JOURNALING THROUGH PAIN & TRAUMA:

WRITING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN

A COMPANION PIECE TO

Women and Pain: Taking Control and Finding Relief



- Journaling is a self-care technique that can help you heal, grow and thrive.
- Journaling helps bring order to your deepest thoughts and fears. It creates order out of chaos.
- Journaling acts as free therapy. It helps you have a conversation with the person who knows you best: you.
- You can go back and track your progress. Read what you've written and see how much progress you've made on your journey.
- Some find joy in knowing their words help others, so they share their healing. But whether or not you share your work is up to you.

Writing prompts developed by therapeutic writing expert Sarah Saffian, LMSW, MFA

Download companion piece at drwaynejonas.com/women

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT YOU/ THAT YOU ASPIRE TO BE

Make a list of five things that define you in some way, or that you aspire to have define you — just one word, one phrase, or a sentence at most. It could be a role or label (mother, doctor, daughter); a quality of your personality, outlook, physicality; a particular skill (or a lack of skill); a strong like or dislike; an experience you had that was especially meaningful, perhaps one that somehow divided your life into a Before and an After (for instance, the onset of the pain); a place, an object, or even another person especially meaningful to your sense of self. See what rises to the surface organically, without spending too much time over-thinking; you could do this exercise again in a month and come up with five completely different things. Once you have your list, think about each item and expand on it, writing what you mean by it and how it defines your sense of self, coming up with examples of you showcasing that quality, or if aspirational, imagine how you might achieve it. Does the pain define you? Explore how to defuse the power of the pain, downgrading it from a key aspect of your identity to something that is happening to you. What <i>else</i> are you, besides the pain, to get back to your true, whole self?		

ANTHROPOMORPHIZE THE PAIN

Imagine your pain as a character, with whom you have a connection but from whom you are distinct: it could be a person, an animal, an object, as long as it is outside of yourself. Describe it, observing it from the outside, and write a scene where you're interacting with this pain character. What would you say/do to it, and it to you? The point of the exercise is to differentiate yourself from the pain — you experience the pain, but you are not the pain, it is not fundamentally who you are — acknowledging its presence in your life, but putting boundaries on it.		

EMOTION MADE EXTERNAL

Write about a moment when you felt a particularly strong emotion, or write about the emotion you're feeling right now — in either case, write in the <i>present tense</i> , for maximum immediacy. Explore the emotion solely through its <i>external</i> , <i>physica</i> manifestations — that is, what was/is happening in your body (palms sweating, heart racing, head throbbing)? How did/do you interact with your environment, through all your senses (shadowy or sunny, stuffy or breezy, sounds and smells, tactile sensations, etc.)? You don't need context/plot/explanation of what's happening; just get right to the emotion in the moment and describe it physically. By expressing our emotional state through our physical experience of it, you are able to delve into the heart of it. And from there, it can be transformed into a new feeling.		

CONCEPTS OF HOME

Write down five concepts of home — can be a place, but can also be another person, an activity, a ritual (ways of keeping a home), an object, a scent, a taste/food, a sound/music, a time of day, or a color which makes you feel fully at home. How does something transform from a house to a home — what makes a mere physical structure, or space, feel like <i>home</i> ? Is it because important things happen here? When we feel "homesick," what exactly are we yearning for? The idea is that the feeling of "home" is positive — grounded, centered, safe — which may or may not have been the case in your official home growing up, or in your current home. And how is an environment an extension/reflection of your identity?		

FIVE NECESSITIES

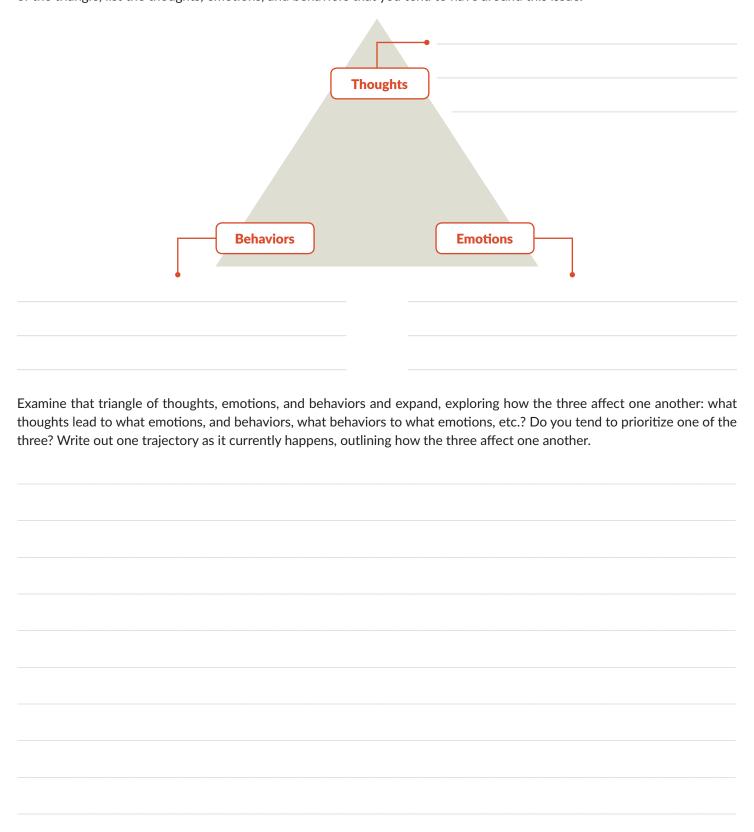
This is similar to Five Important Things — if you could bring just five things on a trip, or if you were moving, or if your house were on fire and you were running in to save just five objects, what would they be? Go beyond practical necessities (a toothbrush, for example, doesn't need to be one of them — unless dental hygiene is a <i>crucial</i> aspect to your sense of home and self!) to investigate more deeply what you prioritize, what's truly important to you to feel grounded and centered. Can be metaphorical, e.g. not actual objects, but relationships, rituals, etc.		

SPRING CLEANING

This is the flip side of Five Necessities — what are five things that you don't need and could let do you not need/no longer serves you? As with Five Necessities, you can get abstract here — calso be people, habits, attitudes, etc.	

THOUGHTS/ EMOTIONS/ BEHAVIORS

Pick something you're currently struggling with - your pain, for example, whether the actual physical state, the way you manage it (or don't), the way you communicate about it, the way you seek support (or don't) from others, etc. In each corner of the triangle, list the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that you tend to have around this issue.



How might you tweak your automatic thoughts to provoke different emotions and behaviors different thoughts, etc., how might you prioritize the three differently? Write out a revision of the your thoughts, emotions, and/or behaviors to affect the other two differently; how might the semore productively?	ne same trajectory, adjusting