

A SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH E-BOOK

includes a  
**30-day**  
challenge: let  
your creative  
light shine

# your creative spark

PROMPTS, PROJECTS,  
TIPS, AND INSPIRATION TO  
FAN THE FLAMES OF AN  
INTENTIONALLY ARTFUL LIFE

Spirituality  
& Health

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*Your Creative Spirit* was curated by Sandra Salamony,  
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# 5 Questions for Julia Cameron

THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR ANSWERS OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT HER OWN CREATIVITY

## 1. Why do you think people assume “it’s too late” to get creative in midlife?

Ours is a youth-oriented culture. Our media perpetuates this myth. Magazines glorify the exploits and the monetary gains of young people. As F. Scott Fitzgerald remarked, “There are no second acts in American lives.”

## 2. An “artist date” is your idea of assigned play. What is an artist date in your world?

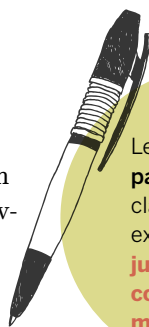
I love to go to the movies alone. I like being able to focus on the film without taking anyone else’s reactions into account. I also like visiting Santa Fe’s Canyon Road, which has over 100 galleries. I may poke into only three or four, but I am always engaged and fascinated by the range of work shown.

## 3. What is it about walking that makes it so vital to the creative process for you?

Walking focuses us squarely into the present. It also allows us to integrate the insights we have received from the other tools, Morning Pages, Artist Dates, and Memoir.

## 4. How does spirituality play a role in tapping into creativity?

Morning Pages are a potent form of prayer and meditation. They put us in touch with a larger, benevolent “something.” I have often heard them described as being a “portal to faith.” When we work on our creativity, our spirituality deepens. When we work on our spirituality, our creativity deepens.

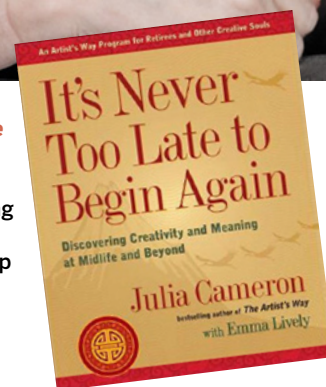


Learn about **morning pages**, Julia Cameron’s classic creative exercise, on her site: [juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages](http://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages)



MARK KORNBLUTH

In her book, *It’s Never Too Late to Begin Again: Discovering Creativity and Meaning at Midlife and Beyond*, best-selling author Julia Cameron offers tools and inspiration to wake up the artist in all of us.



## 5. You are an accomplished writer and artist. Do you still have new aspirations?

I would love to see my plays and musicals more widely produced. I have a friend who insists that I am “really” a playwright, no matter how many books I have written.

BY ALMA TASSI

# Inspiration



# Say Hello to Your Creative Soul

## 4 WAYS TO CONNECTING INTERNALLY

WHEN WE TALK about connection, it's often in terms of the external, of reaching out to other people. But what about connecting internally, with aspects of ourselves that we feel are unfulfilled? Many of us want to inhabit a more creative life, but aren't sure how to tap into that rich resource that lies within. For this week's Healthy Habit, here are a few ways to invite in that connection.

### 1 Make Choices More Fun

Create spontaneity in your life by adding a game-like environment. Instead of a chore list, for example, create a chore spinner and spin to see what task to take on. Rather than writing down a pro/con list, try the app created by Jonathan Jackson, which mimics his spatial form synesthesia. Called **ChoiceMap**, it helps with everything from picking a baby name to knowing which job offer to accept. And don't forget the old picking numbers out of a hat: Write choices down and pick them, whether you're trying to decide where to go to dinner or which vacation destination to try next.

### 2 Play with a Child

Many of us, parents included, feel shy with actually playing with kids, but it's a great way to loosen up creative energy. Playtime doesn't need to be fancy—there's always tag, hide-and-seek, Simon Says, building a fort or setting up an indoor obstacle course. There are even books on this, such as *The Art of Roughhousing*, for those of us who need a nudge.



### 3 Set a Noodle Timer

Whether you are a musician, painter or poet, set an alarm for 20 minutes and throw yourself into the art of noodling around. Let the creative process flow from the beginning, without judgment, and see what intriguing ideas flow out. This is entirely different from practicing, project-ing, or performing. It's fooling around time, and it's essential.

### 4 Use Your Hands

Research published in the journal *Cognitive Science* suggests that moving our hands plays a huge role in how we think and in our overall wellbeing. The theory is called embodied cognition, and looks at things such as how hand gestures can affect change in our behavior. Boost your creative spark by using your hands to eat finger-food-friendly items; knead bread; mold clay; knit; brush an animal.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER



## A Room of One's Own

MANY OF US HAVE AN INNER ARTIST WE WANT TO NOURISH, BUT NOT THE BUDGET FOR A PAINTER'S STUDIO OR WRITER'S RETREAT. HERE'S HOW TO CARVE OUT A SACRED SPACE FOR CREATIVITY.

**THERE'S A STEREOTYPE** that creative types are messy. The writers, toiling away with papers stacked high on their desks. The painters, with oils staining their smocks. We create! We expand! Birthing isn't supposed to be tidy. True, but what happens when our artistic outpourings become clutter? Take the jewelry making enthusiastic whose bead supplies hog the bedroom, making her husband feel unwelcome. Or the painter who hasn't had a sit-down meal in months because her dining table has become a de facto easel. How can we share space with our art, and still have room for ourselves and others?

"Some studies seem to indicate clutter enhances creativity, but other studies indicate clutter prevents us from doing our best work," says Arizona-based Joshua Becker, a leader in the simplicity movement and founder of the blog **Becoming Minimalist**. "Our artistic gene may produce certain tendencies in life, but those

tendencies do not have to become habits. We choose our habits each morning.”

The goal is to find the optimal amount of supplies to do your best art, says Becker. “We need certain tools to create our work, but when the supplies or the physical clutter becomes burdensome on our energy, time, or mind, those same tools actually detract from our best work. We should worry more about finding the optimal amount of art supplies, not the constant accumulation of more. Because most often, in our society of overproduced and constantly marketed goods, our supplies have become a burden to us, not an advantage.”

### PARING DOWN

Becker’s best tip for artists and crafters is to remember that *your best creativity is in your hands not in your tools*. “We focus too much energy and attention on the pursuit and accumulation of tools than we do in honing our craft. No new piece of gear is going to complete your work for you. Sometimes even the opposite is true: Removing unneeded items from your workspace may remove distraction and provide more clarity for your work.” He suggests asking the following questions:

- Do I spend more time shopping for supplies or honing my craft?
- If I were to create a list of only the most basic tools necessary for my art, what would make the list?
- Do the physical tools around me inspire me to better work or distract me from it?
- Do I really need more supplies or do I need more time to do my art? If the answer is time, what clutter can I remove to create more time and space for art?

Because the bottom line is, you don’t need more supplies to be a better artist. You need to sit down and make some art.

### SHARED ROOMS

Roxie Sarhangi is a public relations and social media marketing professional in Los Angeles and the owner of Roxie PR. She’s also an avid painter, and as she’s working more with larger-format canvases, finding space in her apartment is getting more challenging. Her dining room is becoming half canvases, half dining room. But such coziness can be a blessing.

“It inspires me. If I have a piece I’m working on, I can find new ideas. Having it in my view can be very useful. There is something nice about walking by it every day



with fresh eyes.” To keep her paints, brushes and specialty papers in order, she uses an art cart with drawers. “I had it in a closet and recently decided I would rather leave it out. I enjoy having it in the space because it’s easier to access. But it’s organized, it’s all in drawers, it’s neat. I keep the brushes in clear glass containers or a white flower vase. It looks artful.”

Sarhangi’s mindfulness is a great example that rooms don’t have to serve a single purpose, as long as you’re intentional about it. Think about what boundaries or storage solutions a room needs in order to be dual purpose. Becker says, “Sometimes the boundaries are time-related (at 5 p.m., I need to put everything away). Sometimes they are physical-related (all of my art supplies need to fit in this cabinet). And sometimes they are mindset-related (Right now, this is not a room where I think about art, this is a place where I enjoy dinner with my family).”

When decorating an art zone, “think about if you want a space that is energizing, or peaceful and calming,” says Samantha Williams, the principal designer at Pasadena-based Ederra Design Studio. “If it’s soothing and calming you’re after, focus on cooler colors and selective items that support the space. Lighting is very important. Think about soft lights or layers of soft lights. If you want an energizing space, focus on reds, oranges, greens, this could be through the furniture, paint, or art on the walls.”

Even if it’s inside a closet, or a secretary desk that pulls down, the key is to enhance a space so that you’ll be excited to go and create.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

# 5 Ways to Embrace Daily Writing

WRITING IS A VITAL PERSONAL EXPRESSION—A WAY TO BOTH SHARE WHO YOU ARE WITH THE WORLD, AND TO DELVE DEEPER INTO YOUR OWN PSYCHE.

**CONGRATS!** You want to start a daily writing practice. Excellent. Writing is a vital personal expression—a way to both share who you are with the world, and to delve deeper into your own psyche. Expressive writing has even been **studied** as a way to promote mental health. But writing every day is easier said than done. For this week’s Healthy Habits, let’s look at some ways to tailor a writing habit in a way so that it is most personal to you. That way, a daily writing practice becomes a source of true nourishment, rather than a goal that must be met.

**1. CHOOSE THE IMPLEMENT.** Some people love the feel of leather journals and ink pens, while others favor working from a laptop or desktop computer. I recently read that some wordsmiths turn to a basic, old-school word processor called an **Alphasmart**, because they find it less distracting than a computer. Maybe you even enjoy the satisfactory clacking sounds of a typewriter and want to recreate that on your iPad; yep, there’s an app for that. Try **Hanx Writer**.

**2. CHOOSE THE SPOT.** Are you an inside cat or an outside cat? Some people can only focus on their writing if there’s a lively buzz around them. They need to write in settings like coffee shops or libraries. Others prefer the sanctitude of their home, and a private nook or dining room table is more their speed.

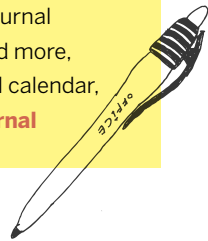
**3. CHOOSE YOUR TIME.** Do you write at 5 a.m., sipping piping hot tea while the house is still quiet? Or are you



YOUR  
TURN

## SHARE YOUR STORY!

S&H has a new way to share insights and practices amongst our readers through the NEW Our Community Journal project. We’re looking for submissions now — find more, including submissions guidelines and an editorial calendar, at [spiritualityhealth.com/OurCommunityJournal](http://spiritualityhealth.com/OurCommunityJournal)



a night owl, tapping happily away after hours? **Some research** suggests that it’s best to write first thing in the morning, when your willpower is strong, while others insist they are more creative at night, when they work through some of the day’s stresses. Regardless of time of day, aim for 10 minutes of writing session per day to build your writing muscles, and work your way up.

**4. CHOOSE YOUR AUDIENCE.** Are you writing a blog? A children’s story for your grandkids? Penning a poem to share at your weekly author’s group? Or perhaps this writing is to be kept closer, more private. That’s fine, too.

**5. CHOOSE TO LET GO.** “The first draft of anything is #\$.” –Ernest Hemingway. This quote is vital to all writers, but particularly new ones, because it’s so liberating. Free yourself from inner criticism. Rather than laboring over each sentence, let the words out without judgment. Trust that you can make them better on your second draft. In the meantime, go fast and free. Relax. Write.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER





# The Link Between Creativity and Movement

## CREATIVITY BLOCK?

A NEW STUDY SUGGESTS THAT SIMPLY MAKING CIRCULAR MOVEMENTS IMPROVES YOUR CREATIVITY.

**LACK OF CREATIVITY** is synonymous with rigidity and tightness, squares and boxes, and a closed nature (both in posture and expression). But what if moving freely and fluidly could alter your level of creativity? That actually might be the case.

A study published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, showed how through gestures and embodied cognition, we could conjure up a more fluid, creative thought.

In the three experiments, fluid arm movement led to enhanced creativity in 3 domains:

- creative generation
- cognitive flexibility
- remote associations

Other mechanisms were also examined, such as enhanced mood and motivation. These results suggest that creativity can be influenced by certain types of physical movement.

“If we think of creativity as fluid and flowing,” asks Michael Slepian (leader of the study), “can moving in a fluid manner help us be more imaginative?”

“Previous work has shown that the body influences what we’re thinking about,” Slepian says. In his latest study, Slepian wondered whether the notion of fluidity and ease could promote a more expansive thought process and facilitate creativity. Participants were asked to trace curved images with their fingers on a computer screen (fluid circular movements). The control group, on the other hand, was asked to trace straight, rigid lines (resulting in rigid movement).

After drawing the lines, subjects were given three tests. The first was to come up with creative uses for a newspaper. The participants that used the fluid movements not only had more ideas, but their ideas were also deemed more creative (by the judges) with the uses for old newspapers. For example, one of the “fluid movement” participants suggested blacking out words with a pen to create a poem. Another suggested that letters could be transferred onto a fingernail by wetting it. The people who drew rigid movements, on the other hand, merely suggested using the newspaper for scrap paper.

In a second test, cognitive flexibility was looked at. They found that the ones who drew wavy lines were less rigid thinkers. “If people are thinking creatively, they are more willing to believe a camel is an appropriate example of a vehicle,” he says, “or a stove is an example of furniture.”

In the third example, Slepian looked at people’s ability to make a connection between three seemingly unrelated words. For example, a subject was given the words “pine,” “crab” and “sauce” and asked for a fourth word related to those three examples (“apple” being the answer). The fluid movement group was more likely to come up with that answer.

The reason this is so important, Slepian says, is that it is evidence that “the body influences how you think, and that what you are experiencing physically can influence your style of thought.”

BY BESS O’CONNOR



## SOME CREATIVE IDEAS FOR FLUID MOVEMENTS:

- Hoola Hooping
- Nia dance
- Zumba
- Drawing circles or wavy lines
- Hula Dancing
- Taichi
- Capoeira
- Painting
- Belly dance

# 5 Questions for Flora Bowley

ARTIST, AUTHOR, AND SELF-IDENTIFIED “PERMISSION-GIVER,” **FLORA BOWLEY** SHARES HOW SHE BLENDS CREATIVITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN DAY-TO-DAY LIVING.

## 1. How does tapping into your creativity nurture personal growth?

When we create, we put ourselves in the driver’s seat without a road map telling us where to go. From this uncharted place of mystery, we’re required to listen closely to our intuition, trust our instincts, take risks, and be willing to change directions along the way. I believe flexing these muscles in our creative practice allows us to be more connected to them in life beyond the studio, as well.

## 2. Where do you see connections between spirituality and art?

Spirituality and art both provide access points to something far greater than ourselves. They can move and inspire us to see the beauty and possibility within and beyond our everyday experience, and allow us to feel more alive and deeply connected as a result. In this way, art and spirituality provide a soothing balm for our souls.

## 3. What kind of mindset do you need to get the most out of the practices you offer?

My approach to painting and creativity requires that you let go of any preconceived “plan,” open your mind to a myriad of possibilities, embrace spontaneity, trust the process, and be willing to surprise yourself along the way. Being gentle with yourself also makes for a much more enjoyable ride.

## 4. What has been the most satisfying outcome for your students?

I love it when students show up saying things like, “I don’t have a creative bone in my body,” or “I can’t even draw a stick figure,” and by the end of the course they can



TYSON ROBICHAUD

FLORA BOWLEY

hardly believe what they’ve created. There’s a real sense of empowerment and transformation that happens when we prove our old stories wrong in this way.

## 5. How has your teaching affected your own art?

Teaching my *Brave Intuitive Painting* process has allowed me to understand the ins and outs and benefits of my process on a much deeper level. It has also kept me on the risk-taking edge of my own painting practice, because this is what I’m constantly asking of my students. I feel a strong responsibility to lead by example.

BY ALMA TASSI

## MEDITATION PRACTICE: DRAWING A MANDALA

Mandalas are used in myriad cultures for a multitude of reasons — meditation, accessing higher consciousness, establishing a sacred space, and reflecting on the universe. For this practice, we’ll use them as an invitation to play with new shapes and mediums, get our creative juices flowing, and explore art making as a relaxing and meditative practice.

### MATERIALS

Paper  
Your choice of mediums: fluid acrylic paint, pens, pencils, paint pens, watercolors, markers, and oil pastels are all good options.  
Natural items such as rocks, leaves, sticks, flowers, moss, etc.

### DIRECTIONS

There really are no rules here, but I do like to start with a center point — this can be a dot, an image, a shape, or a word. Moving from your center point, create expanding rings of design moving outward towards the edge of your page. Let each ring be a response to the ring that came before it. You can also go back inside the rings and add embellishments.

I find that the less I think, the easier this practice of making mandalas becomes.



# Nurturing Creativity through Nature

HERE ARE 5 SUGGESTIONS ON HOW YOU MIGHT LOOK TO NATURE TO ENHANCE YOUR OWN CREATIVITY.

**AS AN EDUCATOR AND WRITER**, I look to creativity as one of my most important tools. I know that without a dose of creativity my lectures and writings will be dull and uninspiring. Yet, creativity isn't something I can find on a shelf or summon as needed. Even with all the wonders of the internet, there's no website I can use to tap into the wellspring of creative thinking.

But I have found a place that helps me and inspires me when I feel stuck or stymied or need some ideas. I go to nature. At times, I'll get up from my desk and take a walk. At other times, I just pause and look out the window to take in the view of the sky and the trees in our yard.

I know there are others, too, who look to nature to nurture their creativity. I currently work as curator of an [online research library](#) promoting the reconnection of children with nature. These studies show that time in nature promotes more creative play, increased problem-solving skills, and improved attention. Even images of nature can lead to more creative thinking.

One **study** found that high school students performed more creatively on a drawing task when images of natural environments were displayed before and during the drawing exercise. Another study, focusing on younger children, shows that play behaviors in natural environments tend to be more social and creative than play on traditional playgrounds. This creativity is demonstrated, in part, through dramatic play where children often use natural “loose parts” (such as twigs, stones, pinecones, etc.) to represent something else. A small branch, for example, becomes a magic wand or water and leaves become a pot of soup.

**Some studies** speak to the restorative properties of nature as an opening to more creative thought. They use the term “attention restoration theory” in reference to the way time in nature can replenish or restore our capacity for directed attention. They also use the term “stress reduction theory” when referring to the impact of nature experience on reducing stress and thereby improving our ability to think creatively.

Here are several suggestions on how you might look to nature to enhance your own creativity.

**1. TAKE A “NATURE BREAK.”** Get outside and take a walk where you can experience the sights and sounds of nature. Daily tasks tend to take a toll on our ability to concentrate. They can also lead to a buildup of stress. Most of us know from experience that both attention fatigue and stress get in the way of creativity. Taking a nature break is one way to restore our ability to think creatively, but it’s not just about thinking—nature breaks also touch us at the feeling level. Don’t be surprised, if after a nature break, you’re not only thinking more clearly, you’re also inspired to express yourself in more creative ways.

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## INTUITIVE WANDERING

This practice is moving through the world guided by intuition and experiencing the world around you through the eyes of an artist always seeking fresh inspiration.

This practice can be done with a sketchbook, a camera, or with the intention of gathering natural items. It can also be done with nothing but a curious mind and heart.

### MATERIALS

- Sketchbook and pens
- Camera
- Basket for gathering

### DIRECTIONS

Intuitive Wandering is simple. It’s about letting go of a plan and allowing intuition be your main source of navigation. The key is to let go of any plans or rational thoughts about where you “should” be going, and allow your heart and gut to lead the way instead.

To begin your wander, close your eyes, place your hands on your heart and belly, take a deep breath, and notice what direction your body is feeling pulled. This pull might be very subtle, so listen closely. Allow yourself to head in that

**2. DISPLAY IMAGES OF NATURE IN YOUR WORK SPACE.** Choose images depicting unpredictability and spaciousness, as studies have shown these aspects of nature to be especially effective in promoting creativity. Unpredictability in nature might be a small lake in a heavily-wooded area or wildflowers blooming along a rocky path.

**3. IF POSSIBLE, ARRANGE TO WORK IN AN AREA WITH WINDOWS PROVIDING VIEWS OF NATURE.** Ideally, what you see will offer variety over time – such as seasonal changes in leaves and flowers or bird activity around a bird bath or bird feeder.

**4. LOOK FOR WAYS TO DEEPEN YOUR CONNECTIONS WITH NATURE.** In addition to spending more time in nature, you can read and write nature-related poetry, keep a nature journal, do some nature photography, and sketch some nature drawings. You might also add more nature-related poses in your yoga practice. If you practice yoga, you’re probably already familiar with the tree pose and the mountain pose. Why not add an eagle or flamingo pose?

**5. HOLD YOUR MEETINGS OUTDOORS.** Board rooms or conference rooms may not always be the most conducive for creative thinking. Try meeting outside instead and see how this impacts the dynamics and effectiveness of the meeting. You might even try this with family meetings. Just being outdoors and in touch with nature can lead to more creative ideas.

BY RUTH WILSON

To see a video of this practice, click [HERE](#)



direction, noticing what sites, sounds, and smells you encounter along the way. Remember, everything you see can be fuel for your creative fire, so take note of the images, color combinations, textures, and lines that really catch your eye.

When you get to an intersection, pause again and feel into your next move.

# Creative Flow

## HOW YOGA CAN SPARK YOUR CREATIVITY

IF YOU DIDN'T know me as a person, and all you knew about me was that I was a yoga teacher and a poet, you would probably think I was pretty boring. You'd think of poems filled with rainbows and flowers, and imagine me crying all the time into the heart on my sleeve. I probably wouldn't get an invite for dinner.

There is this idea out there that true artists live fast and die young—they drink hard, play hard, write hard, and then get liver failure in a tragically young death. How can the peaceful archetype of the yogi go hand in hand with the tragedy of the true artist?

Well, lots of ways, in my opinion. I am indeed a yogi and a poet, but I am none of the above. Though I do cry a lot, that part is true.

What I've discovered, actually, is that my yoga practice shifted my writing quite dramatically—and not towards rainbows and flowers, either. Working with the subtler sensations in my body, cultivating mindfulness, meditating—all this has created space in my writing for me to get out of my hamster-wheel head and write from deeper places. It does for my writing what drinking too much wine late into the night used to: it alters my perception and gives me access to a whole new world. Without the hangover (most of the time). And the poetry's better, I'm pretty darn sure.

There is actually a whole, budding **theory** on how yoga and creativity can work together in all kinds of mediums, from writing, to painting, to music, or just dealing with issues coming up in whatever work it is you do. We need creativity in all aspects of our lives, and in order to access it, we have to be willing to step out of our comfortable boxes. Here are some of the ways yoga can work even better for your creative endeavors than drinking, smoking, and hating your life:

### 1. MINDFULNESS:

One of the major things we do in yoga is notice—not only what's going on physically as we move from pose to pose, but also mentally: What thoughts are going through my



JULIE PETERS

mind right now? How can I detach from these thoughts and turn on what's called the *buddhimind*: the mind that observes? We watch ourselves as if our internal world were projected for us on a huge movie screen. When we let go of the attachment between the emotion and the image/words, we can see the whole picture more clearly. We look at our minds with the artist's eye, and see more interesting ways to express what we are feeling and thinking. Rachel McKibbens is one of my favourite poets, and she describes this process as letting the thoughts and feelings travel out of your head and waiting til they get down to your hands to write them out. Give those wild-horse thoughts space, and there will be room for you to take the reins.

## TRY IT:

Here's an exercise you can try: Practice pigeon pose for at least 8 breaths on each side, and then write a letter: address it "Dear Brain," and sign it "Love, Your Hips." And let me know how it goes!

## 2. BODYFULNESS:

Writer's block happens when we get stuck. Nothing will come out. We can't produce, we can't move, we are locked up. This sometimes happens in our bodies, too—Leonard Cohen and Michael Ondaatje are two authors I studied in school because (get this) they talked so much about constipation. Art and shit have a real connection—when the body is locked, when we can't let go of the waste, the crap, and make space for the beauty and nourishment, the pen can't move. Yoga can help with both those things.

## 3. FEELING FEELINGS:

A Buddhist meditation technique is this: Sit still and encounter an emotion: anger, sadness, whatever. Rather than replaying the story that sparked the emotion over and over again, get curious on a physical level: What does anger feel like in my body? Where specifically do I feel it? Is it associated with a color, an image, a word, a sound? When we pay attention this way, we describe heartbreak less like this: "I feel like my heart is broken into a million million pieces!" (cliche) and maybe more like this: "Some days my heart escapes from my chest and sits in the sunshine pumping, shuddering, disgusting, and making a spectacle of itself outside the safety of my ribcage" (cliche redone; paraphrased from one of my own poems, [Heart Hanging Out](#)).

## 4. BREATHING:

The Latin term for inhaling is *inspirare*, the root of our English word inspiration. Traditionally (we're talking Tarot, Astrology, yoga philosophy, Chakra theory, and many other traditions) the element of air is always connected with ideas, creativity, and the movements of the mind. When we are stuck, mentally and otherwise, we often stop breathing. Vinyasa yoga moves the body with the breath, and breaks through blockages in the blood, lymph, muscles, and connective tissue, so our awareness flows into places in the body we didn't even know we could acknowledge. And when we do start breathing more deeply and more rhythmically, we slow down our brain waves—from the multitasking Beta brainwave state to the more focused Alpha state. This is the state you enter into when a writer is writing, a dancer is dancing, a painter is painting, or when my dad is playing guitar. He can't hear anything else ["Dad. Dad. Dad. DAD! The kitchen is on fire!" ...DAD!].

## 5. EMOTIONAL MAPS:

Yoga philosophy gives us some specific emotional maps to help us navigate the territory of our bodies so that we get better at not only expressing to the world how we feel, but

understanding better what the body is trying to express to us. According to Chakra theory and Chinese acupuncture meridian theory, we hold grief in our lungs, anger in our inner thighs, trauma in our hips, and weakness in our knees. We also learn that the throat is the center of expression in our bodies—it's where we hold all the words we didn't say, where we get tired if we haven't been listening hard enough, and where we lie to ourselves. Opening the physical throat and chest area can help to release old blockages in the throat chakra, opening up space for truth and honesty, and then its creative expression. The hips, on the other hand, are the source of the body's creativity because it is related to our sexual center—svadisthana chakra, where we literally create life. Often if one is blocked, the other will follow—the anger seething in the hips needs to get out through the throat, and moving the physical body can help us access some of this stuff.

## 6. CONFRONTING FEAR:

When we practice yoga, most of the time we are trying to become better. We are learning about ourselves, facing ourselves, and going to those deep dark places that artists sometimes need to go to find the light. Honestly, whenever I meet a person—yogi or otherwise—who is all about rainbows and flowers, I seriously doubt the fullness of their sanity. If you are an intelligent, sensitive human, you'll see darkness. Yoga teaches us how to handle that darkness and learn from it, not how to shove it away.

Yoga can also teach us to get braver: we turn upside down, we jump around, we balance on one hand with our feet tied in knots (well, maybe not that one), we sit still and face the hamster wheels making their sickening turns in our heads [oh GOD it's terrifying]. But then we watch our bodies get stronger and more flexible. We are amazed when we can suddenly do something that felt previously impossible. When we approach our physical fears on the mat, we also learn to manage the terror of speaking the truth. This way we can be more than your run-of-the-mill dead-by-27 tragic artist—we can really make a world out of this thing. And do it beautifully.

Anyway, that's what I think.

BY JULIE PETERS



# 10 Ways to Use a Library for Creative Inspiration

RELAX, REJUVENATE, AND NURTURE YOUR IMAGINATION BETWEEN THE SHELVES.

**RECENTLY I HAD** the chance to spend several hours in a library at a Zen monastery. These monks knew how to cultivate an air of calm and rejuvenation: rows of books on meditation, creativity, nature, and art; headphones and a range of music and audio equipment; comfy chairs complete with thick blankets; and delicious silence. I leafed through some books about creativity and felt enlivened within the first 10 minutes. Soon I began to jot down ideas. When I got restless I pattered, discovering new and intriguing notions on the shelves and enjoying the snow-covered scene outside. I could almost hear my synapses firing, and the many pages of notes I took were proof that the stacks held a welcome cache of inspiration.



While it's true that not *all* libraries attain this level of nirvana for the hungry, imaginative soul, most of them have several welcoming features beyond their collections: hospitable furniture and nooks; prevailing quiet; and kind-hearted librarians and community members. Some of them even have places for snacks and drinks; many have gardens/outdoor reading spaces. And of course, barring any outstanding overdue fines, nearly all libraries are 100% free. Here are some tips on how to use the library as a refreshing mini-retreat for your creative spirit:

**1** Your local library is likely a good bet for your retreat, but don't rule out the possibility of commuting to an alternative that boasts longer hours, more space, quieter rooms, etc. Many university libraries are open to the public and often have longer hours than their community counterparts.

**2** Plan a scheduled timeframe of being "locked in" at the library. Of course you can leave any time, but committing to a set time also sets your intention for the day and helps frame the day as an "event" rather than just a random, undefined visit. Your retreat can encompass solo time only, or you can plan a day that includes attending a class or lecture offered on site.

**3** For your solo time, strategically seek comfort. Avoid high-traffic areas and think about what conditions are best for your muse: curling up in a nook or sitting at a desk? Bring music and headphones if that helps your artistic mood. Wear soft clothing and bring a wrap or throw. Stretch your limbs, neck, and back at regular intervals.

**4** Decide up front about Wi-Fi (or lack of it). You may enjoy the ability to research online or browse innovation-sparking sites, but on the other hand it could become a distraction. If that's a strong possibility for you, consider locking your phone in the car or disabling your laptop's wireless connection.

**5** Start by jotting a loose agenda. Do you want to dive right into a project or ease into your day with some poking around? Use hour blocks to divvy up time for planning, creating, researching, learning new things, simply being still, and even daydreaming. If your creative practice can't be fully executed at the library (perhaps you are a muralist, or a sculptor!) use the time to derive inspiration, research and revise ideas, order supplies, etc.

**6** Remember, as poet Emily Dickinson did, to dwell in possibility. Your agenda is counterproductive when it becomes a confining experience. Remain open to new thoughts and directions that beckon from the stacks.



**7** It's okay to close your eyes: consider a catnap or meditation to help you center. Studies have shown that meditation can boost creativity. Meditation instructor Tamara Lechner recommends being playful in this regard (avoiding overthinking), adding that sometimes trying a new approach can help to enhance meditation's power. If you are accustomed to using an audio guide for meditation, engage in a silent session, and vice versa.

**8** Feeling stuck? Look up your favorite author, artist, or musician and peruse some pages/listen to the audio to get into the groove. Mix it up—if you are a visual artist, read some poetry; if you are a writer, enjoy a book full of intriguing photos.

**9** While silence is often an ally, for some it can become stifling. If you draw energy from interacting, spend time getting to know the librarians and your fellow patrons. Consider eavesdropping, too—overheard conversations can work as random idea generators!

**10** Be open to unusual or unorthodox resources to gain new perspective. For example, the Pikes Peak Library District in Colorado hosted a Human Library in 2017 that included a 91-year-old, a refugee, a Native American, a person with autism, etc. Volunteers who sign up to be "books" can be "checked out" for periods of conversation.

The writer Jorge Luis Borges said, "I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library." With some thoughtful planning the library truly can serve as a haven for your creative spirit.

BY KATHERINE HAUSWIRTH

PRINT • PIN

# 16 Affirmations *for* Nurturing Creativity

KICKSTART YOUR CREATIVE SELF WITH THESE POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS.

**IN HER BOOK** *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*, Elizabeth Gilbert urges us to start creating. Right now! She has this notion that if we don't, our ideas may give a mighty sigh and go play with someone else. But even if you don't buy into that belief, it's certainly true that if you don't birth your idea, it's not happening. Just like exercise and spiritual progress, you cannot outsource your own creativity—this isn't housework or tax prep. It would be nice, though, wouldn't it? Some proxy could hand us those toned arms, sans thousands of pushups, and a thick, bestselling book, without having to do years of typing and researching and chasing down an agent and a publishing deal. But no, this is all on you, man.

So. Let's fan those nascent flames of creativity, because they are in there. Read books like Gilbert's. Create a sacred space for your artistic pursuits, which we've covered on page 6. And push forward, starting with these affirmations for nurturing the creative soul that is part of the very essence of what it is to be human.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

I choose to create.

The artist is already present within me.

I attract brilliant ideas.

Today I am making time to create.

Divine inspiration surrounds me.

I am awake and see the world through fresh eyes.

I am spontaneous; I surprise even myself.

The wellspring of creativity runs deep.

I am always developing as an artist.

Today, I am filled with infinite, creative energy.

My creative self wants to come out and play.

My creativity flows freely.

I'm ready to share my authentic expression.

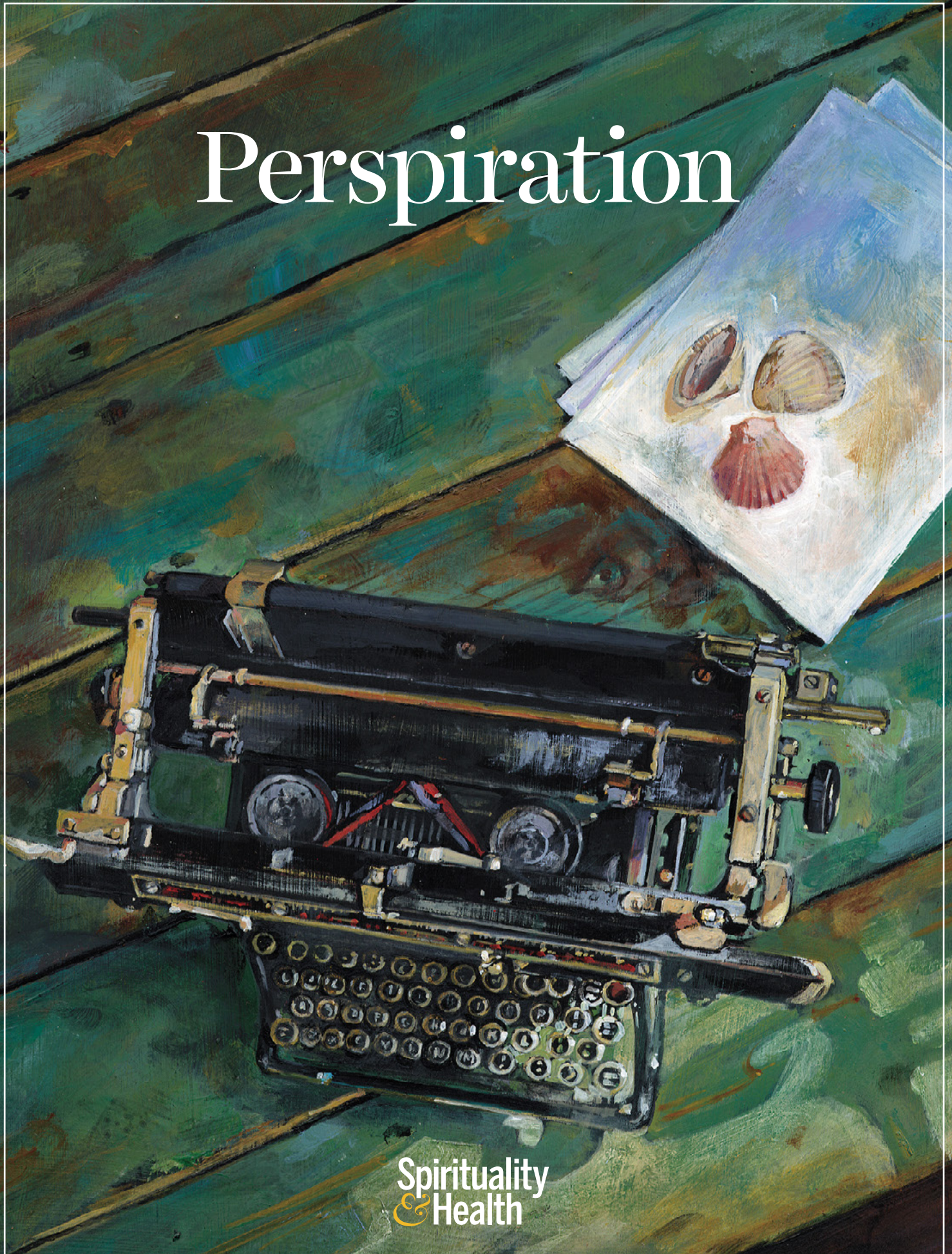
I open myself to a life of creativity.

My creative energy is limitless.

I give myself room for expression.



# Perspiration



# Picturing the Moment

LEARN HOW THIS ARTIST STARTS HER DAY WITH CAMERA IN HAND.

**TINA SCOTT LASSITER** is an artist and healing professional whose work has appeared regularly in *Spirituality & Health* magazine. Here is Tina's practice:

*I am a writer and a self-taught artist and photographer who was using mindful practices before I was exposed to "mindfulness". Perhaps because of an early interest in Buddhism or maybe because as I studied integrative medicine, I discovered that what I was learning seemed to already be embedded in my DNA. Being totally in the moment with all of my senses engaged is just how live. After my morning ritual that includes introspection, prayer, a short Yoga Nidra session, a combination of self Reiki and acupressure followed by a brief inspirational read, as often as I can, I dress (earrings a must) and go for a mindful walk with my camera.*

*Never do I plan the route, I go where I am led allowing the pictures to find me along the way. Something calls out to me and because I have tuned out everything around me, I see what I am supposed to that day. Rarely do I devote much time to composing a "perfect" photograph, though the tendency is to capture close up, detailed images that bring to light what would ordinarily be missed. Being present and in the moment with whatever is before my eyes . . . and sometimes in my ear or nose . . . is a gift in more ways than one.*

*The next part of my practice focuses on sharing. I immediately edit my work, re-living the unplanned path which invigorates mind, body, soul, spirit and heart. Pictures are posted on my blog or sent to friends,*



TINA SCOTT LASSITER

*family, and a list of followers with a message. Each time I hit send, a reply comes back from one or more to say "I needed this today, thank you" leaving me feeling humbled, grateful and happy. And then I return to the world.*

Learn more about Tina and follow her work on her blog [here](#) and on her Instagram page [here](#).

BY ALMA TASSI



## START YOUR DAY WITH SHARING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

If you're inspired by Tina's process, create your own morning altar (or a few), and share a photo of it on social media. Make sure to tag @spirithhealthmag and @myeclecticeye.

# Surprise Yourself with a Nested Meditation

ONE OF THE more ingenious tools we've found for reframing a tough situation—or simply having fun with words—is a process that psychologist Kevin Anderson calls nested meditation. It began when Kevin's father refused the five-times-daily dialysis that would prolong his life, and Kevin wept to his brother, "How can this suffering be?" His brother replied, "It's a gift." Kevin contemplated the answer and then wrote:

**How can this suffering be?**

**How can this suffering be  
a gift?**

**How can this suffering be  
a gift?  
Rip it open.**

**How can this suffering be  
a gift?  
Rip it open,  
and the heart floods with compassion.**

Kevin realized he was on to something: "A way to move, in a few words, from surface observations or feelings into deeper layers of experience." So he came up with a strict format that he detailed in a collection of meditations called *Divinity in Disguise*, which won an *S&H* Best Spiritual Book Award.

Each stanza after the opening line begins with the words from the prior stanza in the exact order and with the same spellings and line breaks. Part of the magic feeling the nested form evokes is seeing the exact words take us to such different places as the next line is added.



YOUR  
TURN

## S.C.O.P.E. YOUR MEDITATION

**S:** Show up with a pad of paper and a pen or pencil.

**C:** Calm your body, mind, and spirit with a few minutes of deep breathing.

**O:** Observe your inner and outer world. Make note on paper of inner thoughts or feelings or outer perceptions (sights, sounds, smells). Let the flow be free.

**P:** Play with one or more of the lines you wrote down in the step above. See if you can add another line that shifts the meaning in a surprising way. If not, rework the first line or choose another one to play with. Keep playing your way from stanza to stanza.

**E:** Enjoy what shows up.

There's no need for every stanza to connect logically to the one before or after. Each stanza may be its own separate meditation, as is apparent if you pause for a breath or two between stanzas.

**We are all one.**

**We are all one  
step from the edge.**

**We are all one  
step from the edge  
of the annihilation.**

**We are all one  
step from the edge  
of the annihilation  
of all hatred.**

Kevin's second book of nested meditations, *Now Is Where God Lives*, is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

BY S&H EDITORS

# Blackout Poetry: Creation Through Reduction

I'M EMBARRASSED to admit this, but in my office file cabinet right now, on the second shelf from the top, are 11 journals. Some are plain, paper-backed, utilitarian; others are beautiful with hardbound covers containing thick, creamy paper and satin ribbons to mark their pages. The one thing they have in common, though: They are all blank.

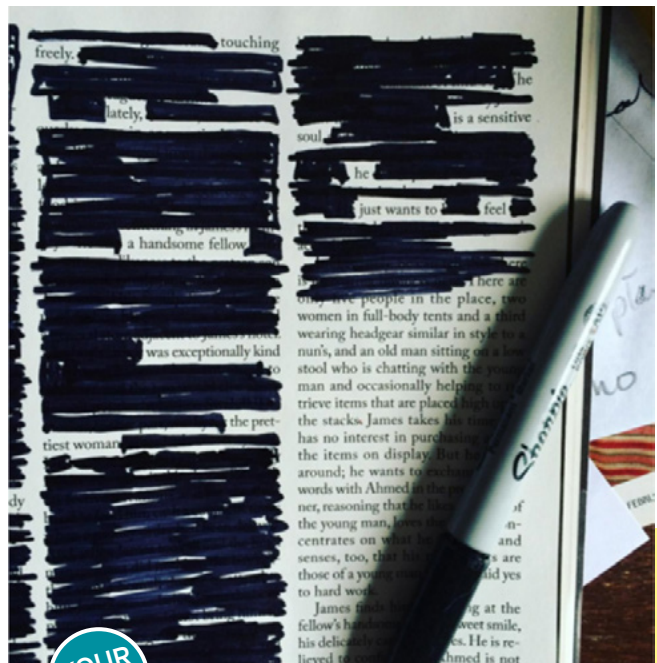
I'm a sucker for the potential of a blank journal—that opening page stretching out before me, all peaceful and pristine like a field of fresh snow. And yet, at the same time, there can be something intimidating about an empty canvas. Creation anxiety wells up, and my inner critic starts yammering away at me even before I've put pen to paper: What do I want to say? How can I say it best? Is this even interesting? Will I cringe when I read it later? Maybe I should “save” this really nice journal for when my thoughts aren't so messy.

Even seasoned writers will admit: The hardest part is often just to begin.

Writing is an essential part of my daily self-care and spiritual practices, so when those moments arise where I can't seem to get out of my own way, I take another path: I start with a page that's full of words instead of one that's devoid of them.

Blackout poetry is a form of creative writing that involves redacting words from text published in, say, an old newspaper or magazine. All that's required is a thick black marker, a body of text, and a little patience. Think of it like carving a statue out of a block of marble—the material is already there, it's just up you to decide what to take away to create shape, form, meaning.

There is no right or wrong way to go about making a blackout poem. I usually begin by skimming the article, noting interesting words or phrases, maybe even using

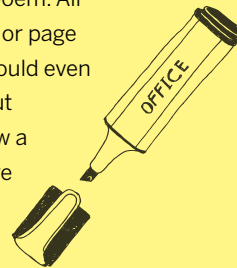


EMILY BINGHAM

YOUR TURN

## WRITING EXERCISE

Today, set aside 10-15 minutes to create a blackout poem. All you need is a thick permanent marker and an article or page torn from a newspaper, magazine or old book (you could even print a page from an online article). Don't worry about whether or not the poem is “good”—just seek to draw a message, story or idea out from the page. Then, share it on social media and tag us (@spiritualhealthmag)! We can't wait to see what you come up with.



a pencil to underline them. Once I've “gathered” these words, I go back over them again, drawing boxes around them with my marker, linking them to create sentences and build an idea. Word by word, paragraph by paragraph, I scratch out the rest of the unneeded words, until finally when I look at the page, a story or poem is looking back at me.

By nature, blackout poetry is messy. It requires you to be in the moment, open your mind, and work with what you've been given. It's also permanent: Once you've deleted a word, you can't un-delete it. So you learn to let go a little, reset your expectations, go with the flow. If you don't like what you end up with? You crumple up the page, toss it in the recycling bin, and begin again.

Ray Bradbury once said, “Writing is not a serious business. It's a joy and a celebration.” In times of creative stagnancy, sitting down with a newspaper and a Sharpie helps me shake out the stuck feelings and allows me to loosen my perfectionist grip. And it's fun! It's always fascinating to see what my subconscious decides to shape out of a bunch of words sitting on a page, almost like a verbal Rorschach test. And whenever I make a blackout poem that I really like, I even write it out longhand—in one of my blank journals, of course.

BY EMILY BINGHAM



## Shared Journaling

INSTEAD OF KEEPING A PRIVATE JOURNAL, A SHARED JOURNAL CAN BE A WAY TO USE WRITING TO CONNECT OR DEEPEN A RELATIONSHIP.

**BACK IN JUNIOR HIGH,** I was positively livid when I discovered that my mother had read some of the inscriptions from my friends in my yearbook. She had innocently wanted to get to know me better, but to me, it felt like a deep betrayal. At age 12, pen scrawls in a book felt so deeply personal, even if they were inane “have an awesome summer!” type comments.

During our awkward preteen years, we guard our yearbooks, diaries and journals like sacred scrolls. We slam our journals shut when a sibling enters the room. Seal our diaries tight with heart-shaped locks and stuff them under the pillow for safekeeping. As we get older, we still tend to guard our journals with that same fortress mentality.

Sometimes that is for our own good. Journals are meant to be a safe haven, a space to vent, to pour out our unvarnished thoughts without judgment or fear of censorship, either from self or society. We wrestle with our most prickly and uncomfortable emotions on those pages, detangling them and picking through. We sort out what matters—what needs to be acted on—versus what is best left behind, released onto page 74 and no longer needed. As receptacles of such powerful feelings, some journals are tools rightly kept very private.

But journals don't always have to be such tightlipped, solitary vessels. Have you considered inviting another participant into this space? Instead of keeping a journal for "me, myself and I," a shared journal can be a way to use writing to connect or deepen a relationship. Shared journals can work especially well between parents and teenaged children, as it creates a dialog that can sometimes be missing in the rocky years of adolescence. Shared journals are also enjoyed between grown siblings or between trusting friends. A shared journal transforms meditative writing into an openhearted experience—the writer takes the leap and shares with a reader; the reader becomes the writer, and a delicious loop of dialog starts to liberate both sides.

Ready to try a shared journal? Here are some topics that can provide starter topics:

- 1 What is your favorite memory of the two of you together?
- 2 What five words would you use to describe yourself? What five words would you pick to describe the other person? How have these words stayed the same or changed over the years?
- 3 What scares you most these days? What used to scare you but now doesn't bother you at all, and why do you say that?
- 4 If you could change one thing about your life right now, what would it be?
- 5 Lists can be revealing, too, such as, "Three things I bet you didn't know about me," "my three favorite books" or "five favorite songs of all time."

With a shared journal, you might be surprised not only how much better you can get to know a loved one, but also how much better you can get to know yourself.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

**HELPFUL HINT:**

Have mutually agreed upon time constraints, so that the journal keeps moving back and forth between the writers and doesn't get sidelined in the daily shuffle.

**Your Creative Spirit**  
WITH FLORA BOWLEY

To see a video of this exercise, click [HERE](#)



In this episode, Flora Bowley shows how collaboration can bring together creativity and connection.



## COLLABORATIVE PAINTING OR DRAWING

Collaboration is a powerful and fun way to connect with other people, as well as a great way to loosen up and let go. This practice can be done on any scale and with any mediums.

**POSSIBLE MATERIALS**

- Paper or canvas
- Pens, pencils, markers
- Watercolor or acrylic paint
- Paint brush(es)
- Water to clean your brushes

**DIRECTIONS**

Each person starts by adding marks, color, and/or imagery to their surface. After a decided upon amount of time, you each switch your piece with your partner (or partners). Now it's your turn to add to what they've started for you. Feel free to turn the paper or canvas, cover over parts of what is already there, and really make it your own . . . until you switch again!



# Random Acts of Poetry

## HOW TO TURN ANY ORDINARY TREE INTO A POET-TREE

**NATURE, THEY SAY**, abhors a vacuum—which may be why we fill the space between us with communications of all kinds. During busy times, we email, post, text, and tweet and are surprised when we look up and see a flesh-and-blood face. Poetry posts are a way to combine human connection and a connection with nature. They are like those real-estate signs that hold listing sheets, except that instead of listings, they hold and display poems, quotes, or words of wisdom. They range in complexity from imitation trail markers to unprotected pages attached to trees, which turns trees into—yes—poet-trees.

### MATERIALS

- Materials for posting, such as a length of string or a prebuilt box
- Statement, wish, quote, or poem honoring nature
- Tree or lamppost
- Unbleached paper

### PREPARATION

Find a quote or a poem that honors nature and may inspire human beings. Print it out or copy it by hand and live with it for a week to make sure it speaks to you in a variety of moods. Then consider the kind of experience you want to offer.

- Do you want to post a single page that people come to see, or a product people can take with them? Will your posting be ephemeral—designed to wear away over time—or encased in a permanent or semipermanent home?
- Make sure that laws or regulations permit you to post materials in your chosen spot. Your own driveway or lawn may be the best spot for a posting; city and parkland kiosks can work, too.



### THE POST

Set an intention, post your material, then become the first reader to read the post aloud. Let the sound steep the area with good intentions.

### THE CLOSING

Ceremonies and rituals are all about making words and intentions come alive. By posting them to share with friends and strangers alike, you invite ceremony and an appreciation for nature into everyone's life, and you contribute to a truly social form of media.

**BY SHERI REDA**

From *Life-Cycle Ceremonies: A Handbook for Your Whole Life*, an ebook from the **Celebrant Foundation**.

# Being in the Presence of Change

JOIN EARTH ARTIST DAY SCHILDKRET IN CREATING MINDFUL MORNING ALTARS FROM FOUND TREASURES.

**TWICE LAST WEEK** I bumped into friends while in the midst of busy days. These are women who I adore, but haven't seen in much too long, each of us consumed with the busy-ness of our own lives. Taking ten minutes to dive deep into a visit, while all of life continued to swirl around us felt like a blessing in my day.

We must choose to create these moments in our days. Day Schildkret, author of *Morning Altars: A 7-step practice to nourish your spirit with nature, art and ritual* says that “the biggest intention of creating morning altars



Day Schildkret. His book, *Morning Altars: A 7-step practice to nourish your spirit with nature, art and ritual*, is available at [morningaltars.com](http://morningaltars.com).



Subtle Grandeur by Day Schildkret

is to interrupt my day; to step outside of the incessant screen time, stress, and non-stop pace of my life. It is a way to step into timelessness, which for thousands of years is the way humans have lived on this planet: timeless and present and in awe of the natural world. As modern humans, we are worshipping other gods: time and speed. The consequences are stress, isolation, and anxiety, which so many are suffering from.”

Heartbreak led him to creating his first morning altars, while taking his dog on walks, and discovering treasures from the earth right outside his back door. “It started as a very personal practice,” explained Schildkret, “a love letter between me and the earth. Eventually people started to find them and find meaning in them, and ultimately the practice renewed my faith that I can continue walking in my life.”

Creating these mandalas, or impermanent earth art, is about “stepping into wonder, imagination, curiosity



The Faded Dawn by Day Schildkret

and surprise, all of the qualities the wilderness, the natural world, brings forward; all qualities children have in spades. Kids, earth, and art happen without thinking about it. In our culture all impermanent are is subjugated to children, while permanent art is for adults. This idea of impermanence is deeply woven into my work, and the intention,” explains Schildkret.

Schildkret describes the creation of morning altars as a “practice of being in the presence of change. Sometimes the way you think things should be aren’t like that, and the question becomes, how do you respond to that? I’ve built so many altars, and none of them exist anymore. Some have been destroyed in the process of creating them, a gust of wind comes along and blows away what I have spent hours creating.” We can begin to let go of what we are holding onto by releasing our attachment to what we create.

Schildkret explains his experience with the creative process, “I try to step out of my own way. When I can really wrestle myself out of the way, something very alive and mysterious wants to speak through me- some may call it a muse. I know when it’s present because my hands have trouble keeping up with it wants to do. It’s almost like a deer that’s bounding in front of me, and I’m just trying to keep up. I know the difference when I’m struggling with myself, and when something else is playing through me. It’s a very different feeling.” Even if you feel that you don’t have a creative bone in your body, consider

being open to a sense of play and curiosity. “Somewhere inside of you is your five year old self, who knows exactly how to play.”

For those who feel removed from the natural world, Schildkret invites them to look around with fresh eyes. He has led workshops in the very heart of cities where, at first glance, there is nothing natural to collect. After foraging, participants returned with a variety of unexpected materials. “When people can practice the skills of curiosity and wonder,” he says, “they realize how much they are missing in the world around them.

BY KALIA KELMENSEN

YOUR  
TURN

## SHARE YOUR ALTAR

If you’re inspired by Day’s beautiful work, create your own morning altar (or a few), and share a photo of it on social media. Make sure to tag @spirithealthmag and @morningaltars.

Day also has a community page on his site where you can share your impermanent earth art. To be featured, send a photo of your altar, your name, along with when and where it was made to [day@morningaltars.com](mailto:day@morningaltars.com).



# Journaling to Rediscover Hidden Interests

TRY THIS JOURNALING EXERCISE TO REDISCOVER SOMETHING YOU USED TO BE PASSIONATE ABOUT AS A CHILD.

**I RECENTLY CAME ACROSS** a study that said our personalities are pretty much set for life by the time we're in first grade. "We remain recognizably the same person," wrote the study author, Christopher Nave. "This speaks to the importance of understanding personality because it does follow us wherever we go across time and contexts." I love this idea: Our personalities, dutifully trotting along behind as we move through decades and apartments, lovers and jobs.

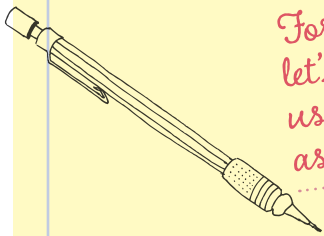
Not only are our personalities set—things like how quiet we are, or how outgoing, how orderly we like our physical surroundings, how verbal or spatially inclined we are—so too, are our interests. Think back to what you loved to do as a child: maybe it was play chef, and today, you still love to try new restaurants, sample new foods when you travel, and enjoy cooking at home. Perhaps you were a bookworm as a kid, and still are an insatiable reader with a three-foot stack of books next to the bed. Other passions, however, tend to fade away because they suffer the dreaded “less practical” problem. What I am to do with my inexplicable love of

plastic play food? Well, I can collect it, I suppose. But you see what I mean. Some things just don’t translate as well to the world of Grown Up.

These journaling exercises are tapping into the passions of your first grade self, but remember, that self still resides within you. You can honor that self by threading some of your old interests—no matter how zany they may seem at first to you—into your current adult world.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

YOUR TURN



*For this journaling exercise, let's rediscover something you used to be passionate about as a child.*

**EXERCISE 1.**

**Think back to a time when you had a collection.**

What was the collection of? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you keep it? \_\_\_\_\_

How large was it? \_\_\_\_\_

How long did it take to acquire this collection? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it now? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was this collection so important/What did it represent? \_\_\_\_\_

What part of you is still affected by this collection? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a piece of this collection you'd like to resurrect and bring into your current life in some way, and if so, how? \_\_\_\_\_

**EXERCISE 2.**

**What did you used to love to do more than anything else?**

What was this activity? (Riding a horse? Visiting a candy store?) \_\_\_\_\_

Picture yourself partaking in this activity and describe it in detail. \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel after seeing yourself doing this? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything about this cherished activity that you'd like to bring back into your adult life, and if so, what? \_\_\_\_\_

**EXERCISE 3.**

**Is there anything you loved but stopped doing because of X reason?**

What was this activity? (Ballet? Climbing a tree? Playing the trumpet?) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you stop? \_\_\_\_\_

How did that make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything about this activity that you would like to try again, or some aspect of it that you would like to invite back into your life? \_\_\_\_\_

# The Art of Aliveness

TRY VISUAL RIFFING WITH FLORA BOWLEY

**IN A RECENT INTERVIEW** on Marc Maron’s WTF podcast, actress and writer Lena Dunham shared a thought about her father’s profession as a painter. She said, “We have so many options now with media that being just being a straight up painter with brushes and paint is increasingly rare.” The classic art form has given way to variety of methods to express your artistry, although when people imagine an artist, a person with a brush and canvas often comes to mind, coupled with the assumption, “I can’t do that.”

Flora Bowley believes you can. A professional painter herself, she believes everyone has the ability to explore their creativity if they are willing to create a daily practice to exercise the muscle. The process she works in is layered acrylic painting, which can change at any time. Not having an idea when she starts and letting go of the attachment to have it look a certain way clears the way for organic play and intuition.

After realizing life as a professional painter wasn’t giving her the fulfillment she needed, she started Bloom True Workshops to teach her process to first time painters. She discovered an audience that craved a chance to bring tactile creativity into their every day lives—from

Your Creative Spirit  
WITH FLORA BOWLEY

To see a video of this exercise, click [HERE](#)



YOUR TURN

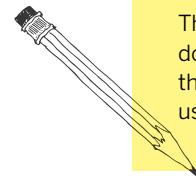
## VISUAL RIFFING

Take a piece of paper and draw 12 boxes.

Pick a shape such as a triangle, a moon, or a line and put it in every box.

Now, riff off the shape. If you start with a circle, one box can be a balloon, the next can be a sun, and so on.

This exercise gives you 12 chances to do something different with the same thing and is a simple way to start using those creative muscles.



moms who wanted to feed their own cup, to people who were once art school students wanting to reignite an old passion.

In her workshops Bowley says, “I want my students to get out of their heads. Getting into feeling their body is the goal, so I use walking meditation, yoga, and dance breaks. We stand when we paint to get bodies moving, instead of just hands moving, and coming from their center.” Her new Creative Revolution E-Course is about how to incorporate creativity into daily life. Practices are simple and can be done at a kitchen table with different mediums and jumping off points. She said, “The art of aliveness is how to move through the day with a more creative sensibility—noticing color and shade and cultivating presence.”

One exercise she offers is called Visual Riffing and you don’t need anything more than a pencil and a piece of paper.

To learn more about Flora Bowley and her workshops, visit her at [florabowley.com](http://florabowley.com). You can also often find Flora’s work in the pages of *Spirituality & Health* magazine.

BY ALMA TASSI

# The Empowering Gift of Memoir

AN INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA WALKER

**REBECCA WALKER CONSIDERS** teaching memoir “a kind of personal philanthropy. It’s a calling.” She has been following this call for almost fifteen years, and has been writing memoir for much longer. She leads **memoir writing workshops** to groups around the world, is a best-selling author, and writes daily. She shares the process of reshaping your story so it can empower you.

## What is it about teaching memoir that is meaningful to you?

I feel like I’m most in the flow of what I am here to do when I’m helping to support people in telling the stories they’ve been carrying about who they are and what their lives mean. I help them reshape those stories in ways that are empowering, and contribute both to their health and to the health of their community and the world.

I really try to excavate the things that have shaped them. Often those are very painful and they are carrying those wounds as part of their story of who they are. The work of teaching memoir is really about getting in and chiseling the barnacles off of the heart. There are the different elements we focus on and the formal way in which memoirs are constructed that we study, but really the work is internal: psychological, psycho-spiritual, emotional, and relational. It’s goes very deep.

## How do you help to re-shape a story when it isn’t a helpful one?

The first step is to create a space of safety for people, or for yourself. We must have permission to look at the old wounds, to acknowledge them, to forgive oneself and the people who may have injured us. We must be very careful



with our assessment and to be willing to feel all the things we’ve dammed up. It’s important to let it all out. It’s like when kids have those blocks with letters and they spill them all out—and create words from the letters. It’s like that—toss it all out onto the table and not be afraid. Then to slowly understand the sense that we have made of these experiences.

Then, with the support of someone who believes that underneath all that story, all those wounds, is a being that is pure and already liberated and free, and has the will and the power to take those experiences and learn from them. There must be the belief that we can grow from them and become someone who can incorporate the incidences and come up with a different self conception, a different idea of who they are.

It’s inherent in human genius that we are infinitely able to rewrite our stories, and to reflect and re-tool our minds. You have the power to rewire your brain by retelling this story in a way that places you as the heroine, the survivor, the vanquisher. I often say in class, that at the end of a good memoir, you’re giving your reader the

*There is an understanding that it is possible to change one's story, and that it's necessary in order to change the larger global story. So there's a deep motivation to shed the past stories that aren't working.*



gift of showing how you climbed the beanstalk, got the golden eggs and climbed back down. You've extracted the wisdom from your experience, and in that way you're giving a gift to your reader, who may be in the process of great struggle and not understanding how to find the riches in that struggle.

### **What are some prompts that help people uncover their stories, and perhaps discover new ways of telling them?**

What was the first story that you were told about yourself? It's important to look back and see what you were told you were. Some were told they were timid children, some told they were superheroes, some told they were dishonest; everyone was told something that they held onto. It's important to figure out what your first story was.

What is the first story you told about yourself? At what point did you break away from this idea you were given about yourself and start to design your own identity. That's usually, I want to be a lawyer, I'm someone who loves cats.

What was the reaction you got from people to that story? Usually there is some sense of pushback—people don't want you to be telling your own story.

How did you respond to that? Did you succumb to their response and hold on to their story of you or did you keep pushing forward to be self-defining?

If you could be free of other people's stories that have been projected onto you, what is the story you want to tell about yourself? Who do you want to be? What story would feel most aligned with your deepest aspirations to who you are? What would that look like? This is about really trying to figure out a story that is true and aligned with one's purpose.

What will it take for you to die a good death? What is the story that you want to be told about who you were. Or what are the stories you want to have about yourself when you're dying?

It's all about reflecting and writing a story for this body in this time, that can carry you through the vicissitudes of life, letting go of the stories that don't serve you, and believing that you can.

### **Have you seen a shift in who is drawn to writing memoir in the last couple of years?**

I've definitely seen a change. I feel that people are more open to the process. There is a sense of necessity and urgency about the work. There is an understanding that it is possible to change one's story, and that it's necessary in order to change the larger global story. So there's a deep motivation to shed the past stories that aren't working. They recognize that we have to do that collectively and they feel much more connected to this collective shared space. They understand that if they can do it, they will be a part of a movement that's doing it.

I've been talking about the importance of changing the story of whiteness and white privilege for a long time. Lately, there's a real commitment and openness, specifically from white people who have privilege, to rework what it means to them. A commitment to retell their narrative of white privilege to mean something that's much more about standing with and for people who don't have the same kind of privilege, and to shift their relationship with the people who are being impacted by their privilege to make sure that they take responsibility for where they are. I'm seeing willingness to change their story from one that's aloof and distant to one that's fully enmeshed, integrated, and open to doing the work of functioning together as a fully integrated community. That is one of the most exciting shifts I've seen in the last couple of years.

People want to be better. Through memoir, I get to touch and see the places inside of every single person I've worked with that wants to be better, that wants to heal, that wants to be whole, that wants a story that restores their full power and humanity, and all of what that means. It gives me hope.

BY KALIA KELMENSEN



Try **writing your memoir in a flash** on the next page



# Write Your Memoir in a Flash

THE BIG ADVANTAGE OF THINKING SMALL.

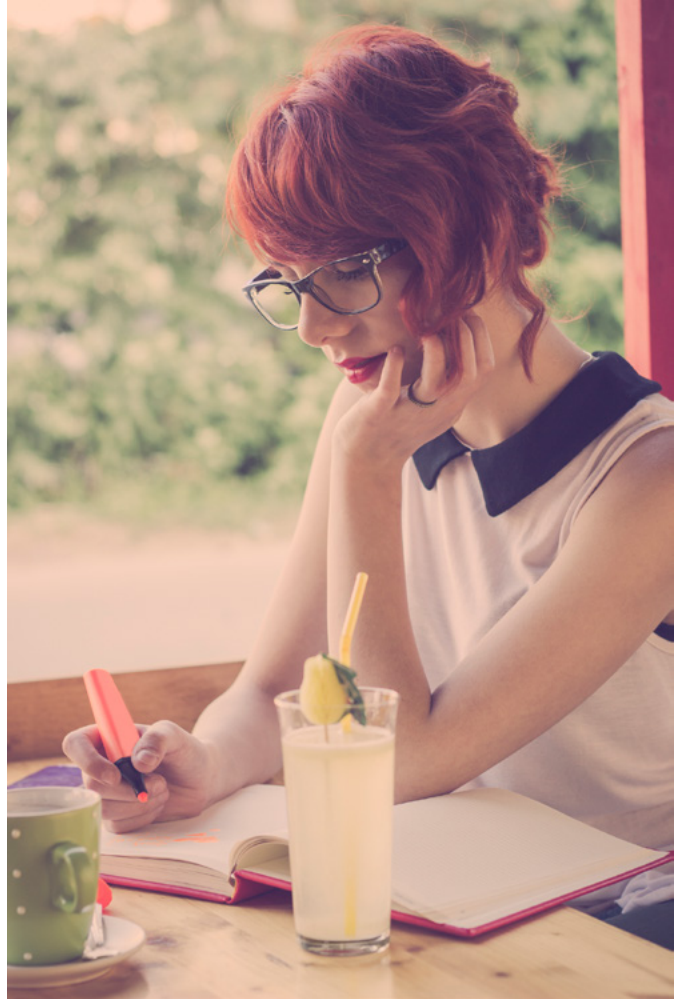
**WONDERING HOW TO** approach your memoir? Today there are essentially two schools of thought. The conventional way is to think big, focusing on one's signal achievements, and the key turning points that took you through your particular journey in life. This method may produce a perfectly serviceable text, but it does have some disadvantages. One is that the storytelling tends to become abstract, draining the color and texture out of the life you lived in a particular time and place. A more serious drawback is that the focus on "major" and "meaningful" can make the prospect of tackling such a project even more intimidating than it would be otherwise.

Enter a new alternative: telling your story in a short format, like flash. While it may be better known as a short format for fiction, flash is becoming increasingly popular for creative non-fiction, and that includes memoir.

Most flash stories average less than 750 words—that's about a page—and can be as **short as six**. That may sound like a challenge for telling your whole life story, but that, in a way, is the point: recounting your biography in near real-time is the one thing you do not want to do to a reader. Unlike a Wikipedia entry or history textbook, a memoir prioritizes focus of story over completeness of information.

Often it comes down to the selection of evocative details. Like Proust's madeleine cookie dipped in tea or Nabokov's fluttering blue butterflies, one vivid image from the past can unlock a whole storehouse of memories.

Try this exercise as a way of writing a 500-word flash memoir:



- 1. Start from the senses:** What were the smells, sounds and tastes that made up the scenery of a certain period of your life?
- 2. Locate the struggle:** Even if it wasn't earth shattering, what was your most immediate goal at that moment, and what stood in the way of accomplishing it?
- 3. End with a twist:** What happened that you weren't expecting?

If a book-length memoir is the documentary film, think of flash memoir as the snapshot. No need to strive for the perfectly composed Instagram image, however; a blurry Polaroid is an equally valid aesthetic choice.

And while writing in this way is infinitely less daunting than taking on a novel-length project, that's not the only benefit of flash memoir. By shifting focus from momentous life events to the little details you thought you had forgotten, it gives you the opportunity to enjoy the process of discovery and play on the page, instead of always working so hard.

And that's big!

BY ANNA ROHLEDER



# Let Your Creative Light Shine

Take the projects out of order, repeat favorite prompts, whatever you like! Simply challenge yourself to create every day for 30 days.

<p><b>1</b> Try your hand at black-out poetry (page 22)</p> 	<p><b>2</b> <i>Visual riffing day!</i> (page 30) Try a circle shape to start</p>	<p><b>3</b> Morning pages: read the link on page 3 and join Julia Cameron in creating your morning pages</p>
<p><b>4</b> <i>Noodle Time:</i> follow step 3 on page 5 and let yourself noodle for 20 minutes</p>	<p><b>5</b> Journaling day: try the exercise on page 29 to try to rediscover your hidden interests</p>	<p><b>6</b> Create a morning altar (page 26)</p>  <p><small>SUBTLE GRANDEUR BY DAY SCHILDKRET</small></p>
<p><b>7</b> Collaborate! Find a partner to journal together (page 23) or create art together (24). <i>See Kathryn's list of prompts on page 24 for journaling inspiration</i></p>	<p><b>8</b> Write your memoir in a flash (page 33)</p>	<p><b>9</b> Draw a mandala with Flora Bowley (page 11)</p>
<p><b>10</b> Start your day with a camera and a meditative walk, and then share your photos (page 20)</p>	<p><b>11</b> Your choice: Repeat a project that you enjoyed, invent your own art play exercise, or take an artist's date as described by Julia Cameron: "The Artist Date is a once-weekly, festive, solo expedition to explore something that interests you."</p>	<p><b>12</b> S.C.O.P.E. a nested meditation (page 21)</p> 
 <p><b>13</b> Create another morning altar (page 26) <i>Variation: use tiny materials</i></p> <p><small>S&amp;H: SANDRA SALAMONY</small></p>	<p><b>14</b> Visit a library today (page 16) <i>See page 17 for tips on how to use the library as a refreshing mini-retreat for your creative spirit</i></p>	<p><b>15</b> Write Julie Peters' letter to your brain after pigeon pose (page 15)</p>

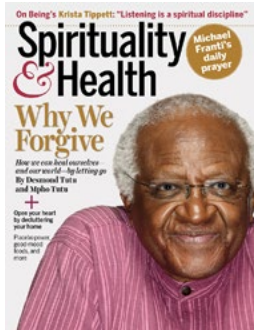
30-DAY CHALLENGE



# Let Your Creative Light Shine

Take the projects out of order, repeat favorite prompts, whatever you like! Simply challenge yourself to create every day for 30 days.

<p><b>16</b></p> <p><i>Take a meditative meander: follow Flora Bowley's tips on intuitive wandering on page 13</i></p>	<p><b>17</b></p> <p><b>Try your hand at black-out poetry (page 22)</b></p> <p><i>This time : warm-up with fluid arm movement exercise (page 9)</i></p>	<p><b>18</b></p> <p><b>Draw a mandala with Flora Bowley (page 11)</b></p> <p><i>If you used white paper last time, try black paper today</i></p>
<p><b>19</b></p> <p><b>Morning pages: read the link on page 3 and join Julia Cameron in creating your morning pages</b></p>	<p><b>20</b></p> <p><b>Print Kathryn's list of affirmations on page 18. Cut each one out and place around your living space.</b></p>	<p><b>21</b></p> <p><b>Create one more morning altar (page 26)</b></p> <p><i>Variation: use non-botanical foraged materials</i></p> <p>S&amp;H: KALIA KELMENSEN</p> 
<p><b>22</b></p> <p><b>Write your memoir in a flash (page 33)</b></p> <p><i>This time: use only 6 words (sixwordmemoirs.com)</i></p>	<p><b>23</b> <b>Your choice:</b></p> <p>Repeat a project that you enjoyed, invent your own art play exercise, or take an artist's date as described by Julia Cameron: "The Artist Date is a once-weekly, festive, solo expedition to explore something that interests you."</p>	<p><b>24</b></p> <p><b>Make a poet-tree (page 29)</b></p> 
<p><b>25</b></p> <p><b>Noodle Time: follow step 3 on page 5 and let yourself noodle for 20 minutes</b></p> 	<p><b>26</b></p> <p><b>Visual riffing day! (page 30)</b></p> <p><i>Try a triangle shape this time</i></p>	<p><b>27</b></p> <p><b>Collaborate! Re-join your partner (or invite someone new) to journal together (page 23) or create art together (24).</b></p> <p><i>See Kathryn's list of prompts on page 24 for journaling inspiration</i></p>
<p><b>28</b></p> <p><b>Start your day with a camera and a meditative walk, and then share your photos (page 20)</b></p>	<p><b>29</b></p> <p><b>S.C.O.P.E. another nested meditation (page 21)</b></p>	<p><b>30</b></p> <p><b>Share your story! Write a journal entry on your creative journey and share it with us (page 8)</b></p>



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