

A Few Tips On Letter-Writing As Spiritual Practice

Presenters: Judith Valente and Paul Quenon

(Here are a few practices we found helpful. They are by no means the “final word” and please add your own ideas to this list).

“But how happy, how carefree, how joyful you are if you have a friend with whom you may talk as freely as with yourself, to whom you neither fear to confess any fault nor blush at revealing any spiritual progress, to whom you may entrust all the secrets of your heart and confide all your plans. And what is more delightful than so to unite spirit to spirit and so to make one out of two?”

From Book Two of “Spiritual Friendship” by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Reflect well on who might be a good correspondent and ask that person if they are willing to put the time and effort into it. Not everyone you ask will be able to say yes. This is a practice that takes time and commitment.

Decide beforehand on topics you want to write about, such as prayer, meditation, silence, nature, work, dealing with conflict or disappointment ...

Take time to reflect before you write. Write a draft and then go back and revise the letter. These are not messages we dash off like emails. Think of your letters as works of art, as gifts.

Answer your letters as soon as you can. Perhaps select a particular day or days of the month that you write so you get on a regular schedule of writing. But be prepared to have some lulls in your correspondence. Life happens and sometimes one or the other person will be unable to respond in a timely fashion. Have patience with one another.

Be honest in your letters. It is authenticity that will make this practice worthwhile. Write from the heart, but never use the letters to chastise or criticize the other person. If you disagree, be gentle and loving in your disagreement.

Learn from the other person. None of us possesses complete wisdom.

Write with whatever tools give you pleasure. If you have a favorite type of pen, use it. If you want to handwrite your letter on fine paper, by all means do it. If typing is more comfortable, type your letters on your computer and print them out. The important thing is to make your letters a reflection of you.

Getting Started

Here are some letter-writing practices that can also help us on our spiritual journey.

Contact someone with whom you'd like to start a correspondence, perhaps a trusted friend or spiritual advisor to see if they would like to engage in an exchange.

If you do not find or want a writing partner, there are other profound letter-writing practices you can do. For example, write a letter addressed to God about a situation or problem you are facing. Then, write a response back from God.

Write to parts of your body.

Write to your younger self or your older self.

Write to someone who can't answer back (who is deceased or departed from your life).