

By Sarah Massry

Write your way Home

Join Yocheved Rottenberg, CJF, Therapeutic Writing Facilitator, on a journey of healing, self-knowledge, and discovery

As soon as I picked up the new release, *Write Your Way Home*, by Yocheved Rottenberg, I was struck by the brilliance and depth of this masterpiece. As an avid writer for over a decade, I had never done much journaling, but I was intrigued and decided to try. I read through the beautiful Torah introductions and the prompts that followed. Then I took out a pen and a notebook and the words just flowed with writing that I later cherished.

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND. WHEN DID YOU START WRITING, AND HOW DID YOU DISCOVER THE POWER OF WRITING?

As a young girl all of my fears, dreams, and thoughts filled many spiral notebooks. As I maneuvered my way through the steep upward climb of life, I discovered that whenever I wrote I felt much better. I saw that I had many answers within me that I could discover through writing. By journal writing, I connected to myself in a deep and calming way. I also connected to Hashem through positivity and hope. I saw that writing helped me and changed me.

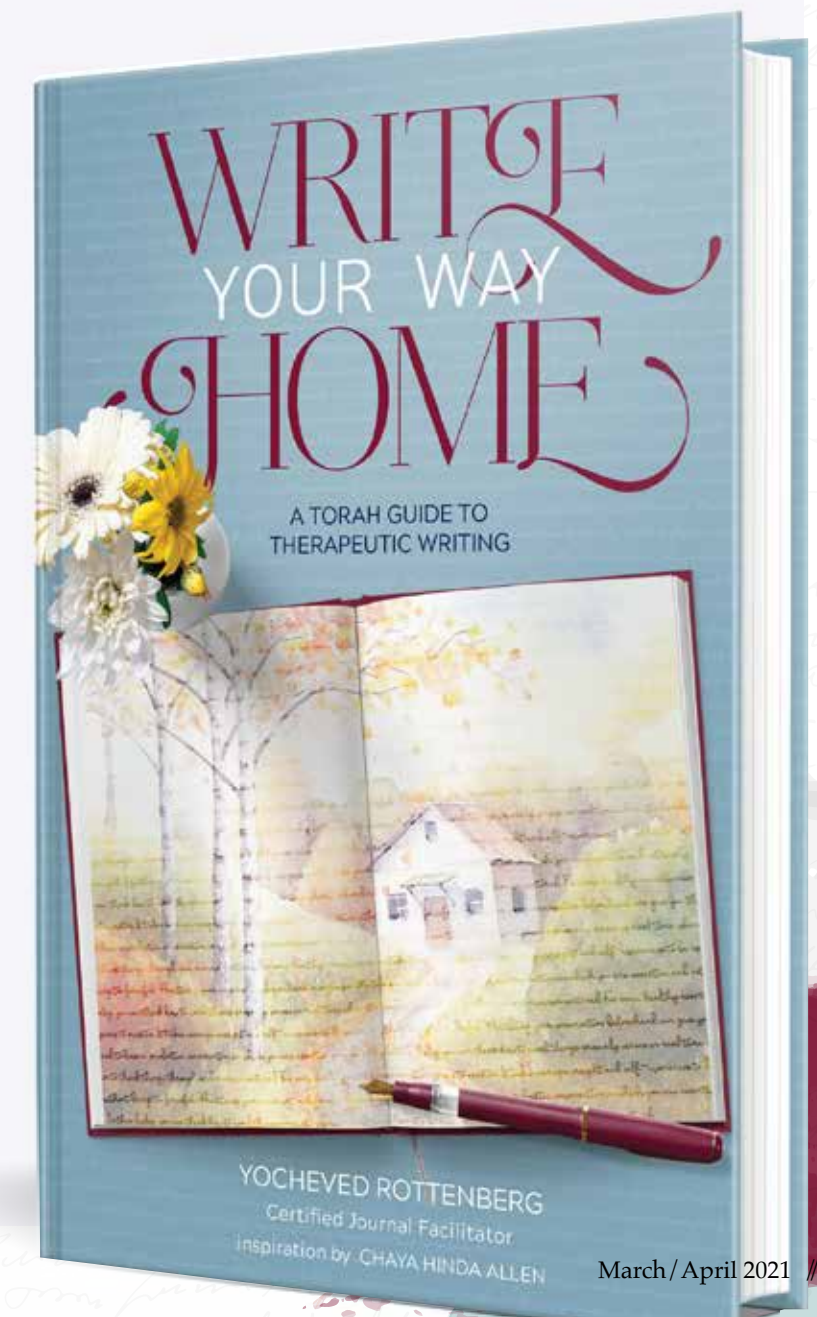
AT WHAT POINT DID YOU DECIDE TO SHARE THIS WITH OTHERS?

Determined to share this with others, I first trained at The Yanar Institute, The Israeli Institute for Internal Family Systems, to become a therapist, and then at the Therapeutic Writing Institute to become a Certified Journal Instructor. I now lead live classes in my home in Yerushalayim and international classes on zoom to hundreds of women throughout the world.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT JOURNAL THERAPY IS?

Therapeutic writing is the simple process of using writing to get to know yourself better, to discover what's going on deep inside of yourself, and to access unique solutions to your problems – solutions that only you can give yourself.

All journal writing is cathartic; just releasing the emotions that are bubbling up inside of us makes us feel so much better. Therapeutic journal writing – with specific and guided writing prompts – is particularly cathartic and clarifying. We have the benefit of releasing the feelings that are troubling us. But then, due to the specific structures of each exercise, we reach clarity too. We understand what is going on beneath the surface of the general emotions, what is really bothering us, and we try to discover how we can move forward.





One very beneficial part of the process is called the 'reflection.' When we finish every writing exercise, we read it over and reflect upon it. Then we write what we notice as we read it over, either how we felt, what it brought up within us and what we were surprised to notice. This helps us objectively reflect on our inner feelings.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THERAPEUTIC WRITING?

Anyone who can physically write can benefit from therapeutic writing. It is not necessary to be a professional writer or to be talented in any specific area. The only thing one needs is an open mind about trying a new tool!

When writing professionally, writers deliberate on each word to analyze how to best create a sentence. In therapeutic writing, we just write whatever comes to mind and specifically try to think as little as possible. That is hard for some people, who are so used to thinking and judging their whole life.

But in order for us to discover what's really inside ourselves, we need to write quickly and bypass our inner critic and the dozens of trained voices in our head that judge us. We need to just write what's really inside of us.

WHAT BENEFITS CAN ONE GET FROM THERAPEUTIC WRITING OVER OTHER MORE STANDARD THERAPY?

Firstly, there are certain situations that need therapy as well. But for someone who did not go through a serious trauma and just wants to deal with difficult situations, or for someone who has been in therapy in the past, therapeutic writing is tremendously beneficial.

Firstly, it is a lot cheaper. Therapy can be debilitatingly expensive and writing doesn't cost more than a pen and notebook – and a book or course to learn to do it properly. In addition, therapy can only be done at specific set times. Writing can be done whenever you're struggling and whenever you need to feel better.

TIPS FOR JOURNAL WRITING

1. Protect your privacy. Store your journal in its own special place so that the temptation for others to read is diminished.

2. Start with an entrance meditation. Nearly every journal technique benefits from a few minutes of focused quieting. Use visualization, soft music, candles, deep breathing, stretches or whatever works for you.

3. Date every entry. Dating every entry allows you to chronologically reconstruct your journal by date. It also lets you hear the silence between your entries.

4. Keep (and re-read) what you write. Often the writings that feel like throwing away contain the seeds for future insight. Keep it, re-read it later, and surprise yourself with how much you knew that you didn't know you knew!

5. Write quickly. You can outsmart the dreaded "journal block" by writing so fast that the internal critic and the internal censor can't keep up. Keep your pen moving!

6. Start writing; keep writing. Start with the present moment ("What's going on?") Or start with a feeling ("I'm so mad I could bust!") Or start with a

story ("Today the weirdest thing happened....") Once you've started, don't go back to edit or rewrite. And don't think too much. Let it flow.

7. Let yourself be truthful. Your own truth is not your enemy. Don't try to talk yourself out of knowing what you know or feeling what you feel. Give yourself permission to tell the truth.

8. Write naturally. If there is one inviolate rule of journal writing, it is that there simply are no rules! Do what works. Don't worry about what you're not doing. Give yourself permission. Let yourself enjoy the process!

Source: Kathleen Adams, MA, Director of Center for Journal Therapy and Therapeutic Writing Institute

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Lastly, a tremendous benefit of writing therapy is that slowly, with time, we learn to become our own therapist. We learn to contain our own pain, to be there for ourselves, to offer ourselves support and to access the tremendous wisdom that we have within ourselves to guide us in ways that only we can think of.

CAN YOU SHARE SOME TIPS FOR BEGINNERS TO GET STARTED?

The simplest tip is to just write! All cell phones have timers. Set a timer for five minutes and then ask yourself, "What do I need to write about right now?" Then begin writing. Don't stop writing until your timer rings. It doesn't matter what you write about, just write without thinking or analyzing. Anything you write will be helpful. If you feel you are stuck just write, "I don't know what to write" again and again until something pops into your mind.

When the timer rings, stop writing and then read over your writing. Be in touch with yourself as you read over your writing, noticing if you have a physical reaction as you read or if any emotions are surfacing. Then write a "reflection." A reflection begins with, "As I read over my writing, I feel..."

The members of my classes vary from age 18-80. I've found that sometimes seniors think that they have no reason to write. Whatever their life is, it is. But it's very surprising to see that even at such an advanced age in life, even

if there is not much that you can do physically for yourself, emotionally you can make real improvements in your life through writing.

CAN THERAPEUTIC WRITING HELP ONE IMPROVE HIS MIDDOS AND HIS AVODAS HASHEM?

When we get in touch with ourselves, we connect to our *neshamah*. In *Yiddishkeit*, emotional healing is not a goal in itself. The goal of emotional healing is to enable to serve Hashem better, without being blocked by our internal struggles. The more we clear away the internal debris, the smoother our path of connection to Hashem is.

This is an integral message of my book. In a way, my book is a manual to *avodas Hashem*, with each topic beginning with a hashkafic introduction by Chaya Hinda Allen, including sources and writing exercises about the topic. Emotional healing and *ruchniyus* growth are the same process and writing is a very simple and powerful way of facilitating it.

WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU SHARE WITH OUR READERS?

Sometimes we think that in order for something to have great results it needs to be something very dramatic or expensive. It's not true. A simple process like a few minutes of writing here and there can have a very powerful and real effect on your life. Try it, you'll be grateful that you did!



Try it out!

Excerpts from *Write your Way Home*

FEAR TO FAITH

Do you have faith? Faith in yourself, faith in others, and faith in Hashem?

Having faith requires vulnerability. It requires courage. It requires trust.

Developing faith is a most worthwhile endeavor. It is the door to all opportunities.

Sometimes it doesn't require too much work, it just requires a decision to cross over the doorstep and enter the space of faith.

1. You're going to write an alpha-poem. On the left side of your page, write the word FEAR, starting each letter on its own line. Then write the word FAITH, again starting each letter on its own line.

2. Now write a poem about a fear that you have, starting each line with the letters of FEAR. Then write a second poem with the words FAITH, writing how can you turn your fear into faith. Don't think too deeply about this transformation before you begin writing; just write down whatever comes to mind.

3. When you finish, read over the two poems and write a reflection.

A JOURNALIST'S REPORT

Writing prompt excerpted from Write Your Way Home

1. Imagine that you are an invisible reporter. You've been hired to write a report on the _____ household (fill in your last name). Your job is to write down what you see. You're not judging, assuming, or analyzing. You are simply a journalist doing your job. You have no previous biases or any ulterior motives.

2. In your mind, walk toward your home, imagining yourself as an objective journalist. Notice the outside of your home, the walkway or front porch, the door. The door is open for you to walk inside, but no one sees you enter. What do you see as you walk in? What sounds or smells are there? What items do you see scattered around? Walk through the house, going from room to room, writing down all the details that you notice.

3. Now begin to study the people in the home. No one sees you, since you are invisible. What do you notice about the members of this family? Describe each one — how they look and act, what they're doing. Describe the family members' interactions with each other. Don't make any judgment calls, just write whatever you notice. When you're finished, head back to the open front door. Gently close the door and walk out.

4. Read over your "report." What does it bring up in you? How can you use your new awareness to develop empathy for the members of your household? Write about it.

5. Read over all your writing and write a reflection ✕