

Ritual for Letting Go

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Humans are built to tell, listen to and live out stories. A story that we believe and tell ourselves can shape our lives and affect who we are. This is especially true when it is a story that we tell ourselves about who we are and what we are capable of. It has the power to limit our lives and the power to live creatively. When we recognize a story for what it is, and realize that it is something that we don't want to live with any more, it is time to let it go. This ritual is an opportunity to let go of a story you have been living with and not let it continue to define who you are. It is about a metaphoric cleansing, setting of intentions, self-anointing, healing, new beginnings and possibilities.

I want you to think of some story that you have been living with and want to let go of. It might be something recent or something you have been holding for a long time.

For example, it might be...

- holding onto hurt after a friend hurts you or when an important relationship ends
- continuing to feel sorrow or failure over the loss of some responsibility, position, capability, or ability that was important to you
- a belief that you aren't capable of doing something you would really like to do
- thinking you are a worthless human being because of some past physical, psychological or other failure. This last example was true of me for years after I first experienced mental health problems. Internalizing some of the stigma that society has against mental illness, I thought I was a worthless human being. When I was able to let go of this story, my life started to blossom in many ways.

When something comes to an end, it can leave an opening for something else unexpected, rewarding, and different to start growing.

Here is the ritual, we will call casting stones.

- Find a stone and hold it in your hand.
- Imagine the story that you want to let go of and visualize transferring it and the feelings you have about it to the stone.
- See the depression and anxiety swirling in your body, through your arm, into your hand and leaving your fingers as it transfers into the stone.
- Allow at least a minute for you to visualize this.
- Now you release the burden. It may help for you to repeat:
 - I realize what I am holding on to and why I am holding on;
 - I forgive myself for holding on;
 - This stone has taken my heavy burden from me
 - I now release the burden so that I may feel light and free again.

- Now cast the stone into the water. Visualize your heavy feelings going with the stone and choose to really believe that you've released the heaviest part of your burden. The problem is symbolically released as the stone leaves you.

Some of you may want a longer version of this ritual for some deep seated problems. If so, take a stone and keep it in your pocket for a week. When you feel negative feelings about the story coming to you, hold it in your hand and visualize transferring them to the stone, similar to what we've just done. After about a week, cast your stone into a body of water, or deep into an open or wooded area.

How is it that a ritual like this can work?

People have long believed that rocks and stones can be charged with feelings. Utilizing visualization to place your pain outside of yourself and then transferring that pain physically away from you isn't just symbolic. With the longer version of the ritual, taking seven days to experience your pain fully when it's overtaking you and then allowing yourself to release it can be very effective.

Letting go is challenging, and sometimes you have to do it again and again and again until it sticks. You show it to the door, and somehow it keeps creeping back in. And then you gently guide it back out.

The cue here is *gently*. It is as true for letting go as it is for any type of change. What you resist persists.

Benediction:

May the stories that define our lives be stories that we welcome stories that bring healing and hope. Amen.

Sources:

This ritual is adapted from rituals at:

- *Five Cool Rituals to Help You to Let Go*, by Jennifer St. Germain, smallifeslowlife.com/2015/08/08/small-life-slow-life-five-cool-rituals-to-help-you-let-go/
- *A Ritual of Letting Go, Cleansing, Intention and Hope*, by Lois Van Leer, www.uua.org/worship/words/ritual/ritual-letting-go-cleansing-intention-and-hope
- *9 Beautiful Releasing Rituals to Help You Let Go*, by Marthe, www.thefreedomexperiment.com/2014/01/24/releasing-rituals/