



THE LOVE LETTER TECHNIQUE

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*Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a
tender look which becomes a habit.*

PETER USTINOV

This method of journaling is based on the insightful and heart-felt work of its two innovators, Barbara DeAngelis, Ph.D. and John Gray, Ph.D. It is built upon the concept of an “emotional map,” which says that our emotions are like an iceberg, where the very top, floating portion of the iceberg represents our anger. Underneath the anger is our sadness or hurt. Under the hurt and sadness lies our fear. Underneath the fear, lies a level called responsibility (or accountability/self-responsibility). And the deepest layer beneath the surface of the water is love, wants, needs and desires.

This technique recognizes that we often use the surface emotions of anger, sadness and hurt as a cover-up for our fear. Only in confronting our fears can we begin taking responsibility for our emotional choices in life. Once we take ownership of our fear, we can learn ways to release it, confront it and work with it, without allowing our fear to overwhelm us. In letting go of our

fear we can begin to feel the love inside of us and better express our true needs, wants and desires.



By expressing our emotions at every level of the iceberg, we reach what is called “The Complete Truth,” which says that we are more than our anger, more than our sadness, more than our fear. All these emotions and the desire to love and be loved (that underlies them all) comprise the complete truth of who we are.

... we are more than our anger, more than our sadness, more than our fear.



The Master once noticed one of his rebellious disciples eating food on a holy fast day. The Master said to the disciple, “Surely, you must have forgotten this was a fast day and that’s why you’re eating!” “No,” replied the disciple, “I did not forget this is a fast day.” “Then surely,” said the Master, “your doctor must have told you that you can not fast because of health problems.” “No,” replied the disciple, “I am perfectly healthy.” The Master then lifted his eye skyward and said, “Dear God, look how precious your children are. I have given this man ample excuses to explain away his behavior, but he refuses to deviate from the truth, even when it incriminates him.”

Paying attention to our hurts, fears, insecurities, unfulfilled wishes, expectations, wants and desires is vital and necessary for healing our emotional pain.

In order to truly heal, we must all refuse to deviate from the truth, even when it incriminates us. The truth of our feelings, wants and desires holds the critical information that we may need in order to heal. In fact, no real healing is possible without our truthfulness. Telling the “complete truth” is what writing love letters is all about. In being honest with ourselves about our feelings and fears—especially the uncomfortable feelings—we can begin the healing process.

(The above story is adapted from Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. *Living Each Day*, Copyright 1992 by Mesorah Publications, Ltd. p. 12; the Master in this story is Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev.)



When our anger, sadness and hurt lead us into conflict and opposition in our relationships (personal/intimate and business), this shows up as emotional tension. This emotional tension is a cover-up for our deeper feelings and fears. In releasing, exposing and exploring our deepest fears, responsibilities and vulnerabilities, we open ourselves up to the love (or the inability to feel love and acceptance) that underlies our external conflicts. By fully expressing our emotions at each level of the iceberg, we break through our emotional tension—chipping away at the iceberg—thereby avoiding the disastrous “Titanics” in our lives. Paying attention to our hurts, fears, insecurities, unfulfilled wishes, expectations, wants and desires is vital and necessary for healing our emotional pain.



The Master came upon a pond and stopped to look at his reflection in the still water. “Is this reflection me?” the Master

inquired of his disciples. “No,” replied his disciples, “that is only an image of you reflected in the water.” “Then how does the water hold my image?” inquired the Master. “It holds you with a skin like a mirror,” replied one disciple. “And where,” said the Master, “do we touch, this pond and I?” At which point, the disciples reached into the water and splashed the Master in the face!

Our hurts, fears and insecurities are but a reflection of our consciousness. By paying attention to them, we can become aware of the deeper source—in consciousness—of our painful feelings. In this awareness, we learn that we are not our feelings but our feelings are a reflection of us. The love letter technique helps us to pay attention to our feelings, to look at our image reflected in the waters of our feelings, and to be splashed and cleansed by the waters, so that they awaken us to our true and deeper thoughts and desires which can help heal us. This whole process helps us to make visible the invisible. Our feelings help make visible the attitudes, beliefs and sense of spirituality that constitutes our true essence. Our feelings provide invaluable feedback so that we can—through *attention* to our feelings—change our true image, our true character, so that the reflection staring back at us from the waters is one that is pleasing to our soul.

In *Soul Food: Stories to Nourish the Spirit and the Heart*, authors Jack Kornfield and Christina Feldman say that our attention is the vehicle that “connects us with the changing rhythms of our own thoughts, feelings, and yearnings. Learning to listen inwardly without judgment or resistance is to begin to understand ourselves—it is the source of wisdom.”

(This story was adapted from a story by Thomas Wiloch found in *Soul Food: Stories to Nourish the Spirit and the Heart* by Jack Kornfield and Christina Feldman, 1996, HarperSanFrancisco, p.81; the Master in this story is Lord Shantih.)



The love letter technique is simple: write a normal style “Dear So and So” letter, making sure to address each level of the emo-

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

tional map (iceberg). These letters are intended to help us process our own feelings, giving us the clarity and courage we need to begin healing our relationship with ourselves and with others.

These letters are *not* to be sent to anyone, unless both persons involved are familiar with the technique and have agreed beforehand to work things out in this way.

***The love letter format
follows this basic structure***

Dear _____,

Paragraph 1 (Anger)

I am so angry:

I hate it when you:

It makes me so angry:

I am furious that:

It really pisses me off:

Paragraph 2 (Sadness/Hurt)

It hurts me (that/when):

I am so sad that:

It grieves me to:

It makes me sad:

Paragraph 3 (Fear)

I am afraid that:

It scares me (to see/when):

I am so scared that:

*Anger is love turned
inside out.*

BARBARA DEANGELIS

*Fear is a question:
What are you afraid
of, and why? Just as
the seed of health is in
illness, because
illness contains
information, your
fears are a treasure
house of self-
knowledge if you
explore them.*

MARILYN FERGUSON

*One word frees us of
all the weight and
pain of life: that word
is love.*

SOPHOCLES

It frightens me:

Paragraph 4 (Responsibility)

I am sorry that:

Please forgive me for:

I never meant to:

It was never my intention:

I apologize for all the times I:

Paragraph 5 (Love/Wants/Needs)

I love how you:

I love when you:

I am so grateful to you for:

I want/need to:

I want/need you to:

What I really want is:

What I really would like is to:

Love,

Journaler

Here's a sample love letter written by Mary

Mary is having trouble expressing her need to spend more time with her husband Jim. She is beginning to feel resentful, angry and hopeless about their relationship. Due to her increasing insomnia and heart palpitations, she schedules a visit with her physician, who after a thorough examination and testing, advises her that many of her symptoms are stress-related. She does not

*Those who sow in
tears shall reap in joy.*
PSALMS 126:5

want to use any addicting drugs like Xanax or Valium, so her doctor suggests she journal through some of her emotional conflicts, in hopes that she may cool down her stressed out, overheated nervous system. She agrees to try.

***Here's Mary's love letter
to her husband Jim***

Dear Jim,

*I am so **angry** that you just run up to your computer every time we have an evening to spend together. It really pisses me off that you don't want to spend more time with me and that I have to fight for your attention. I want to scream so you'll wake up and see how much you're missing, but no, you want to go on the Internet and get lost in your own little world.*

(Tip: Don't edit your feelings. This is the time to "let 'em have it." You're really just expressing your own internal anger. It would be inappropriate to blurt this out or dump it on your partner in this raw form. Remember, you need to break through your own anger to get to the deeper levels of the iceberg. This anger may have nothing to do with your partner or business associate or whomever.)

*'Tis the most tender
part of love, each
other to forgive.*

JOHN SHEFFIELD

*It makes me **sad** to think that you would rather be*

Though it is critical to be fluent at expressing our hurt and anger, we must always understand the deeper levels from which these emotions arise.

*off with your computer than sharing time with me. It hurts me to think that I'm not attractive enough or interesting enough for you. I feel sad that we don't have the same fun times together that we used to. It **hurts** me to think that we used to want to spend all our time together and now I miss that.*

(Tip: Many times women are more comfortable expressing hurt and sadness, while men are more at home expressing anger. In both cases, these feelings are the surface emotions of the iceberg and oftentimes serve only as a cover-up for our deeper fears (perhaps for safety or emotional survival or even physical survival), resentments and unfulfilled needs. Though it is critical to be fluent at expressing our hurt and anger, we must always understand the deeper levels from which these emotions arise. None of these emotions are “good” or “bad,” they are simply emotions. The challenge is learning how to express our anger and hurt in ways that are respectful of others while honoring our deeper unfulfilled need for love and acceptance. Dumping our anger and sadness on others in an attempt to manipulate them into doing what we want never leads to a win/win situation where we can take care of ourselves and simultaneously give others the opportunity to honor their needs and wants.)

*I'm **afraid** that you are losing interest in me. It*

scares me to think that our relationship may be in trouble and I don't know how to get you back. I'm afraid that if we don't spend more time together we're going to drift further and further apart. I'm scared that you aren't in love with me anymore. Maybe I'm not pretty enough anymore. Maybe I'm not good enough for you.

(Tip: This is the most important step to get to. We must uncover our fears and insecurities. Without an awareness of our fears and where they come from, the secondary anger or sadness they generate will often be inappropriately expressed or inappropriately unexpressed. Fears are normal, healthy and real. We do not want to eliminate fear, we want to recognize it and listen to it. Fear is a friend when it alerts us to situations in which our physical, emotional or spiritual survival is actually at risk. Often, however, fear is irrational, and is not tied to any real threat. This is where we must learn to moderate our fear and “take it on,” so to speak, not allowing it to cause us to react in harmful or inappropriate ways.)

*I'm **sorry** that I haven't been as attentive to you lately either. Please forgive me for getting so lost in my own needs that I forgot to listen to what you needed to be happy. I never meant to take you away from the things that you love. I just want to find the place where we can be more loving and open with one another. I want us to share our lives fully with each other.*

Without an awareness of our fears and where they come from, the secondary anger or sadness they generate will often be inappropriately expressed or inappropriately unexpressed.

Many times we reflexly think the problem is outside of ourselves. It's what "they did to me," "how they treated me," etc. When we really look into our heart, we usually find our share of responsibility for the situation.

(Tip: This level allows us to take responsibility for our own part in the situation. Many times we reflexly think the problem is outside of us. It's what "they did to me," "how they treated me," etc. When we really look into our heart, we usually find our share of responsibility for the situation. Claiming our part, accepting our shortcomings, and taking responsibility for our own mistakes is an absolutely crucial factor in the healing equation.)

*I **love** you so much and I know how scared I am that we are losing each other. I **want** us to spend more time together doing things that help us build the kind of family and relationship I know we both want. I am crazy about you and you are so important to me. I never want to lose you. I never want to take you for granted.*

(Tip: It is important to get to the actual wants, needs and desires. Unfulfilled or thwarted needs often lead to resentment, anger and hurt. We may not even be aware of our own deeper needs (usually to feel loved, accepted and appreciated for the very one that we are) and we may unconsciously spill these needs or expectations onto our spouses, lovers, business partners or friends. You can see how important it is to become more aware of our inner life, our deeper needs, and be able to express them clearly and consciously in

We may not even be aware of our own deeper needs (usually to feel loved, accepted and appreciated for the very ones that we are) and we may unconsciously spill these needs or expectations onto our spouses, lovers,

our relationships at home and at work. In this way, we can be sure that our emotional reactions are tied to an awareness of our deeper needs. We can ask for what we want clearly, without placing unrealistic expectations upon our relationships. This is part of our journey into higher consciousness. This is the way we create greater love, fulfillment and inner peace.)

General tips:

Try to give equal time to each section and don't get stuck on only one level (like anger or hurt). Move through all the levels of the emotional map in each love letter. At first, limit your time to three to five minutes in each section. Leave yourself time to complete the whole love letter in one sitting. It is important to break through to the love. You can always go back and write additional letters for all the unresolved issues.

There are many ways to write the letters. To really understand a situation, you may want to write the letter you think your partner would write to you. You may be amazed at how much better you understand their point of view. For example, after Mary's letter to Jim, she may want to write a letter from Jim to herself. She would be "guessing" what Jim would say to her, but it would help her understand her partner better.

In deeper emotional issues, you may want to write letters to your own inner child (that part of us that represents the playful, irresponsible, fun loving, scared part of us that lives inside our "adult" exterior). You may want to write a letter to your adult from your inner child. You may want to write a letter from one of

your parents to the other parent, or from you to one of your parents. You may want to write a letter to God, or write a letter from God to you. The list is endless. Remember, the whole purpose is to expand our awareness of our true needs and wants and to become more loving, more awake, and more aware, so that we may approach life from a place of consciousness and choice, rather than reaction and fear.

***Write a love letter to your
physical illness or disability***

We can write a love letter for processing emotional pain associated with physical illness or disability. By addressing our body (or our symptoms) as the “significant other” in a relationship, we begin healing a vitally important and often overlooked relationship—the one we have with our body.

In this case, the patient Nathan has been diagnosed with cancer, and he is addressing his body to help him process some of the deep and painful emotions he has had to face in coming to terms with his diagnosis. The process works similarly for any patient who has to come to terms with any difficult medical condition or disease process such as arthritis, irritable bowel disease, chronic fatigue, infertility, heart disease, lupus, Parkinson’s disease, migraine headaches and more.

Dear Body,

I am so angry at you for failing me. I have always treated you well, and I can't believe you would fail me,

By addressing our body (or our symptoms) as the “significant other” in a relationship, we begin healing a vitally important and often overlooked relationship—the one with our body.

Love letters are one of the best tools I know for finding greater clarity, courage, awareness and healing in our lives.

that you would betray me. I eat well and exercise regularly and who are you to turn on me and disable me with this horrible cancer? I hate you for taking away my hope and the certainty of my future. I am so furious that you would deny me the opportunity to be with my family and see my children grow and watch my dreams come true. I hate what you have done to me.

It saddens me to think that I will miss out on so much. I am brokenhearted that my children may not have me around to offer them the support and love they need. How could you do this to me? I am so furious.

(Tip: Notice that you may be in the section on hurt when new anger comes up. Simply return to the anger section and get the anger out even more.)

I am so sad to think my wife will have to take care of our children alone, without my help. I will miss her so much. I am so afraid that I will come to be a burden on my family, that I will bring them down. It scares me to see my family so worried about me. I am so afraid that I won't make it through this alive, that my chemotherapy won't work. I am so scared that I have let down my wife and my kids.

I am sorry that I didn't always eat the best foods and get the most exercise I could have. Perhaps I could have taken better care of my emotions and been nicer to you and not pushed you so hard and stressed you out so much. I never meant to put such a difficult burden on

you by working so hard and stressing so much about everything.

I am trying to be strong but I need your help. Please be strong with me. Please help the chemotherapy fight off these cancer cells that are plaguing us both. I need you to work with me. I need your help. I need your love. I want to be here to grow and love my children and adore my wife. Please watch over me and let's work together to heal this cancer.

Love,

Nathan

Notice the deep awareness and emotional release that come from writing love letters. Try writing a letter addressed to: 1) Dear Overweight Body 2) Dear Recurrent Colds 3) Dear Fatigued Body 4) Dear Migraine Headache or 5) Dear Stomach Aches. When you complete your letter, try reading it out loud. Or record it into a tape recorder and listen as it is played back. Love letters are one of the best tools I know for finding greater clarity, courage, awareness and healing in the midst of difficulties and challenges.

For even more benefit, write a "response letter" and a "connection letter"

In his book *How to Get What You Want and Want What You Have*, John Gray adds a wonderful addition to his love letter technique. After writing your initial letter, write a "response let-

ter.” This is a letter written back *to you from* the person you just wrote to in your original love letter. In the response letter, write everything you would like to hear from that person that would make you feel understood, loved and cared for. Write down the ideal response, even if it seems selfish or unrealistic. The whole idea is to get in touch with the deeper wishes, desires and wants underlying our feelings of anger, hurt, sadness or fear. This ultimately leads us to the powerful healing place of forgiveness—of others and of ourselves.



A student asked his Master to teach him about forgiveness. The Master directed the student to watch a certain innkeeper at the time of the upcoming new year. The student promptly checked into the inn and observed the innkeeper for several days. As the new year approached, the student saw the innkeeper pull out two ledger books from his desk. From the first book, he started reading out loud all the things he had done which he felt badly about, including times he acted unkindly, lost his temper, responded impatiently or acted selfishly. Then the innkeeper pulled out the second ledger and began reading out loud a long list of all the bad things that had happened to him over the past year. At this point, the innkeeper turned his vision to the heavens above and said, “Dear God, it is true that I have done many terrible things this year. But many terrible things have also happened to me. We are now beginning a new year. Why don’t we clean the slate and call it even! I will forgive you and you forgive me.”

Forgiveness is wiping the slate clean even when we cannot understand all the bad things that have happened to us. Forgiveness frees us to “give as before” and helps us to let go of grudges, resentments and disappointments that keep us from loving fully.

(This story adapted from *Living Each Day* by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Copyright 1992 by Mesorah Publications, Ltd.p.

342; the Master is Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk.)



The response letter has five major categories and within each category, you can use the suggested sentence stems to express your deeper feelings. The categories are:

Paragraph 1 (Apology)

Please accept my apology for:

I'm sorry:

I apologize that:

I never meant to:

Paragraph 2 (Forgiveness)

Please forgive me:

Can you forgive me for:

Please pardon my:

Paragraph 3 (Understanding)

I've come to realize:

I now understand:

Paragraph 4 (Promises)

I want you to:

I promise to:

Paragraph 5 (Love)

I love you:

I care for you so much and:

You mean the world to me and:

Here's an example of a response letter

After Mary's original letter to her husband Jim, she writes a response letter from Jim back to herself. It might go like this:

Dear Mary,

*I am so **sorry** that you have felt ignored by me. I never meant for you to feel that way. I know I sometimes get preoccupied with my work and the computer, but I am genuinely sorry that I have ignored you in the process. Please accept my apology.*

*Please **forgive** me for ignoring you and leaving you to feel so unimportant in my life. You mean so much to me, I never want you to feel that way. Forgive me for my selfishness.*

*I **understand** now how important it is for us to spend quality time together. I've come to realize that nothing can replace the time we have together. I don't want to wake up one day and realize I have missed out on what's most important. I now understand that I can find other times to do my work that won't take away from the limited time we have together.*

*I **want** to have the special relationship we dreamed of and I want you to know how very important you are to me.*

*I **love** and care for you deeply and want us to grow closer and closer together. You mean the world to me and I am so grateful that I better understand how*

important and sacred our time together is.

I love you so much,

Jim

After writing your response letter, take time to write a “*connection letter*.” This is a letter written back to the original person you wrote to, expressing how good and grateful you feel when you receive the love and understanding you really want from that person. The connection letter helps us experience what it feels like to get what we want, to feel supported, nurtured and loved. The connection letter connects us to the spiritual core of love and essential worthiness that lies within each one of us. This fills us with the internal strength to love ourselves and feel worthy of love even when people and external circumstances fail to give us the love and attention we want and deserve.

The connection letter uses the following sentence stems to help you get in touch with your feelings of being supported, loved and cared for.

I am so grateful that:

Thank you for:

I now understand that:

I love when you:

I am beginning to understand:

I forgive you:

It fills my heart to hear ____: (to know:/to see:/to feel:)

***Here's an example of Mary's
connection letter back to Jim***

This letter gives Mary a chance to internally experience the good feelings and inner strength that come from realizing her own sense of inner worthiness. By supporting herself in these “imaginary” conversations with Jim, Mary gets to experience her own inner sense of lovability and worthiness. Her connection letter might go like this.

Dear Jim,

Thank you so much for your understanding and love. I am so grateful that you understand how important our time together is and how much we can build and grow if we take the time to nurture our relationship. You are the most important person in the world to me. I am beginning to understand how deeply you love me and that makes me feel good. I know how hard you are working to take care of us. I just don't want to sacrifice the most important thing we have together—the love and closeness we feel for one another. I forgive you for ignoring me. I realize you never meant for me to feel that way. I am grateful for the love we have and it fills my heart to know how much you love me and care for us. Thank you for being so understanding.

Forever yours,

Mary

*For one human being
to love another; that
is perhaps the most
difficult of all our
tasks, the ultimate,
the last test and
proof, the work for
which all other work
is but preparation.*

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Remember that the whole purpose of writing a love letter is to get beyond our fears, hurts and anger to the love—and need to be loved—that lies within our painful emotions. Though we may achieve some level of inner peace by writing these letters, it is critical—when appropriate—that we take our insights to our partners, friends and significant others in order to share our deeper feelings in dialogue and conversation. The goal is not to feel good but to be loving.



The Master spoke frequently of the importance of action. He would tell his disciples, “All the virtuous thoughts in the world do not produce a single virtuous act, a single gesture of help, a single dollar for charity. A fusion of thought and action is vital.”

We must combine thought with action and—in so doing—take our new insights out into the world of our family, workplace and community in order to help make the world a kinder and more loving place in which to live. This is the essence of writing a love letter. It helps us process our raw emotions of anger, sadness, hurt and fear and find within these emotions, the strength and courage to love ourselves and others more deeply.

(The above story adapted from the writings of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson found in *Toward a Meaningful Life: The Wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson*, edited by Simon Jacobson, New York: William Morrow & Company, 1995, p. xii.)



For more information and a complete description of this technique, see: *How To Make Love All The Time*, by Barbara DeAngelis Ph.D. and *What You Feel You Can Heal* by John

Gray, Ph.D. These two authors are powerfully insightful, loving and inspiring in the area of love, relationship and emotional healing. I cannot recommend their work highly enough.