

“Let it go” journaling

Among the top tier of self-care rituals I have practiced is “let it go” journaling. This style of journaling invites us to capture the stream of conscious thought and write it out on paper. Each and every word, sensation, instinct, and nuanced feeling that the factory of our minds produces. We aim to fill a page or pages with this content or write for a certain amount of time, like 15 minutes.

Regular writing in this way rewards us with a decrease in our neurosis and elevates our sense of well-being. On the surface, it seems almost too basic to work. Simply writing down my thoughts and feelings helps me? Ask anyone who regularly journals in this way and they will give you a resounding “yes”. Better yet, try it for a week and come to your own conclusions. It’s not a magic bullet, but I would offer that you will find your unnecessary suffering will decrease by roughly 10%-20%. If you are familiar with compounding interest, 10%-20% over the course of months and years can substantially change the quality of one’s life.

The liberation is profound; having a piece of paper in front of me and a pen in my hand symbolically becomes the portal through which I can enter into a realm of safety and understanding. I can write anything I want on this page. Anything. All of the ‘unacceptable’ thoughts and emotions that so much mental energy is expended keeping tucked away gets to come out here. There is nothing that is off-limits. Penmanship, spelling, and grammar simply don’t matter. I like using yellow legal pads because the pages rip out so easily that upon completion of my writing session, I rip the page(s) out and throw it right into the trash. Tear it into tiny pieces, burn, shred it, soak it in water....do whatever feels right so that you nor any other person ever gets to read it. That’s the only way we can be fully honest on the page. This type of writing is not about documenting your life or organizing thoughts. This is a primal way to purge your soul. Your soul craves release and will reward your bravery with peace.

Notice what thoughts emerge when you think of sitting down with pen and paper in this way. Maybe it excites you or frightens you, maybe this seems absurd or even harmful, or maybe it’s refreshing to be given permission or direction on how to do something like this. Whatever you think about it, maybe that’s material to start writing about.

If you have distress about writing, acknowledge it. Try to write about what happened where that distress got installed. For me, it was all the angst from school about writing persuasive essays. They needed to have proper intros, conclusions, topic sentences, etc. This is different from that kind of writing. None of that structure matters here. We are simply attempting to be the scribe for each and every thought or emotion we have. If we sit down and don’t know what to write, we literally start writing “I don’t know what to write” as many times as we need to until a new thought or feeling replaces it.

None of us can write as fast as we can think. So in order to capture the stream of conscious flow on paper, we have to slow down the thinking mind. For those of us who struggle with racing thoughts, this proves both challenging and very soothing. Imagine turning on a firehose with no

one holding the nozzle end. It flails about uselessly. Writing the stream of thoughts from our mind is like holding the nozzle and channeling what needs to be released in a productive way. This valuable skill we learn transfers to other areas of life as well. It helps us think more clearly and even can be useful in falling asleep.

We all live with certain aspects of our thoughts and emotions suppressed. There is good reason for some of our material to stay under our control and not present in our consciousness day after day. If we can vent off these energies from time to time or as situations present, we are much more able to maintain that control and not have these repressed parts of ourselves come out in unhelpful ways. Imagine a pressure cooker without a relief valve. In a matter of time, it will explode and make a mess of things and people. Writing like this is the pressure valve that prevents explosions.

How often should a person sit down and have a “let it go” journaling session? It varies. Experiment with different writing frequencies and times of the day. Maybe for a week do it every day for 20 mins when you wake up. See how things are feeling in your world at the end of the week and make some adjustments. I find that various seasons of life call for different needs to be met. For many months, I wrote three pages a day every day, ala Julia Cameron’s Morning Pages (a great resource). Other times it has been far less frequent and in smaller doses. Your internal sense of knowing will be useful in guiding you on how much of this you need. Don’t have much connection to your internal sense of knowing? Better get to writing.