



Written Inquiry - A Journaling Exercise

A collaboration with Philip Nordenfelt



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www.inner-alchemists.com

There are three steps to this process. They are not strictly sequential but generally come after each other. It's ok if they bleed over into each other.

They are **awareness, acknowledgement and integration**.

Equipment

You will need:

- Journal

- Safe space that doesn't bother you
(if you're sensitive to sounds it should be generally quiet, for instance)
- Comfortable seating is recommended
(you will go between meditation and writing multiple times)
- Pillow to scream in if necessary in case your worry about neighbours hearing

Process

Take a few minutes to get into a relaxed state. Breathe deeply, extending your stomach. Close your eyes and settle in. Set an intention for the session. It can be to work on a particular trigger you have experienced. Or it can be something else, like jealousy, insecurity, shame or any other emotional challenge you experience in your daily life. When you have something that you want to work on, continue with the following steps.

1 - Awareness

Third person perspective - the feeling is 'it'

In this step we inquire into what is happening in us when we experience a trigger or strong negative emotion. We look at what the emotion looks like. What it is protecting us from. Who it is representing. We connect with it, befriend it, get curious about it. Gentle curiosity guides us.

Ask yourself questions like the following, and write down the questions in your journal. Take a moment to contemplate the answers. Really take time to explore this internal emotional space, especially if it's hard for you to feel, in general.

This step can easily take 10 - 20 minutes. Breathe deeply all throughout the exercise, and especially when you are experiencing strong reactions to the work.

"What does the feeling look like?"

"Where do I feel it in my body?"

"What shape does it have? Is it solid, fluid, something else?" "How is it moving? Is it moving?"

With these questions we gently get to know this inner creature. We want to befriend it with love and compassion. Remember that the bad feelings are not your enemy, they are your friend. They are, in fact, you.

Write down your learnings in the journal. I like to use a different style of text depending on if I'm writing a question, answering the question or writing about some physical experience. It can look like this:

2 - Acknowledgement

Second person perspective - the feeling is 'you'

Once you feel ready, it is time to understand the origin of this creature.

To help it open up, it's good to give it some acknowledgement by writing:

- *"I see how powerful you are."*

We then ask the shadow questions like:

- *"Where do you come from?"*
- *"What is the reason you are here?"*
- *"What are you protecting me from?"*
- *"When did I first feel like this in my life?"*

With patience, these questions can lead us to memories from the past. It might be your childhood, it might be later than that. You might see a string of events which all share this emotion.

Generally the first thing that comes to mind is the right thing to focus on for you at this point in time.

Once something has come to mind and you feel an inclination to choose that event or situation to inquire into, go ahead and start to really dive into the details of that particular event or situation.

Visualise the scenario. Think about the people in it, the way it looked, the way you felt. Were you angry? Were you ashamed? Did you feel threatened? What did the room or space look like? Really picture all the smallest details you can. Write this down in your journal. Add as much detail as you like. The more you add, the more you help yourself in the rest of the process and the next time you do the work.

Once you feel ready, you can move to the next step.

3 - Integration

First person perspective - the feeling is 'I'

Here we switch from the 2nd person perspective to the first.

In this step we understand why the feeling exists and what it has been protecting us from. We understand what we would have needed to feel protected but that we did not get at the time.

In short terms, we learn how we were failed by the outside world.

With the scenario from above in mind, ask yourself the following questions:

- “*What made me feel unsafe/ashamed/embarrassed/[other negative emotion] in this scenario?*”
- “*How should I have been protected to safely go through the experience and learn but not get hurt?*”

You can sit with this, contemplate and then write the questions and answers down in your journal. Try to really feel into your body and see what happens.

Give it what it needs

Now try to visualize the scenario and give your younger self what he or she needed to feel safe. The parental figure you needed who wasn't there. Imagine the scenario with all of its details and really connect with your younger self, sending love and compassion. Make sure to tell him or her that it wasn't their fault. They are lovable. They are perfect the way they are. Ensure that you give all of the protection and support necessary to make them feel safe, and have them navigate the scenario in a safe way.

If you need to remove people then remove them. If you need to fly around the world on a magic carpet then do that. It is your world, you can do whatever you want in it. You are free to model whatever is necessary to make your younger self feel safe and loved effortlessly and unconditionally.

I invite you to contemplate all of this for as long as is necessary. Then it could be useful to write about your experience in your journal.

Thank it

To close off, we use what we have learned and we thank our younger self from having protected us. We assure the younger self that we are capable of handling whatever comes our way as we are adults now. We thank the younger self, we make sure to release any emotions that want to be released and we imagine hugging our younger self with deep love and compassion.

You will notice that the younger self wants to give away control to you. They want to be young and playful and free. They don't want to worry or be on their guard. All of that energy spent can now be released and given to you in the here and now.

It can be useful to contemplate and feel into this for some time and then to write down the experiences in your journal.



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▼ Complete example 1

Awareness

My eyes are jumping all over the place. I find it impossibly difficult to hold eye contact.

I don't feel like I am being authentic, no matter what I say.

If I am saying something, I will be interrupted by this scanning sensation of looking within the group to see who approves of me, who likes me, what is my status.

It's gotten so extreme these days that I know it's coming up to be healed.

I always used to deal with this, and break through it by using tricks to get myself into a good state.

And now I just feel... clamped.

It's a sensation of melting.

Of becoming very very little. Soft. Weak. Slimy. Shrinking.

Shrinking and melting. I can break through it but it's so, so present.

Sexual tension. But perhaps the sexual tension is only in my experience.

Jumping, tense sensation around the forehead.

Dull, brick-like blockage on the right side.

The dull brickiness can only be filled by sexual validation.

I'm constantly in a trauma response state.

I barely have the energy to tell a story, or inquire into others, be interested in other people.

The jumping around, gathering information about my status is draining my battery.

It's getting so much energy and it's so obviously useless.

And when I let it rest... I just feel weak and meek. Calm, but sexless.

This is the same feeling that I got when I was at a highschool party and my crush was there.

I couldn't talk normally to her.

I melted in front of her.

I felt shame, worthlessness, weakness.

A hand holding me down.

Clamped around my side, around my heart.

Arms stiff and clumsy.

Sight jumping around.

Voice trembling.

Acknowledgement

Hello, feeling of constant alertness of my social status and female appreciation.

I see how powerful you are.

You are making me feel tense, restless, weak, small, like a little boy.

What are you here to teach me?

That you are a little boy.

Okay. What do you mean?

You are little because you have been little. Because there is little of you that is even left of the man you were before you were born.

Because there is no one to protect you. She won't respect you.

She will drop you, she will ditch you, when she truly finds out about who and what you are.

You are a DIFFERENT species. Don't forget that you are different and you can not pretend to be the same.

And that means she will ditch you.

Okay, I think I understand what you are saying. But why do you think she is different / I am different?

She grew up happy with herself. She developed properly. Whereas You were not socialized properly and have giant holes in your self esteem.

I understand that that is your perception.

What are you protecting me from?

Damage to the reputation. Outcast from the group. Total and utter humiliation.

Having to call your parents crying because everybody hates you.

Thank you for protecting me from being outcast.

What happened to you?

I was outcast. Everybody hated me. Because I tried things. Because I went for what I wanted, but those desires were not okay. They all hated me!

Integration

Thank you for protecting me from being outcast. I am actually really attracting so many loving and healthy people around us today, that you don't have to protect me from that anymore. I thank you, and now I really am okay with or without any group.

I will always take care of you, and I will be always able to find new friends.

I understand that you think we are a different species because we've had holes in us, we are carrying pain and holes in our development, but actually, so is she, and so is everyone. I want you to know that we will not be rejected, for having insecurities, for having holes and twists in our development, because she and everyone else does! Why do we pretend to be different when we are so much the same!

There is no need to even bring this up as "my" problem, this is everyone's thing and it does not belong to me specifically.

She's dealing with childhood pain. Neglect.

That so called perfect childhood that you think makes someone more worthy, not only does not exist, but also does not make someone more worthy.

Nobody had it perfect. Whatever happened to us, let them all see it. Let them all see it and touch it in the other one. Touch it in the other. This is what connects us. This is what we are here to do! I am giving myself permission to be foolish, to be awkward, to be socially inept. And laugh about it. And laugh about it.

Thank you for this conversation, 16 year old Erik. I will come back to you and talk more with you. You can go do something you really like. You can go play drums and go on the computer and lose yourself in nerdy stuff. I will make sure that we can be relaxed and make social errors and laugh about them and not get ostracized. That's a thing of the past.

We control our destiny now.

I love you.

▼ Complete example 2

Awareness

It's a hot flash. A hot, cramped sensation in my chest and head. Hands and throat also getting really hot.

My vision becomes more narrow. My heart races. I want to turn away. Run away.

I feel like I want to curl up in a ball and cry. I want to cry. I want to cry and lay on my back and ask WHY, WHY, WHY does this keep

happening, why can't I be like that, why. I want the group to save me from my suffering.

I feel envious and worthless. I feel very small. I feel a hot pressure on my heart.

Acknowledgement

Hello, hot cramped sensation in my chest.

I respect how powerful you are.

Why are you making it so hard for me?

Making what so hard?

Good question.

Let me ask instead: what are you trying to tell me?

I'm just sad.

I know, I can feel that. I feel that sadness. That sense of what I want being unreachable. Because it's in another person than me.

Why do you want to protect me from?

From the bad, bad experiences we had going up to girls. From humiliation. From ostracization. From being exposed for being selfish. For being exposed for not understanding social rules.

So why do you come to the surface when I see her with him?

Because you could never be that. Because she's not for you. Because she's with him. Because he's got something that you don't. Because...

Because you can never become someone else. So you can never have some interaction that you see other people have. Because it wouldn't be yours.

Okay, I understand. Then why do you make me feel like I want to?

Because this hot jealous flash you give me, it feels like to me you are saying something is wrong.

Something is.

What is wrong then?

We don't have acceptance. We don't have the experience of being accepted for our natural playful expression. And he has.

I understand.

When did you first feel this?

In the bathtub with D. In the classroom with Rawina. My physical impulses were not acceptable. And so I shut down and became your hot flash.

Integration

Your hot flash is me. It is your physical sexual expression that you had to suppress. I am in pain because I was unrequited. I was not answered.

I am joy. I am happiness. I am pure love and I am sexuality. And I had no place to go. That's why I am in pain.

Every time someone said: "Don't do that", or laughed at me, or were shocked by me, or creeped out by me, I became more and more shut down.

Until now, here, I am just watching from my glass tower, locked up, where no one really knows, while I have to watch other people expressing themselves freely.

My sexuality was never okay in groups. It could never find a place.

I am telling you I need a place. I need to be healthily integrated.

I am so, so lonely. I am so frustrated. I am repressed.

All I want is happiness, merging, pure joy, pure love.

It hurts me that I creep anyone out. That I get disapproval. That I get locked up.

I understand. I appreciate your intention. I understand that you want me to integrate you.

Shall we call in the help of the older brother? Because we need healthy expression. And we were never taught that.

Yes, please. Someone to guide me. I am pure life force. I need healthy expression. I need help and guidance.

And I crave acceptance and reciprocity.

I understand. That is really okay. I will create an environment for you where you are accepted. And I will get the help of the older brother to guide us towards healthy expression.

Older brother archetypes, here we come.

I summon thee.

I need you.

▼ Complete example 3

I'm realising this sense of being lost, far from home, abandoned, hopeless, has followed me throughout my life.

It's popped up in all sorts of moments of uncertainty. Or just in winter, when the days get short and they are way too dark.

But perhaps it has just been amplified by winter and circumstances.

It's always been a companion when I travelled alone.

Let's try something different.

Awareness

The disturbance is a profound feeling of being lost, abandoned by parents, forgotten at the supermarket, far from home.

It makes me on the verge of crying.

It upsets my stomach and causes tension and a contracted sensation in the body.

It makes it hard to look around and perceive my environment. The more I sense about my environment, the more sad I get.

Retreating inward is my default reaction to mitigate it.

It is the feeling of being forgotten on a train as a child, riding to unknown, unfriendly places, and being too frozen to ask anyone for help.

It makes me weak in situations where others would be strong.

It totally overshadows my confidence.

It makes it hard to think and see clearly.

Acknowledgement

Hi, profound feeling of being lost, forgotten, and abandoned.

I respect how powerful you are.

Why won't you leave me alone?

Because you haven't learnt to live without me yet.

What does that mean?

you know.

No, I don't think I do. I think I am much more powerful than how you are making me feel.

I don't feel that way.

Then how are you feeling?

Like no one's listening to me.

Ok. Let me listen to you then. What is it you want to express?

I feel alone because I was alone.

I feel abandoned because I was abandoned.

I feel frozen because I was frozen.

When were you frozen?

Before. I was frozen before .. time started for you.

Are you saying you are older than me?

Much, much older.

Can you tell me how old?

Ask me what you really want to know.

You're right, I'm sorry.

What I really want to know, is: how do I get rid of you?

I'm sorry that you want to get rid of me. I'm sorry I hurt you. I hurt by just existing. I am in constant pain.

You ignore me in the summer, and then you ignore me harder in the winter.

I'm sorry I tried to get rid of you. I just didn't want to feel the way you are feeling.

Guess we have that in common.

What are you here to help me with?

Coping with loss. You have no idea how to cope with loss. You distract yourself. And then when you lose something, you cry one time and then pound yourself on the chest for how emotionally healthy you are.

Yikes, I see what you mean. I guess I just don't like being sad. But I do like learning things and then talking about them.

I know you do, but sometimes it is time to slow down. Take time for yourself. Feel this.

I don't buy it. We do this dance every winter. When are we done?

Never.

What are you here to tell me?

That you can't control anything. If I decide we're not feeling well today, then that's what's up.

What would make you happy?

Listening. Reading me stories. Warm socks. Cuddling in bed.

Sigh. If I give that to you, then can you stop making me feel so bad?

I want you to want to.

What you did today was nice, but it was a manipulation. You think you can just get rid of me, shut me up, by throwing me a bone.

Okay, I think I get it. I want to want to take care of you. But what would help me, is to know who you are?

I'm YOU. I'm the you that you left behind when you wanted to be popular and cool. You pushed me away, and I have been tugging at you ever since.

Integration

I'm not okay. I'm not okay. I want my mommy. I'm not okay on my own. I'm left here in this classroom with mean kids, MEAN kids, I can't go anywhere for help.

Teachers won't help, they don't care. I've been sent on this school trip and I feel abandoned.

I'm in this foreign place, everything looks unfamiliar and ugly and menacing.

Things look evil. I am ancient. I am the ancient abandonment.

In this lifetime, in this instant, I am living through betrayal by teachers, being sent to survive before I was ready, with a bunch of mean kids I don't understand, with my parents out of reach. I'm being cornered, bullied and ignored, the girls laugh at me for crying. No one cares about me. I want to go home. I want to go home. I want to go home.

* crying break *

Okay kid. We can go home. I take the kid out of his bed, throw away the energy drinks he had in an attempt to be accepted, and hug him. Then I carry him to the front of the living room, where the girl betrayed his trust by making everyone watch him cry. I give everyone a stern talking to, telling them to look in themselves and raise their hand if they never felt sad and out of place somewhere. And it turns into a lovely conversation, where even the bullies come forward saying they didn't mean it that way. But we still go home. He never wanted this class trip. He would much rather play in the forest, with his buddy. So I take him there. There's trees, a goat, one friend, and just nature and his parents' caravan. Space to play and a space to come home to. That's a real vacation for him.



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