

## Writing A Love Letter To My Enemy

Here is a writing exercise I often recommend to clients, patients, and friends that has great power to integrate alienated, wounded, or rejected elements of the psyche. I have adapted this exercise from the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh.

Writing A Love Letter To My Enemy creates space in the mind between the mental or physical experience, and the portion of the mind that can be aware of and care for the experience. We begin by personifying the internal quality or experience (i.e. painful emotion, physical sensation, habit of mind; e.g. anxiety, chronic back pain, hyper-criticality), and speaking/writing to it as though it is a separate entity.

- 1) Describe your experience of the physical or mental state—the way you see, know, and/or feel it (e.g. If physical - shape, texture, density, heat, movement; If mental, find the physical corollaries, describe them and also include your history with it: patterns you've noticed, relationship to other emotions or thought patterns, associated memories, etc.)
- 2) Recognize and articulate how the quality has served you or how it has tried to benefit you (e.g. anxiety tries to keep us away from danger by paralyzing and looping possible dangers; pain tries to tell us that something is being injured so that it is taken care of and not injured further; the inner critic attempts to keep us motivated, acceptable, "productive").
- 3) Convey the ways in which you have experienced aversion toward, and have been unkind to or not made space for or accepted this experience in the past (and the present).
- 4) Write out, in as loving a way as possible, the ways in which this experience has been a hindrance for you in your life, a hardship—the ways in which you have been hurt by it.
- 5) Make a request from courage and faith in your own resilience. Ask this experience to shift or at least to allow you to change in its eyes. Let it know that you have grown, possibly outgrown, this strategy, and that you have other tools available at this point in your journey. Most importantly, let it know that you will not hate it when it arises, that you will attempt to understand and listen deeply to what it has to say.