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 journal is divided into two parts. The first part is about understanding “where things are” in various aspects of 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 second part of the journal is about healing these trouble spots. 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 a kind of 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 paper bag trying to punch our way out. The problem is the paper bag 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 another opening. By simply stepping outside of it we see the paper bag from a new perspective. We see what the problem was but the fact that we are outside the bag may also be the solution we’ve been looking for.

Your journal can be your lifelong friend or tool to be used anytime or anywhere you feel the need to clarify what is happening with you in the moment. If you are in therapy, it will be important to journal on those aspects of your life that are related to your reason for seeking help. 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 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 the only 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.

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 examples that show you what the instructions are trying to say.

- Date each journal entry. This will enable you at later times to reflect back on how you have changed and grown.

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INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

The following exercises are meant to assist you in developing your capacity to observe and describe.

A. WHO AM I?
This question is asking you how you define yourself as a person, how you see yourself and what you identify with in life. List up to 20 responses to this question that begin with the words “I am...” without thinking too hard.

B. WHO AM I NOT?
This question is asking you how you dis-identify with aspects of life, those things or qualities that do not make up your definition of yourself. List up to 20 responses to this question that begin with the words “I am not...”

C. FOCUS ON FEELINGS
This exercise is to assist you in focusing on and describing your feelings. Writing down and sharing feelings is a key part of the journal process and is a means by which you come to know yourself. Try the following exercises before moving on to the main part of the journal work.

1. We experience many different kinds of happy feelings. Think of a time or occasion when you felt happy and then describe the kind of happy you felt.

I was happy when...

My happy feeling was like...

2. We experience many different kinds of sad feelings. Think of a time or occasion when you felt sad and describe the kind of sad you felt.

I felt sad when...

My sad feeling was like...

3. We experience many different kinds of angry feelings. Think of a time or occasion when you felt angry and describe the kind of anger you felt.

I felt angry when...

My angry feeling was like...

4. Please describe the kinds of feelings you are having right now as you are writing in your journal.
JOURNAL PROCESS #1a

THE PRESENT CONTEXT
("Where am I now in my life?")

Life is a journey. Life is a book. Life is a drama. Life is a work of art. Life is a growth process. Life is a timeline.

There are many different ways that you can conceptualize the reality of your life. Whatever metaphor you use, the reality is, your life has a beginning, a middle and an end. Your life in the world began at birth and will end at the death of your physical body. The middle of your life is everything that occurs in-between. It is obvious that right now you are somewhere in the middle of your life.

If your life is a journey you have carved a path and traveled through different times and places on your way to this present destination. You have not yet reached your final destination.

If your life is a book, you have a story to tell that has many chapters, which have led to this present chapter of your life. The end of your story is yet to be told.

If your life is a drama, there are many Acts and Scenes, which have already been played out and have led to this present Act and Scene of your life. Your Final Act has yet to be played out.

If your life is a work of art—whether it is a painting, a song or a sculpture—the final touches of your masterpiece have yet to be completed.

If your life is a growth process, you have passed through many stages of development from infancy, through childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood. You have grown and changed and right now is where you are in the total unfoldment of your life. The full blossoming and fruits of your life have yet to be realized.

If your life is a timeline, you have passed through many eras or periods of your life that have led up to this present moment of your life. There are many more points along the line that have yet to be marked.

However you conceptualize your life, the reality is that at this moment, at this instant this is where you are. Right now, you have come to a particular destination, you are “writing” a chapter, you are living out a scene, you are at this stage of your growth or you are living in this particular period of your life. You could literally say that this instant is where you are or where you’ve come to in the total duration of your life. And the fact that you are still alive, there is more to come and that “more” is yet to be determined.
Throughout these journal exercises, we will use these metaphors interchangeably to help you describe the various aspects of your life. If there is a particular metaphor that works well for you, go ahead and use it.

In this first exercise, you will simply describe where you are in this present period of your life journey. This is a broad, general statement of what is true for you as you reflect on this present time. This present time is more than “this present moment”. The present time may stretch back to certain life events and circumstances that mark off this period. This present period is your own subjective experience of what is true for you. For some this present period may stretch back only a short time while for others it may stretch back many years.

Describe the outer events and circumstances that are occurring and also your inner experience in relationship to these events and circumstances. You need not go into much detail. You want to simply gain a general grasp, without judging, what is happening now in this period of your life and how you feel about what is happening. You want to consider both the positive and the negative aspects of your life.

A good phrase to open the door to this present period is to begin some sentences with the phrase, "This is a time when..." then complete the sentence with what is true for you. Some useful questions to prompt yourself are:

- What is happening in my life now?
- What major events and circumstances seem to mark this current period. How far does this present period seem to go back? When did it seem to start?
- What recent changes have occurred in this present chapter of my life?
- Who are the people that seem to play an important role in this particular time and place of my life?
- What feelings and emotions am I having in this present period of my life?
Where am I now in my life?
This is a time that has its difficulties and promises. My financial situation is weighing so heavily on me. I feel stuck in many ways. I am not fulfilling things that I would like to do and it is my financial situation that seems to be holding me back. This is a time of trying to reconnect back into my spiritual awareness and seeking to trust the positive outcome of things. My financial picture has been so bleak for so long, a never ending cycle of getting more and more into debt and never having enough money to do things other than pay bills. I have no freedom to do anything else with my life. It is working day after day. There is never enough money, no matter how much I seem to make. I seem to waste a lot of precious time. I feel stuck, helpless to do anything about it...
JOURNAL PROCESS # 1b

THE LIFE SPACE
("Where am I now in specific areas of my life?")

The previous exercise allowed you to position yourself—where you are—in the total context of your life as a whole. In this exercise you will be looking at where you are in specific areas of your life.

Your life can be conceived as a space or sphere that has components to it. These relatively separate components also have a life to them; that is, they have growth possibilities, which are yet to be actualized. Your life is very much like a tree with branches. The previous exercise described the present overall state of the tree. In this exercise we are looking at the present overall life of the branches. It is important to realize that these branches cannot be considered outside the total life of the tree. As the branches grow so does the tree as a whole. If the tree is to realize its full potential we need to make room for the branches and allow them to spread out as far as they want to go.

There are some areas of your life that are working just fine. Growth is happening by itself, so to speak, without much effort and struggle. But there are other areas of your life where your growth is stunted or where you feel stuck in some way. It is these areas that you want to give the most attention to but it will still be helpful for you to acknowledge where things are—positive or negative—in all areas of your life including any other areas that are unique to you. The following page is a “map” that gives you an overall view of the typical areas of your life. You may have already touched on some of these areas in the previous exercise but here you will go into a little more detail. Within each area are “sub” areas for you to consider and include in your statement of “where you are”.

Respond in this exercise as you did in the previous one. Consider what is happening in these specific areas and write a general statement about where things are, and where you are emotionally in relationship to these things. You need not go into a lot of detail but reflect on what is happening in these areas and how you feel about where you are.

- Where am I in my marriage/primary relationship?
- Where am I in my relationship with my family of origin?
- Where am I in my relationship with my current family/children?
- Where am I in my relationship with my work or job?
- Where am I in my relationship with money and finances?
- Where am I in my social relationships/group/friends?
- Where am I in relationship with my education?
- Where am I in my relationship with my inner life?
- Where am I in relationship with my body?
- Where am I in the area of my spiritual growth?
- Where am I with my past relationships?
Some useful questions to prompt you are:

- What is happening in this particular area of my life now?
- What events and circumstances seem to mark off this present period in this area?
- What changes have recently occurred?
- What am I feeling about what is happening in this present period.
My Marriage
I must say that Lisa and I have grown up a lot over the last 22 years. I feel connected to her in many ways yet disconnected at the same time. I think she knows me and understands me and I believe I have come to know and understand her in many ways as well. But sometimes I wonder if I really know her and whether she really knows me. Those last two statements sound inconsistent. Is it really possible to know another’s soul? Is it really possible for someone to know my soul? I guess we do the best we can. I know she supports me in just about anything I choose to do. I go through many mixed emotions with Lisa, emotions that come and go. I feel close to her but I notice a feeling of irritation that is rather persistent. But I really can say that she is my best friend.

My Family of Origin
I am somewhat disconnected from my family. It has been sometime since I have been back to visit them. I miss seeing them. It seems we have all become somewhat disconnected since Dad died. I have mixed feelings when it comes to Mom. I love her but I see that I still have some guilt after I talk with her. I do not know where my guilt comes from but I feel very guilty much of the time…

My Children
My relationship with Mark and Claire has changed so much over the last couple of years. They are growing up and becoming their own… I seem to have very little influence in their lives yet I still believe I am important to them in some ways. I don’t know where things are going with Mark. He has been so distant from me for the past couple of years. I look back and see that I have maybe let him down in some ways. Maybe I have not lived up to what he has truly needed and wanted from me. I have feelings of sorrow and inadequacy when I think of Mark…

Money and Finances
This is an area where I am struggling the most and also where I have the most feelings. Debt piled on top of debt, taking loans out to consolidate debt, never ending. I know that I am not handling money well. I know that I need to get a hold of it. I am living paycheck to paycheck and if something happens to me, my family is in trouble. I am not trusting Lisa in the way she spends money. I believe she way over spends and does not seem to care about living within a budget. I feel resentment, anger, frustration, hopeless…

Social Relationships
I really don’t have anybody in my life that I would call a “close friend”. I like the people I socialize with but I do feel somewhat distant. I know that it is important for me to be around people but at the same time I don’t like a lot of small talk. Many of my relationships are very superficial. I feel uncomfortable in many social situations.

My Spiritual Life
Sometimes I wonder if God is really there. Yet it seems that something is with me through thick and thin. Call it a force, I don’t know. Religion is not part of my life. I do find myself praying spontaneously but mostly its when things are really painful. I often hear myself saying, “please help me”.

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LIFE CONTEXT
(“Where am I with…”)

MY MARRIAGE/PRIMARY RELATIONSHIP
- Communication
- Sex
- In-laws
- Mutual Goals
- Finances
- Mutual Interests

MY FAMILY OF ORIGIN
- Mother
- Father
- Siblings
- Relatives

MY CURRENT FAMILY
- Son
- Daughter
- Partner
- Family Roles

MY PAST RELATIONSHIPS
- Ex-spouse
- Childhood

MY WORK
- Career
- Income
- Job
- Coworkers

MY FINANCES
- Income
- Debts
- Expenses
- Investments

MY SPIRITUAL LIFE
- God
- Faith
- Religion

MY SOCIAL LIFE
- Friends
- Activities
- Group
- Organization

MY EDUCATION
- Degree
- Personal Growth
- Personal Interests

MY BODY
- Health
- Food and eating
- Substance use
- Weight
- Exercise

MY INNER LIFE
- Memories
- Creativity
- Goals
- Feelings
- Thoughts

OTHER