks in the natural world, I walk every day that I'm here. I have a couple shaggy dogs and I go out and I walk and that was part of my solitude and silence practice, too. And a lot of my songs have nature imagery, are moments in nature imagery, like the beautiful not yet. Sometimes there's an idea that comes up. It's never like a full blown, like, okay, here's the lyrics. It's more like a feeling that comes up from it; a noticing. And when I notice a connection, it's hard to describe that, but yes, thoughts and ideas and language will come out of that attention.

Preeta: That's beautiful. We talked about your early influences and spirituality and seeking, a little bit about your social concerns, activism, justice. I'm curious, what are your earliest encounters with music and poetry and why do you think that became your craft of manifestation.
Carrie: It's interesting. We come into this world with affinities and things that are our hearts and our spirits lean into that we love and no one ever told us to love them. We just did. And I think music was like that. I didn't grow up in a musical family at all. I grew up in a little factory town in Northern Indiana. But in that little factory town there were a lot of factories that made band instruments and flutes. That was one of the main industries there. So because of that, the public school system had a wonderful and a really wonderful and well supported music program in the public schools. I'm a huge proponent of the arts in the schools and what they really mean for children, for us as a community, as a culture. To have that available in the public schools because that's where I encountered music: in the American public school system. I started as a little girl. I played flute and played in orchestras and band and did that whole thing and I just loved it. But at the same time, I loved books. I loved books and language. And I would go on writing my own little books soon as I could write a few words. So as I got into my teens, you can't really sing and play flute at the same time. So I picked up a guitar and it was like "ah! this is it". I learned my first three cords. And started writing my first very young song. And I had fallen in love with the singing poets of that time, the Leonard Cohen and the Joni Mitchell's and Dylan and Paul Simon; people who were putting really beautiful poetic language with a certain kind of song writing. And I would just study them. I would just study how they put the language together and how they put the language together with music, and I continued to write.

One of my favorite stories about starting in music though, when I was a senior in high school, I had an English teacher and he found out that I liked to write songs and he was a musician too, and he gave me an opportunity. He said, "well instead of taking a test or writing an essay about the things we're going to study in this class, you can write a song". And I thought, "wow, that's great". But he said, "but in the song language-wise, you really do need to prove to me that you know what the material is, so you have to write something poetic, but also get the point across in a certain kind of way. And that the music also reflects that. And I'm for it" and then he said "but the catch is you have to sing it for the class".

Oh! And I was very shy at that point in my life, just barely talk to people. Now I'm going to sing it in front of my class. But I accepted it. I said "I'll do that". And so I wrote a whole collection of songs over that year and sang it for my class, and folks were very supportive. It was really amazing. And at the end, it was like we all had ended the year projects and I had this little collection of songs and a guy who was like studying recording stuff, so he recorded them. But it was amazing to have this teacher who said, "I see you. I see something about you that's shining. And I want to give you a place to put that, to express that". I'm sure you can do that now in our current system. But it changed my life. You know, that teacher's name was Ben Young. I have been in touch with him at some different points in my life, but he changed my life by saying, "I see you and I see something that shines in you."

How important it is. We don't tell people when we see. I kind of make it a point, you know? And sometimes I think it takes people aback, when I see something that shines in a person, I say "that just shines in you." I like to say it out loud because we don't always get to hear it out loud. "When you do that, you just shine". So yes, these are a couple early experiences. I didn't come from a musical background or family. That came out of the American public school system and I had a great teacher.

Preeta: What a great teacher. Amazing. I had the pleasure of hearing you speak about your trip to India at one point as a pivotal period for you. You were doing a lot of travel, global tours, as part of your performance and also connecting with people across the
globe. But I’m wondering if you can tell us a little bit about that trip and other trips that might’ve been very pivotal for you.

Carrie: It was such an amazing experience. I’d always been fascinated with India and wanted to go, but I hadn’t yet. I was invited to come to India the first time. He was a teacher there at the embassy school and he invited me to come there and work with the students, creating works of art based on the concept of peace and justice. And then we would have a presentation at the end of the week.

And then also the American Center, which was a part of the American embassy, that brought American music to India, but not for expats, but to go into Indian communities. And because I’ve done a lot of work with service and service organisations, in the afternoons, I would go to different kinds of projects, particularly that young Indians were involved with. And I would visit and work with them or be with them. And then in the evenings I would sing and I would sing for different communities. And so I went all over India singing and meeting people, and doing beautiful work there. And I fell in love with India. I really did. It’s an amazing country and it’s spiritual.

It’s so wonderful because it’s just part of the fabric of things. Everything is just part of the fabric. There’s ribbons in the trees, it’s like part of the fabric. Parts of it were very hard for me because here in the United States, a lot of us, we know that there are people living under the bridge, but we don’t see them. But in India, that’s not hidden, it’s beautiful and inspiring and spiritual. It’s side by side with suffering. And it’s not candy-coated. It’s there. And so for me, there were parts of that that were very hard for me because, and I take in that in a way, but at the same time, it’s just there.

So I had an amazing experience there. And I just loved the different parts of India too. In the South and being up in different areas and what that was like. And then while I was there, I met Amjad Ali Khan and his two sons, Aayan and Amaan, and they’re masters of the Indian Sarod. For people in the United States and don’t know Indian classical music, I would say it would be like the cello of the Indian classical world.

It’s a lower instrument. It’s very resonant and beautiful. And we ended up doing a project together. Amjad is wonderfully respected and honoured in India. So it was really quite an honour to get to do a project with him. And I guess he had never done a project with a vocalist before, but my voice was very low. And in some places it overlaps sonically with the Sarod. So it was really interesting to write songs. I don’t write Indian classical music, so to write from my Western perspective, leaving open space, so that there would be that openness for the improvisation that happens in Indian music, to be able to come through that as well. And then that overlapping of sound, of my voice being so low and being in some of the same sonic places as the Sarod. So it was really just an amazing experience. And then I went back again after the album was released and did another tour, and then stayed and traveled some afterwards. It was a really life changing experience.

But I also think that a lot of my travels have been that way too. I went with a health and hunger organization to India, Africa, the Middle East, and different places in Europe. Everywhere I go, I am always so touched by the thread that connects us as human beings. Mothers love their children. If I sang a song about small things, the human things, it was recognizable. It is like, no matter where you go and no matter what language, there is something that speaks through that shared human condition to that thread that pulls between us, that’s recognizable. Love is recognizable. Kindness is recognizable.
everywhere you go. So that’s been something for me to really take in, to appreciate and also be really comforted by.

Being a traveling folk singer, I work with a lot of really wonderful organizations and I am not the rolling stones. It’s not like I am going from arena to arena in my private jet. I come into communities and I am there and I love that. But everywhere I go, not just one place or some place, every place I go, I meet people who are in their own way trying to make the world just a little kinder place in all kinds of ways, with all kinds of projects and all kinds of daily experiences. But I meet them everywhere I go. They don’t always get the front page, they may not even get the back page, but they are there and that gives me a lot of hope that the best of what we are is out there. We don’t always hear about it, but I feel very grateful that I get to see that close up because of the way that I have lived my life. It’s really been something I get very grateful for.

Preeta: In part based on your Goodwill tours, you said that it’s kindness that will save the world. Not necessarily grand gestures, but simple acts of compassion and you described them as like the country cousin who sings in the kitchen and does the dishes before she is even asked.

Carrie: (laughs) Sometimes we talk about love and I believe in love, I do. But sometimes love can get big, kind of big as in you almost can’t get your arms around it but kindness is human size. It’s daily and sometimes small, but it changes everything. If you ask a person, “think back and remember a couple acts of kindness that you remember to this day, and the person who extended that act of kindness to you”. He/she may or may not even remember but you do remember it to this moment. I think we all have lots of those. In the current world that we are living in and with the crisis we are facing right now, how important simple kindness is going to be. Kindness to ourselves, as we navigate what comes up when we stop.

We’re human beings and we have a part in our brain, the little amygdala part that says, “am I safe, am I safe, am I safe” all the time It’s very human to want to be safe and being in a time of unknown, it can produce a lot of fear and anxiety. So that kindness to ourselves when we need to stop, when we need to breathe, when we need to step back, we actually need to step up. That kindness to one another and those small check-ins. I called on my neighbors, we were country neighbors so we are kind of far apart. They are an elderly couple so just checking in if I need to get them something. So just kind of keeping touch with what’s within. Like I said, there’s so much I can’t change right now in this crisis, but small things, daily things which I think will give one another hope and give one another a sense of what it is that we hope to see on the other side, too. When we will be on the other side of this, nothing is going to be the same. It will be a new world. And my hope is that this is going to be an opening. There will be suffering and there is suffering already. But there will also be a moment of opening, a moment of invitation when we say to ourselves, “what can we do differently? What must be done differently now? And what did I learn in this time”? When we really find out, we are connected globally. We are connected in terrifying, beautifully and in powerful ways and what will we do with that? And I think there’s a chance here for a great opening. I don’t think it’s going to come top down. I just don’t think so. I think it’s going to come from the groundswell of all of us, what we’re putting into the system of what we’re learning right now. There’s going to be an invitation that we can accept or not, and that my great hope is we will learn and we will take that invitation.

Preeta: You were talking earlier about the role of silence in your life and the place that
allows you to go within yourself to find a more generative, creative energy, and how that informs your work. I am feeling for you personally, this perhaps extended period of retreat, if there is something in you personally that wanting to be born, do you feel yet?

Carrie: What a good question. Yes there is something that wants to be born right now. Valerie Cower, who is the creator of the revolutionary love project shared, "this was not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of a womb and what is being born." There is something being born in me right now and I am not sure what it is. It has been coming for a while and I think, this time of pulling in, of slowing my life will be a time for me to really consider what that is. There are songs that are waiting to be born right now and they are starting to come, but I am trying to be patient with that too. What I have been learning in the last few years, this has been a very deep time for me personally, in my personal life. Time of loss and grief, a time of some very hard inner work and on beautiful inner work, and important outer work. But, I feel like I had to be patient with how when it is ready, when I am ready to kind of put it all together, to be able to talk about it as a whole. And it is here. I'm starting to write about this experience of the last few years, and also what we are experiencing now. So yes, there are songs waiting to be born, but I don't know. There is a creative connection that may come out of this, but I was not expecting it at all.

And I want to be really open to that because sometimes, I have a song called “you can do this hard thing”, and it is about looking at the times in your life where you had to really persevere and the people in your life that said, “you can do this. You can get through this very difficult time.” Looking back and using that in a way to help you now, that those experiences inform and help you move through the difficulty or having now, but also at the same time that there may be new things that are coming, creative things that are coming now, because we are living in a time like no one has seen in the last many, many, many years. So, we have never seen anything like this. So, I am trying to stay open to this creative thing may also arrive that I am not expecting. I have a poem and a song in my last album called, “learning to fit with not knowing” that in times of uncertainty, being able to live in the beautiful not yet, to live with uncertainty, to see what creative thing, might be ready or likely coming into the world, coming into you, being born. Like I said, I don't know exactly what that is yet. There are songs, I have a few songs and I have been writing, but I think it is going to unfold.

Pavi Mehta: Carrie. I'd like to ask one question as we let listeners add in their questions. You said something earlier in the call that I found really intriguing and that you said your songs don't come from what you know, but from the questions that you are leaning into. I've been looking at just the titles of your songs and each one of them, they like these little poetry fragments, “brink of everything,” “room at the table,” “bare to the bone”, “a light in the window.” I was wondering if you could share the story of the question you were leaning into, that “burst a song” and then perhaps share the song itself with us, kind of bring the music, back into the conversation.

Carrie: Music back into it. Well, I could play this song that I was just talking about, the song, “you can do this hard thing”, because the question was about getting through a difficult kind of, actually, maybe not. There is this song called “Sanctuary” and the song -- let me quickly tune my guitar, you can hear that little tuning thing -- something had happened and I was emailing with my friend Parker and I was sitting in an airport and asking him, “what does the person do when they are feeling personally or politically heartbroken?” and he wrote me this beautiful letter back, that sometimes it is
for moving forward for action, but sometimes we take sanctuary for a while, that we rest in the arms of an individual or a community, a beautiful idea, and we gather our strength and our courage there, to put up for the long ... for what’s ahead.

(Singing)
Will you be my refuge
My haven in the storm,
Will you keep the embers warm
When my fire’s all but gone?
Will you remember
And bring me sprigs of rosemary,
Be my sanctuary
Till I can carry on
Carry on.
Carry on.
This one knocked me to the ground.
This one dropped me to my knees.
I should have seen it comin’
But it surprised me.
Will you be my refuge
My haven in the storm,
Will you keep the embers warm
When my fire’s all but gone?
Will you remember
And bring me sprigs of rosemary,
Be my sanctuary
Till I can carry on
Carry on.
Carry on.
In a state of true believers,
On streets called us and them,
It’s gonna take some time
Till the world feels safe again.
Will you be my refuge
My haven in the storm,
Will you keep the embers warm
When my fire’s all but gone?
Will you remember
And bring me sprigs of rosemary,
Be my sanctuary
Till I can carry on
Carry on.
Carry on.
You can rest here in Brown Chapel,
Or with a circle of friends,
A quiet grove of trees
Or between two bookends.
Will you be my refuge
My haven in the storm,
Will you keep the embers warm
When my fire’s all but gone?
Will you remember
And bring me sprigs of rosemary,
Pavi: Such medicine for these times. Thank you so much, Carrie.

Carrie: Oh, well thank you.

Pavi: And as serendipity would have it, just that we were sharing the story of Parker Palmer, we had a comment come in from him and a question for you. He said, “You are one of the most generous people I’ve ever known. Can you talk about where that impulse comes from in your life and though I know you don’t do generosity in expectation of a return, how do you experience the rewards of being generous?”

Carrie: As usual, a wonderful question from Parker. Generosity and if kindness is a country cousin of love, I think generosity is somehow family as well with kindness. The idea of living in a generous community. I have experienced people with generous spirits all my life, and in my family, all around me. I talk sometimes about how the things that have saved us, that have always saved us, are still here to save us. But things like generosity of spirit, how many people do you know of generous spirit and many, I’m sure, kindness and good parenting and humor and courage and these wonderful things, they’re right here. It’s completely available to us. So I guess maybe that generosity, it comes out of a well of my own, but also from seeing it in people I know and love and I have always admired, and Parker is included in that list. This idea of what comes back and sometimes those kindnesses and that, living with hopefully, a generous spirit, it does come back and sometimes in the most surprising ways. Going to India was one of those generous moments; it’s a connection here and a connection there. And a relationship is started with a family and it came back with this invitation to India, so sometimes it comes back in such interesting and unexpected ways as a songwriter and making my life in music. First, I didn’t go to college for music. I went for visual arts. So I was chocking up all the safe and secure professions you could possibly think of. Visual art, check. Folk singing, check. This love for music, love for language, love for a certain kind of spirit I’m trying to bring into my music and art in the world. Taking that risk to follow my soul’s imperatives. The things that have happened to me in that experience have been way more interesting and way more creative than I could have ever envisioned. If you had asked me thirty years ago “What’s the coolest thing that could happen to you?” I could not have envisioned that I will be on the phone here with you today, having these beautiful questions. I couldn’t have imagined something as wonderful as this. Okay, there’s been a struggle, too. Let’s be real. But at the same time generosity comes back in such interesting ways when you follow what’s true for you. If I stay true, then the way is true.

Pavi: Beautifully said. I’m going to go to a caller in our queue here now.

Caller: Hello Carrie. This is Lloyd in Minneapolis and I just want to say how very much I’ve appreciated and loved your music over the years. I was introduced to you many, many years ago in the culture column in Jim Wallace’s Sojourner Magazine and you are on the very short list of people who, whenever there’s a new album out, I get it. I don’t have to have heard anything from it before.
Carrie: Well, bless your heart.

Caller: Your music is so extraordinary and I can't believe that your voice gets more beautiful by the year. I'm just transported so frequently listening to your music. So I just want to thank you so very, very much.

Carrie: Oh gosh. Well, thank you Lloyd. I'm very touched. What a lovely thing to hear today. I really appreciate that. My heart is full with that. Thank you.

Pavi: We have a question and comment from Lisa who says: "Thank you for sharing. I was surprised when tears started to flow when you talked about needing to be patient with what is coming for each of us creatively. I think I need to learn more about that patience. Is there a practice you might suggest for me as I try to sit with being patient?"

Carrie: Yes, being patient with yourself. I can be so much more patient and kind with other people. That part wasn't as hard as learning to be patient and kinder to myself. For some people it's the other way. But that's how it works for me. I don't know if I have a particular practice. I guess paying attention to it. If I want to have a life of kindness, that really means being kind to myself, too. Patience is an aspect of kindness. I'm a hard worker. As I said earlier before, I have this part of myself that works hard. When I have a project, I can really focus. I have an idea, I'm visioning this and I'm going to get it done. That's a wonderful part of myself. It's passionate and if it works, right.

But at the same time, looking at that part of myself with the lens of a certain kind of kindness and balance. It may not be time for that kind of action right now. I may need to sit with it for a while. I may need to explore it in different kinds of ways. It may need to be a poem before it's a song and maybe it needs to be a picture before it's a poem. It may need to be a conversation with a really trusted friend before I can do any of those things. Sometimes these other experiences are what leads us into what's being born, that next creative process. I haven't always been kind to myself about it. I have to say, this is something I've really had to learn and I'm not totally there yet. Let's just be honest about it. I still have my days, but I think I'm getting there and the things that you had to say are there, and they will be said, and some of it is having trust in it.

You know, it's hard to trust, especially the creative process. The creative process is not linear. It's not A to B to C to D. The creative process is sometimes A to B to Q to 11. So being patient with and trusting that it's going to take me where I need to go.

When I look back, and I think maybe if you look back too, I would look at some of the ways that you've gotten to a creative moment or to something being born. All the steps that got you there. For me it's not usually linear. That helps me trust, being able to look back and say: Hang with this, follow my heart, trust my intuition, and be patient. It's a great question. And I said I'm still working on myself.

Pavi: Well, we have two questions from two different people that I'm going to ask in a combined way. The answers are related. Steve Gibbons asks: "What's the role in your creative process of listening to others and allowing them to tell their stories?" Emily Olson asks: "How do you reckon with the suffering you witness in the world and in your own personal experiences of loss and grief?"

Carrie: Oh, they are two beautiful questions. Thank you. Could you repeat the first one?
Pavi: Sure. The role in your creative process of listening to the stories?

Carrie: There's a Quaker practice. It's a listening practice called “clearness process”. It's a certain kind of listening. You're not listening to create a solution. It's not brainstorming. A lot of times we listen thinking of what we need to say next, or trying to fix a problem or nurture in some way. But it's a kind of listening where you just stay open and hear the person into their own speech. It's a really good practice. I use this a lot in my adult life. Working with Parker Palmer is very foundational, some of the really amazing work he's done with circles of trust and the Center for Courage and Renewal. So it changes how I listen.

I guess that doing that as a practice has been really, great for me. Cause sometimes I'll ask, “you know, do you want to brainstorm here or do you want to be heard?” You know, cause I just want to hear you. I think I have a bumper sticker on my head that says, “I love a good story”. Because people tell me stories everywhere. In a restaurant, in the shuttle bus going back to get my car, and I love it. And some of that is that folks sense when you are really listening and also when you're appreciating. I've never met a person yet without an interesting story to tell. Never once. Sometimes you gotta get them going because they're shy or whatever. But I have never met a person yet without a really amazing story to tell always. The listening part of it, hearing stories being what stories we live by stories. We frame our life by the stories we tell ourselves and tell one another, you know, it's important. And the second part of the question about how do I navigate the sorrows and the grief and struggles of my own life creatively and I have to say a lot of that does get channeled into my writing. You know, it's channeled in other ways as well, but that's probably for me one of my direct ways of channeling at us doing something with that. My last album was a lot about uncertainty and navigating through some really difficult times. And then also the light that comes in with that, even in our most difficult times, there's light and there's humor and making sure that I also pull from that at the same time as much as I can. But yeah, it's often channeled through my writing, through my song, sometimes poetry. I do a lot of different creative things. That's probably my most consistent. It will express itself there.

Pavi: We have a comment and a reflection from Shelley who says, “I often wake up to a song in my mind as if my soul or my inner mystic DJ is offering for the day. This morning was Carrie's song, “the plumb line”. She quotes, “and I didn't plan to live in these troubled times, but here I am holding on to the plot line. So I ask myself, what values are the rope of my inner plumb line, always, or especially today? Thank you, Carrie.”

Carrie: Oh gosh. Oh, my heart is full with that one. Thank you so much. I like the idea of the mystic DJ. I'm going to walk around with that one for a while and like, what is my own inner mystic DJ like playing through my head today? But yes, thank you. The idea of the plumb line in that song, a plumb bob is when you're in construction and a plumb line has a bob at the bottom that has a weight to it and then a line and you'd kind of dangle it. And by doing that, you can see where the true center is. So that when you're building, you can see where that true center is. So, you know, that was the metaphor I was using for where my true center is in this. Yes. I did not expect to live in these troubled times. We are living in times that are asking us to be better people than we ever thought we would need to be. So you know, where is that thing that grounds me, that centers me. That's a good question to ask myself each day and it's in that song.
Pavi: I was thinking about your songs, Carrie, and how they kind of are like birds that fly from the nest. They're out in the world and they're nestled in people's palms and hearts and homes-- and what an incredible invisible web of connection you weave! I was wondering what is your relationship to those connections to your songs once they've been created and are out in the world and to your listeners? How do you relate to that web?

Carrie: Well, that's a great question. Songs are interesting. Once I've created a song and the song goes out into the world, it's like we send our songs into the world and we really don't know where they're going to land. We just, all we can do is hope they land well and with our best intentions with them. And I'm always so grateful when someone lets me know that a song has landed safely and well in their heart. You know, people are quite generous with me and I'm always so grateful for that. I said I don't know where they land. And when someone lets me know, it was part of their mystic DJ today. I don't always need to know that, you know, like you just have this trust that they're going where they need to go because at that point, in a lot of ways, they don't have anything to do with me anymore. It's the song and the song has a life of its own. Gosh, I love when people tell me that they sing the song. We think it in the car with my kids. The nicest thing you can tell a songwriter, it's like you sing the song and, and you make it your own that it in some ways has nothing to do with me anymore. But I am also grateful that people are very generous with me. And sometimes when I've been weary, you know, that notice comes saying, “Yup. It landed well and safely in my heart. I'm grateful for that.”

Pavi: On that note, we have a message from Kristin from British Columbia who says, “Carrie, first off, I want to tell you how important your music has been to me. Oftentimes, I sit in the parking lot of the school where I teach and listen to “Holy as the Day is Spent” before I go into the building and begin my work day.

Carrie: Oh, again, my heart is full. Thank you for letting me know it landed well and safely in your heart. Yeah. “Holy as the Day is Spent” is a song that took all of these small things. You know, like sometimes, spiritual language can get lofty and I wanted to bring this idea of, sacredness of, of holiness, into the of smallest things.

(Singing)

Holy is the tuition drain,
the soap and think,
and the cup and plane
and a warm Woosah Nicole
like a shower heads
and good dry towels

The song is just about the holiness that these small moments, in small things in our life and how beautiful that before you go in to teach, you listen to them. I will carry that one with me. Thank you.

Pavi: Preeta, it's amazing how this flew by on, on golden wings here, our time together. But I wanted to invite your voice back in.

Preeta: Oh yeah. I'm just, feeling so much gratitude and reflecting on some of the beautiful metaphors we've been discussing about the plumb line -- and thinking
about how through a phone line, actually, I’m feeling just deeply your true center or feeling close to your true center. It’s extraordinary, Carrie, how you hold the presence that you convey even in this most imperfect, in some ways, of technologies, but it shows just how deeply that center and that light shines within you, that it can come across the phone line. So that’s one thing. And then I’m just really thinking about the mystic DJ, and I love the way you just kinda said that, once the song is out there, you don’t have anything to do with it anymore. And, you know, I’m thinking that here you are offering your true center in these discs to then get called upon by each of our mystic DJs…[Carrie laughing] so much gratitude.

Carrie: Well, thank you. I’m grateful to be on this program. What a beautiful program this is and I was so touched to be invited to be part of it and I know you’re doing great things at Awakin and with ServiceSpace and the other different projects involved there. Thank you for having me and allowing me to be part of this community today. Like I said earlier, these acts of kindness, these conversations, are always important, but now more than ever.

Pavi: Carrie, I know we are slightly over time, but I can’t ask you this question that we ask all our guests. And that is simply, as the extended Awakin call and ServiceSpace community, what can we do? How can we show up to be in service of your vision in the world?

Carrie: Oh gosh, what a great question. These have all been great questions. I think this is going to come down to each one of us. Like I said, I don’t think it’s going to come top down. I just don’t think the change that we’re looking for, that we’re needing, that would sure help. And maybe it will, but I think that what we all put into that groundswells, into the groundwater, those daily actions that are holding the creative tension between what is and what could be, and should be and then what we do each day. I think it’s gonna come down to each one of us and finding what it is that their soul longs for, leans to. Music is the thing that I could not not do. And the love that pulls my soul forward. I think everyone has things like that to pay attention to. Where your heart is leaning, you know, where kindness is leading. I think it’ll take us and all of that in interesting, creative, different ways of what we put into that change conscious.

Pavi: We’ll segue into our closing moment of gratitude for all that we’ve received in this call. You’ve said it many times, Carrie, that your heart is full. I think you filled all of our hearts as well with everything that you’ve shared. Thank you, thank you all for being with us. May you all be well and safe and nestled into the sanctuary of your homes and hearts at this time.

Carrie: Thank you.