

# Wall Journaling: A Method for Personal Discernment

*by Steve Fick*

Several years ago I received the scholarship that CYM awards each year for a week at the Pendle Hill retreat centre outside of Philadelphia. My intent was to have a week of inner reflection to help me reconnect to the spiritual roots of my painting practice. The week was deeply rewarding, and I returned with clarity about a number of questions that had been blocking my way forward. The method that I came up with for discernment was so helpful that I want to share it with other Friends.

When I first arrived, I moved the furniture away from one wall of my dormitory room to free it up as a large workspace. Having created my 'canvas' I got a stack of paper, a marker, and a roll of masking tape.

It felt very important to me that my 'wall journal' would remain absolutely private, protected from any sense of critique or judgment. I started writing sentences, phrases and words on pieces of paper, and attaching them randomly to the wall. I wrote big enough that I could easily see what I had written from across the room. It also felt important that there was no sense of rush or external timetable to the process. I was at Pendle Hill for a week and could let the process move along at its own pace.

I wrote freely without self-censure, as feelings and thoughts arose. I recorded questions, expressions of emotion no matter how negative, statements, and insights. I did not worry about making sense out of any of it. I was simply recording what was happening within me as I faced those unresolved, confused places. It was a process of clearing and emptying. In retrospect, it reminded me of what happens when a sperm fertilizes an egg in the womb - first there is an explosion of cell growth into a large, undifferentiated mass. Only later does a mysterious principle start to take over and organize the mass of cells into patterns that will create a living being.

Slowly but surely over the week, like a fetus developing in the womb, my jumble of papers took form. Perhaps the womb that enwrapped and protected the process was my conviction that if I were honest, patient, self-compassionate, and listened with clear intent, the Holy Spirit would be there as a guide.

I started seeing connections between things, and repositioned the papers accordingly. Questions led to other questions. It became clear what was core and what was peripheral. I discarded papers that seemed redundant or irrelevant. Two or three primary themes emerged and secondary considerations fell into place in relationship to these. Insights emerged. By the end of the week the wall read like a clear narrative, through what previously had seemed inscrutable. To finish the process, I made myself a small booklet and recorded the fruits of my discernment to take away for reference, along with a list of queries for future consideration.

Since the week at Pendle Hill, I have regularly used this method and have always found it extremely effective. Having a full week at one's disposal is a rare privilege, but even taking a couple of hours for the process has produced strong results. During these sessions I find myself alternating between active journaling and silent worship.

One doesn't necessarily need a wall to do this. One could use post-it notes on a large sheet of paper. But for me it is very helpful to have my materials large enough that I can involve myself physically in the process. I find it's easier to be angry (or joyful) with a marker on a large piece of paper, than with a pen on a little post-it note.

Journaling is a powerful method for discerning one's path forward, and is a time-honoured part of the Quaker tradition. I hope that this particular approach will prove helpful to others.

A belated thank you Friends, for making it possible for me to go to Pendle Hill. I hope that anyone who might benefit from such an opportunity will consider applying for the scholarship from HMAAC.



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