



WRITING THERAPY FOR A NEW YEAR

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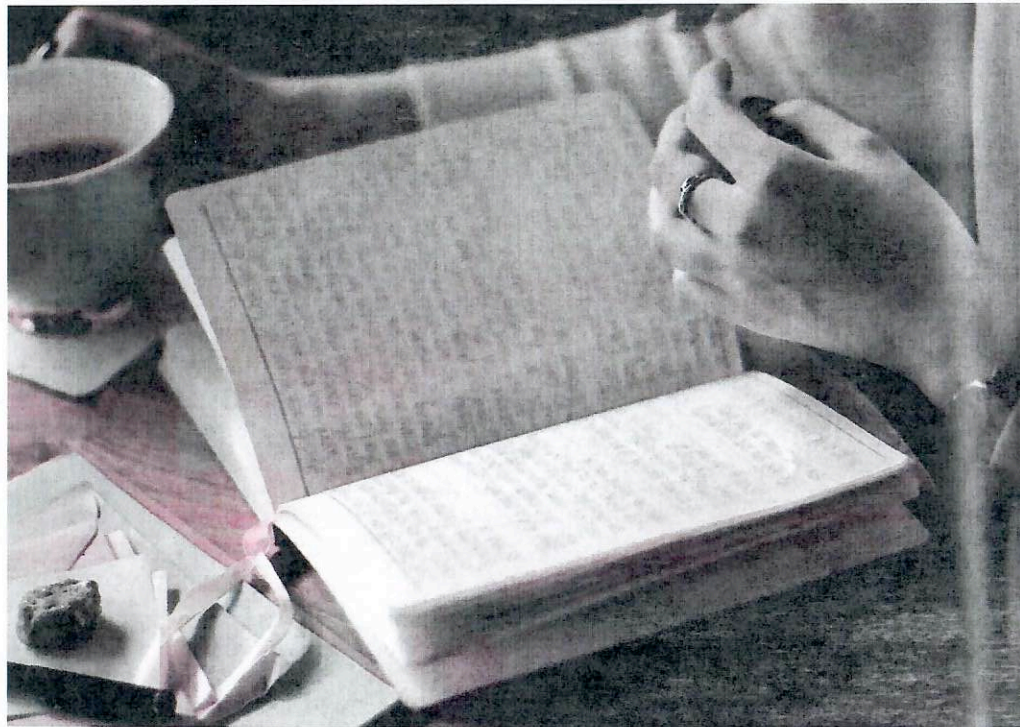
Navigating through the 2020 pandemic has meant dealing with many unexpected personal, financial, and universal challenges. For many, the shift has resulted in more time alone, or a shift from the external to the internal. It's always important to maintain a sense of emotional and mental well-being, but even more vital during a time of upheaval. This is when we need to bring ourselves from the darkness to the light, and to hold a space for our overall health. And writing can help. Hopefully, this article will help you kick-start a daily writing practice.

I've been writing for more than five decades. My passion for this form of creative expression began at the age of ten, when my mother gave me a Kahlil Gibran journal to help me cope with the loss of my grandmother, who lived

in our home. Little did my mother know that her one simple act set the platform for my eventual career. Since that day, I have come to see that writing has always made me feel better when navigating difficult times.

Writing has many healing and therapeutic properties. It heals because it serves as an outlet where we can express ourselves and our emotions. It gives us a way to make sense of and clarify our feelings about certain experiences, especially during life challenges. It helps us communicate our thoughts to ourselves and to those around us. Also, studies have shown that when writing in the first person, our body, mind, and spirit tend to become stronger and more balanced.

Writing time is also alone time. Being alone with our thoughts is healing because it allows us to tap into a creative



outlet for learning about ourselves. Writing can help us identify priorities, answer life's essential questions, and determine our reasons for being. All in all, it offers the magic of self-discovery as a path to psychological and spiritual well-being.

Everyone deals differently when going through challenges, so it is important to know what works for you. Whether writing about grief, fear, guilt, or relationship difficulties, writing provides a container for your feelings and helps you make sense of the rumblings in your mind. Remember that, for the most part, life is shaped from the inside out, so writing can help you maintain your connection with the wisdom of your heart.

THERAPEUTIC WRITING

Writing can be therapeutic because it helps us develop self-awareness, creativity, a sense of gratitude, self-confidence, and mindfulness; inspires us to manifest our intentions and tap into our authentic selves; is empowering and energizing; and helps us identify life patterns.

There are different ways to express yourself on the page, and the genre you choose depends on what resonates with you. Some different forms of writing for therapy include journaling, letter writing, poetry, essay writing, memoir writing, and fiction. A few of the most popular types for beginners are discussed below.

JOURNAL WRITING.

This is often the way people begin to write. You can use writing prompts, like those I shared in my book *Writing for Bliss*; or you can engage in automatic or stream-of-consciousness writing, which means that you write for 15 to 20 minutes without stopping. This is one way to tap into the messages of both your heart and your subconscious mind. It is also a way to release the stress associated with your life experiences.

Letter writing. This is another excellent way to tap into your innermost feelings and can also help you connect with those far away, which is particularly useful during a pandemic. Sometimes when we direct our sentiments to one

person, we are more inclined to tap into the voice of the heart. Also, sometimes it is easier to say what we need to in a letter than it would be to speak with someone in person.

POETRY.

This is the voice of the soul expressed in a succinct way. It is a form that encourages you to slow down and tap into specific feelings. A poem is a collection of fragments with a theme. People often turn to poetry when in the midst of strong emotions. If you are drawn to this creative outlet, it is wise to read a lot of other people's poetry to get a sense of the various styles, which range from a definite rhyming pattern to more free verse. ▶

SOME WRITING PROMPTS FOR 2021:

1.	Write a letter to yourself reflecting on how 2020 was for you. Discuss your challenges, hurdles, accomplishments, and concerns.
2.	Be mindful of your inspirations. Write about situations or individuals that inspired you and made you feel good over the past year.
3.	Practice mindfulness. Sit quietly for a few moments. Do not speak to anyone or interact with any electronic devices. Now write about your experience in that stillness. What did you notice? What thoughts were running through your mind? Did you focus on just one thing, or did your mind wander to different aspects of your life?
4.	Write about what brought you solace in 2020 and if you will continue this practice in 2021. If not, what new activities do you hope to engage in?
5.	Cultivate an attitude of gratitude. A journal is the perfect place to express your appreciation for all the good things in your life, as focusing on the light helps foster health and well-being. As author Shakti Gawain wrote in her book <i>Creative Visualization</i> , "The more light you allow within you, the brighter the world you live in will be." Expressing gratitude also offers hope and will bring a smile to your face. So write about the small things that make you happy—perhaps a pair of shoes you love or a food you love to eat—as well as the larger aspects of your life, such as your relationships with your loved ones.
6.	Develop your intuition. It has been said that intuitive people listen to the voices of their souls and follow their instincts. For some people, this is a developed skill, but for others it comes more naturally. Write down some questions or concerns you have about 2021. Stop for a moment and look to your inner soul or higher self, and write down the answers you receive.

"WRITING CAN REMIND US OF THE JOYOUS TIMES IN OUR LIVES AND SHOW US HOW WE CAN CALL THEM UP WHEN LIFE GETS CHALLENGING."

ONE MORE MESSAGE

Developing a regular practice is important when you start anything new, including writing. This practice should make you feel joy; but if, instead, you find yourself becoming stressed or anxious, take a break or try another form of expression. While writing, you might enter into a state of bliss, which should definitely make you feel better.

Writing as a way toward attaining bliss can be helpful when we are at a transition or crossroads in our lives and are unsure of our true calling; or during

pandemic times such as these, when we have more time to ponder and be introspective. Writing can remind us of the joyous times in our lives and show us how we can call them up when life gets challenging. Finding bliss through writing is about paying attention and being mindful of all the things, situations, and people that bring us joy, as well as anything else that helps us get us in touch with our inner child—which can be therapeutic no matter what else is going on in the world!