

Antagonism Journaling Worksheet

The following is a journaling & reflective process for times when you are caught in difficult feelings of antagonism toward another person, group of people, or institution. The process that follows draws on forgiveness processes from various spiritual traditions, as well as processes from 12 Step recovery groups. You can think of this as a process for resentments, grudges, or animosity. While we don't *have* to move past those feelings, and there is no "should" around doing so, we may choose to work through them, in order to move into a more peaceful and open state.

A couple of guidelines for this process:

- You can journal **by hand or type** – whatever you feel gives you the most insight and ease in your writing. You can do this worksheet on your own, or you can [follow along with a guided video and group session here](#).
- For the first few times you move through this process, I suggest you do not choose a situation that involves trauma or abuse, or that began in your childhood (when you were 0-18). For those situations, you will want to be familiar enough with this process to decide if and when you want to apply it around those hurts, and you may also want to engage professional support as you do so.
- With that in mind, choose an "everyday antagonism" today and for the first few times you do this process – for example, a colleague that irks you, the client you've come to feel is exploitative, a neighbor you resent for being inconsiderate, or a distant relative who has long bothered you.
- Stay open! See what the process reveals if you bring an attitude of curiosity and openness to it.
- Feel free to share. You are welcome to share this handout with other people in your life or work.

Antagonism Journaling Questions

1. In a phrase or two, name the antagonism: *Toward what or whom do I feel antagonism?*

2. Look at the impact in your life: *How does this antagonism impact my mood? My body? My peace?*

3. Understand the stakes: Often, we develop these antagonistic feelings when we felt some fundamental need of ours was being threatened. For example, a situation with a boss who expects work around the clock may threaten our sense of freedom and autonomy. The relative who makes misogynistic jokes at family gatherings may threaten our sense of safety. What matters is not that the need is *actually* threatened, but that we perceived it to be threatened.

Think about your situation and reflect on: *What did I feel was at stake for me in this situation? What fundamental need felt threatened? (For example, my sense of safety, of freedom, of dignity, of belonging, or my self-concept – the way I like to think of myself.)*

4. Look at your role. Now we begin to do the difficult and brave work of looking at our own role in the situation – not in a spirit of self-blame, but because when we see our own role, we also find our agency. That’s where we find the ways that we could do things differently next time.
 - a. *What was the beginning of abandoning or betraying myself in this situation? Where was the first small place I people-pleased, deferred, denied myself, or otherwise didn’t act to meet my own needs?*

Sometimes our own role in the situation is simply that we had no idea how to speak up for or act on behalf of our own needs in the situation, or we didn’t see a way – because of power dynamics, financial needs, and so on – to be able to do so. For example, we didn’t speak up to our boss about our boundaries with work hours because we needed the job and felt that would risk our employment.

Reflect on: *In my situation, what were the ways I didn’t know how to speak up for or act on behalf of my own needs? What were the ways I didn’t feel I could do so?*

b. *What did I do over time with my regards to my needs and feelings in this situation?*

c. Quite often, one of the roots of our own antagonistic feelings is our own dishonesty, with self or others, about our feelings, needs, and requests in a situation. And underneath that dishonesty, we often find fear.

In what ways was I dishonest (with self-or others) in this situation?

In what ways was I fearful?

d. (If you are watching the video, pause to answer this question – it is not in the video version of the process). *Does the above whisper anything to me about how I might be able to do things differently in a similar situation in the future? No big conclusions here, just some beginning insights or intimations...*

5. Now we can move into wishing well both ourselves and the other party. Key point: you don't have to agree with or feel the words of your blessing/well wishes to say them! One way to think of it is that we can say these words – even repeatedly over many days or weeks – to help us cultivate the feeling of compassion, even if we feel the opposite at first.

Recite the below blessings silently or aloud to yourself. Or you can rewrite them – that's another way of bringing them into your being. (If this wording doesn't resonate for you, write your own alternative. The key is to come up with words that help you step into a compassionate perspective.)

Blessing for the other: (Use this wording or write your own.) *May I remember that x is human. May I remember they are (hurting, wounded, conditioned, imperfect, limited), as am I. May I remember they too are a sacred creation making their way in a challenging world.*

Blessing for self: (Use this one or write your own. The key is to come up with words that help you step into a compassionate perspective.) *May I remember that I am human (hurting, wounded, conditioned, imperfect, limited). May I remember I am a sacred creation making my way in a challenging world.*

7. Moving forward.

- Take a moment to add some notes about what you learned from moving through the process today, what feels most important and what you want to remember.
- The last part of our journaling may have given you a new idea or approach for the situation you were writing about, or for other similar situations in the future. If so, your job is to remember it and live into it. That will take some practice, will definitely include missing the mark sometimes (such is the work of inner change!) and will likely require some reminders of the new idea or approach. To help with remembering, write it down somewhere where you will see it regularly, and set up a structure to regroup in that new perspective repeatedly (for example, you might make a commitment to bring this into your regular meditation or journaling practice, or keep a note in your calendar to give a few minutes to reconnecting with this idea each day.)
- For others, the last part of the journaling may not have yielded any big ahas – yet! That’s okay. In that situation, ask your mind/heart/spirit – or the greater collective Mind/Heart/Spirit, to help you answer those last questions over the days to come: What would love do here? What is my spirit’s knowing? Then you can go about your life and see what answers, or whispers of answers, show up in the days to come.
- If you liked this process, use it again as new antagonisms show up in your life, or as you continue to work through old, accumulated ones.

Sources and Further Reading

Two sources / approaches have particularly informed my approach to working with antagonistic feelings. Both are important sources for the ideas reflected in the process above, and both are great resources to explore for further learning.

The Dance of Anger: A Women's Guide to Changing Patterns of Intimate Relationships, by

Harriet Lerner

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous

Stay in touch! For more resources to support your wellbeing like this one, sign up [HERE](#).