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the
**ARTIST'S
WAY
WORKBOOK**



**JULIA
CAMERON**

— The Artist's Way —
WORKBOOK



Julia Cameron

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CREATIVE CLUSTERS GUIDE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALSO BY JULIA CAMERON

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INTRODUCTION

THE BOOK YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS is the very spine of the Artist's Way teachings. *The Artist's Way* did not begin as a book at all—it began as a series of class notes. I would gather my group into a cluster and say, “Here is what I suggest you try now.” I well remember my early classes taught in New York in a high-ceilinged loft space in SoHo. I remember the mix of skepticism and eagerness on my students' faces—a blend of hopefulness and desperation. I particularly remember a punked-out redhead named Janet, who sat, arms crossed and defiant, daring me to devise tools that would work. The tools that work are the tools you will find in this book. They are the distillate of twenty-five years' teaching experience. If you work with them, a creative breakthrough will follow. It is a lot like doing Hatha yoga: you simply stretch yourself into certain postures and experience a heightened energy flow. Many of the tools will seem deceptively simple. What does finding five pretty rocks have to do with anything? The answer is “Everything.” The stones you select remind you of the beauty of creation. Carried for a week in your pocket, they remind you that you, too, are intended to create.

“Julia,” I am sometimes chided, “your tools remind me of kindergarten.” I say, “Yes, they do. When was the last time you had fun learning?” If you undertake the tools in this book, you *will* have fun learning. You will one more time awaken the childlike part of you that creates—the artist within. It does not matter whether you are a declared artist with a chosen art form, or simply someone who yearns for a more creative life. The tools will work if you work them. The Artist's Way is an experiential path. We awaken our creativity through using it, not through theory. If you are hungry to understand on a more intellectual level the tools in this workbook, you may wish to read the *Artist's Way* text in its entirety. The essays in *The Artist's Way* match the tools, but I repeat, you do not need to know *why* something works in order to have it work. As a rule, too much thinking is a part of being blocked. Artists and intellectuals are not the same animal. This causes a great deal of confusion. Our schools educate us intellectually but not artistically. We learn how to deconstruct art, not construct it.

Through the simple building blocks that are the tools in this book, you will learn how to heal old wounds and move toward new horizons. You will examine and discard damaging mythology and painful personal experiences in the arts. A tool at a time, you will learn how to construct a new and more positive life built on greater optimism and resiliency. You will not learn to be fearless, but you will learn how to create despite your fears.

Art is a spiritual act. It takes faith to move onto the page, the stage, the easel. The pages of this workbook make up what is essentially a spiritual toolkit. Through morning pages and artist's dates—each of which is explained in this book—you will learn how to build a spiritual radio kit that amplifies the voice of inspiration. You will come in contact with a powerful spiritual force, which some may call God, and others merely the Muse. Do not allow semantics to block you. You do not need to believe in anything particular in order for these tools to work. Although they may seem quite Zen, the tools are in fact intensely practical. They work not on some imaginary life but on the one you've actually got. Simply add these tools to your life as it currently exists. Do not look for dramatic—traumatic—change. The shift you will experience will be substantial, but it will come to you in many tiny increments.

Our mythology around art is very damaging. Our culture teaches us that creativity is a frightening pursuit. This is not the case. Creativity can be both safe and user-friendly. All of us are creative, and through the use of these simple tools, any life can be made more creative. It is my hope that you will

enjoy the process of working with this book, that you will become larger, stronger, and more colorful—that your dreams will move from the realm of fantasy into reality. As you heighten your capacity to listen for creative guidance, you will find your path unfolding organically one step at a time. When I go out to teach, my students often greet me with the sentence, “Your book changed my life.” I always respond, “Thank you, but *you* changed your life. You did it through the use of a spiritual toolkit.”

You might want to think of this workbook as an owner’s or driver’s manual for artists. Together with *The Artist’s Way*, or separately, it provides firm and steady guidance for the creative life. These tools have unblocked children’s books and feature films. They have been used by Hollywood actors and midwestern schoolteachers. Operas have been written, plays have been penned, novels have come to life, and one-person shows have sprung into being. If you have a creative dream, or even a vague yearning, these tools will clarify, prioritize, and energize your undertakings. We are far more creative than we imagine. We are far larger and far more daring. It is the purpose of this toolkit to help you emerge as an artist. This may mean you are in for some delightful surprises. You might undertake the work hoping to unblock your writer, only to discover in passing that you also embody an innate photographer, sculptor, or painter. We are more gifted than we know, and our gifts lie in many unsuspected directions.

The Artist’s Way is a journey of discovery. You are the terra incognita that you will be exploring. Expect to fall in love with both yourself and the world around you.

Basic Principles

1. Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.
2. There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life—including ourselves.
3. When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator’s creativity within us and our lives.
4. We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.
5. Creativity is God’s gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.
6. The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.
7. When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction.
8. As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle though powerful changes are to be expected.
9. It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.
10. Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

CONTRACT

I, _____, understand that I am undertaking an intensive, guided encounter with my own creativity. I commit myself to the twelve-week duration of the course.

I, _____, commit to weekly reading, daily morning pages, a weekly artist's date, and the fulfillment of each week's tasks.

I, _____, further understand that this course will raise issues and emotions for me to deal with.

I, _____, commit myself to excellent self-care—adequate sleep, diet, exercise, and pampering—for the duration of the course.

(signature)

(date)



The Basic Tools

TOOL ONE: MORNING PAGES

IF THERE IS A SINGLE simple tool that is the bedrock of my creative life—and any creative life—the tool is morning pages. I have been writing them for twenty-five years. I do not begin a day without them. What exactly are morning pages? They sound like work. Why should we do them? They are three pages of daily longhand stream of consciousness, written first thing upon arising. An excellent meditation practice for hyperactive Westerners, the pages clarify and prioritize our day. Morning pages are not intended to be high art. They are not “real” writing. They are simply the siphoning off of the mind’s surface so that we can get to the deeper thoughts and impulses that lie beneath our daily voice-over.

What is the daily voice-over? It is that petty, picky voice that brings us up short so often. You know how it goes: “I forgot to buy kitty litter. I didn’t call my sister back. I should have spoken up in the meeting yesterday. I need to get Tide. The car has a funny knock in it....” All of us have a voice-over of things we are concerned with. Morning pages are a catcher’s mitt for these concerns. By putting them onto the page, we are able to move into our days with fresh eyes.

Morning pages may be whiny and grumpy. They may feel petty and negative, although occasionally a shiny new insight may come glittering through. My daily pages might begin, “I am awake and I am tired. I feel discouraged. I need to get out for a better walk today....” Rarely is there anything upbeat or anything that seems directly connected to creativity. Eugene, a painter friend of mine, says that he is depressive by temperament and that his morning pages help him to “dig out” every morning. I know what he means.

My pages are often grumpy. I use them to vent. I like having a private place where I can be as petty as I sometimes feel. “I didn’t sleep well last night. I had a nasty dream....” In my pages I tell the universe what I don’t like and what I do. “It was great to talk with Mark yesterday. I need to make a lunch date with Joel. I wonder if I can get to the piano today, if only for a little while.”

Morning pages are a witness to our passage and they are a cheerleader for our efforts. “It’s great that I got to the park yesterday. I needed the exercise.” Occasionally, morning pages are the seedbed for new creative ideas. “Wouldn’t it be fun to write a musical about Merlin?” (Yes, it was.)

Morning pages make us known to ourselves. They map our many contradictory urges. “I want to move back to Los Angeles, but I love New York.” A day at a time, a page at a time, the pages guide us. They make us proactive on our own behalf—and almost without our noticing it. Daily, they point us toward what in 12-step jargon is called “the next right thing.” That thing is usually small and doable. The pages move us into action on our own behalf.

“Julia,” writes Grace, a thirty-something writer, “I was perfectly happy drunk in the Outback, then I started doing morning pages and now I am sober and living in Los Angeles!”

Morning pages make us intimate with ourselves, and this, in turn, allows us to become more intimate with others. Comfortable in our own skin, we are more comfortable naked to another

scrutiny. Our marriages improve. So do our close friendships. We become visibly healthier.

~~“My therapist told me to start doing morning pages,” I am often told, and many therapists do urge their patients to try the pages. Often I hear of therapists who run Artist’s Way groups. They have discovered that much of what we call neurosis is actually blocked creativity. As their patients unblock, they grow happier and stronger. “Therapy” is working.~~

It is my belief that in writing morning pages we are in effect building a spiritual radio kit. With every day’s writing, we are “sending”: “This is what I like. This is what I don’t like. This is what I want more of. This is what I want less of....” We do not write into a vacuum. We write into a vibrant, interactive universe that hears our daily pages as prayer. Often our prayers are answered in the form of greater personal clarity. We “suddenly” see where we have been stymied and what it is that we can do about it. A clear-cut action looms before us, one we find possible to take.

Prayers are answered, too, as increased synchronicity. We are more and more often in the right time and place, “happening” to find exactly what it is that we have needed. We “wander” into a new art supply shop and find exactly what we need for our project. We “happen” to spot a notice on a laundry room bulletin board for the exact course of studies we have been considering. Out of the blue, an old friend calls with news of a job opportunity. We go to a reading and encounter a literary agent who is open to considering our manuscript.

Increasingly, the universe seems to be a place of open doors and richer opportunities. We are no longer stuck and stymied, alone with our dreams. In fact, our dreams tend to take on weight and substance until they are less dreams than plans. This metamorphosis happens almost without our effort. Pages are both gentle and thorough. We are transformed from dreamers to doers.

Morning pages are a spiritual practice that connects us, artist to artist, with the Great Creator. We are carefully mentored by the Presence we encounter through the simple process of moving our hands across the page. The Great Creator takes infinite care with us. Its energy flows toward us in the form of impulses and urges. We get a “funny feeling” that we should try something. We do try it and it does succeed. “This really works!” we catch ourselves thinking. We become bolder as we start to trust our own guidance.

“But Julia,” asks Marv, a salesman and type A personality, “do the pages really need to be written longhand? That’s so slow!” Yes, it is slow, and that is a part of what is good for us. By slowing down, we connect to our emotions and our intuitions. We then tend to act holistically, in ways that reflect an integrated whole.

As a society, we are addicted to velocity and we tend to think that faster is better, but it isn’t always. When we write by hand, it is the equivalent of driving slowly. At fifty-five mph, we notice our surroundings. We are aware of how we feel. We say, “There’s an Exxon station. My exit is coming up.” When we write by computer, our thoughts and realizations tend to whiz past us—just like driving seventy-five mph and wondering, “Oh my God! Was that my exit?”

“But Julia, do the pages really have to be done in the morning?” is another oft-asked question. In my experience, the pages work far better first thing in the morning, and so that is the practice that I encourage. After all, if you do the pages at night, you are complaining about a day you have already had and are powerless to change. How much better to let the pages do what they do so well—prioritize, shape, and streamline our day.

By doing morning pages as suggested, we actually win for ourselves windows of time throughout the day. The pages take time—let us say twenty to forty-five minutes—but they also give time back to us. Our days become our own. It is difficult to write pages and allow yourself to be hijacked for someone else’s agenda. “This doesn’t feel right,” you will catch yourself thinking. Your pages teach

you to honor such insights.

Morning pages are a tool for metabolizing life. They work for us in painful and intense passages: death, a divorce, a career change, a lost friendship. Taking our hand to the page, we make for ourselves a handmade life. We raise issues, and the answers come. Nothing is too large. Nothing is too small. Morning pages walked me through my father's lingering death from cancer. Morning pages helped me to name my new puppy.

"This morning I realized I could love again. I could allow myself to be vulnerable," Annie, who is walking through a difficult divorce, tells me. "I was afraid I would always be closed off, but the pages helped me to open again. I am so grateful."

Most people who work with morning pages do become grateful for their presence. Virginia Woolf advised us that all artists require "a room of one's own," and for many of us the pages become that room, that personal and private spot where we can be utterly and totally ourselves. A Jungian analyst tells me that the first forty-five minutes of the day are the time in which we are without our normal ego defenses. We are closer to the impulses that come to us from our subconscious. We are more alert to messages from our dream state. Sometimes these messages really need to be heard. "Morning pages take advantage of a unique window of opportunity," she relays. "They catch the ego in an undefended state and so it speaks to us with candor."

"Whenever I get into trouble, I go back to the practice of morning pages," Alan, a corporate consultant, tells me. Hearing him, I want to say, "Why get into trouble at all? Why not use morning pages consistently and see if you can avoid getting into trouble?"

Morning pages are an early warning system that lets us know when danger is lurking near. The pages are quick to identify a "funny feeling." We have just a hunch, an intuition, that something is wrong—and it is. The "something" may be trouble in our relationship or at our job. It may be a buried resentment causing trouble between us and our sibling. Whatever it is, the pages will point out the problem and, if we let them, move us toward a solution.

- "You and your husband need to go on actual dates," the pages might suggest. "The romance is fading between you, but the embers are still there."
- "You ought to talk with your boss about your idea for restructuring the department."
- "You could take yourself back to graduate school and pursue your interest in counseling."

Morning pages leave no corner of our life unexamined. Our dreams, our hopes, our disappointments, our pains—all of these are grist for the mill. A day at a time, a page at a time, an issue at a time, we become intimate with ourselves. Our hidden feelings become known to us. We ourselves are the terra incognita that we are exploring.

"I never knew I had such a passion for color," Martine, a petite, raven-haired lawyer, exclaims. Her morning pages suggested she paint her white-walled apartment in tropical tones. "When I get home from work now, I feel like I am in the Caribbean."

"I hadn't practiced a hobby in twenty years," reports Eleanor, a classical musician. "My pages kept reminding me that I know how to sew and to crochet and to needlepoint and knit. One day on my lunch hour I stopped in a needlepoint shop, and since that day I have made half a dozen beautiful floor pillows."

With morning pages, we frequently retrieve the parts of ourselves that we have lost. Lucy, a kind, blond kindergarten teacher, has returned to ballroom dancing after a twenty-year hiatus. "I think I have become too much Mary Poppins. I'd forgotten about my passionate side." She laughs. "The tango is

vertical expression of a horizontal thought.”

For Victor, a securities analyst, it is a passion for poetry. “I hadn’t really read any poetry since I got out of college and I had no idea how much I missed it. Now I go once a week to hear local poets read and I am catching up on a lot of poets who have emerged in the past twenty years. I’ve even put pen to page myself a little bit.”

Although the content of morning pages seems to have nothing to do with art, they often move first to more artful lives and then to art itself. “I think of morning pages as a vacuuming process,” Janet, a therapist, tells me. “I poke the pages into every corner of my current life, and when I am done with them my consciousness is clean and fresh and ready for new ideas.”

New ideas do come to us through morning pages. It was the pages that first suggested to me that I was musical, a proposition I found highly unlikely. I was, I thought, the nonmusical sibling from a family of musicians. Music was something I admired but nothing that I tried—until the pages insisted I should try. “You will be writing radiant songs,” they assured me. Trusting the pages, I tried a first song. Since that song, I have written many more—three full-length musicals and two children’s albums. And yet if it weren’t for the nudging of the pages, I might never have tried music at all.

“Julia, I was one very unhappy lawyer when I undertook morning pages,” Keith, a charismatic Broadway star, recently told me. “The pages got me out of my miserable job and into my new vocation. I cannot thank them enough.”

Morning pages are not a magic wand, but they may be something very close to it.

Marilyn, an overweight writer with a wicked wit, undertook morning pages, and as she used them to record her issues and conflicts, she lost nearly fifty pounds—and gained a one-woman show. “The pages told me what was eating me and they told me what I was eating,” she jokes. “Once I became willing to look at my feelings in the pages, I no longer had to eat to stuff my feelings. Morning pages didn’t turn me into a sylph, but they turned me into someone far more attractive to myself and others.”

She is not alone in this transformation. Often, when I am teaching a twelve-week course, I find that at about six weeks, many students attract new lovers. So pronounced is this trend that I have sometimes been tempted to tease, “Write morning pages and you will rekindle your love life.” On more than one occasion I have given a book signing, only to have someone step up to the table and say, “Julia, I want you to meet my husband. We met in an Artist’s Way group.”

We are practicing tools of enlightenment and the “lights on” aspect is visible. I have often joked that we should take before-and-after shots of students who try morning pages. From the front of the room, the change in people’s appearances is astonishing. “You’re doing well. I can tell,” I will often say as a subtle but thorough makeover takes place in the class. New hairdos, new clothes, new makeovers—all of these are a part of the new self that we are uncovering. Stacy, a fitness coach, begins the course dressed in martial arts black. At the midpoint she arrives wearing a pink silk shirt—and she looks ravishing.

With morning pages we have a spiritual makeover. We begin to feel better about ourselves and to treat ourselves better—this shows. It may be something as simple as getting enough sleep—adequate exercise. It may be a marked shift in our color preferences or a willingness to stop hiding under tents and start wearing more form-fitting clothes. It’s probably any number of small changes that all add up to a distinctive shift. There is a famous California joke: “What did you have? A facial lift or a surrender?”

With morning pages we surrender to being more truly ourselves, and those selves are colorful and beautiful. Pages may help one person to stay married and help another person to get divorced. Pages may help their writer go back to school or to drop out of a program that is ill-fitting. A day at a time,

page at a time, morning pages emphasize our unique individuality. They aid me in my life as a writer but they aid lawyers and teachers and therapists and painters—anyone who tries their hand at them.

Among my Christmas cards this year was one from Maureen, a student from fifteen years ago. Since then, she married, and she is now homeschooling her hyperbright son. “Thank you, Julia, for morning pages,” she writes in the card. “They keep me sane!”

Morning pages do keep us sane. They do this by focusing us on the now, the very practical nuts-and-bolts reality of life as it is unfolding. Although pages may be responsible for many large changes, they accomplish those changes one small step at a time. They tutor us in doing that “next right thing.”

Sometimes that thing is “Sort your sock drawer.” Sometimes it’s “Submit your play for publication.” The next right thing may have nothing at all to do with art and everything to do with artful living. “Call your sister,” the pages may advise. “Look into lower rates for auto insurance.” No corner of our life is inconsequential to our pages.

“Don’t forget that tomorrow the postage rates go up,” the pages may remind us. “If you mail the package now, your friend will have it by her birthday.” Gently reminding us of our many duties, pages function like a personal servant: “Madam. Don’t forget your hat and gloves!” Pages teach us to care for ourselves, to minister tenderly to our needs and wants.

“I lived alone in a studio apartment and it often felt like a prison cell,” Madeline, an executive secretary, writes me. “At the urging of the pages, I acquired some houseplants. That would seem like a small change, but it made a tremendous difference in my environment. A little later, the pages urged me to adopt a kitten. I thought I didn’t want the responsibility, but the pages were insistent: ‘You’re lonely,’ they told me, and they were right. Now I come home to a Persian kitten and a jungle. It’s wonderful.”

In order for pages to be effective, we must be open to what they suggest, to the many insights and intuitions that we will experience through their use. Sometimes, they will suggest a course of action that seems to be beyond our reach: “I wonder what it would be like to go to graduate school and study poetry?” the notion might rear its head. “Graduate school! Poetry! That’s too difficult!” we might think.

The pages are a gentle nag. They will bring up an idea repeatedly until they have our attention. When they do, we may find that we have been stubborn and closed-minded about a change that actually well within our reach. Bernice, the woman who was nudged about studying poetry in graduate school, now has a master’s in poetry. She had told herself she was “too old,” only to discover that poetry made her once more young at heart and that her chronological age—seventy-five—didn’t really matter when it came to putting words on the page.

With morning pages, we are tutored in our own best interests. The pages put us in touch with a source of wisdom that is higher and wiser than our usual consciousness. Our hand is led through the labyrinth of our lives as we write. It has been suggested to me that with pages we get to know both of self and our Self, that higher octave of consciousness that guides us when we are willing to be guided. No matter what our dilemma, pages have a refreshing way of suggesting the many small actions we can take on our own behalf.

“I didn’t want to do morning pages,” Michael, a Harvard-trained educator, writes. “They didn’t seem scientific enough for me. Then it occurred to me that I was the one who wasn’t being scientific. Pages asked me to experiment and record the results for myself. I decided to try them. The results that I found were astonishing. My difficult job became far easier as I became more focused and less distracted. My sedentary lifestyle became that of an athlete. I started walking and then took up running. As I write, I have received a key promotion and run in two marathons. Pages seem to give me

a cutting edge.”

The cutting edge that pages offer differs for each of us. The businessman was offered shrewd counsel. That was his need. The pages respond to the unique needs of each of us. If we are lonely, morning pages offer us companionship. If we feel unseen, they offer us a sense of witness. As our sense of isolation diminishes, we are able to reach outward to others more easily. A day's pages might remind us to get in touch with a long-forgotten friend or to phone a new acquaintance and foster a budding friendship. “I was just thinking about you!” our long-lost friend might exclaim.

As we use morning pages, we will often experience a heightened sense of synchronicity. We will be in the “right” place at the “right” time. Perhaps we will lay our hands on exactly the piece of research that we require. We might find the coat we were looking for on sale. As our interests sharpen, those interests seem to be fed. Curious about Tibet, we might encounter a photo exhibition or a concert given by traveling monks. We learn to expend our time in the direction of our curiosities.

Using the pages, we will become more shrewd about what we do with our money, tending to spend it along the lines of our genuine interests. The pages might suggest a magazine subscription or membership to a museum. They are alert to our hidden desires.

Colleen, a homemaker from Libertyville, Illinois, writes, “When I began the morning pages, I was convinced I was a dull person without much to say. I didn't see how I could possibly fill three pages, but I soon found that it wasn't too difficult. I had many more interests and enthusiasms and opinions than I had imagined.”

Taken at face value, morning pages seem to have nothing to do with art. After all, what does “I forgot to buy kitty litter” have to do with writing your opera? As it turns out, plenty. The kitty litter is a distraction, as is the conversation you need to have with your boss and the present you need to buy for a friend's baby's christening. All of these concerns eddy through your consciousness and keep you from thinking about the opera—unless you put them on the page. When you put them on the page, you put them out of your mind. You silence an annoying voice-over. The mental static ends. With your worries out of the way, your mind is able to roam more freely, to turn in more adventurous directions. In the course of an ordinary day, the end of Act One might come to you with crystalline clarity.

There are people who consider their morning pages to be prayer. They think of the pages as “Dear God” letters informing the universe of their precise likes and dislikes. Whether you conceive of the pages as prayer or something far more secular, they do serve as a bridge to what might be called higher realms. In addition to recording impressions, pages may be used to receive impressions. This is very simple. It is largely a matter of posing a question and then listening for an answer and writing it down. Very often the most complex situations are addressed with startling—and revelatory—simplicity.

“What should I do about my ex-husband?” Margaret, a recovering alcoholic, wrote of the turbulent relationship that still haunted her. “Just love him,” the pages responded. Reading that answer, Margaret reports that her conflicted feelings began to ease. The truth was that she did still love the man and that by accepting that, she was able to move on.

Pages do move us on. You cannot write morning pages and remain stagnant. The pages themselves are a form of motion. I often compare the pages to both a river and a boat. A day at a time, a page at a time, you enter the pages and enter into the flow of life. You are able to ride out the rapids of your life and the quieter waters as well. The pages give you both a place to rest and a vehicle in which to move forward.

“I think of the pages as a meditation practice,” Sister Raymond Mary, a nun, tells me. She has been writing the pages for a decade, and they have seen her through many shifting phases in her vocation.

“They are with me when I am full of faith and when I am full of doubt,” she reports. “The consistency gives me optimism.”

Optimism is a frequently reported fruit of morning pages. So is hope. As we take our hand to the page, we take our hand to our life. We are not victims, abandoned by a capricious deity to fend for ourselves. There is, we come to sense, a benevolent Something that receives what we write and acts upon it. Our clarity seems to trigger charity on our behalf.

We live in an interactive universe. The changes and shifts that we make in our inner consciousness are reflected by changes and shifts in our outer world. As we move to a larger and more satisfying identity, we do it first on the page and then in our lives. Before we know it, we are living at a deeper level.

What the pages say may surprise us. I realized with shock that I absolutely love my teaching job. Facing this fact, I found my feelings of gratitude zoomed upward. “Why, I am very lucky,” I thought. “I love my work and I love my students. Maybe I should consider teaching more?”

Negative feelings as well as positive feelings come to light. “I don’t think Laurie really listens to me.” Or, “I need to either quit working overtime or start getting paid for it.” Morning pages teach us self-respect and we learn to expect—and receive—respect from others. Almost imperceptibly, our lives become gentler and more fruitful.

Morning pages tell us when we are overspending our time or our energy. They tutor us in the art of self-investment, channeling our energies and our finances along lines that are personally rewarding. When we are bingeing, physically or fiscally, the pages help to put us on track.

“Julia, I started writing the pages and within a month I stopped gambling. A month after that, I stopped drinking,” Bill, a novelist, told me. “I still do pages. In fact, I carry my journal with me.”

Many people describe morning pages as a sort of homecoming. It is a recovery process in the sense that we re-cover the distance we have traveled away from our authentic self.

“I hadn’t painted in twenty years,” Crawford, a painter, tells me. “I had put everything and everyone in front of my art. When I started working with the pages, my own dreams began to resurface. I saw that I would never be truly happy unless I allowed myself to paint. With the pages egging me on, I began painting—at first a little and then a lot. Now I am a full-time painter and very grateful.”

“Morning pages were my lifeline,” reports Walter, a writer. Before pages, he wrote short comic monologues, but always yearned to try something more ambitious. “Since starting pages, I have written and published two novels. I would never have been a novelist without the pages.”

“Yes, thank you for the pages,” Anne, Walter’s wife, chimes in. “We had been hovering on the brink of divorce. He was so miserable and there seemed to be nothing that I could do to help him. My husband is now so much happier!”

For some people, the pages are a means of resuscitating a long-forgotten dream. For others, the pages are an opportunity to dream a brand-new dream, one that they never held before.

Morning pages bring our hopes, dreams, fears, and confusions into focus. They point us toward areas that need attention. While some people may use the pages to face an addiction, others may find the pages leading them toward dreams they had never articulated. As we come into focus, our size and shape are often surprisingly large.

What we love may surprise us. A discouraged fiction writer took to doing morning pages and was led into writing about architecture—something she deeply enjoys. A poet took to the pages and found herself drawn to writing memoir. A novelist took to the pages and unblocked a flow of writing that took her in an entirely new direction. She switched from third person to first person. An actress tried the pages and found herself writing a one-woman show.

A teacher at a high-powered music conservatory requires all of her students to do morning pages. “If they are truly going to be artists, then they need some tools to ground them in an artist’s life,” she says.

Morning pages will ground us in any life we have—and with morning pages, that life will improve. We are far more colorful, far more creative, and far more charismatic than we know. As we feel the power of morning pages, we come to feel our own considerable power. We are each of us in touch with the infinite.

TOOL TWO: THE ARTIST’S DATE

THERE IS A SECOND TOOL that is essential to a creative awakening. That tool is a weekly artist’s date, a festive solo undertaking to explore something that excites or interests us. Unlike the morning pages, which are work, the artist’s date is play—and that makes it much harder for people to do.

Ours is a Calvinist society. We have a work ethic and we understand the idea of “working” on our creativity. We speak of, but do not really understand, the notion of “the play of ideas.” That word “play” is pivotal. Creativity comes forward by being coaxed, not bludgeoned.

When I am teaching a twelve-week class, it takes only a little time before most of the class are writing their morning pages seven days out of seven. What is much more difficult is for me to cajole or convince the class that there can really be a benefit in the weekly artist’s date. How can “play” help them work, they want to know.

Here is how. With the morning pages, we are sending. We are notifying the Universe of our likes and dislikes. We are, if you will, telegraphing. With the artist’s date, we set our dial to receive. We are receptive to inflow, no longer concerned with outflow. To execute an artist’s date, we must be open-minded, and that open mind is available to inspiration.

It works like this. It is a bright, sunny Sunday afternoon and I have roused myself from my apartment’s cozy comfort to take my artist’s date. I leave the Upper West Side and travel to Murray Hill. My destination is a bookstore, The Complete Traveller. The store is a treasure trove of explorer lore. Some books are new and crisp. Others are old and musty, long out of print. Scanning the shelves I find myself drawn to the section on ocean voyages. A battered book on Magellan comes to hand. Without thinking about it, I buy the book on impulse. I dawdle a little longer, looking at maps of the Isle of Wight, another interest. Leaving the store, I do not think anything much has happened. I do not realize that I am carrying out with me the entryway to a decade’s worth of music. I do not know it then—not consciously—but I will be writing music about Magellan.

The inspiration we receive on an artist’s date isn’t always so linear. We do not always come away from our expeditions with a new sense of creative direction. We do, however, come away with a new sense of well-being and connection. Many students report that they feel the benign touch of synchronicity on their artist’s date. Others, many others, report that they experience a heightened sense of conscious contact.

Claire, a clothing designer, lives in New York and favors trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “I go to the Asian wing,” she tells me. “There is a sense of timelessness there amid the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. I may go in agitated, but I come out tranquil. Something—or Somebody—seems to speak to me there.”

For Glenn, another New Yorker, it is the American Museum of Natural History that speaks to his soul. A painter, he has often found his imagination fired by the dioramas, tableaux of animals in their natural habitat. “One of my favorite paintings came straight from the dioramas,” he tells me. “I’ve

been going to see the same exhibits for thirty years. They never get old to me.”

Arthur is a gallery owner. Often his artist's dates are explorations into rival galleries. Any sense of competition soon fades as he becomes immersed in the art and not the commerce. “I love what I do,” he tells me. “My artist dates always give me inspiration as to how I can do it better.”

Not all artist's dates are highbrow. Victoria, a young actress, got a massage for an artist's date. “I knew I had to meet with a very important director the next day, and I was very tense about it. Sometime during the course of my massage, I remembered that I loved acting and that I was faced with an exciting opportunity more than a test.”

Artist's dates often reveal our inner longings. Laura takes herself to fabric stores, where she browses through rack after rack of brocade and lace. “The wardrobe I use in my job as a kindergarten teacher is what you might call ‘sensible.’ I dream of the hoop skirts from *The King and I*.”

Roy is an academic with a secret passion for exotic automobiles. He drove three and a half hours to attend a show of Ralph Lauren's car collection. “I can dream, can't I?” He laughs. When he turned sixty, his grown children gifted him with a vintage Mercedes. He claims that driving it is always an artist's date.

The dreams of our artist's dates have a peculiar way of turning into reality. Sophy, a teacher of gifted students, began her Francophile dreams with a trip to a small French bistro. A week later she was at a French movie with English subtitles, and a week after that she attended an exhibition of Matisse. Soon afterward she took a course in French cooking and began boning up on her high school French with the Pimsleur audio disks. The last I heard, she had rented an apartment in Paris and was planning to spend the month of July there.

It pays to think of the artist's date as one half “artist” and one half “date.” We are out to woo our own consciousness. We plan and execute enticing adventures. Our excursions may have a romantic overtone as we treat ourselves the way we wish a lover would treat us. Veronica, a retired high school principal, reports to me that she goes to the theater solo once a week. “I thought it would be lonely and I would feel strange. I found it surprisingly comfortable and I now prefer it to going to the theater with a date.”

I am often asked if artist's dates must really be undertaken solo and the answer to that is yes. (We are not alone. We are with our own creative consciousness.) This makes us catnip to others, but we must resist the temptation to take them with us no matter how they plead. Why this rigidity? Because when we are with a significant other, our consciousness is constantly monitoring their consciousness. We go to a movie and ask ourselves, “Are they enjoying this as much as I am?” Rather than focusing on our own inner world, we are focused outward. We are attending not to self but to other.

“At first I found artist dates very difficult,” Maggie, the mother of five, confesses. “I felt so guilty about claiming time for myself. After a few dates, I began to feel differently. I began to see that taking time for myself was really cherishing myself and my creativity. My attitude shifted. Now I felt like that hair-color ad. You know the one: ‘Because you're worth it.’ ”

Artist's dates do convince us of our worth. Many students report that it is during an artist's date that they strongly sense the presence of a loving Higher Power. No matter what we call it, there is indeed a benevolent Something or Somebody that makes itself known to us when we take time out to make contact with our inner adventurer. When we dare to take an artist's date, we reach out creator to Creator, artist to Artist. One need only observe the natural world to see that God revels in adventurous cliffs, jungles, waterfalls, deserts, mountains, seas! When we take our weekly adventure, we put ourselves in the presence of the Great Adventurer, the Lord who invented Kilimanjaro and Vesuvius. As we are outward bound, we sense an inward grace. Such contact is almost automatic.

“I decided to take a drive for my artist’s date,” Susan, a literary agent, recounts. “I turned onto a country road and before long I was in a tunnel of green. ‘Something made all this,’ I caught myself thinking—and I would have said I was an atheist or at best an agnostic.”

Some people deliberately take spiritual artist’s dates. They visit a great cathedral, marveling at the high vaulted ceiling and the stained glass.

“I went to St. John the Divine,” Judith, a concert pianist, relates. “I decided the church was truly well named. I did feel something divine as I was standing in that vast space. My heart soared up. Whether that was God or me myself, I don’t know, but I enjoyed the sensation and I often think back to that moment when I meditate.”

Like morning pages, artist’s dates are an active form of meditation. Going into a children’s bookstore, Alex, a contractor, felt himself entering an altered state. “I let myself browse the way a kid would browse. I looked at lots of books on dinosaurs and a couple on trucks. I guess ‘browsing’ fills me with wonder. Maybe that’s why I build things.”

Artist’s dates do give us a sense of the bigness of the world. Jane, a costume designer, takes her artist’s dates in the medieval section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “I look at armor and I think, ‘People really wore that.’ It makes the past so much more real. You could say that I simply connect to my own tradition. For centuries people have had clothiers. I am not so different from someone sewing by candlelight.”

Jane is not alone in using her artist’s date to find common ground. Gene, a painter, divides his artist’s dates between contemporary galleries and museums. “It is astounding to me how a painting from three centuries ago can feel absolutely contemporary while some of the contemporary work that I see feels already dated. The one thing that always strikes me is that someone stood in front of an easel, just as I do. And someone painted stroke after brushstroke, just as I do. Painting is a solitary act, but I belong, if you will, to a communion of painters. We are all together in our solitude.”

Artist’s dates teach us how to cherish and enjoy solitude rather than fear and avoid it. As we pause to take in the beauty of the world, we take in our own beauty as well. “I started to actively like myself on artist’s dates,” reports David, an actor. “I liked the adventure of them and I liked the notion of myself as an adventurer. For some time, I had been feeling too small. With artist’s dates, I began to feel just a little heroic to myself again. It reminded me of how I felt when I first started acting, like I was just a little bit larger than life.”

“For me the world underwent a huge metamorphosis,” says Gail, a sculptor. “I was turning claustrophobic in the name of my art. My world had shrunk to me and my studio. I felt at home with a lump of clay but the outer world felt hostile to me. I was becoming quite a recluse. Artist’s dates challenged my notion that the world was a hostile place.”

Many students report that the world feels more benevolent to them as a result of artist’s dates. Jean, an animal portrait painter, undertook teaching her dogs to hunt. Every weekend she drove with her dogs to a game preserve, where she felt a sense of enchantment in the wild marsh grasses and overarching skies. “I was painting nature, but I had almost forgotten how to simply enjoy nature.” She laughs. “I have to say I think my paintings have improved with my temperament.”

Jean is not alone in noting that artist’s dates sweeten her moods. For many students artist’s dates bring a heightened sense of well-being. It is as if the act of self-nurturance that artist’s dates require brings to us a new sense that the universe itself is a nurturing place. It is as if we commit to our care only to find that the world co-commits.

“I decided to take my first dance class in twenty years,” Janet, a nurse, reveals, “but I was afraid.” She went to breakfast at my normal diner and was seated at the counter next to a woman who taught

beginner's dance. She was very nice, and when I told her that I was coming back she suggested I start with her. She even offered me my first class for free."

It isn't unusual for the universe to support our desires with some helpful synchronicity. Mark had a lively interest in Africa, which he decided to explore in his artist's dates. He began with a meal at an Ethiopian restaurant. On the bulletin board at the restaurant, he noticed a sign advertising African dance. "Why not?" he told himself, and took down the number. "Although I think I am a klutz, I actually loved the class," he recalls. "But what I really loved was the drumming. I struck up a conversation with the drummer, who said he offered private lessons. I am now in week six of drumming lessons and I am loving it." As a teenager, Mark had fooled around with a drum kit. Drumming again, he felt like a teenager, young and full of vigor.

Artist's dates often lead us to make peace with our past. Gabriella, a caterer, had ridden hunt seat jumpers as a young girl. Now in her early forties, she hadn't ridden in more than twenty years. "I thought I would just ride once," she tells me. "But I rode once and it was so wonderful that I realized I wanted to ride always. I started taking weekly lessons, then I leased a wonderful horse. I am sorry for all the missed years, but when I am riding, I forget about those years. All that exists is me and the horse. I feel like I am turning back into the girl I once was."

A renewed sense of youthful exuberance is a frequent fruit of artist's dates. In seeking what it is we would like to do, we often consult a youthful part of our self, something that might be called our "inner explorer." This part of our self is an optimist and an amateur in the best sense of the word.

Pam, a social worker, discovered in her morning pages that she yearned to try filmmaking. For an artist's date, she went to a one-day workshop on independent filmmaking. "I was so frightened," she remembers. "I don't know what I expected, but everyone was very nice and very encouraging. No one laughed at my idea for a short film, and by day's end what seemed like a pipe dream began to seem quite doable. I just had to be willing to be a beginner."

Mavis went swimming for an artist's date and liked it so much she joined an athletic club so she could swim all the time. "You know how it is when you are in the water." She laughs. "You feel so slim and sexy!" If she keeps up her swimming, Mavis may actually end up slim and sexy—and not just when she's in the pool.

It is not uncommon for an artist's date to be the seed of a larger good unfolding. The artist's date trains us to take risks on our own behalf. Those risks may start out very small—going to a film—and end up far bigger: going to film school. When we explore an interest, we become more interesting to ourselves. When we see that it is possible to risk, we soon see that all risk can be broken down into small "doable" dates with ourselves.

"I didn't have to become brave enough to go to film school," explains Pam. "I just needed to become brave enough to go to day one of film school. Then I needed to become brave enough to go to day two. A day at a time, I was quite brave enough, although when I looked at the prospect as a whole, it made me quake in my boots."

"I had artists on a pedestal," Vincent, a high school teacher, remarks. "I thought of them as superhuman beings for whom making art was easy. I never thought of artists as being fearful, stumbling or trying. When I began taking artist's dates, I was fearful, but because I had promised myself that I would try to take them anyway, I muddled through. Somewhere in there it occurred to me that maybe all artists had fears and muddled through. The breakthrough for me was a poet reading where the featured poet was visibly nervous yet performed anyhow. The very next week, I read one of my own poems at the open mike. I thought, 'If he can do it, I can do it.' And I did."

Artist's dates give us a feeling of accomplishment. They add to the richness of our lives by giving

us a sense of adventure and largesse. Many blocked artists suffer from a sense of martyrdom. They are often workaholics who have forgotten how to play. The artist's date is enforced play.

"My mother had a poem taped above the kitchen sink," remembers Christian, a music producer. "It was a poem against workaholism. It went, 'If your nose is down to the grindstone rough / And you hold it down there long enough / Soon you will say there's no such thing / As brooks that babble and birds that sing / Three things will all your world compose / Just you, the grindstone, and your darned old nose.' "

Despite his mother's warning, Christian grew up to be a workaholic. "I got all of my self-esteem from the amount of work that I did. If you asked me how I was doing, I told you what I was working on. Artist's dates were murder for me because they meant I was actually supposed to take a little time off. I did them over my dead body, but I did do them. What a difference they made!"

For the workaholics among us, a strong inducement to taking artist's dates is the positive impact they frequently have on productivity. It is as though when we allow the slightest bit of positive inflow, we are rewarded by an increase in our creative outflow.

"I was grappling with a rewrite on a novel," says Alice. "It was really a case of my struggling uphill every day. I felt stale and was afraid that my prose showed it. I went to my desk each day like I was going to the mine. I told myself I had a deadline on the rewrite and that I was much too busy working to take an artist date. Unfortunately, I shared this opinion with a writer who used *Artist's Way* tools on her own work. She said, 'Oh. If you're on a deadline you should actually be doubling your artist dates.' She assured me that extra artist dates were the key to her own productivity—and so I tried them. I was astonished by what happened. I seemed to be flooded with new and workable ideas. My prose reacted like it had gone to a spa!"

When we think of art as an image-using system, we begin to get the idea. If we acknowledge that we are ourselves an ecosystem—let us say a small pond—we can begin to see how the making of art can deplete our system unless we are careful to keep up a fresh inflow.

Cornelius is a young composer who also ascribes to the double artist's date theory. "I made my New Year's resolution to do two artist dates a week. I figured I was working on two projects, a musical and an opera, and that each project deserved its own booster."

Artist's dates increase our productivity by decreasing our tendency to stalling through personal sorrow in opera and dramatics. It is difficult to work when we are feeling sorry for ourselves and it is difficult to feel sorry for ourselves when we are taking artist's dates. For many artists, it is learned behavior to be constructive rather than destructive. Rather than indulge in self-dramatization, we can put healthful drama into our lives through a habit of small adventures.

"I was chronically depressed and I made sure you knew it," admits Edward, a substitute teacher who dreamed of a songwriting career. "I always had a tale of woe and it always got in the way of me actually making music. I needed to find a new roommate. I needed to find a new job. My excuses for not working on my art were endless, and I really didn't see how some enforced play was going to help me at all. 'Just do it,' my Artist's Way friends would tell me. 'You don't have to understand it for it to work.' My first artist's date was a flea market. All I did, it seemed to me, was stare at tables full of junk—then I went home and sat down at the piano for the first time in months. I started noodling around before I knew what I was doing, I wrote a song."

Edward has been doing artist's dates for six months now. He has also written a dozen songs. With morning pages and artist's dates in place, he has made a beginning on positive work habits. "I was in the habit of not working and now I am almost in the habit of working," he says. "I do get to the piano a few times a week. I am not as productive as I'd like to be, but I am a lot more productive than I was."

Artist's dates teach us how to initiate, execute, and have closure on events. We plan the artist's date ahead of time. We anticipate our excursion and experience whatever resistance rears its head. Very often our resistance seems reasonable. "Why can't I take Fred with me?" we ask. Or, "I really should work late on Wednesday, and the movie probably isn't that good anyway." When we tell ourselves no, Fred can't tag along, and that we will see the movie as planned, we learn an important lesson about productivity, namely, that our mood doesn't matter and that excuses not to work will always surface and even sound astonishingly plausible. Learning to not wriggle out of our artist's dates teaches us not to wriggle out of our other commitments to ourselves.

"I did it! I did it!" we may want to crow after we have successfully completed a planned artist's date. This is the reward of closure, a sense of well-being and accomplishment. Many artists have difficulty with finishing a piece of work. They start work but cannot seem to bring it to completion. Artist's dates teach us the joys of commitment and closure.

James traces his master's in poetry to his history with artist's dates. "I began with open mikes, then I progressed to more formal readings. I began to feel comfortable in the world of academe. I stopped defining my work as 'street smart' and started to see that it might be just plain smart. When other poets reached out to me, I allowed them to persuade me to undertake a master's degree. I was intimidated at first, but I found all my experience with open mikes and readings really helped me. I went from being a 'street poet' to a poet, period."

Many of us undergo a sizable shift in identity as a result of artist's dates. We may, like James, learn to view ourselves differently. Or we may, indeed, become quite different. "I lived in New York but I was actually frightened by the city," confesses Hannah, a transplanted midwesterner. "My family thought I was living this glamorous big-city life, but I really had a very short leash. I went to my job and home to my studio apartment. The rest of the city was terra incognita. Artist dates changed all that. I started one date at a time, one area at a time, to explore Manhattan. I went to the garment district. Then I went to the plant district. I went to Chinatown. Then I went to Little Italy. I taught myself the subway system. I took one of those open-topped tourist buses. After six months, Brooklyn stopped seeming like such a foreign country. I even took myself to a Greek neighborhood out in Queens." There is a telltale pride in Hannah's voice as she recounts her adventures. While she didn't exactly shift from an introvert to an extrovert, she did shift from a timid person to a braver one.

Timothy's shift was quite different from Hannah's. An extrovert to begin with, he was well used to hopping frantically from adventure to adventure. "My friends used to call me the Energizer Bunny," he jokes. "I was like a hyperactive child, bouncing from activity to activity, crowd to crowd. For me, what was different about the artist date was that I was supposed to do it alone. This was surprisingly tough for me. I found my artist dates made me more reflective. As a result, I began to be able, for the first time, to stay home alone by myself and enjoy some solitude. Solitude had frightened me before."

Whether we are introverted or extroverted, artist's dates make us more comfortable with ourselves. For Hannah, they were the end to her painful seclusion. For Timothy, they marked a stopping to his frantic, adrenaline-driven life.

Andrew, a corporate lawyer, discovered a life outside of his job. "I had begun to feel that I was a dull person. What I didn't realize was that I had enthusiasms and interests but I tamped them down. Once I began to follow up on my interests, those interests became stronger—and I became more interesting to myself."

Anyone meeting Andrew today would never think of him as a dull man. He is mid-stride on writing a mystery novel. He leads a lively life of museum shows and concerts. He is a frequent theatergoer and an avid attendee at literary evenings. His habit of artist's dates has become for him a way of life.

The great acting coach Michael Chekhov advised his students, “If you want to work on your art, work on your life.”

The world is a rich and variable place, simply “throbbing with life,” in Henry Miller’s phrase. As we allow ourselves to taste its many fruits, our own work becomes more rich and more varied. As we nurture our own roots, we become more fruitful.



Recovering a Sense of Safety

This week initiates your creative recovery. You may feel both giddy and defiant, hopeful and skeptical. The readings, tasks, and exercises aim at allowing you to establish a sense of safety, which will enable you to explore your creativity with less fear.

Tasks



1

Set your alarm to wake up a half-hour earlier than usual every morning; get up and do three pages longhand, stream-of-consciousness morning writing. Do not reread these pages or allow anyone else read them. Ideally, stick them in a large manila envelope, or hide them somewhere. Welcome to the morning pages. They will change you.

List below a few creative affirmations from Week One that have particular significance for you. Also below, copy any “blurts” from your morning pages—those negative statements about yourself and your life that tend to crop up in each day’s morning pages. Convert these blurts into positive affirmations.

An affirmation is a strong, positive statement that something is already so.

SHAKTI GAWAIN

2

Take yourself on an artist's date. You will do this every week for the duration of the course. A sample artist's date: Take five dollars and go to your local dollar store. Buy silly things like gold stick-on stars, tiny dinosaurs, some postcards, sparkly sequins, glue, kid's scissors, crayons. You might give yourself a gold star on your envelope each day you write. Just for fun. Record your experiences below.

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you've imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simple.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

3

Time Travel: Describe below three old enemies of your creative self-worth. Please be as specific as possible in doing this exercise. Your historic monsters are the building blocks of your core negative beliefs. (Yes, rotten Sister Ann Rita from fifth grade does count, and the rotten thing she said to you does matter. Put her in.) This is your monster hall of fame. More monsters will come to you as you work through your recovery. It is always necessary to acknowledge creative injuries and grieve them. Otherwise, they become creative scar tissue and block your growth.

Make your own recovery the first priority in your life.

ROBIN NORWOOD

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