

# The Developmental Journal

"Keep a journal!" It's universal advice, from Judy's eleventh-grade creative writing class, through the Masters program she took in counseling, through just about every self-improvement or spiritual growth program or practice either of us has run across. Whatever their differences may be, everyone who has some idea of facilitating any aspect of human psycho-spiritual growth realizes that one important part of the process is to monitor that growth. Now, in our turn, we offer the same advice to our own students: keep a journal.

There are many kinds of journals. Magical journals are typically more like lab notebooks than anything else, records of rituals or meditations undertaken and results achieved. Diaries can be simple narratives of our days, or they can go deeper. Therapeutic journals are used, sometimes in a highly structured way, to delve into our inner selves, hopefully to heal long-buried hurts. Dream journals record our dreams and our attempts at dream interpretation. Each of these and more have their specialized uses.

The developmental journal, the kind Judy kept in graduate school, takes a more holistic approach. In keeping track of your development as a priest/ess, your journal should chronicle any experience, in any part of your life, that seems related to Witchcraft or to your own psychological, spiritual or magical growth. Rather than teasing out the various threads of your development, the point is to show how they all weave together to make you a Witch and priest/ess.

It's good to start any new journal with a brief autobiography. Even more important is an assessment of your current situation. What do you feel are your particular strengths and weaknesses as a priest/ess? What are your strengths and weaknesses in your life overall? What would your life look like if you were to describe it in terms of a Tarot spread, the four elements, the seven planets, or whatever your favorite structure of understanding is? What about you or your life do you hope will change through your study of Witchcraft? This will give you a baseline, a sense of where you're starting from, not in your entire life, but in this particular phase of your journey.

As you go along, date each entry, and note the phase of the moon. Next take a few quiet, meditative moments to relax, ground, center and clear your mind, then consider the general feeling or tone of the day (or of the moment). What is today's color, texture, taste, scent? Describe today in terms of your favorite art form. If today were a note, what instrument would it be played on? If today were a dance, how would it be costumed? lighted?

After that, anything you do or experience that relates to your study goes in: books or articles you read, dreams, workshops you attended, contents of your meditations and reveries, rituals you participated in with a group and rituals you did alone, museum visits and walks in the woods, divinations you did for yourself or had done for you, anything.

You might also include occasional short excerpts from other people's writing or artwork that particularly move or inspire you, usually with a bit of explanation about what it means for you.

The most important items to include are events in your ordinary life that seem related to your current Wiccan training or activity. Are you facing any major problems or decisions at this time? The most important thing we are learning together is how to perceive the Sacred and the magical as they permeate everyday life.

Your journal is a place for you to explore the interconnections between all of these different experiences and how they all work together in your development as a Witch. So the idea is not just to report, but to reflect, to explore how you felt about it, what it meant to you, what you learned from it. Here are a few possible questions for reflection: they won't all apply to the same experiences, and there are an infinity of other possible questions:

- ▶ **Why did you seek this experience?** If what you are recording is something you chose to do, like read a book or go to a workshop, what was your original interest or hope or expectation, and to what extent was it fulfilled? Did the experience contain any surprises for you?
- ▶ **Why did this experience come up for you at this particular point?** If the experience was unplanned, like a dream or an apparently related event in your secular life, what connection do you see between the experience and your Wiccan work? What might your deep mind or the Gods be trying to show you?
- ▶ **What did you (or what might you) learn from this experience?** How does this experience relate to, interact with, confirm, contradict, build on other Craft-related learning or activities you are engaged with at this stage? Does anything about this experience perplex you? How does this experience extend your personal knowledge base?
- ▶ **If you could do it over, would you respond to this situation differently?** If so, how? why?
- ▶ **How might you share what you have learned?** Do you want to offer a workshop or write an article or in some other way share some of your new knowledge with

the coven or with the community?

- ▶ **How do you feel about this experience?** Do you have any emotional reactions to this experience and what you've learned from it? Does this reaction surprise you in any way?
- ▶ **What does this experience and your reflections on it mean to you?** How does it support, challenge or expand other beliefs, understandings, meanings and values in your life?
- ▶ **Have you acquired any new skills from this experience?** How might you use these skills to foster your own growth or to serve the community?
- ▶ **Do you think you'll be doing anything differently** in either your religious or your secular life as a result of this experience?
- ▶ **Where would you like to go from here?** Does this experience raise any interesting questions for you? How do you think you might explore those additional questions?

Journal entries are not limited to words, and certainly not limited to words in paragraph form. Poetry, calligraphy, charts and diagrams, symbols, pictures you draw, even things you clip and paste in from elsewhere, all are appropriate. Remember, some of us are relatively more visual and others more verbal. Your journal should reflect your own learning and expressive styles, the way your own mind works.

Now, a few points about the practicalities of journal keeping.<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **The book:** For some people, having a beautiful artifact to write in helps establish journal-keeping as a special and sacred activity. There are lovely bound blank books available in shops, or you could even make and/or decorate your own blank book.

For others, that type of book is almost intimidating, too pretty to mess up -- a plain spiral notebook works better. They will be less inhibited knowing they can remove a really badly spoiled page. In any case, you'll want a book that easily opens and lies flat on a table or your lap.

Using a word processor to make your journal entries allows you to keep an up-to-date index of topics. This is particularly good for ritual records that might be consulted years later. On the other hand, unless your computer is fairly sophisticated, you are limited to words in straight lines. And, unless its a laptop,

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1 Many of these suggestions are based on the ideas of Lady Iontas.

you are confined to your desk. A notebook and pens can go anywhere, allowing you to maintain your journal at festivals or write out in the woods.

If you use a ring binder, you can combine different types and colors of paper, handwritten and computer printed material, and even include clippings, artwork and photography in page protectors. But it's easier to lose pages from a ring binder (it helps to number the pages so that you can recover when all the pages slide out in a heap on your floor). All of these are entirely your own choice. Do whatever works best for you.

- ▶ **The paper:** Lined paper is easier to write on. Unlined paper is easier to draw on. Rough-textured paper may cause ink or paint to bleed. Recycled paper is more Earth-friendly. Acid-free archival paper lasts longer.
- ▶ **The pen:** If you think you'll be doing a fair amount of drawing, you'll want a collection of markers in different colors, not just a pen. Either way, you may find it helpful to regard your pen or pens as ritual tools and avoid using them for more secular purposes. In fact, it's a good idea to ritually consecrate both the book and the pen or pens.
- ▶ **The setting:** Some people like to have a set time and place for journal work. Experiment. First thing in the morning works best for some, bedtime works best for others.

Still other people like to have their journal with them at almost all times, so they can catch ideas and feelings as they bubble up. Feel into your own work style, and follow your own preference. All that really matters is that you use your journal frequently.

Your journal is not so much absolutely secret as absolutely under your control. Don't leave your journal laying about. Nobody should ever see it without your carefully-considered permission. Do not show it to anyone casually. Don't let it be commonly known that you are keeping a journal at all, as journals have sometimes been subpoenaed.

No one should ever be required to show anyone else their journal. We believe that even requesting to see another person's journal is unacceptably invasive. Nonetheless, you may someday choose to share your journal with a mentor or a partner within a context of deep trust. Sharing on that level is entirely your prerogative.

Although there is no particular goal or end point to a process of life-long growth, it's a good idea to repeat the full-scale assessment exercise as you approach any major life passage. Initiation and Elevations are obvious, but also consider marriage, divorce,

starting a new school program, becoming a parent, major career moves, or any other significant turnings in your life as occasions for thorough self-examination. It also might be good to make a practice, perhaps at Samhain, to read through the last year's entries and consider setting some goals for the year to come.

Used in these ways, your journal becomes an important way for you to nurture and guide your own growth as Witch and priest/ess. It will also give you a resource for guiding your own eventual students through similar developmental processes. If an elder is someone who started sooner, your journal will help you be a *conscious* and helpful elder. Write on!

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