

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIVING JOURNAL

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The purpose of journal work is to enable you to explore your *present* experience of living and to complete unfinished emotions from your past. Journaling is a powerful tool to assist you in your quest for self-discovery. Through journaling, you will come to know yourself in a way that opens up new possibilities for living and communication.

A metaphor of our individual lives is that we are on a journey through life from birth to death. We are travelers who are making our way through the world and carving a path towards completion and wholeness. Our birth is the beginning of our journey and the death of our physical bodies is the end. Between these two poles of our physical existence, birth and death, we live our lives, and *right now* is where we are in that total process. *This moment and this place* is where we are *now*. The true essence of journal work is this: it is an acknowledgement of where we are at particular points in time and place in the total duration of our life journey.

It is obvious that an individual in his or her life journey passes through particular times and places. These times and places are situations of a person's life that are contexts for particular experiences, actions and events. These situations, and the experiences contained within them, constitute our personal history, our "story" so to speak. This is our past. It is the path we have carved up to this present moment of our lives.

The fact of many of our lives is that we are still anchored to this past—relationships, events, circumstances and emotions—that we haven't finished or completed. Without being aware of it, we are responding to the world in the present *as if we were still back there*. We become bound to our past and much of our energy is contained in situations and emotions that are incomplete. Journal work will enable you to work through and complete your past so that you can release the energy contained for the on-going journey of your life.

As you successfully complete your past and release your attachment to it, you will discover a greater energy and enthusiasm for living. At this point, journal work can become a useful tool in creating goals and paths of action toward reaching your goals. Using the metaphor of life as a journey, you discover your ability to create your destinations. Ultimately, this phase of journal work is about discovering your spirituality and your true reason for existence.

HOW TO USE THE JOURNAL



The first step is to get an 8 x 11 notebook or something similar to call your personal journal. Your journal is for your eyes only until you reach a point where you may decide to share parts of it with a significant other. Knowing that your journal is for *you*, will encourage you to be totally honest with yourself.

The first part of the journal is about understanding “where you are” in your life. It is about gaining an overview of your life up to this present time and seeing clearly where the trouble spots exist. The first part is somewhat tedious but here you will learn to “step back” and see things from a new perspective. Stepping back, putting your life into perspective, seeing the wholeness of situations is laying the foundation for effective “working through” of difficulties. But stepping back can also be a solution in itself.

Many problems are like living inside a box trying to find our way out. The problem is the box and thus we live “inside” the problem. We spend our energy trying to fight our way out missing the fact all along that there is an open door. By simply stepping outside of it we see the box from a new perspective. We see what the problem was but the fact that we are outside the box may also be the solution we’ve been looking for.

Your journal can be your lifelong friend or tool to be used anytime or anyplace you feel the need to clarify what is happening with you in the moment. It will help you to “step outside” of your emotions and thoughts and see them for what they are—emotions and thoughts! As you learn to observe your thoughts and feelings you will learn to take charge of your inner life rather than your thoughts and emotions taking charge of you. If you are struggling in a marriage or relationship there are journal exercises specifically for you. Based on what you share in therapy, I will coach you on particular points on which to focus. But once you learn the process, you will be able to return to your journal to work through other situations on your own.

Journal work is a powerful tool for personal growth and the more you use it the more skilled you will become in making it work for you. Writing in your journal is a kind of meditative exercise where you learn to give yourself loving and caring attention. You are learning to reflect on your inner world and through this process you enable yourself to grow and develop your true self. Journal writing is a dynamic process where you become involved in the living of your life in a whole new way. You will soon discover that what you write in your journal *is* the living of your life not just simply a story *about* your life. The reality of your life is always occurring *now*. The past is over and the future is not yet.

Through journal writing, you are simply getting in touch with *the way things are* both in your inner world and your external world. One of the keys to personal growth is that, when you are living your life based on the way things *are*, instead of what you think life and others *should* be, change and growth happen *by itself*. Your

happiness is a function of knowing and accepting fully the way you, and others, *are*. Knowing who you are is *observing* your inner world.

As you learn the basics of writing on your inner world, journal writing can become a powerful tool for communication with your partner. True communication is a process of opening up to your inner world and making yourself known to another. Your relationship will become transformed from one of blame and control to one of *sharing* with one another *who you are*. You and your partner are two different people who are choosing to travel through life together. You are not here to own or control your partner, nor is your partner here to live up to your expectations. As you learn to open up with one another to the deeper aspects of your experience, you will find a connection with your partner that is beyond what you could ever imagine.

Learning to share your journal with another will maximize the value you gain from your writing. The attitude, "I would never share my journal" is an expression of how much you want to keep yourself secret. Keeping yourself secret, keeps you separate and apart. And one reason you choose to keep yourself secret is your fear of *being judged*. But the *fear of being judged* is really an expression of how much you *judge yourself*. Many of us are horrified with our own self-awareness, and we imagine that others would recoil in horror "if they really knew me." As you trust the process of opening up, you will discover that your fears of being known are blown way out of proportion. But the point is not that you become an open book to everyone around but rather that you become an open book to yourself. As you learn to accept your own *experience* you increase your overall freedom to *be* in the world.

One thing to be aware of is that you may very well resist the journal process. Many of us are simply uncomfortable with self-exploration. One reason for our discomfort is because we are unfamiliar with the process; and getting to know ourselves is also something we both "fear" and "desire". We yearn to know and understand ourselves but in the course of life the people closest to us generally discourage this quest. We gradually learn that paying attention to our "inner world" is not something that gets us a lot of acceptance and love. Yet our inner life continually calls for our attention.

Below are a few guidelines for writing in your journal:

The key to getting the most out of journal writing is to develop your *observing self*. What you typically call observing is really judging, evaluating and explaining. Your mind is continually judging, evaluating and explaining everything. That is its nature. True observation is seeing something *as it is*. Articulating an observation is simply *describing* something the way it is. To judge is to say what something *should* or *should not* be. To evaluate is to determine whether something is *good* or *bad*. To explain is to look for *causes*, or *why* something is the way it is. If you are judging, evaluating or explaining then you are not observing. You want to develop your ability to observe the workings of your own mind—to *hear* your thoughts, to *see* your images and memories, and to *feel* your body sensations and emotions all of which occur *now*.

- Before starting to write a journal entry, take a few moments to become still within yourself. Take the attitude of stepping back and waiting for a thought or feeling to develop. Closing your eyes and concentrating for a few moments on your breathing allows you to contact your inner world.
- You need not worry about "style" or correct grammar or "what others might think". Instead of consciously writing what you think you *ought to*, try writing what *wants to be written*.
- Sometimes single words or short phrases or metaphors may say more than long, drawn out sentences. The point of journal work is to write the facts of your experience as it occurs in the present, however you experience it.
- When writing on particular experiences from the past, write from the point of view of being *there now* instead of merely writing a story *about* your past. Write your entries in *present tense* verbs as if the situation were happening *now*.
- For the first part of the journal, seek to follow the instructions as closely as you can. As you move into the later parts, you can become more creative. Each exercise has some real examples (most from one person who participated in a journal workshop) that show you what the instructions are trying to say.
- Date each journal entry and keep a running log of each exercise. Title each journal entry by type of entry, (e.g. "Where am I now...", "Dream", "Life Path" etc). This will enable you at later times to reflect back on how you have changed and grown.
- If you are coming to therapy as a couple, I will give you specialized exercises which will help you use your journal as a tool for communication. *True communication is learning to "open up" to your inner world and make your inner world known to your partner*. When you write, you will tend to go more into the depth of your feelings and experience. As you learn the technique of exchanging your journal writing you will come to know one another on deeper and deeper levels.