

Writing (Dialoguing) Meditation

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Decide what relationship needs attention and feels timely to explore right now [for example, your relationship with: another person (living or deceased), your body; food; something you're addicted to; your work (job, career, both); money; a possession or possessions; a pet/pets; etc.].

Approach the writing with full openness and honesty, not holding back (four letter words are welcome if they fit). Write with the intention to *not* share it with anyone else. You can always change your mind if that seems wise after-the-fact, but it is important to leave the internal editor out of the mind while doing this writing meditation.

Express both your thoughts *and* feelings. The research shows that only when the related emotions are expressed is there significant value in this therapeutic process. As emotions arise also give yourself the space and time to bring your attention to them in a self-supportive and compassionate way. If you are not already familiar with mindfulness meditation I recommend that you get acquainted with this approach to working with your emotions so that they can be expressed fully rather than become overwhelming and defended against through shutting down or some other way of avoiding (see self-compassion.org/practices for free guided mindful self-compassion meditations and soundstrue.com for free guided mindfulness meditations).

The research of Dr. James Pennebaker and others has found that when people express their emotions in the constructive ways of writing or speaking with someone about their emotional pain, the process leads to significantly improved mood; decreased anxiety; decreased physical pain; increased immunological functioning; and less illness, doctors visits and medical costs.

Another psychologist, Ira Progoff, approaches writing in a similar way and adds a very helpful “dialoguing” technique. Use the following steps in exploring the relationship you decided upon:

1. Write down your thoughts *and* feelings as described above about the relationship, noting where and how your emotions are felt in your body, including related sensations such as: tightness, pain, itching, heaviness, nausea, pressure, etc.
2. Imagine what the subject/object of the relationship would say in response to what you have written; not what you wish they would say, but what you believe they would say if they were honest with you. Write down the response in first person (e.g., Mother: “Well, I think...;” Body: “Well, I feel...;” Alcohol: “From my perspective, I...;” etc.). I recommend you write both a general response and address the various specifics.
3. Continue with a dialogue as you would if you were writing the script of a play, by responding back to the subject or object: e.g., Me: “I feel...,” remembering to continue expressing your feelings as well as thoughts. Then the subject/object responds back to you and then you to it, continuing on with the dialogue until it feels complete or until you feel stuck.

4. Now think of someone who, to you, is wise and loving (e.g., a good friend or mentor; a parent or grandparent, living or deceased; a counselor or spiritual advisor/leader; Jesus, the Buddha, or someone you have read that you have a good sense of what they might say). Take a moment to tune in to their energy and then write down what you imagine that he or she would say in response to the dialogue you have just had, writing it in first person as if they have been listening in to the conversation and you are inviting them to share their perspective on the relationship.
5. If you have any questions for the wise, compassionate person, ask them and then write down what you believe he or she would say in response (i.e., now dialogue with this wise and loving person about this relationship).
6. Finally, review and reflect on what has been written: making note or highlighting what you want to remember, determining how you want to be different in the relationship, and/or creating a plan of action to implement what you've discerned you need to do regarding this relationship.