

Journaling and the Quest for the Inner Voice

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The Magic of Journaling

Have you ever looked at an old letter or essay that you wrote, and noticed that it took you back to the feelings and thoughts of that time? Like an old song or familiar smell, there is something magical in how the act of writing captures something about our state of mind. Writing is more than just words-something is literally caught "between the lines".

For some, finding and trusting the inner voice is just as important as that of the external voice of a mentor, guru, teacher or therapist. Even when the psychological and other "issues" are cleared, we are left with core spiritual/existential questions that no one else can answer-what is the unique purpose of our life-and our inner voice can inform us. At times, we have had the experience of hearing our inner voice but not listening due to fear or other emotions.

One of the many definitions of yoga is the finding (or quest for) the inner spirit. Meditation is a process whereby one observes the mind and over time learns that there is a greater spirit that is not mind. Just as the superficial appearance of doing postures in yoga, or sitting quietly in meditation does not reflect the deep inner work that occurs, similarly the process of journaling is much more than just writing. The process of using language to explore one's experience not only captures that experience for reflection at other points in time, it somehow objectifies that experience. Furthermore, once one has cleared away all the "chatter" of the mind, in the silence that is created, the inner voice begins to speak. Thoughts, ideas, feelings somehow make their way to the surface from very deep places. For some, recording and exploring these messages when alone is safer or potentially more meaningful than when working with others.

A Journal has many connotations-by some it is considered a place to record the events of one's life, or to gripe about the life's cruelty's as in a diary. However, several pioneers such as Ira Progoff and Julia Cameron (see below) have developed methods of journaling that are structured in such a way to cause reflection, growth, and clarity of the inner voice. Using their methods ("journaling technology") can have a very powerful impact on the course of one's life if approached with the same

mind-set as one approaches the practice of yoga and meditation.

Intimacy With the Self and Insight

Today's complex lifestyle tends to distract one from inner study and questions. Sometimes, faced with crisis, tragedy or change in circumstance, people return to such questions. Journaling provides a readily accessible, inexpensive, simple opportunity to cause such reflection. In addition, it serves as a reference when one wishes to re-explore one's periods of life.

Fears of Writing

Some people express anxiety about journaling because of life-long issues related to writing. Since a journal is a very private thing, there is no need for concern about grammar, spelling, penmanship, style etc. In fact, some journaling exercises encourage non-traditional styles of expression, just to free oneself of the critical voices that may appear. When journaling, just like doing yoga, it is important to turn off the critical voices and give yourself permission experience yourself as you are.

The Relationship Between the Past, Present and Future

One of the most profound discoveries that I made with my own journaling, and that allowed me to get past several professional and personal obstacles, is that journaling changes our perspective of the past and future. Generally, in our society, we learn that the past is fixed and that the future is open. However, as we journal, we learn that the past is always changing. From each vantage point of our life's journey, the past can look different. More-so, it can even be re-interpreted in significant ways. In addition, though it seems that the future is open and undefined, if our relationship to the past is fixed, then that can cause the future to be fixed as well. How often do we encounter people who are "stuck" in the past, basing action of today or tomorrow on experiences of the past?

Mystical Aspects of Journaling

It is commonly observed that when one practices

journaling, just like yoga, the synchronicity of one's life seems to increase. For example, watercoloring may come up out of the blue in your journal, and the next day, a friend might call to ask you to take a class with him or her.

Sample Journaling Exercise

Life-positioning Exercise: 1) Write a paragraph about where are you in your life right now. What are the themes? What are the issues that are demanding your attention? What chapters are ending? What chapters are starting? What aspects of your life have you neglected but are calling out to you. 2) Once you have written this statement, read it aloud to yourself (or record it on tape and listen). 3) Sit quietly and observe the thoughts and feelings that come to your mind in response. Jot these down in a separate section of the page. Has your inner voice sent you any message?

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.

For More Information

- O See my previous articles on: Detoxification, Elimination and Simplification and What We Really Need
- O My website, www.c4oh.org, has helpful articles on related topics
- O Journaling Workshops are offered periodically by Dr. Cheikin. Call to be placed on the contact list.
- O Cameron, Julia: *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. Penguin, 1992. ISBN 0874-776-945.
- O Intensive Journal Workshops 1-800-221-5844; www.intensivejournal.org
- O Flickstein, Matthew: *Journey to the Center: A Meditation Workbook*. Boston: Wisdom, 1998. ISBN: 0861-711-416.
- O Price, Alison: *Writing from the Source: Techniques for rescripting your life*. London: Thorsons (HarperCollins), 1999. ISBN 0722-536-836.

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