

## Praise for *The Listening Path*

‘Julia Cameron has done it again. In *The Listening Path*, she gently guides us to become more in tune with ourselves, our world, each other and beyond – bringing more clarity, connection and joy into our lives. Whether you’re a seasoned creator or just getting started, *The Listening Path* will guide you to access the treasure trove of wisdom that lives within, and in the world around you’

—Amber Rae, author of  
*Choose Wonder Over Worry*

‘Julia Cameron brought a new approach to creativity to the world with her extraordinary book, *The Artist’s Way*. Now, in *The Listening Path*, she takes us into a completely different dimension of creativity: the ability to listen at deeper and deeper levels. As a lifelong student of the art of listening, I can tell you there is nothing quite like this book. I encourage you to read *The Listening Path* and make use of its life-changing gifts’

—Gay Hendricks, Ph.D.,  
*New York Times* bestselling author of  
*The Big Leap* and *Conscious Luck*

## Praise for Julia Cameron and *The Artist's Way*

‘Without *The Artist's Way*, there would have been no *Eat, Pray, Love*’

—Elizabeth Gilbert

‘This is a book that addresses a delicate and complex subject. For those who will use it, it is a valuable tool to get in touch with their own creativity’

—Martin Scorsese

‘I absolutely love this book ... It's a really good starting point to discover what lights you up’

—Emma Gannon

‘This book has been revolutionary in my creative life. It's a must-read for every artist’

—Ito Aghayere, Instagram

‘I love it. A practical, spiritual, nurturing book’

—Russell Brand

‘Unleashing our creative potential is the key to a more meaningful life’

—*Psychologies*

‘I picked this book up for the first time when I was twenty-one years old. It completely changed my life’

—Kerry Washington, Instagram

‘If you have always wanted to pursue a creative dream, have always wanted to play and create with words or paints, this book will gently get you started and help you learn all kinds of paying-attention techniques’

—Anne Lamott

**THE  
LISTENING  
PATH**

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THE  
LISTENING  
PATH

The Creative Art  
of Attention



JULIA CAMERON

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## INTRODUCTION

It is almost seven P.M. on a July evening in Santa Fe, and the sky is still a bright, azure blue. I sit on a bench amid trees and flowers. Birds chirp in the tree nearby. I can't see them, hidden in the tapestry of leaves, but I hear them as clearly as if they are next to me on the bench. Farther in the distance, a raven caws. Is it communicating with my nearby songbirds, or is its conversation unrelated? Farther off, a dog barks. A light breeze shifts the tall purple flowers by my bench and they rustle against one another as they sway back and forth. A car passes by, its engine quieter than its heavy wheels crunching through the gravel below. Far in the distance, a horn honks on the main throughway. Wings flutter as a bird lights to the sky, gliding away and out of sight. Nearby, the songbirds' chatter has slowed, but they still sing, a tuneful discussion in the greenery above. Earlier, it sounded as if they were all speaking at once. Now they seem to be taking turns. Are they listening to each other?

And what does it mean, to listen? What does it mean for us in our everyday lives? We listen to our environment, whether it is the chirping of birds or the commotion of

the city streets—or perhaps we don't listen, tuning it out instead. We listen to others—or perhaps we wish we listened better. Others listen to us—or we wish they did. We listen for our instincts, our hunches, our guidance—and perhaps we wish we could hear them more clearly and more often. The listening path asks us to tune into the many cues and clues that surround us every day. It asks us to take a moment to stop and listen—and argues that the moment spent tuning in, especially when we think we “don't have time,” doesn't take time, but gives us time . . . and gives us clarity, connection, and direction as well. Listening is something we all do—and something we can all do more of. Every life can be improved by improving our listening. The listening path is a gentle path, with tools along the way to become better listeners—to our environment, our fellows, and ourselves.

This book will serve as a guide, urging the reader to listen more carefully and to listen in deeper and deeper ways. When we listen, we pay attention. And the reward for attention is always healing. The listening path brings us healing, insight, and clarity. It brings us joy and perspective. Above all, it bring us connection.

### THE PATH TO DEEPER LISTENING

Over the next six weeks, you will be guided to expand your own listening, one level at a time. Each form of listening builds upon the next. I have learned that if we consciously work to listen, our listening deepens quickly. Deepening our listening is not time consuming so much as it is a matter of paying attention. This book will guide you to deeper and deeper listening within the life you've got, whether your schedule is busy or open, whether you live in the country or in the city.

We all listen, and we all listen in a myriad of ways.

We listen to our environment, where tuning in to the

sounds we might habitually tune out brings us surprising delight: the birds in the tree above enchant us; the tick-tick-tick of the kitchen clock brings us steadiness and comfort; the jangle of the dog's tags on the water bowl reminds us of the determination of life.

We listen to other people, and we learn that we can listen more closely. When we listen—really listen—to what others have to say, their insight often surprises us. When we don't interrupt, but wait, allowing our companions to extend a thought instead of rush to complete it, we learn that we can't in fact anticipate what they will share. Instead, we are reminded that we each have so much to offer, and that, given the chance, our companions will offer something more than, and different from what we might expect. We just have to listen.

We listen to our higher self, and in doing this, we are led both to guidance and to clarity. We do not struggle to think something up; rather we listen and take something down. Very little effort is required; what we are after is accuracy of listening. The voice of our higher self is calm, clear, and plainspoken. We accept each insight as it comes to us, trusting the often-simple thoughts that appear as ideas, hunches, or intuition.

Practiced in listening to our higher selves, we are ready to listen yet more deeply, reaching beyond the veil to listen to those close to us who have passed on. We find the unique and individual ways that our connection remains intact, and the ability to explore and expand that connection with ease. Reaching further still, we learn to listen to our heroes, those who we have not met but wish we had. And finally, we learn to listen to silence, where we may find we discover the very highest form of guidance. One step at a time, the listening path is a gracious experience of becoming more in touch with our world, ourselves, our beloveds, and beyond.

Let us listen.

## THE BASIC TOOLS

I have taught live workshops in creative unblocking for forty years. I have watched students become unblocked, blossoming creatively, whether that means publishing books, writing plays, opening galleries, or redecorating their homes. I have also seen a distinct and consistent change in my students as they work with the tools: they become happier and more user-friendly. Many relationships heal and improve. Relationships that need to end are allowed to do so. Collaborations are openhearted and productive. As my students become more honest with themselves, they become more honest with others. As they are gentler with themselves, they are gentler with others. As they are more daring, they inspire others to dare.

I have come to believe that these changes happen because, through the use of the tools, students become better listeners—first to themselves, and then to others. The listening path takes this observation and dives deeper into the root of all creation and connection: our ability to listen.

And so, the basic tools remain the same: Morning Pages, Artist Dates, and Walks. Each tool is inherently based in listening—and each develops our listening skills in specific ways. With Morning Pages, we serve as a witness to our own experience, listening to ourselves each morning and thus clearing the way for further listening throughout the day. With Artist Dates, we listen to the youthful part of ourselves who craves adventure and is full of interesting ideas. And with Walks, we listen both to our environment and to what might be called our higher power or higher self—I myself, and my many students, have found that solo walks consistently bring what I like to call ahas.

I have written forty books. When people ask me how

I do it, I tell them I listen. They sometimes think I'm being glib. But I'm not being glib; I'm describing my writing process in the most accurate way I know how. Writing is a form of active listening. Listening tells me what to write. At its best, writing is like taking dictation. There is an inner voice—that voice speaks to us when we listen. It is clear, calm, and guided. It is surefooted, putting one word after another, unspooling the thread that is our train of thought.

Focused on conscious listening, we become aware of a listening path: a path grounded in what we hear. When we listen, we are led spiritually. Listening for our emerging truth, we become increasingly true to ourselves. Honesty becomes our currency. We are given a glimpse of our souls.

“To thine own self be true,” the bard advised us. And when we are true to ourselves, we deal more truthfully with others. The listening path leads us to connection. The listening path is communal. We meet and greet our environment, our fellows, and ourselves.

Because it is sourced in honesty, the listening path is a spiritual path. As we listen for our personal truth, we hear a universal truth. We tap into an inner resource, which can be called grace. As we work to listen more and more authentically, we find ourselves ever more honest. A step at a time, we are training ourselves to honesty. In time, it begins to be automatic.

The habit of listening must be formed and practiced, and there is a simple way to begin it. You may start as I started—and still start each day: with the practice of Morning Pages. And what are they?

## MORNING PAGES

Morning Pages are a daily practice of three pages, stream of consciousness, written first thing upon awakening. I,

and many others, have used them for decades and have found them to be the most powerful tool to practice listening. The pages are about anything and everything. There is no wrong way to do them. They range from the petty to the profound.

“I forgot to buy kitty litter. . . .” “I didn’t call my sister back. . . .” “The car has a funny knock in it. . . .” “I hated that Jeff took credit for my idea. . . .” “I’m tired and I’m grumpy. . . .”

Morning Pages are like a little whisk broom that you poke into all the corners of your consciousness. They say, “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. . . .” The pages are intimate. They tell us how we really feel. In the pages there is no room for evasion. We tell ourselves we feel “okay,” and then we tell ourselves what we mean by that. Does “okay” mean “not so good” or does it mean “fine”?

Pages are for your eyes only. They are private and personal, not to be shown to anyone, however close they are to us. Pages are written out longhand, not by computer. Writing by hand yields us a handmade life. Writing by computer is faster, but speed is not what we are after. We are after depth and specificity. We want to record exactly how we feel and why.

Pages puncture denial. We learn what we really think, and it is often a surprise to us.

“I need to leave this job,” we may find ourselves saying. Or “I need more romance in my romance.” Pages nudge us toward action. Something that seemed “good enough” no longer seems that way. We admit we may deserve better, and then we admit our own inertia: our regrettable tendency to settle, which we have now outgrown.

Pages are a form of meditation. We write down our “cloud thoughts” as they cruise through our consciousness.

But pages are meditation with a difference: unlike conventional meditation, they move us to action. They do not “meditate away” our concerns. Instead, we write them out, and as we do, we are faced squarely with the question: “What are you going to do about that?”

Pages corner us into action. They do not settle for anything less. They tutor us into taking risks—risks on our own behalf. The first time pages raise the notion of action, we may find ourselves thinking, “I couldn’t do that!” But pages are persistent, and the second time they raise the notion, we may find ourselves thinking, “Maybe I could try that.” As the pages edge us further on, we find ourselves recording, “I believe that I’ll try . . .” And we do try—and quite often we succeed.

“I knew you could do it,” the pages may crow. Pages are a companion. They witness our lives. We find ourselves “taking to the page” in times of confusion. Pages help us to sort our often conflicting ideas. We write, “I think I need to break off my relationship.” And then we write, “Maybe I need instead to try a risky conversation.” We try the conversation and find ourselves delighted with the result.

Morning Pages are wise. They put us in touch with our own wisdom. We find ourselves tapping an inner resource that gives us answers to our many and varied problems. Our intuition is heightened. We find unexpected solutions to situations that used to baffle us. The spiritually inclined among us begin to speak of God. God, they say, is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Whether we call our helper God or simply the pages, we experience breakthroughs. Our lives begin to run more smoothly. We come to count on it.

“Do YOU STILL do Morning Pages?” I asked a colleague who taught with me twenty years ago.

“I do them whenever I get in trouble,” he replied.

“But if you did them regularly, you wouldn’t get in trouble,” I chided him—realizing that I sounded like a bleeding deacon.

Yet it has been my experience—forty years’ worth—that Morning Pages ward off difficulties. They give us a heads-up when trouble is looming. Pages are fearless: they do not hesitate to broach unpleasant topics. Your lover is growing distant, and pages mention this unsettling fact. Nudged by the pages, you instigate a difficult conversation. The risk pays off. Intimacy is restored.

Pages mentor us. They help us to grow in needed directions. They perform what I call “spiritual chiropractic,” adjusting us in needed directions. Loudmouths learn to keep their counsel. Milquetoasts begin to speak up. Always, we are moved in the direction needed. Pages are uncanny in their insights and adjustments.

Make no mistake: pages are a tough-love friend. If there is an issue we have been avoiding, pages will point this out. I received a letter: “Julia, I was perfectly happy drunk in the Outback. Then I started Morning Pages. Now I’m sober. . . .”

Drunkenness, overweight, codependency—pages will tackle them all. We are nudged in the right direction, and if a nudge doesn’t work, we are shoved. Pages put an end to procrastination. We act in the direction indicated, if only to get the pages to shut up.

A woman in Canada writes, “I’ve never been one to journal or keep a diary, but pages intrigued me.” Intrigued, she began the practice. Within weeks she began to reap the benefits. Unlike conventional journaling, where we typically set a topic—“I’m going to write everything I feel about Fred or my mother”—pages are free-form. They feel—and are—scattered. We skip from topic to topic to topic—a sentence here, a sentence there. My

Canadian correspondent found herself poking into odd corners and gathering insights in many directions.

Pages can be profound or petty. Frequently they are both. A “little something” bothers us, and is revealed upon further writing to be the tip of an iceberg. How we feel about the issue matters. We write “I feel,” and then we write “I really feel.” Layer by layer we become intimate with ourselves. We discover our hidden self, and the realizations are thrilling.

Because self-knowledge is exciting, pages are addictive. The listening path that they inaugurate is never dull. People who start out declaring “My life is dull” soon find those same lives riveting. The examined life becomes a rich resource. “I didn’t know I felt that way” is the sentence that accompanies some new nugget of self-knowledge.

“Julia, I learned more in a few weeks of Morning Pages than I did in my years of therapy,” reports one practitioner. This is because pages gave him a glimpse of what might be called “the undefended self.” Jungians tell us that upon awakening we have about a forty-five-minute window before our ego’s defenses are in place. Catching ourselves off guard, we tell ourselves truth, and truth may differ markedly from our ego’s version of events. As we listen—and record—our actual feelings, we become habituated to the truth. We puncture “I feel okay about that” to reveal that we may not feel okay at all. As we discover our authentic feelings, we discover our authentic selves, and those selves are fascinating.

“Julia, I fell in love with myself!” is a sentiment often exclaimed with wonder. Yes, pages teach us to love ourselves. Because we accept each thought that comes to us, we learn radical self-acceptance. Listening for thought after thought, we come to anticipate with eagerness just what we are up to. Each new thought unfolds another layer of our self. Each layer tutors us further in our lovability.

Because we reject no thoughts, we teach ourselves that all parts are welcome here. This welcoming attitude is the bedrock of the listening path. A word at a time, a thought at a time, we accept our insights and ideas. No thought is turned away as unworthy. “I feel grumpy” holds equal sway with “I feel wonderful.” Dark thoughts and light thoughts are equally valid. We are hospitable to all moods.

The listening path takes practice. We “hear” thoughts and our next thoughts, but the “still small voice” that we hear is subtle. It is tempting at first to discount what we hear as “just our imagination.” But the voice is real, just as our connection to the divine is real. If we ask for reassurance, we hear, “Do not doubt our bond.” And so we continue to listen, and as we do, we come to trust our guidance. Morning Pages become a reliable resource. What at first seemed farfetched, over time becomes dependable.

WRITING MORNING PAGES is like driving with the high beams on: we “see” ahead of ourselves, farther and more clearly than our normal low-beam vision. Potential obstacles stand out clearly. We learn to avoid trouble. Equally valuable is our pages’ ability to spot opportunity. Our “luck” improves as we pick up the cues our pages are sending.

“I never believed in ESP,” a recent letter protested. “But now I think there’s something real going on. Pages are uncanny.” The “uncanny” knack of Morning Pages shows itself most often as synchronicity. We write about something in our pages, and the something that we write about shows up in our life. Our wishes become tangible. “Ask, believe, receive” becomes a working tool of our consciousness. As we work with pages, we find ourselves being ever more candid. We write out our true wishes, and the universe responds.

“I didn’t believe in synchronicity,” one skeptic wrote. “Now I count on it.”

So do I.

I wrote in my pages that I yearned to make a film. Two days later, at a dinner party, I found myself seated next to a filmmaker. Furthermore, he taught filmmaking. I told him my dream, and he said “I’ve got one slot left. If you want it, it’s yours.” I did want it. My next pages recorded my gratitude.

Although pages can be about anything and everything, gratitude is fertile ground. Counting our blessings on the page makes room for more gratitude. When we say “I have nothing to write about,” we can turn our lens toward the positive, enumerating our blessings from large to small. A sober alcoholic can say “Thank you for sobriety.” A fit person may give thanks for health. All lives contain grounds for gratitude. The listening path numbers myriad causes for a grateful heart. Focusing on the positive breeds optimism. Optimism is a primary fruit of the listening path.

The deliberate shift from negative to positive can be done whenever we find ourselves with “nothing to say.” All lives contain something to be grateful for, even if that something is rudimentary. “I’m grateful I’m alive. I’m grateful to be breathing. . . .” Fundamentally, each life is a miracle, and by acknowledging this fact, we celebrate life itself.

“Be still, and know that I am God,” the Scriptures advise us. As we practice listening, we come to sense a benevolent *something* that touches our consciousness with a feeling of belonging. With pages as our witness, we are no longer alone. Rather, we are partnered by an interactive universe. I recently tried to put this fact into words. “The answer to my prayer? A listening God who knows I’m there.” It is not hubris to conjure a “listening God.” The practice of pages is a spiritual practice. As we write, we

“right” our world view. The world changes from a hostile one to a benevolent one. As we listen, we are led—led carefully and well.

THE PRACTICE OF writing Morning Pages quickly develops into a habit. Scientists tell us it takes ninety days to groove a new habit. But Morning Pages become a habit in far less time than that. As a teacher, I have observed two to three weeks as the turning point. It is a short investment of time for a large payoff. The habit of pages yields us a spiritual path. That path—the listening path—both guides and guards us.

My colleague Mark Bryan compares the practice of pages to a NASA launch: we fire off daily pages and the change seems slight—a few degrees from our normal life. Over time, those few degrees are the difference between landing on Venus or Mars. The slight shift in our trajectory looms large.

I recently did a book signing, and at reading’s end, a man approached my desk. “I want to thank you,” he said, “for a quarter century of Morning Pages. In all that time, I missed only one day—the day I got quadruple bypass surgery.”

I sometimes miss pages on early travel days. Arriving at my destination, I do “evening pages,” but they are not the same. Writing at night, I am reflecting on a day I already had and am powerless to change. Morning Pages lay out my day’s trajectory. “Evening pages” record the day’s journey as hit or miss. Belatedly, I see the day’s many “choice points”—places where I could have chosen more productively. Instead, I squandered my day.

Morning Pages are frugal. They make the best, most productive use of the day at hand. “Pages give me time,” a woman told me recently. “They appear to take time, but they give me time instead.” I am familiar with this

paradox. I write for forty-five minutes in the morning, but then throughout the day I seize many “spare moments.” I spend my time according to my own priorities. Time becomes *my* time.

Writing pages, we move through our days more efficiently. We eliminate what I call “mental cigarette breaks”—those long pauses while we ponder what to do next. With pages in place, we move smoothly, activity to activity. “I could do X,” we think, no longer procrastinating. We do “do X”—grabbing time and using it in our own best interest.

I have sometimes said that pages are a radical codependency withdrawal. We spend our time on our own agendas—no longer on the agendas of others. We are often stunned to discover the amount of time and attention we have spent “people-pleasing” others. As we withdraw our energies back into our own core, we are shocked by the power that is suddenly ours to do with as we please. Many of us have spent our lives being batteries for others. We have worked to fulfill their dreams, neglecting our own. Suddenly, with pages in place, our dreams are within our reach. As we take each small step that the pages indicate, our dreams become our reality.

“Julia, for years I wanted to write and didn’t. Then I did pages. Here is my novel. I hope you enjoy it.” With that, I was handed a book.

I’ve often remarked that teaching, for me, is like visiting a garden. I’m handed books, videos, CDs, jewelry. People have used my tools and the seeds of creativity have sprouted.

“I directed a feature film,” an actor told me exultantly. “I owe it to the pages.” I was thrilled for him, recognizing a dream come true.

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