

Heal Your Self with Writing

Catherine Ann Jones

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This accomplished writer's "focused journaling" exercises encourage self-discovery.

Catherine Ann Jones' first book, *The Way of Story: The Craft and Soul of Writing*, inspired creative writers to complete short exercises in order to gain deeper personal insight. *Heal Your Self with Writing* is a natural next step, using the same methodology to encourage anyone to follow "a step-by-step journey of discovery" through a process the author/playwright calls "focused journaling."

Jones combines large doses of psychology, philosophy, and spirituality (influenced by her stays in India) with numerous writing exercises ranging from simple: "focus on what about you has remained the same. Write a few lines about that" to complex and involved: "the challenge is to transpose a negative situation or feeling into a positive one. ... Take your time, contemplate then write down each response, allowing it to be as long as it needs to be."

The exercises are sprinkled throughout each of eleven chapters structured around personal challenges, such as "Balancing Thinking with Feeling" and "Integrating the Opposites: Standing in the Light, Facing the Dark." The author also includes a chapter about focused journaling. Unlike ordinary journaling, which involves writing about anything, focused journaling, writes Jones, "is looking directly at your Self and mirroring what you think and feel about how you view the world, specific subjects, events, and people." The exercises accompanying this chapter are particularly intriguing. One exercise, for example, asks the reader to identify three people they know. Then, writing as if the reader is each person, he or she is to identify that person's desire, what they did to achieve that desire, and the "price paid" for following that dream or desire. Finally, the reader is asked to write down their own response to what this person says.

Some readers, particularly those for whom writing does not come easily, may tire of so many writing exercises, but Jones believes strongly in focused journaling as a process that leads to discovery. On the whole, the exercises do seem to be geared toward the reader's own enlightenment, which could be just the motivation one needs to keep plugging along. Writes the author, "Remember always that the solution to any challenge lies within and all that is needed rests dormant, waiting for you to tap into infinite wisdom."

In the end, *Heal Your Self with Writing* is a book that should be of considerable value, whether or not the reader actually completes all of the exercises. Catherine Ann Jones skillfully and adeptly weaves so many messages of positive reinforcement and eye-opening introspection into this manual that the text alone is sure to inspire reflection and instill reassurance. Still, the reader who is willing to work through the exercises will likely be rewarded by a whole different level of self-understanding.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (Fall 2013)

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