THE ART OF INTROSPECTION

“Find out what you are...because you want to make yourself what you ought to be.”
— Paramahansa Yogananda

To improve yourself and quicken your spiritual progress, you will find it beneficial to practice the art of introspection at least once a week. An especially good time to introspect is on a day of silence or after a long meditation. (Some guidelines for effective introspection are included in this section.) A brief introspection period should also be included in the devotee’s evening meditation when one reviews the day and mentally asks: “How did I apply the Guru’s teachings today?” Paramahansa Yogananda said: “It is a good idea to keep a mental diary. Before you go to bed each night, sit for a short time and review the day. See what you are becoming. Do you like the trend of your life? If not, change it.”

Paramahansaji recommended introspection as an important aid for spiritual unfoldment. “Analyze your thoughts,” he said, “and see on what throne of consciousness your ego is seated; what kind of consciousness is predominant in your mind.” Once you become aware of the general trend or state of your consciousness — whether it is primarily occupied with thoughts of self, of others, of God — then you can proceed to a more specific analysis.

To introspect, write down those positive qualities you know you need to offset undesirable habits or flaws of character you especially want to overcome — good qualities such as kindness, patience, will power, self-control, enthusiasm, devotion, discrimination, concentration, purity of mind, even-mindedness, emotional maturity, willingness to serve, loyalty to God and Gurus, and so forth. From your list choose one particular quality and begin to apply it in little ways in everyday life. If, for example, daily tensions and frustrations cause you to speak unkindly to your family or associates, try making a conscious effort to cultivate kindness. Watch yourself. Observe your reactions — at home, at work, and everywhere you go. Whenever you feel compelled to answer sharply, stop, place your attention at the Christ Consciousness center between the eyebrows and call upon God and Gurus. Ask Them to help you to remain calm and unruffled. Think to yourself — “I must put first things first. No matter how I am provoked, I will not allow myself to give in to unspiritual behavior.”

During your study of Paramahansa Yogananda’s teachings, find passages in his books and Lessons in which he dwells on this subject. Sri Daya Mata often mentioned how greatly she benefited by taking one spiritual quality at a time and trying to make it an integral part of her life and consciousness. By striving to the best of your ability to apply the principles of Self-realization in your own life, you can “make yourself what you ought to be.” You will not only gain an outer reward as you become an increasing influence for good in your family, business, community, and social relationships; but above all, you will achieve the inner reward of an ever-deepening joyous communion with Spirit.
“Introspection is a mirror in which to see recesses of your mind that otherwise would remain hidden from you.”

— Paramahansa Yogananda

Gurudeva pointed out that we must thoughtfully analyze our life, find out what it really amounts to, and then take steps to make it all it ought to be. “You should look at life unmasked, in the mirror of your experiences. View time and space as they come to you in the form of problems, experiences, and relations. Look at the perpetual current of emotions and thoughts that arise within you. Go into the heart of your aspirations, dreams, hopes, and despairs. Dive deep into the mute cravings of your inner self. Life is manifesting itself through all these channels and demanding that you seek understanding with your highest intelligence, wisdom, love, and vision.”

Regular Introspection Important

The benefits of introspection come without fail through regular practice. Avoid blaming other people or circumstances for problems you may face. Strive to recognize that you yourself are the creator of every situation in your life, and of your destiny. When you recognize a shortcoming, do not let your growing awareness be a source of discouragement. Rather, it should make you more determined to overcome each weakness. God does not expect you to be a perfect model, but He does expect you to keep on trying! Even when you fall short of your expectations, remember, God is not so much concerned with your success or your failure; He wants to see if you will keep on trying. Always remember: “A saint is a sinner who never gave up.”

Continuous effort, regardless of temporary failures, will ultimately carry the faithful devotee to the Divine Goal. It is that continuous right effort that attunes you to God and the Gurus, and makes you receptive to Their guidance and boundless blessings. Thus, you will march to your goal with the unceasing help of God and the Great Ones.

Do not attempt to measure your spiritual progress; leave that to God and Guru. Just do your best to meditate regularly, to develop devotion, to introspect, and to continuously remind yourself that you are not a mortal man or woman. You are an immortal soul, a wave of the ocean of Divine Consciousness. Where else can the wave go but back to the ocean?
GUIDELINES FOR INTROSPECTION

My Spiritual Practices

1. Do I meditate regularly morning and evening? at other times?

2. Do I daily and correctly practice the Self-Realization Fellowship Energization Exercises and the techniques of Hong-Sau Concentration, Aum Meditation, and Kriya Yoga? with devotion and concentration? careless?

3. Do I include the Guru’s prayers, chants, and affirmations?

4. Are my meditations short or long, calm or restless — am I alert? dull or sleepy? Am I striving to make every “today’s meditation deeper than yesterday’s”?

5. Do I try to recall during my daily activities the peace and joy of meditation? Do I practice the presence of God? How much was I with God today? in thought, feeling, action?

6. Do I keep regular periods of silence and seclusion in order to practice the presence of God in a deeper way?

7. Am I setting aside one day or night a week for greater spiritual effort and for silence and longer meditation?

8. Do I dedicate my work and all activities to God and Guru, remembering Who is the Doer?

Leading a Balanced Life

1. Do I get enough fresh air, sunshine, exercise, and recreation?

2. Do I study Paramahansa Yogananda’s writings daily? What have I learned and what shall I apply more earnestly?

3. Am I adhering to a simple, healthful diet? Do I avoid overeating?

4. Am I moderate in the use of all my senses — am I striving for self-control and purity of mind?

5. Do I work with concentration, and do I relax sufficiently when I have the opportunity?

6. Do I balance my time properly?

7. How do I use my free time: constructively, for a good purpose? Do I devote enough time for service to my family? friends? anyone in need? Self-Realization Fellowship activities? and the larger community?
**My Behavior Toward Others**

1. Am I kind, considerate, and thoughtful toward my family, business associates, friends, and fellow disciples?

2. Am I striving to become a living example of the Self-Realization Fellowship teachings, rather than merely instructing others on how to improve their own lives?


5. In conversation with others, am I friendly, truthful, positive — avoiding negative and critical remarks? Do I avoid gossip?

6. Am I beginning to live more by the ideal of forgetting self and serving others?

**Participation in Self-Realization Fellowship Activities**

1. Do I attend SRF services, ceremonies, meetings, and special functions, as well as meditations?

2. How much service am I performing for the Guru’s work — can I possibly give more time or material support to his cause?

3. Am I willing to share duties or rotate with others, or do I selfishly cling to “position”?

4. Am I interesting other persons in the SRF path by my good example and willingness to give interested individuals SRF books or free literature? Have I brought anyone to an SRF service as my guest? (The disciple does not proselytize, but is ever alert to the spiritual receptivity of others.)

5. Do I attend SRF retreats, classes, and lectures when possible?

**Personal Matters**

1. Am I really striving each day to draw closer to God — am I developing a deeper love for God, for Guru, for others?

2. Am I striving to seek God’s will in all my thoughts, feelings, and actions?

3. Do I feel happier as time passes, and am I striving for right attitude under all circumstances?
4. Am I living according to the basic laws of human conduct contained in the Ten Commandments, Patanjali’s Eightfold Path of Yoga, and Christ’s Sermon on the Mount?

5. Am I practicing loyalty to God, Guru, and the Guru’s society?

NOTE: It may be advantageous for you to keep a personal diary, which will enable you to check the trend of your spiritual life. If you wish, you may use the “Spiritual Diary” available from Self-Realization Fellowship, which contains an inspirational thought for each day from Paramahansa Yogananda and others, with ample space for your own notes.

Extracts from the writings of Paramahansa Yogananda on “The Art of Introspection”

Analyze your life as though in a mental laboratory. Examine the perpetual current of emotions and thoughts that arise within you. Penetrate to the heart of your aspirations, dreams, hopes, and despairs. Dive deep into the mute cravings of your inner self. It is necessary to correct the wrong thinking of incarnations to escape the delusions of ignorance and to reclaim your heritage as a child of God.

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To consider dispassionately one’s faults is very difficult. But if one can assess his shortcomings without developing an inferiority complex, he is using his time profitably.

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Spiritual progress is very subtle. Never say that you are not progressing. Develop self-confidence by conquering your weaknesses. The greatest evidence of spiritual growth lies in deep inner effort to go upstream against one’s old wrong habits toward the source of lasting happiness.

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Truly scrutinize your life. Find out what it really amounts to; then take steps to make it all it ought to be. Change your consciousness; that is what is really necessary. Bring forth the soul image that God implanted in you. Every day happier than yesterday: that is the standard of spiritual life.