

Praise for Soul Vows

"Like the sun's sacred vows to give this earth warmth and life, so too should each heart love all creatures. May this new book by Janet Conner help unfurl the wings of many. May blessed words, as they can, complete us. Discovering the Presence that makes the atoms dance will reveal our own astounding beauty and a wild, holy, majestic giving like the mountains and the sky." —**Daniel Ladinsky**, international bestselling Penguin author

"In *Soul Vows*, Janet Conner has provided seekers with a sure, rich and deeply fulfilling path to spiritual advancement and genuine knowingness. It is one thing to hold a theoretical sense of the Divine, and quite another to open to immersion in the Indwelling Beloved. I invite you to feast upon and savor the wisdom and practices within this powerful book, for you will be lavishing yourself in the exquisite possibilities of your True Nature!" —**Dr. Roger Teel**, senior minister, Mile Hi Church, author of *This Life Is Joy*

"Open this book if you have been in the shallows longing for the deep. Janet will guide your way to more of your divine self, shining as the light of the world." —**Linda Martella-Whitsett**, author of *How to Pray Without Talking to God* and *Divine Audacity*

"This profound but practice-based book is a joy to recommend! It surely represents a new and needed wave in spiritual teaching, where teachers like Janet Conner are not afraid to speak of divine intimacy—yet in a way that is far beyond mere sentiment—and which invites the reader to actual experience. Water is good, but Janet changes it into intoxicating wine." —**Richard Rohr**, OFM, Center for Action and Contemplation, author of *Falling Upward* and *Immortal Diamond*

"Janet Conner is a spiritual teacher for the 21st century: part guru, part girlfriend, a writer able to translate deep truths into practical action. In *Soul Vows*, she awakens the mystic in each of us and gently prods us to make good on the silent promises from deep within." —**Victoria Moran**, author of *Creating a Charmed Life* and *Shelter for the Spirit*

"*Soul Vows* is Janet Conner's best book yet! Prepare for a deep dive into your Self." —**Ellen Debenport**, author of *The Five Principles* and *Hell in the Hallway*

"This is a wonderful book, gracefully and wisely written. Anyone on a spiritual path will learn a great deal from it." —**Andrew Harvey**, author of *The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism*

"Janet Conner's *Soul Vows* teachings have been a gateway to my mystical self, an initiation to a sacred journey of feeling grounded in the Earth while connected to the Divine. This book takes you on a life-changing escapade of finding your inner truths and powerfully infusing yourself with them daily. Janet is an extraordinary storyteller and spiritual teacher. She masters the complex and then gives you her synthesis and the specific keys to the Kingdom. Opening this book is like lifting the lid on an ancient Treasure Chest, full of sacred secrets and invitations. My gratitude to Janet; her wisdom is infinite." —**Gail McMeekin**, author of *The 12 Secrets of Highly Creative Women* and *The 12 Secrets of Highly Successful Women*

"Janet Conner has written a beautiful-yet-practical book that is no less than a map to discover our mystical heart. In *Soul Vows*, she illuminates the way, step by step, so that we can learn to listen and trust our own still small voice, guiding us to our deepest union with Life. Read this book and you will discover the path that leads to the Divine within." —**Joel Fotinos**, author of *My Life Contract*

"Do you hear that unanswered longing calling from your soul? Janet Conner guides you in the process of giving answer to that call with profound skill. In this work Janet draws upon many disciplines and sources, as well her own deep processes. I predict *Soul Vows* becomes your companion in finding your own finest answers to your spiritual longing." —**Mary Anne Radmacher**, author of several books including *Lean Forward into Your Life* and *Live with Intention*

"Janet Conner's *Soul Vows* is a mirror reflecting the Presence that is you. You don't so much read this book as peer into it and allow it to show you what you already know and who you already are. You won't be disappointed." —**Rabbi Rami Shapiro**, author of *Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent*

"In *Soul Vows* Janet Conner issues a clear invitation to each of us to wake up to the sacred agreement we've each made with our divine Source. And when we wake up not only do we activate our deep connection with the Divine, we also come to know who we are, what we are here to do, and to live our lives with a grace that feeds our

heart and nourishes our soul.” —**Susyn Reeve**, author of *The Wholehearted Life* and *The Inspired Life*

“With elegant, graceful, poetic prose, Janet Conner shows herself again to be one of our most gifted spiritual writers. This book is like the song of the soul. The greatest insight this book offers is the realization that we—all of us—come from Love and . . . ultimately . . . return to Love. There is no other origin . . . no other destination . . . no other place to be.” —**Ramananda John E. Welshons**, author of *One Soul, One Love, One Heart*

“My favorite part of this book is its celebration of paradox. With her succulent writing, joyful spirit, and refreshing vulnerability, Janet Conner expertly guides us into a sacred relationship with all that is. She is not prescribing easy answers; she is inviting us into the living mystery, which is love, which is, as it turns out, who we really are.” —**Mirabai Starr**, translator of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Julian of Norwich, author of *God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity & Islam*

“As we experience the heartfelt steps of questioning, writing, listening, chanting, and moving, we find ourselves climbing to higher states of awareness... right along with the paradox of going deeper and deeper into the mystery of who we are with each revelation.

“Through the seven chakras, Janet Conner beautifully illustrates how everyone is wired to experience the Divine directly. As each vow from our soul is uniquely discovered in each chakra, we finally find our most natural personal statements until we feel whole and our soul vows feel complete. We ultimately become comfortable expressing the magnificent Truth of who we are. Imagine that! Janet Conner did, and she encourages us to do the same, knowing all the while that these vows will continue to evolve in their meanings and purpose for our lives. Thank you, Janet Conner. Diving into *Soul Vows* has opened my heart even more than I thought was possible. My soul knows I AM forever free to be Me! Who wouldn't want everyone to feel that way?” —**Linda Linker Rosenthal**, transpersonal psychologist, author of *The Seven Chakra Sisters: Make Friends with the Inner Allies Who Keep You Healthy, Laughing, Loving, and Wise*

Other works by Janet Conner

Writing Down Your Soul

My Soul Page

The Lotus and The Lily

My Life Pages

Soul Vows

*Gathering the Presence of the Divine in You,
Through You, and as You*

JANET CONNER



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*For you,
because your soul wants five things,
and one of them is to commit to values,

and your soul knows five things,
and one of them is there is a Presence inside you.*

*And for my Jerry,
whose soul vows set him free.*

Each Soul Completes Me

*My Beloved said, "My name is not complete
without yours."*

*And I thought: How could a human's worth
ever be such?*

*And God, knowing all our thoughts, and all
our thoughts are just innocent steps on the
path, then addressed my heart,*

*God revealed a sublime truth to the world
when He sang,*

*"I am made whole by your life. Each soul, each
soul completes Me."*

—Hafiz, from *A Year with Hafiz*,
translation by Daniel Ladinsky

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Prelude

what your soul knows

There is a Presence inside you. There is a Presence inside everyone. Though you may have long ignored it, perhaps even willfully turned the other way, that divine Presence is alive and well and growing. It is a pulse, silently tapping out the rhythm of the ancient dance of longing for something more, something bigger, something to mark your every step as holy, important, and good. That Presence knows you. It knows who you are and who you long to be. It knows that the life of the Divine is your life, the love of the Divine is your love, and the Presence of the Divine is expressed in, and through, and as you. That Presence is now calling you to step into its tender embrace to learn the words and music and movements of your dance of divine Presence—Soul Vows.

welcome to your soul vows adventure

In 1997, my marriage disintegrated in rather dramatic fashion, and I was catapulted into a spiritual life I didn't know existed. At first, I did not recognize my divorce as a divine invitation; I was too angry and too frightened. I froze into a relentless state of panic. My one relief was a daily conversation with "Dear God" in my journal. Somehow, all that furious scribbling activated a wise, loving voice inside me. For three years, I turned to that voice every morning, sobbing out my story and begging for help. Help always came—sometimes through life, sometimes through dreams, sometimes through friends, but most consistently through the voice on the page. I began to trust that voice. I discovered there wasn't anything I could not say, any feeling I could not express, any fear I could not expose. I didn't know it at the time, but I was giving birth to the spiritual practice of deep soul writing.

One of the first topics I hashed out with "Dear God" was the sticky muck of vows. Marriage vows, I wrote, don't mean a damn thing! So are all vows suspect? Are vows by their very nature hopeless? Can a person ever declare vows that are true and holy and good? And live them—actually live them—always, forever?

A few days after I blasted out my questions, I stumbled upon *The House of Belonging*, one of David Whyte's early books of poetry. In the first few pages, I read a poem called "All the True Vows":

All the true vows
are secret vows
the ones we speak out loud
are the ones we break.

There is only one life
you can call your own
and a thousand others
you can call by any name you want.

Hold to the truth you make
every day with your own body,
don't turn your face away.

Hold to your own truth
at the center of the image
you were born with.

Those who do not understand
their destiny will never understand
the friends they have made
nor the work they have chosen

nor the one life that waits
beyond all the others.

By the lake in the wood
in the shadows
you can
whisper that truth
to the quiet reflection
you see in the water.

Whatever you hear from
the water, remember,

it wants you to carry
the sound of its truth on your lips.

Remember,
in this place
no one can hear you

and out of the silence
you can make a promise
it will kill you to break,

that way you'll find
what is real and what is not.

I know what I am saying.
Time almost forsook me
and I looked again.

Seeing my reflection
I broke a promise
and spoke
for the first time
after all these years

in my own voice,

before it was too late
to turn my face again.

The second I finished reading Whyte's "All the True Vows" I raced to my journal. "Dear God!" I wrote, "I know the vows I want! I want vows to *me*, to my *self*, to my *soul*, to *You*!" And with that declaration, my divine voice and I began long, intense conversations, diving deeper and deeper together into the well of my soul to find my true vows.

About a week into our conversation, I realized that before I could declare my new, true vows, I had to uncover and release the old underlying false vows—the fears and beliefs that had held me hostage since childhood. It took a lot of deep soul writing to excavate them, but once I'd dredged them up, looked them in the face, heard their stories, and thanked them for their service,

I was able to let them go. I prayerfully told each false vow, “You can go now,” and—wonder of wonders—they left. For the first time in my life, I felt the genuine breath of freedom.

From this clean empty place, I was ready to call in my true vows. I sensed the import of what I was doing, so I didn’t rush. I spent weeks in dialogue with “Dear God,” talking over all the possibilities and trying some on for size.

At the same time, I was reading *Anatomy of the Spirit* by Carolyn Myss. Before reading it, I had viewed the chakras as an Eastern energy system that was intriguing, but also a tad confusing to my all-too-logical Western mind. After reading it, I couldn’t miss the truth: the chakras are the beating heart at the center of humanity’s diverse spiritual traditions. Weeks later, as I was reciting my final vows out loud one morning, I stopped halfway through and burst out laughing. I’d written seven vows that perfectly matched the seven chakras.

My new set of vows was the most exciting thing that had happened to me in years. I was on fire to share the joy of releasing my old, false vows and living my beautiful, new, true vows. It was time for a celebration. On November 11, 2000, ten women sat in a circle on my living room floor as I declared my vows publicly for the first time. From then on, November 11 became a holy day. Each year on that date, I stop and reflect on how my soul vows have carried me through the past year and on all the deeper meanings they revealed.

November 11, 2010, was the tenth anniversary of my soul vows. To honor that special day, I drove to my favorite sacred place, St. Michael’s Shrine in Tarpon Springs, Florida. There, I had a long written conversation with my divine voice. As I wrote, I realized I’d said my soul vows over three thousand times, and the more I said them and the more I lived them, the more gifts they bestowed and secrets they revealed.

“How can I thank you?” I wrote.

The answer was swift: “Teach it!”

And that’s what I’ve done ever since.

Here are my soul vows. I speak them aloud every morning, adding the pronoun *I* in front of each. I pray my soul vows in the order of the chakras, from bottom to top.



welcome to your soul vows adventure

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These words never fail to inspire or surprise me. On any given day, one of them will reveal a layer of meaning I never noticed before. Let me give you one example. For years when I said, “I come from love,” I thought I was saying, “I, Janet, come from a state of love. I do my work with love. I write with love. I treat people with love. I emanate love.” This was, forgive the pun, a lovely sentiment, but it also felt a bit like a burden. When I said this vow, I heard, “Gee, Janet, you *better* come from love, or you’re not living your soul vows.”

Then one morning, as I was staring at the words and speaking them aloud, I felt something shift in my heart. I stopped. My hands flew to my chest, and I burst into tears. “I come from love” doesn’t mean I have to generate love; it means I was generated *by* Divine Love. Love doesn’t come from *me*; it comes from my Divine Source. That’s a huge difference in meaning—and it only took me nine years to realize it! This deeper understanding has led to a huge shift in how I live this vow.

Now, fourteen years into my relationship with my soul vows, I am beginning to see that the vows themselves were always breathing and living in a space of vast consciousness. They were always big. It is me who has slowly expanded my consciousness to meet them. I also see that they are a paradox. They came through my pen, but I didn’t choose them. They chose me. They called to me from a future, expanded, potential self—my divine Self. And they beckon to me still, pointing the way to a deeper and deeper relationship with my self, my soul, my life, and my God. I long ago stopped pretending I know what my soul vows mean. I recognize them now as lifelong companions whose beauty and depth I can never exhaust.

From my story, you can see that soul vows bear little resemblance to business contracts, legal agreements, or even most marriage vows. Those kinds of human documents outline the promises, obligations, and responsibilities of the parties—who does what, what happens when they do, and what happens when they don’t. Your soul vows are very different. They’re

simple. They're short. They don't require any details or definitions or clauses, and they don't lay out consequences. And yet these few simple phrases will carry you far beyond the benefits of any human partnership, all the way into the joys of divine partnership.

You might use the word *values* to describe your soul vows, but there's a vast difference between your soul's most precious values and the value statements you see posted on corporate walls. The latter are rarely referred to and, sadly, often have little influence on employee behavior. Soul vows, on the other hand, have meaning. Big meaning. Powerful meaning. Knock-your-socks-off meaning. You will refer to them every day of your life, and they will influence everything you do and every choice you make. They will become alive in you.

Your soul vows are also different from the popular values described in books such as Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* or Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements*. These values are all smart and powerful and good, and following them creates a solid foundation for effective human interaction. But you are seeking a transmutation forged by an intimate and deeply personal relationship with the Divine, and these universal values, wise as they are, cannot carry you to the holy life that is yours and yours alone.

Your soul vows are not the same as your soul purpose. The two work seamlessly together and support one another, but they're not the same thing. Your soul purpose is your *why*—the destiny embedded in your being. Your soul vows are your *how*. They describe how you choose to walk this earth—not just at work or at home or in a relationship, but in every moment of every day. They are your grace points. They are how you receive and spread grace. As you live your soul vows, you become a fertile container in which the seed of your soul purpose can take root and flourish. If you long to know your soul's purpose, finding your soul vows is an ideal place to begin.

At first glance, soul vows appear to be a short list of qualities or behaviors. "Oh, great," you might think. "A list. How boring!"

But Mary Anne Radmacher, a creativity teacher and the most prolific artist and author I know, disagrees.

“A list is a door to seeing. A list is a door to knowing. A list is a door to deeper understanding,” she says. But not just any list can be these things. In every creativity workshop she teaches, Mary Anne asks participants this question: “Which is a more successful shopping list—the one you make right before you walk out the door or the one you develop over days of noticing what you need?” The answer is always the same—the list you make over time. Why? Because as the awareness of need arises, you jot it down, which triggers you to remember it and then take action.

Noticing, memory, and urgency are all heightened by the simple act of making a list. Brain scientists recognize this honing of attention as a function of the reticular activating system (RAS). This is a good thing. Without our RAS, we’d be overwhelmed within minutes by a bombardment of stimuli, noise, and sensations. Thanks to our RAS, we can focus our attention to what matters, not to everyone, but to *us*. Hence the successful shopping list. In the coming chapters, as you develop your own soul vows, you’ll come to appreciate the generative power of your own very focused soul vows list.

I titled my original soul vows list “Janet’s Covenant.” Soul vows are indeed a covenant—and an unshakable, unbreakable one at that. Do those words sound heavy? If you think in terms of human contracts, the word *covenant* can feel weighted with effort and obligation and consequences. But this is not a human covenant; it’s a divine covenant—a sacred agreement between you and your divine Source. Soul vows aren’t a list of obligations; they’re a sweet love pact between your divine Self and your God. So of course they’re unshakable. Why would anyone walk away from all that love? And they are unbreakable because they describe who you are at your core, your essence, your very soul. To break them, you would have to stop being you—and that, by definition, is impossible.

As lovely as a list and a divine covenant are, your soul vows are something even more. They are a *prayer*—a deeply personal,

grace-inducing prayer. Over time, your soul vows will evolve into the most beautiful and powerful prayer of your day. When you speak your soul vows, four grace-filled things happen.

First, you renew your deep love for these ways of being. With each vow, you reenergize your commitment to live in alignment with your soul's most precious values. That alone lifts your spirit, triggers your RAS, focuses your attention, and influences your behavior. As you live your vows, you literally build who you are in this world, moving closer every day to your whole, authentic, holy Self.

Second, because your soul vows are a two-way covenant between you and your divine Source, as you declare them for yourself, you simultaneously activate divine response. As you speak a vow, you invite divine grace to move through you, creating a welcoming space for people and situations that are energetically aligned with that value, and—here's the most amazing part—simultaneously and effortlessly deflecting the people and situations that aren't. Over time you will find yourself surrounded by more and more of what is in sync with your vows and less and less of what isn't. This is how your soul vows change your world.

Third, your soul vows activate your inner mystic. I've asked dozens of spiritual leaders how they define mysticism, and they all agree it's a direct experience of the Divine. But please don't think that experience is reserved for the holy and the few. You were created a mystic. You are wired to directly experience your divine Source. That's why, no matter how many books or coaches or teachers talk about how to live an authentic life, a happy life, or one filled with meaning and purpose, there is still a persistent, lingering hunger. It's not a hunger for another program. It's not a hunger for a new advisor. It's not a hunger for a new way to control your thoughts, shift your emotions, or bring more balance into your life. It's not a hunger for another round on the self-improvement treadmill. It's not a hunger that can be satisfied reading a book or solving a problem in your mind. It's not a mental hunger. It's a hunger of the heart. It's a hunger of the soul.

It's a hunger for a tangible experience of the Divine.

Mystics of old understood this hunger. They marched off into seclusion to find it, face it, and feed it. They prepared themselves. They fasted. They chanted. They prayed. They meditated. They burrowed deep within their spirit and psyche to their very soul. And then it happened. They felt the divine embrace.

Most of us, today, don't want to run off to a monastery or ashram to satisfy that hunger. And we don't have to. We can plant our feet in our modern, wired, distracted, insanely busy lives *and* have a mystical experience of the living presence of the Divine. We can succeed at our jobs, pay our mortgages, raise our children, *and* live a holy life. Your soul vows are a very real and, in the end, quite simple way to walk into the mystical experience of the divine embrace. By the time you and your soul vows have become best friends, you will realize that you are a mystic.

Fourth, when you speak your soul vows, you are calling your full divine Self into this particular space-time experience. Your presence on this earth at this moment is *not* your total Self. It is an expression of that Self, one face of that Self, but it is not your full, multidimensional Self. Each time you speak a holy quality, you invoke more and more of your full Self to be present in your current human expression. Visualize your soul vows as stitches reaching through the space-time barrier to gather more and more of the wildly expansive Self that is your potential fullness. That fullness contains previous expressions of you, future expressions of you, and radiant facets of your share in divine Presence. Over time, as you live your soul vows, you weave together a larger, more fully present version of your Self on earth.

In the fourteenth century, Meister Eckhart described this transformation as "God must simply become me and I must become God—so completely that this 'he' and this 'I' share one 'is' and in this 'isness' do one work eternally" (*Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* by Matthew Fox). A woman in a Soul Vows course described her "isness" transformation in slightly more modern terms: "Before soul vows, Wendy 1.O. After soul vows, Wendy 2.O!"

But your individual soul vows do something beyond building your *personal* expanded, 2.0 Self. As each of us calls our expanded divine Self into this space-time experience, together we build the *global* divine body. That's the real power of your soul vows and the real power that alters your experience here on earth. Soul vows are a living construction of a whole and holy Divine in you, through you, and as *you*, which builds collectively into the expression of the divine in *us*, through *us*, and as *us*.

Surely this is how we create heaven on earth.

Meet Your Soul Vows

the seven deep soul explorations

The seven deep soul explorations you will move through to discover, declare, and live your soul vows parallel the seven chakras. Because the energy and purpose of each exploration mirrors the energy and purpose of each chakra, the chakra system is a wonderful map to help you see where you are in the process, where you are going, and why you're going there.

Each of the seven chakra explorations will be explored in depth in the coming chapters, but let me give you an introductory taste, to inspire you to trust the natural progression of this sevenfold adventure and excite you to begin. Then, before you dive in, let me also give you some tips for how to get the most benefit from your journey.

Soul Vows and the Chakras

The concept of the chakra system is ancient, and, at first glance, these explorations may appear to be a new and rather modern application of the chakras' wisdom and grace. But with deeper reflection, I think you'll agree this is not new at all; indeed, this is a re-remembering of the mystical way we are constructed. Or as Hafiz, the great Sufi master, puts it:

Wayfarer,
Your body is my prayer carpet,

For I can see in your eyes

That you are exquisitely woven
With the finest silk and wool

And that Pattern upon your soul
Has the signature of God

And all your moods and colors of love
Come from His Divine vats of dye and Gold.

excerpt from "Exquisitely Woven," *I Heard God Laughing*,
translation by Daniel Ladinsky

If Hafiz were alive, he'd nod and laugh in recognition upon reading how Anoeda Judith describes the chakras in her classic book *Wheels of Life*:

The Tantric philosophies, from which the chakras emerge, are a philosophy of weaving. Their many threads weave a tapestry of reality that is both complex and elegant. Tantra is a philosophy that is both pro-life and pro-spiritual. It weaves spirit and matter back into its original whole, yet continues to move that whole along its spiral of evolution.

"Spirit and matter back into its original whole." That's it! That's what we want and where we're going. That's how we create heaven on earth. So how perfect that the chakras can carry us there.

The chakras are the universal and very beautiful story of the soul seeking union with the divine Beloved. In the ancient Vedic tradition, Shakti, who represents the divine feminine and the soul, longs for union with Shiva, who represents the divine masculine and the One. Shakti awakens with a feeling of longing and begins to travel through six experiences of duality, resolving each one as she goes, until at last she reaches the seventh plane, where she is reunited with her Beloved, Shiva. You will begin, as Shakti began, in the first chakra, and you will arrive, as Shakti arrived, united with the One in the seventh. The journey is a thrilling and holy deep soul adventure.

It is not an accident that the chakra system has seven distinct energy fields, and you will experience seven distinct deep soul explorations to reach sacred unity with the Divine in your soul vows. Seven has long been recognized as the number of totality and divinity. Consider the seven days of the week, seven seas, seven continents, seven colors in the rainbow, seven sacraments, seven days of creation, seven veils of Salome, seven candles on the Menorah, and many, many more. In *Numerology: The Power of Numbers*, Ruth Drayer tells us “the number seven represents spiritual completion.” In *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*, Cynthia Bourgeault explains why seven is such a profound and necessary number: “[E]very developing process whatsoever must pass through seven distinct stages before it reaches its completion.”

First Exploration

Honor Your Longing to Be One

In this initial exploration, you will awaken to your dual, royal lineage—fully human, fully divine. To create a container big enough and strong enough to support your journey through the chakras to become one with the One, you will begin to take loving care of yourself, feed yourself with high spiritual ideas, and become best friends with several vibrant spiritual practices. As you complete your exploration in this root chakra, you will know in every fiber of your being that you are ready for the big adventure ahead.

Second Exploration

Recognize the False Unconscious Vows

That Have Kept You Fragmented

In this sacral-chakra exploration, you will uncover and acknowledge the falsehoods you've been telling yourself about yourself, and notice how those unconscious beliefs have kept you distracted and fragmented. You will sit with your false masters, learn their names, listen to their stories, and receive their surprising gifts. This all happens in the second chakra because all those roiling emotions in your gut have massive creative power. So far, you've been using that power unconsciously to create a life that isn't your authentic self and hasn't been a lot of fun. When you leave this chakra, you will be free.

Third Exploration

Gather Yourself into Wholeness

Your solar plexus chakra is the energy field of both your physical and spiritual centers of gravity. It holds your honor code, your personal power, and how you show up in the world. In the second chakra, you became aware of your false masters. Now, in the third, you will release them in a ceremony that you design yourself. As the ceremony ends, you will revel in the rare and exquisite feeling of being whole.

Fourth Exploration

Listen from Your Heart

When you release your false vows, you create room for your soul vows to make themselves known. This meeting takes place in the heart chakra because the heart is your primary organ of spiritual perception. Your spiritual heart—not your conscious mind—will identify the divine qualities that belong to you, introduce you to the Divine's role in your vows, and reveal how your soul vows gather the Presence of the Divine on earth. You'll know when your heart has chosen your vows because it will jump in ecstasy and tears of recognition will flow onto your cheeks. You will leave this chakra carrying your precious soul vows.

Fifth Exploration

Declare Your Soul Vows

In the throat chakra, you will explore the holy power of sound as your soul vows invite you to learn their sacred chant. Because the throat chakra holds the paradoxical energies of declaration and surrender, you will declare your soul vows with enthusiasm and joy, while at the same time surrendering to them, knowing you don't fully understand what they mean and or how they will direct your life. When you leave this chakra, you will have a new, thrilling personal spiritual practice born from your soul vows.

Sixth Exploration

Gather the Presence of the Divine

The sixth chakra is the energy field of the third eye, the center of knowing and light. As you live the soul vows that belong to you, you will gather more and more of the living Presence of the Divine in you, through you, and as you, bringing more divine light into the world. This is a mystery that never ends. Your third eye—your seat of inner knowing, attuned to divine truth—will support and guide you as the mysteries of life unfold. You and your soul vows will flow in this sixth-chakra energy for the rest of your life.

Seventh Exploration

Live in Sacred Unity

The seventh chakra is the seat of mystical communion with the Divine. As you live your soul vows day after day, year after year, you will no longer say your soul vows; you will *become* your soul vows. You will reach a state where you fully embody the facets of the Divine that are yours to express in the world. In this way, you become one with the One. Only the seventh chakra has the grace to support the mystery of divine union.

The seventh chakra is not the end of your soul's explorations. Instead, the most miraculous thing happens when you touch the holy energy of the seventh chakra. As you gather more and more

and more of the divine Presence in you, through you, and as you in your daily life, you circle right back to the first chakra, your foundation, your grounding, your dual lineage. But this time you arrive with a whole new, joyous appreciation for who you truly are and who you came to be—the Presence of heaven on earth.

The chakra system is an exciting and helpful map, but in the end, your soul vows are a mystery. You think you choose them, but in truth, they choose you. You think you understand them, but years from now you will realize you are just beginning to discover how rich they are and what they really mean. So step into these explorations by setting aside any preconceived notions of what values you think you want to select or how your life will look when you are living them. If you try to identify your soul vows now, before you even begin, or if, as you proceed, you try to steer this ship the way *you* think it should go, you will miss the exquisite joy inherent in divine partnership, and you will not experience the beautiful changes you hoped for when you picked up this book.

How to Get the Most from Your Explorations

Soul vows are a mystical experience. They are a dance with the Divine. By definition, you can't control that or manage that or predict what will happen. And that's a good thing, because in the end, you don't want to. Because what you can control or manage or predict can only be as big or as beautiful as who you are right now and what you know right now. That's not good enough anymore. It won't take you anywhere new. And what you want at the soul level is to be more. More whole. More alive. More authentic. More holy. More of your divine Self.

So at the get-go, set aside your desire to control. If you have an overactive left brain—and we all do because modern society is wired to reinforce only left-brain logic, judgment, and measurement—tell your very logical, but for this adventure highly unnecessary, left brain to take a walk. Better still, tell it to take a

vacation. How do you do that? Simple. You step down the volume of left-brain action activities and step up the volume of right-brain creation activities. That means:

Less media, more reading.

Less facts, more intuition.

Less consuming, more creating.

Less commotion, more solitude.

Less talking, more listening.

Less noise, more silence.

Less knowing, more unknowing.

Less doing, more being.

Less thinking ahead, more living in the now.

In other words, less controlling and more cooperating. Cooperating with whom? Why, with your soul and with your God. And here's the good news: this is not hard. Your soul already knows why you're here. It already knows why you're reading this book. It already knows how you long to commit to holy values. And it knows you are oh-so-ready to step onto the divine dance floor and let Spirit lead. Here are some specific ways you can let go of control and start cooperating with the Divine.

Have a Sense of Adventure

Acknowledge right now, before we begin, that you don't know what your soul vows will be, when you'll have them, or what exactly you'll do with them. You may not even know why you picked up this book. You may have simply felt a nudge and responded. So be brave. Show up. Be real. Follow where your soul leads. Let the adventure unfold.

Create Sacred Time and Space

Your soul vows are not a one-time writing prompt. If they were, you could sit down, ask for your soul vows on the page, and get

up an hour later with your vows in hand. Honor the importance of your soul vows. Give them a sacred space in which they can come forward. Here are a few ways to do that:

Become friends with silence and solitude. There is no substitute for being alone with yourself. That is how and when you are open to divine guidance. But silence and solitude are the two things our consumer society does everything it can to get you to avoid. If you keep yourself busy talking, thinking, doing, going, buying, watching—all the ways we hold our souls at bay—you will miss messages bubbling up from your soul. So carve out time to be quiet. Once you fall in love with quiet, you will never go back to constant bustle.

Engage in daily prayer. Your soul vows will become the most important prayer of your life. So this is a good time to strengthen your relationship with prayer. Return to the prayers of your spiritual or cultural tradition, if you like. Or embrace the prayer practices of other traditions. Or create a new prayer practice of your own. Find one that makes your heart sing. However you do it, become best friends with prayer.

Set aside time for deep soul writing. The questions you will explore in *Soul Vows* go deep, probably deeper than you've ever gone. Give yourself significant blocks of time for writing, reflection, and creating a space in which your soul can be heard.

Set aside time to read. You will select a master-teacher companion book to walk with you throughout this process. Many of your most startling insights will come as you absorb the words of your special teacher. Set aside time to read every day.

Give attention to what is sacred to you. You may look at your life and think you're too busy to set aside time for writing and reading. But you're not too busy; you're too distracted. Do you know the difference? Here's the simple but painful truth: what you give your attention to is what

you deem sacred. Say that out loud: "What I give my attention to is sacred to me." So what are you giving your attention to? Identify ten or twelve activities that get the bulk of your time. Then ask yourself for each, "Is this sacred? Is this holy? If not, why have I carved out so much of my precious time for it?" Then try it in the reverse. Ask yourself, "What's truly important to me?" and write that list. Then count how many hours or minutes those people or activities get. Put those two lists side by side. There in front of you is a clear graphic of the life you have created versus the life you wish you were living. This simple self-evaluation exercise will help you rearrange your life in ways that will have momentous and lasting effects.

Be Willing to Enter the Mystery

The soul can't be explained or understood. It is, after all, your divine Self, and divinity is wild, untamable, and more vast and magnificent than our minds can grasp. Whatever idea or image you hold in your mind of the soul or the Divine is by definition too small. That's perhaps why we feel so compelled to explore these fields of the soul. We long for the mystery. So acknowledge that you are stepping into a mystery, and although that may feel strange, even a bit dangerous, know that all is well because you are guided and held at the deepest level.

Trust Yourself and Trust the Process

A month from now, a year from now, a decade from now, you will look back and feel boundless gratitude for yourself for setting aside the space and time to receive your soul vows. But the only way you can get to that future day of joy is to walk the path now, explore the fields now, enter the mystery now. Even if you're not sure what that means or what will happen, start walking. Trust that your spiritual feet know exactly what they're doing and where they're going. The path is actually brightly lit, if we see with the eyes of our souls.

Make Friends with Paradox

In each of the seven chakra explorations, you will stumble upon a head-scratching paradox.

At first, paradox can seem wildly frustrating because it poses an unanswerable question: how can two diametric opposites both be true at the same time? For example, consider my favorite paradox from Meister Eckhart: “to be full, you must be empty.” Got that? If I’m empty, how am I full? And if I’m full, how can I be empty? It feels like trying to maneuver one boat named *Full* and another named *Empty* into the same slip. Impossible, right? But in the mystical realm paradox is not only not impossible, it’s a truth at the center of life.

The secret to “solving” a paradox is to shift your view of the friction between two apparent opposites from a search for a solution to an invitation into divine mystery. While two boats can’t enter the same space, two wafts of perfumes can and two colored lights can. With scent and light, the two opposites effortlessly merge and create something new, something exciting, a third thing unique unto itself. A triangle is the perfect shape to demonstrate this mystery of paradox. If one side of the triangle is one statement and the opposite side is the opposite statement, then the base of the triangle is not the winner of the two; it’s something new altogether.

In *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*, Cynthia Bourgeault explains what happens as we wrestle with paradox:

In contrast to a binary system, which finds stability in the balance of opposites, the ternary system stipulates a third force that emerges as the necessary mediation of these opposites and that in turn (and this is the really crucial point) generates a synthesis at a whole new level. It is a dialectic whose resolution simultaneously creates a new realm of possibility.

Dialectic, by the way, means “a discourse between opposites; a way of resolving disagreements not by debating to prove a point

or to win, but by exploring metaphysical contradictions to find new solutions.” As you wrestle with the two sides of the triangle of paradox in each of the chakras, you will discover a previously unknown third side and a whole new realm of possibility.

To help you capture these revelations, each exploration will end with a discussion of the major paradox of that chakra and a blank triangle on which you can record your dialectic conversation with yourself and the beautiful new idea that arose as a result.

Put Your Discoveries in Your Pocket

You will make seven major discoveries in your soul vows adventure, one at the end of each chakra exploration. These are treasures that will carry you for the rest of your life. To help you remember them and hold them in your heart, set aside a “Discovery” page or two at the front of your journal and add each discovery to what will become a very holy list. As you make each of the seven discoveries, add them in some way to your prayer practices.

Get into Theta

Many of your experiences in *Soul Vows* will come through deep soul writing. If you are journaling—not soul writing—you could miss access to the depth of wisdom waiting for you a hair below conscious mind. To touch that wisdom, you want to access the theta brain-wave state. Here are the seven steps for getting into theta through soul writing:

1. Set your intention to connect with your divine voice. You do this by simply having the desire to go beneath and beyond your conscious mind, connect with yourself at the soul level, and activate your own extraordinary voice of wisdom and grace. Don't skip over this split-second step. It sets the whole miraculous chain in motion.
2. Address the voice by name. If you have an ongoing soul writing practice, you have a personal term of

endearment for your divine partner. If you are new to soul writing or don't yet have a name, begin to experiment with "Dear One," "Dear Beloved," "Dear Friend," or simply write, "Dear Voice." Eventually your personal and private name will make itself known.

3. Write by hand. It is possible to get into theta on the computer, but looking at a screen pulls most of us back into conscious mind. Write with a pen so you feel the presence of your internal voice in your hand. If you cannot hold a pen, look into voice-recognition software.
4. Activate all five senses:
 - Vision is automatically engaged as you look at the page.
 - The parts of your brain responsible for hearing are firing even if you write in total silence, but if you want to add sound, play sacred music, ancient mantras, meditative chants, or the *Theta Music* CD (available at janetconner.com).
 - Touch is obviously engaged.
 - Activate the sense of smell, your most powerful sense, with essential oils, flowers, candles—anything that appeals to you.
 - Drink pure water after you write. With each sip, speak aloud a blessing or guidance that came through your soul writing. Drinking the grace-infused water brings the wisdom and insights into your body at the cellular level.
5. Ask lots of open-ended questions. In *Writing Down Your Soul* there is extensive information on questions that activate the voice and questions that don't.
6. Write fast, without editing or judging. This is how you leave your critical conscious mind sputtering in the distance. If you're feeling stuck, pick up the speed of your writing.
7. Be grateful. Say thank you.

You will need a journal for this adventure, so this is the ideal time to get *My Soul Pages* or *My Life Pages*, two journals designed for deep soul writers. The seven steps for getting into theta are explained in more detail in both journals.

Pace Yourself

Go through the seven explorations at the pace that feels right to you. When I teach Soul Vows, my live global telecourse, each exploration lasts one week, but there is no set amount of time. Tune into your own soul to know when you're ready to dive deeper and when you're ready to move on. Most people will have the wording of their personal soul vows in five to six weeks. After that, it will take a lifetime to discover what they really mean.

Keep Your Commitment

Soul vows are not a toe dip in the spiritual waters. The seven explorations are not a self-help exercise promising that if you do X, you'll get Y. Discovering your soul vows is making a mystical dive into deep waters that aren't always clear and swimming toward a destination that isn't always visible. That might sound a bit scary, but the hidden mystery is actually what makes this path so personal, so exquisite, and so beautiful. This is an opportunity to explore at the deepest levels who you can be in this earth experience. So if the going should get a little rough, know that it's OK, and stay the course. Beauty, divine beauty, awaits. Carry this sweet truth with you as you begin:

I searched for God and found only myself.

I searched for myself and found only God.

Sufi proverb