

INTROSPECTION is the key to spiritual advancement and Self-realization. It is the process of discovering one's defects, their causes, and the methods of curing them with the increasing light of one's own reason.

Lord Krishna says in the Gita, “*Uddharet Atmanatmanam*”—“One must lift the self (lower self) by the help of one's own Self (higher Self).”

The higher mind is able to lift the lower mind. The purer reason within the mind is able to disentangle the complexed thought-processes of the mind and discover the remedy for the gross expressions of the mind.

Self-analysis and introspection go together. In the process of self-analysis, the emphasis is on disentangling the complexes of the mind, on untying the knots of the heart. But in the process of introspection, the emphasis is on increasing the light of the Self.

Thus, the process of self-analysis becomes easy, spontaneous and effective. The advanced Yogic practices of concentration, meditation, *samadhi* (superconsciousness), repetition of Divine Name (mantra), withdrawal of the senses, and others are intensely involved in the practice of introspection.

Introspection for the Beginner

A beginner usually lacks insight into introspection. He considers physical withdrawal from a problem as an act of introspection. But this is not so.

It is an error to think that you should stay alone until your confusion clears and the mind presents a clear understanding of things. This is not introspection—it is self-deception.

A parable is told about a householder who was awakened in the night by the entry of two

thieves. He woke up to pursue the thieves. As he came out of his house with a flashlight in his hand, he met one of the thieves, but was unable to recognize him as such. Considering him a gentleman, he asked, “Have you seen the thieves running that way?” The thief pointed in the opposite direction. The man was deceived.

Similarly, if you do not have an insight into the art of introspection, you are allowing a defective thought process to throw light on the defects of your personality. You are asking a thief for the whereabouts of another thief. You are bound to fail in your efforts.

It is important, therefore, to understand that in order to render the process of introspection effective, you should not stop the flow of life. Continue to perform your day-to-day duties. Plan your life in the light of Yoga *sadhana* (spiritual practice) so that you have a blend

Master the Art of Introspection

**Guru Purnima Message
by Swami Jyotirmayananda**



of various important forms of self-discipline every day.

See that you are able to practice a little Yoga exercise, a little study of scriptures, a little reflection and meditation, a little selfless service—a little of everything that is vitally important for the integration of your personality. All these “littles” add up to a lot, and you soon discover a profounder light within yourself that reveals the roots of your defects and shows you how to remove them.

Practical Methods of Introspection

Practice introspection every night before going to sleep. Think of the spiritual qualities that you want to promote in your personality. See how far you have succeeded in maintaining a virtuous quality and unfolding it in your life that day.

For example, if you are trying to control the evil of false speech, introspect and find how many times you erred during the day. Instead of developing a sense of diffidence towards your recurring errors, continue to will for the removal of the defects with a detached mind.

Try to find the cause of an evil habit. Do not limit your insight into your psychological problems to the findings of modern psychology. The present science

of psychology provides a great insight into the mind, there is no doubt in this. But this science is still in the making, and its findings need to be substantiated by the insight gained by Yogis. The present findings are mostly based upon the clinical study of abnormal minds—not upon intuitive insight.

Therefore, do not be eager to name your mental trouble. By giving your problem a name such as “paranoia” or “schizophrenia,” you are not solving the problem. Rather, you are stopping the process of introspection. Human mind is limited. It must be led to increasing states of expansion and integration. As you continue to practice introspection successfully, you will overcome all your defects and faults gradually.

You have within you the Power that rules the earth and stars. Your indwelling Spirit can change your life; it can transform your destiny. Therefore, do not establish a sense of limitation on your self-effort. You are the architect of your destiny.

When you witness a recurring defect in your personality, you should not become sentimentally frustrated; rather, continue to introspect. If your reason cannot penetrate the mystery of that defect, learn to surrender to the Divine Self. Pray, repeat mantra, and fill your mind with inspirational thoughts

provided by Sages and Saints in the scriptures.

Realize that the states of the conscious mind do not give you a complete picture of the workings of your total mind. While your conscious mind may harbor a negative mood, your unconscious may continue to advance along positive lines. In the same way, while you are positive at the conscious level, you may be negative in your unconscious mind. The aim of the process of introspection is to purify the unconscious depths of the mind.

Do not fight with your defective thought-processes. Do not try to forcibly will the defects of your personality away. Rather, adopt the art of *Pratipaksha Bhavana* as enjoined in Raja Yoga. Be aware of the defect and set up a gentle process of opposing it by increasing clarity of reason. Then try to substitute a positive thought process. In the place of anger, substitute love; in the place of pride, substitute the thought of humility; and in the place of falsehood, substitute the thought of sincerity and truthfulness.

As your mind begins to taste the joy of a higher virtue, you will be able to transmute the lesser aspect of your mind into the higher aspect. The energy that was involved in maintaining a false understanding will thus be freed from the burden

of ignorance, and will be transmuted into the sparkling energy of truthfulness.

Maintain a diary. Just as people maintain bookkeeping in order to keep an account of their expenses and incomes each day, an aspirant must practice spiritual bookkeeping and see how much he has gained and how much he has lost in his everyday life.

Bring one particular defect of your personality into your view. Oppose it by your will and understanding. Analyze it by your reason guided by spiritual studies. Find its roots by diving into yourself through meditation and enquiry. The moment you find the roots of any defect, they will be exposed to the burning rays of intuitive knowledge. They will not sustain that defect any more. Thus, aim at eradicating each defect from its very root by the practice of introspection.

The dragon of mind has many hoods. You must crush the hoods of this dragon one by one. In this process, every hood that is crushed will yield a precious gem of spiritual value. You will gain more internal light and strength and momentum in the process of controlling and curing the negative aspects of your personality.

Your introspection should not be confined only to the evening hours. Let the deep sensitivity of introspection dominate your mind at all times. Be vigilant

with your mind even when you are engaged in diverse activities of daily life. Being aware of your mind and its movements is an art. It does not require any tension. Guided by this art, you develop the habit of maintaining an insight into everything that you do. You think before you hasten to speak. You introspect before you engage yourself in a course of activity. You develop efficiency and promptness in your life.

All *rajasic* and *tamasic* modes of mind are obstructions in the process of introspection. Agitation, distraction, dissipation, ostentation, externalization, and reliance on the senses—these are the expressions of *rajas*. Dullness, inertia, procrastination, obstinacy, insensitivity to spiritual matters, and overwhelming negativity—these are the expressions of *tamas*. Overcome them by *sattwa*, which expresses itself through increasing harmony, purity, clarity of mind, joyousness, increasing control over the mind and the senses, and an increasing ability to practice introspection.

Introspection in an Advanced Yogi

When *sattwa* or purity roots out most of the negative traits of the mind, a Yogi maintains a spontaneous art of introspection at all times. They see the passing moods of the mind like drifting

clouds in the vast sky. They are able to maintain a spirit of detachment from all thoughts.

This enables a Yogi to practice enquiry into “Who am I?” They practice *Atma Chintana*—meditation on the innermost Self. They discover the implications of the great utterance, “I am That.” They realize that they are not the body, the mind and the senses, but in fact, they are the Universal Self, eternal and everlasting.

The intuitive realization of the Self is the consummation of the process of introspection. Deck your personality with ornaments of Divine qualities by the practice of introspection. Cast off the old tattered shoes of defective and impure traits of your personality. Discover the endless resources of your deeper Self, and end the cycles of birth and death by attaining liberation from the world process.

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