

***Writing Down Your Soul:  
How to Activate and Listen to the Extraordinary Voice Within***

Janet Conner                      San Francisco: Conari Press, 2008

*Always, there are more questions.  
Because the answers, as you are about to discover,  
live deep inside the questions.*

Janet Conner discovered the process of writing down your soul while undergoing a traumatic divorce process during which she was broke and felt helpless, frightened for her son and her life.

Beginning with Julia Cameron's ***The Artist's Way***, she wrote through her despair in morning pages. Writing pages everyday addressed "Dear God", she eventually found wisdom for each day and new ways to move forward standing out on the page.

She developed the technique personally for years before refining it through numerous workshops. Now, she offers this comprehensive guide for writing to connect deeply with your soul and your God. With anecdotes and brief citations, she identifies the physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits of regular journaling practice. She highlights, for example, the ground-breaking work of James Pennebaker revealing the therapeutic value of repeatedly writing down previously undisclosed traumas in terms of both event details and the feelings evoked. His work shows that "writing moves us to a resolution" and that those who use a higher proportion of positive over negative emotion words manage their lives better.

Conner presents the spiritual exercise of journaling in four steps: **Show up, Open up, Listen up, and Follow up.** The first two steps are elaborations of regular journaling while the other two steps take the process deeper toward self-understanding, mystery of spirit, and right action consonant with the inner work.

This is a practical 'how-to' handbook, best read as you practice regular writing. Throughout the book soul questions are presented to prompt writing. Soul questions, listed in categories, support different aspects of writing to the soul: becoming aware, understanding meaning, soul-exploration, imagination and incubation. The appendices offer useful summaries – two page summary of the four steps to writing down your soul, a table comparing this approach to enriching the spiritual practice of writing with traditional journaling, and a list of resources.

Three examples among the many activities/exercises offered serve to illustrate their value.

First, Conner presents the interesting exercise about choosing your conversational partner after arguing that writing for a listener can take our writing to a new level of richness. What/who is listening to our writings: 'Dear God', 'Dear Friend', etc. Conner settled on 'Dear Voice.' When I did the exercise of listing all the possibilities that came to mind, I surprised myself by discovering the satisfaction of writing 'Dear Sophia'.

Second, Conner suggests we harvest our journals. For example, if we commit to write every day for 30 days, we can then use the Thirty Day Writing Log to summarize briefly each day's writing in terms of experiences, surprises, frustrations and insights. Keeping the log teaches us to write beyond surface descriptions, and reviewing the log can enlighten us about the life of our soul.

our soul even if you don't agree with her emphases on this.

Third, we can move beyond artist's block by identifying the different voices of the inner critic and writing their judgments down so that we can see them. Next, we can begin to heal as we look for the good intentions underlying these critics. How are they trying to protect us and when and why did they start up?

The author is overenthusiastic about the power of writing to the soul. Even so, the process of asking yourself deeper and deeper questions and listening for the answers can make journaling a spiritual exercise of great value. Moreover, this volume provides an abundance of ideas for making your own writing more spiritually beneficial to you.

*Writing from deep within my soul is now ingrained into my daily spiritual practice.*

*It is how I meditate and how I pray.*

*It is how I solve problems and how I learn.*

*It's where I mourn and where I express joy and gratitude.*

*It is who I am.*