



## SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Below are some ideas for structuring your Spiritual Autobiography (adapted from Ira Progoff's *Intensive Journaling* method and this prompt from the Church of the Holy Comforter).

### Methods:

#### Imagine your life as stepping stones

A steppingstone is a word or brief phrase that describes a significant point or period along the road of life—for example, “early childhood,” “starting a profession,” “parenting,” “lost in the wilderness,” “retirement.” Steppingstones show a continuity of development despite the apparent shifting of direction along the way. To use this technique for writing your spiritual autobiography, follow these steps:

1. Quietly sit and think about the course of your life. On a blank page, start with the first steppingstone: “I was born....” Describe key people and events of the early part of your life.
2. Continue writing about the remaining stepping stones until you reach the present day. Identify no more than a dozen stepping stones from the beginning of life until now.
3. Once you are done, read over what you have written, sensing the flow of your life with its ups and downs. Then write a brief paragraph describing your life as a whole.
4. To explore your life more fully, go back over each steppingstone, expanding what you have written to include the tone and atmosphere of that period, the significant persons in your life and your relationship with them at that time, your social attitudes, beliefs, and loyalties. Describe who and what inspired you: what books influenced you? Who were the “God bearers” in your life? The more you add to each steppingstone, the deeper your reflection will be.

#### Transitions between stepping stones

This method asks us to look at endings and beginnings and the time between significant points of movement in our lives. The time between learning about pregnancy and the birth of the baby; the time between the loss of a spouse or another loved one and regaining your footing and moving on; the time between learning of an impending move of household and feeling comfortable in a new community; the time between school and finding your deeper purpose—or other periods which you see as “in-betweens.” It is about change. Call up several times of change in your life and spend some time reflecting on the transition periods that accompanied these changes. Use the definitions below to help sort out what was going on within you and in the world around you during these times. Record your actions and feelings.

#### Definitions:

Transition – Passage from one place, state, stage of development to another. A three-part psychological process.

*The “Ending Phase”* – letting go of the old situation or identity. Giving up the familiar and valued. May be accompanied by feelings of disillusionment and/or betrayal.

*The “Neutral Zone Phase”* – exploring the unknown territory between the past and the future—limbo; emptiness or wilderness. An interim period between one orientation that is no longer appropriate and another that does not yet exist. Creativity and new identity are born of this phase.

*The “Beginning Phase”* – creating, and moving toward a new vision and plan. A time of rebirth. An inner realignment. “Making lemonade from the lemons.” Grieving is near completion and the chaos of the unknown has been endured long enough for something new to appear. Hope and energy are renewed, new possibilities defined.

Identify:

1. What was happening? Accidental, intentional? Your actions, others? What did you bring? What did you leave? What did you learn about yourself? Others? The world? God? Explore your feelings, fears, hopes.
2. Select and describe one or several periods of transition as your spiritual autobiography.

### **Your Personal Histories**

You do not have one history, but many—no single expression exhausts everything you have experienced. Each telling of your history reveals something different. So a way of approaching your history is from the standpoint of various themes in your life or by using different perspectives. Here are some examples:

1. Your life with others: Write your history from the perspective of significant people in your life. For example, you might focus on the history of a particularly important friendship. Or the ups and downs of your relationship with a parent or sibling. How have these relationships changed over the years? What have they meant to you? How do they impact your life now?
2. Your intellectual and/or economic history: When did you first realize that what you thought “mattered”? Is there a particular philosophy or set of values that has helped shape your life? What books or thinkers are particularly important to you? List thoughts and events that capture the main ideas of your economic vision and how it has changed? How did these conceptions affect your spiritual growth?