


Written Naikan





*Feeling the pulse of your own heart.
Internal peace, external peace.
Learning to breathe again, that's it.*

Christian Morgenstern

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1. FINDING INNER PEACE AND DISCOVERING YOURSELF

Peace has become very scarce in our culture. Our ears are constantly being flooded with noises: conversations, radio, television, music from headphones, ringing of mobile phones, traffic noises... Also our eyes are constantly being overloaded with images: television, advertising, computers, smartphones, as well as movement in the streets and in shopping malls...

If the outside is so loud and demanding, then it is no surprise that it has become difficult to feel inner peace. People increasingly have the feeling that they have lost touch with themselves. They feel externally driven and can no longer perceive that renowned inner voice.

Naikan's primary message is: It is possible to live in peace and quiet. If you practise turning your attention inwards again and again, then you can find peace — no matter how turbulent the outside is. The Naikan method can be a helpful tool for this.

How do I find inner peace?

This question is becoming increasingly important in our performance-oriented and fast-paced lives. It seems that our culture has forgotten to pause, to take a break. We stumble blindly from one action to the next. We often see the solving of problems as doing more and being even faster.

While the key to problem-solving often lies in retiring and observing the situation calmly. The Naikan method invites you to do exactly that: Retire from your everyday life for a while. Grant yourself a break! Spending a week in silence is ideal for this.

Discovering yourself

It is a modern trend to optimize oneself. The reason for working on oneself is often that the present situation doesn't fit to what is desired. One doesn't want something, one wants to do something about it.

Naikan goes in the other direction. It is about finding a way to deal with everything that is present, and to identify as many aspects and perspectives of life as possible. It is a journey of discovery of one's own being.

Pause for a moment with Naikan

Take a deep breath. Actually, right now.

Direct your focus inwards and be aware of what I would like to show you. Feel it. Simply be aware of what you are feeling, calmness or movement, which impulses emerge, which questions come to mind, which desires arise.

Learn that you do not immediately have to respond to the impressions, impulses and desires. Immediate action is not wanted in these quiet minutes of reflection. Simply try to perceive. Perceive what is, at this moment. That's all.

I have just presented you with a simple exercise for mindfulness.

Naikan adds a simple question technique to this pause:

1st Naikan question:

Who has done something for me? What do I receive?

2nd Naikan question:

What am I doing for the other person? What am I giving?

3rd Naikan question:

What am I doing that creates difficulties?

Perceiving what is, at this moment — and finding clarity with three simple questions. What is currently going on? What comes from the outside? What exactly is my own part? Naikan means pausing and paying attention to oneself.

Is that difficult?

No. The technique is simple. The difficulty here is that we need time and practise to change habits.

Is that possible at the flick of a switch?

At this point you should be warned of a popular misconception: With this is not meant that you will be internally peaceful and calm at the flick of a switch. Unfortunately it doesn't work that easily. Sometimes having a quiet moment makes it clear just how turbulent one's internal being is at that moment.

It's not about changing the current state instantly, but about first perceiving the current state at all. If it is internally turbulent, then it's just turbulent. If you never allow yourself time and rest to pay attention to yourself, then you will not even notice what is going on in your inner life. The corollary of this is that many things occur unconsciously. One feels at the mercy of certain things. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why some people are a little afraid to take time to rest and retreat: They are not accustomed to paying attention to themselves. If you haven't paid attention to yourself and what is going on inside of you for a long time, then you may think a little fearfully: Who knows what will come up from deep inside?

The answer is simple: It shows what part of you wants attention. And when it finally gets attention, then you can work through it and find a good way to deal with it.

Perceiving. Accepting. Only dealing with it then.

Accept the status quo. Accept it the way it is. It is neither good nor bad, it's just part of you.

We unfortunately skip the first two steps very often in everyday life. We immediately act, we want to change things instantly. And then we wonder why we don't succeed. We have already done soooo much!

We behave like a cook who is seasoning a meal while not perceiving whether it is a vegetable stir-fry or a fruit salad. If we do not perceive what

the actual issue is, how can change even occur at all? Chance mainly governs here.

Or we behave like a cook who is seasoning a meal and sees that it is a fruit salad, but doesn't want to accept that, because after all, the vegetable stir-fry was in the fruit salad's place a minute ago. If we do not recognize what the issue is, how can our actions then be appropriate for the situation? How often do we act according to the motto: Now more than ever! Simply because we do not want to accept what our perception has clearly shown.

Inner peace grows when we perceive and accept what is.

Accepting doesn't mean finding everything wonderful and great and forgetting any criticism. Nor does it mean to resign and accept everything passively. Accepting means to look at the facts. That which is, is fine. And at the same time there are things that you can change, and goals that you want to achieve.

Rediscover ancient knowledge

Knowledge about the healing power of peace of body, mind and spirit, has existed for millennia. Every culture, every religion, every path of spiritual training knows methods of retreat and contemplation. Thereby there are always two spheres of activity:

- Methods of regular or daily exercise
- Methods of retreat from everyday life for an extended period

Naikan is a method that can be used both as a tool in everyday life as well as in the form of a time-out.

Naikan is not a religion, although it originated in Japan from the Buddhist worldview. Ishin Yoshimoto, the founder of Naikan, wanted to create a practise of introspection that is accessible and actionable for every person — regardless of his beliefs, regardless of his place in society, regardless of his physical fitness, regardless of his personal opinions.

Naikan neither offers wisdom teachers, nor ideology.

The method is designed for you to find insight from your own experiences. Self-competence and responsibility for oneself are at the forefront.

Drawing from your own knowledge

How often do you ask yourself when you want answers? Can you hear the answers that are coming from within? How do you deal with what you know and feel inside?

We prefer asking other people when we are seeking answers. But can someone else really tell you what the right path is for you personally? If we always look for answers on the outside, then that is a constant source of unrest. Ultimately only the answers that come from ourselves help. Naikan trains the ability to have an internal dialogue with oneself.

If you listen to yourself in order to get answers to your questions, you often receive quite contradictory signals from inside. Perhaps you react in a disappointed manner or have an internal quarrel with yourself. This is also a source of unrest. The healthy way to deal with inconsistencies is by perceiving them, and including these in your decision.¹ Naikan trains the ability to deal with the sometimes conflicting diversity of experiences, and to find clarity.


The tower of strength

Rest and movement are a constant interplay. This is true for the inner workings, as well as for the world that surrounds us. To deal with this moving interplay, we yearn for peace and quiet, for a tower of strength.

We like to look for support and orientation from the outside. But we won't find anything there. Finally, we see that it is about internal support and orientation.

Again and again people come to Naikan to find their own centre, their calming anchor. One participant also came with this request, and recognized the following on the sixth day of her Naikan-week: "I can be my own tower of strength."

Welcome to the world of introspection.



*To know thyself
is the beginning of wisdom.*

Socrates

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2. NAIKAN – HOW DOES IT WORK?

Naikan comes from Japan and is a method of introspection to explore one's own self. The Japanese word "Naikan" translates into inner observation or introspection.

内 "Nai"= inside, the interior

観 "kan"= observing, looking, looking out for

It is about really seeing oneself, about deeply recognizing one's own being, and about meditative self-reflection. No, it's not an ego trip, because you look at your own behaviour with regard to other people — exactly where the 'I' and the 'you' meet.

The Naikan method works with three simple questions that can be used at any time — in ordinary everyday life.

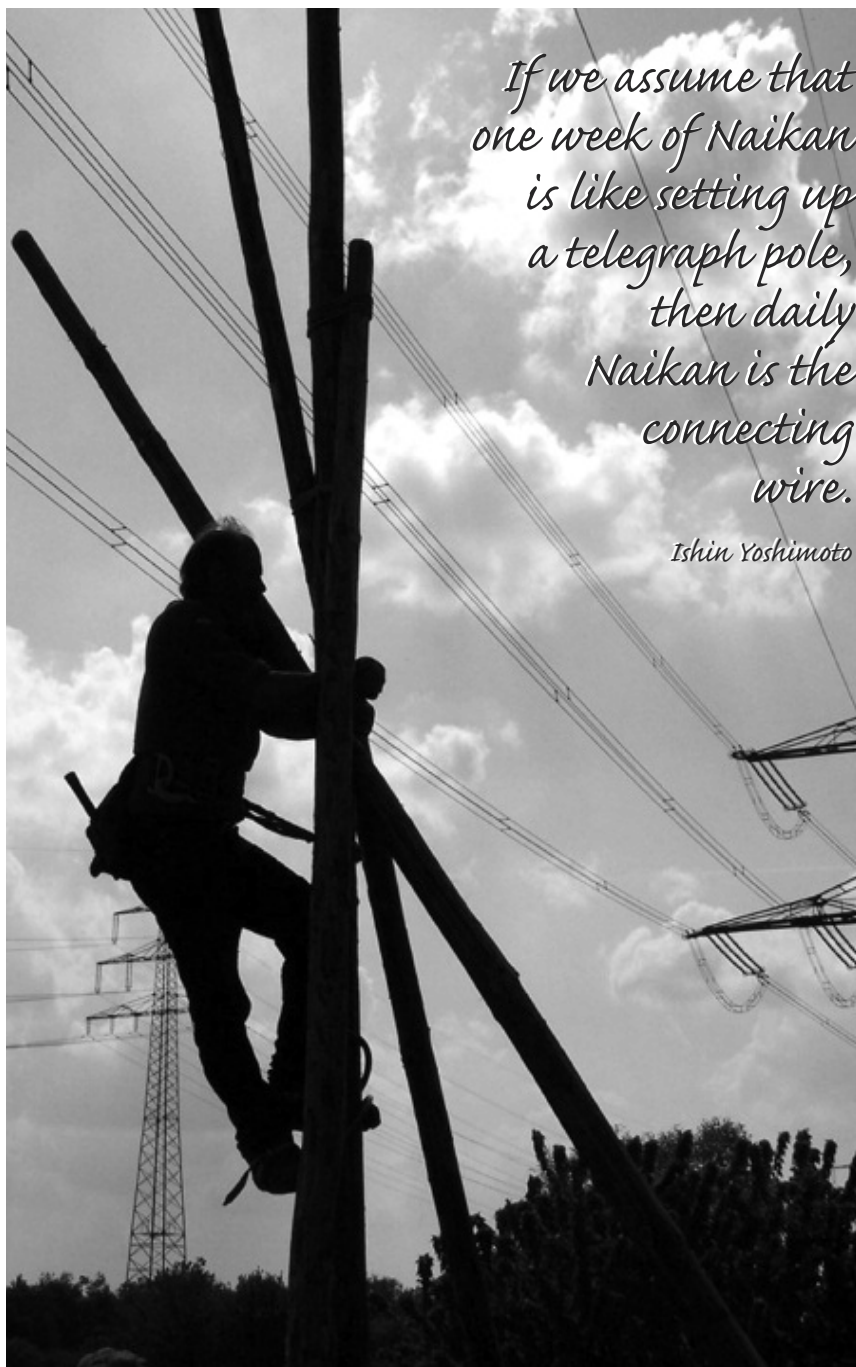
The three Naikan questions:

1. What has the person, who I am taking into account, done for me?
2. What have I done for this person?
3. What difficulties have I caused this person?

By looking at these three questions, you can focus on the constructive areas in contact with others. A well-known, but rarely useful question, loses power:

4. What difficulties has this person caused me?

No evaluation, no judgement.
Just see what actually is.
That's Naikan.



*If we assume that
one week of Naikan
is like setting up
a telegraph pole,
then daily
Naikan is the
connecting
wire.*

Ishin Yoshimoto

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4. NAIKAN — CAN I DO THIS ALONE IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

The Naikan technique, the 3 questions and the focus on a specific person or topic, works very well in your normal everyday life. This is an example of how you can incorporate Naikan into your everyday life:¹³

- Set specific time aside for Naikan (e.g. 15 minutes in the morning, 30 minutes in the evening, 1 hour on the weekend...).
- Combine an activity that you do regularly (e.g. ironing, the walk home from work, jogging...) with Naikan.
- Use short periods, which are unused or boring, for Naikan (waiting for the subway, travel times...).
- Keep a Naikan diary in which you write down your Naikan answers.

You should listen to your inner signals when you are practising alone. Don't expect anything in particular, don't look for anything special in the Naikan questions, just observe what comes up. You will notice that you automatically judge things as good or bad. This needs to be unlearned, or more correctly, looked past. Whether it's pleasant or uncomfortable, it's healthy to be able to perceive all aspects.

The feedback from Mr. J., about a month after his Naikan week, shows that Naikan works well in everyday life: "I have learned to love day-Naikan. Both the individuals with whom you have contact during that day, and the day in general. You see the network which you are a part of more clearly, and the 'little things' like green leaves on the tree or sounds that the day has given you receive more appreciation and you are a lot more thankful."



*A moment
is as precious as a human life.*

Friedrich von Schiller

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Naikan throughout the day — simple and effective

Look back at your day in the evening, think about people with whom you had contact — in person, over the phone, via e-mail — and ask yourself:

1st Naikan question: Who did something for me today?

2nd Naikan question: Who did I do something for today?

3rd Naikan question: Who did I cause difficulties for today?

This is one of the easiest ways to practise Naikan every day. It only requires a few minutes of your time.

You can go through your day once more, in the evening on your way back from work or at home before bedtime.

You can also select a specific person with whom you had contact that day, and ask yourself the three Naikan questions:

1st Naikan question: What did this person do for me today?

2nd Naikan question: What did I do for this person today?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties did I cause this person today?

Practising Naikan with regard to the day that passed, will help you to process the abundance of daily impressions and experiences and to sort them out. In this way you can leave the excitement of the day behind you and come to rest.

A Naikan participant gave me the following feedback on everyday Naikan: "I use the Naikan questions while lying in bed quite often, and I haven't made it to the third question thus far :-)) I always fall asleep very deeply and happily before getting to it."



*Giving and taking –
the law of all development.*

Christian Morgenstern

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Naikan with the focus on a specific person

1st Naikan question: What has person X done for me?

2nd Naikan question: What have I done for person X?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused person X?

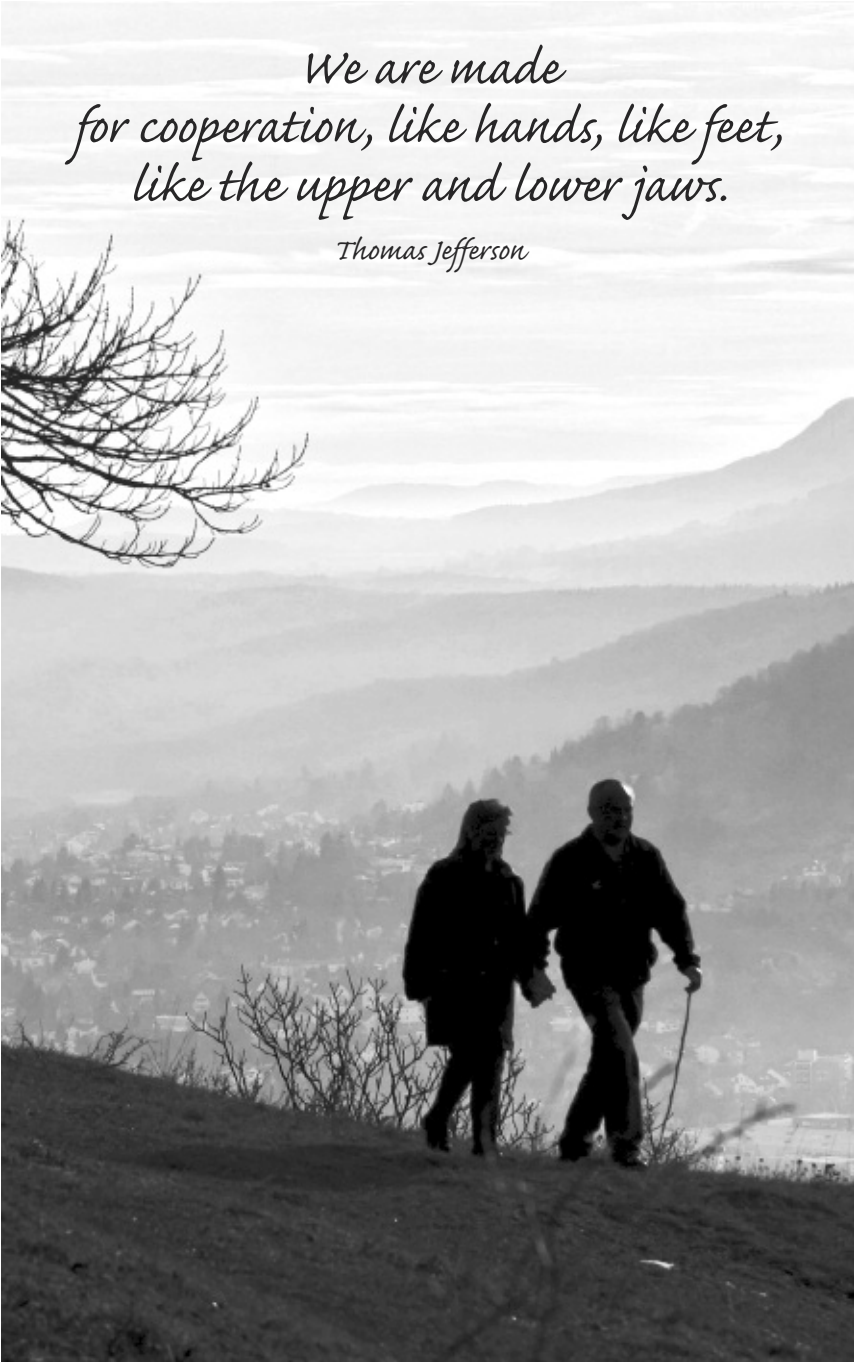
If you want to focus on a specific person in everyday Naikan then you can proceed in two ways:

Option 1: Divide the time periods, from the first encounter with this person up to today, into sections. The sections can be a few years, months, weeks, days, depending on how long you have known the person. Concentrate on a different period every day, chronologically from the first time you met up to now.

This approach corresponds to classic Naikan, this is how you would practise it in a Naikan retreat. It provides a comprehensive view of the experiences that you have had with this person.

Option 2: Focus mainly on the most recent experiences. The last few days, weeks, months. You can focus on a different person every day. Or you can focus on the same period and the same person for several days in succession. It will be fascinating either way.

You can choose anyone from your private or professional life to focus on in Naikan. There doesn't have to be a special occasion to take a closer look at a relationship. Naikan can also be especially helpful if it is not going particularly well with someone. In case of conflicts, the Naikan questions can be used to perceive the person as a whole being again, and not to limit your perception to the current problem.



*We are made
for cooperation, like hands, like feet,
like the upper and lower jaws.*

Thomas Jefferson

© Photo: Albrecht E. Arnold / pixelio.de

Naikan with the focus on your partner

Has the daily-life in your relationship become boring or is it being taken for granted? Then it is high time to pay attention to your relationship:

1st Naikan question: What has my partner done for me in the past few weeks?

2nd Naikan question: What have I done for my partner?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused my partner?

Look specifically for the small things, the everyday things — because the quality of a relationship is especially defined by the so-called little things.¹⁴

Have you recently argued with your partner? Then it is even more highly recommended to bring clarity to the emotional and mental confusion with the help of the three questions:

1st Naikan question: What has my partner done for me through this fight? What did he or she want to bring across or change?

2nd Naikan question: What have I done for my partner through this dispute? Was I able to listen? Was I able to bring my point across?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused my partner? Was it necessary? Did I block something out? Was I careless?

Do not shy away from negative emotions — especially when someone hurts you, it is important to examine the situation very closely. You will see that it is precisely this "uncomfortable" feeling that makes Naikan infinitely valuable.



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Naikan with the focus on a topic

When practising Naikan with the focus being on a specific topic, you perceive several different individuals who are associated with that topic.

It is advisable to ask the Naikan questions about all the persons who play a role:

1st Naikan question: Which people have done something for me with regard to [the topic]? Who, and what exactly?

2nd Naikan question: For whom have I done something with regard to [the topic]? For whom, and what exactly?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused other people with regard to [the topic]? Who, and what exactly?

When answering each Naikan question, you consider which people play a role and what specifically comes to mind about these various people. If this seems too complicated or confusing to you, then you can always focus on an individual person with regard to the three Naikan questions, and do this with each person one after the other.

You can also ask the three Naikan questions with regard to the topic:

1st Naikan question: What have I gotten through [the topic per se]?

2nd Naikan question: What have I done for [the topic per se]?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused [the topic per se]? Have I caused myself difficulties? (Also in the sense of: What could I look out for or improve on the next time?)

Think about whether all three questions really make sense. If your focus is on the topic of "my body", then all three questions fit: What has my body done for me? What have I done for my body? What difficulties have I caused my body? However, if you choose the topic "illness", then the question of "what difficulties have I caused my illness?" is of course nonsense.

Which topics can you choose for Naikan?

- General topics such as work, career, education, health, illness...
- Special topics such as a specific work meeting, a particular conflict situation, a family reunion, the working week, the current day...

Absolutely everything is suitable as a topic for Naikan. The important thing is always to remain specific and consider the three Naikan questions with regard to the people who are paramount in that context.

Here are some suggestions of what could be found on the topic of, for example, work:

1st Naikan question: a) What have people (boss, colleagues, customers...) done for me in relation to the topic (work)? For example, my colleague patiently explained a new work process to me. My superiors approved my desired vacation days. A customer thanked me for my kindness. My partner picked me up from my office so that we could go to a concert afterwards. When I asked him, a colleague gave me some advice in a difficult situation... b) What have I gotten through my work? For example, recognition, money, skills, contact with people...

2nd Naikan question: a) What have I done for other people (boss, colleagues, customers...) in relation to the topic (work)? For example, I completed a task for a colleague. I had a longer consultation with a customer. I made coffee for my colleague. I made a proposal to improve workflow in the office... b) What have I done for work? For example, be punctual, care, invest time, gain expertise, be patient...

3rd Naikan question: a) What difficulties have I caused other people (bosses, colleagues, customers...) in relation to the topic (work)? For example, I forgot to inform a colleague about a particular work process. I was having a bad day and lost patience with a customer. I came to work late and my colleague had to take care of my clients because of it. I told my colleague about a conflict in the office again, which then became too much for him... b) What could I be more aware of? For example, I get impatient when I work for too long without a break, so I want to think about how I can take my breaks in better-spaced time periods...

Some like it complex

Whether someone likes to practise Naikan with a specific topic in mind, depends, in my experience, on the type of person you are.

Some people thrive when they practise Naikan and focus on a specific topic, because they love to explore complex relationships and find different variations and formulations of the Naikan questions.

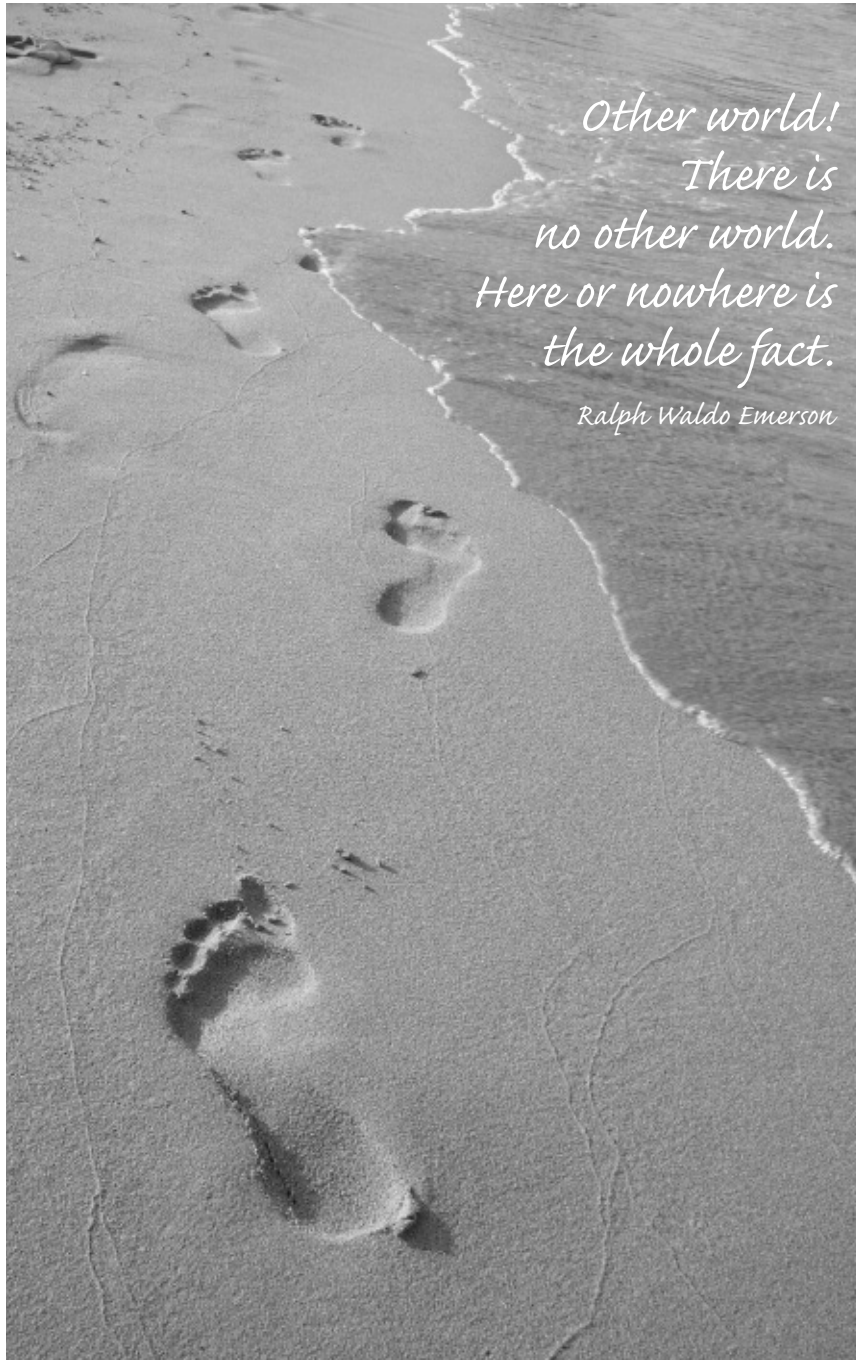
Others become rather irritated at the diversity and consider it to be too cluttered and confusing — they prefer clear and manageable structures and enjoy the classic Naikan questions with the focus on a particular person.

Being creative according to Naikan logic

Naikan always follows the same logic, by which you can adapt the Naikan questions depending on the topic.

The 1st Naikan question looks at what comes from the outside (from other people or external influences or the object of contemplation per se): What has... done for me? What have I received? The 2nd and 3rd Naikan questions examine your own contribution, your own part, that which comes from within. 2. What have I done for...? 3. What difficulties have I caused...?

Just ask yourself which formulations work with regard to a specific Naikan topic. Feel free to get creative!



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Naikan in the here and now

This is how you can apply the Naikan questions to the current situation, and not only to experiences that have already happened:

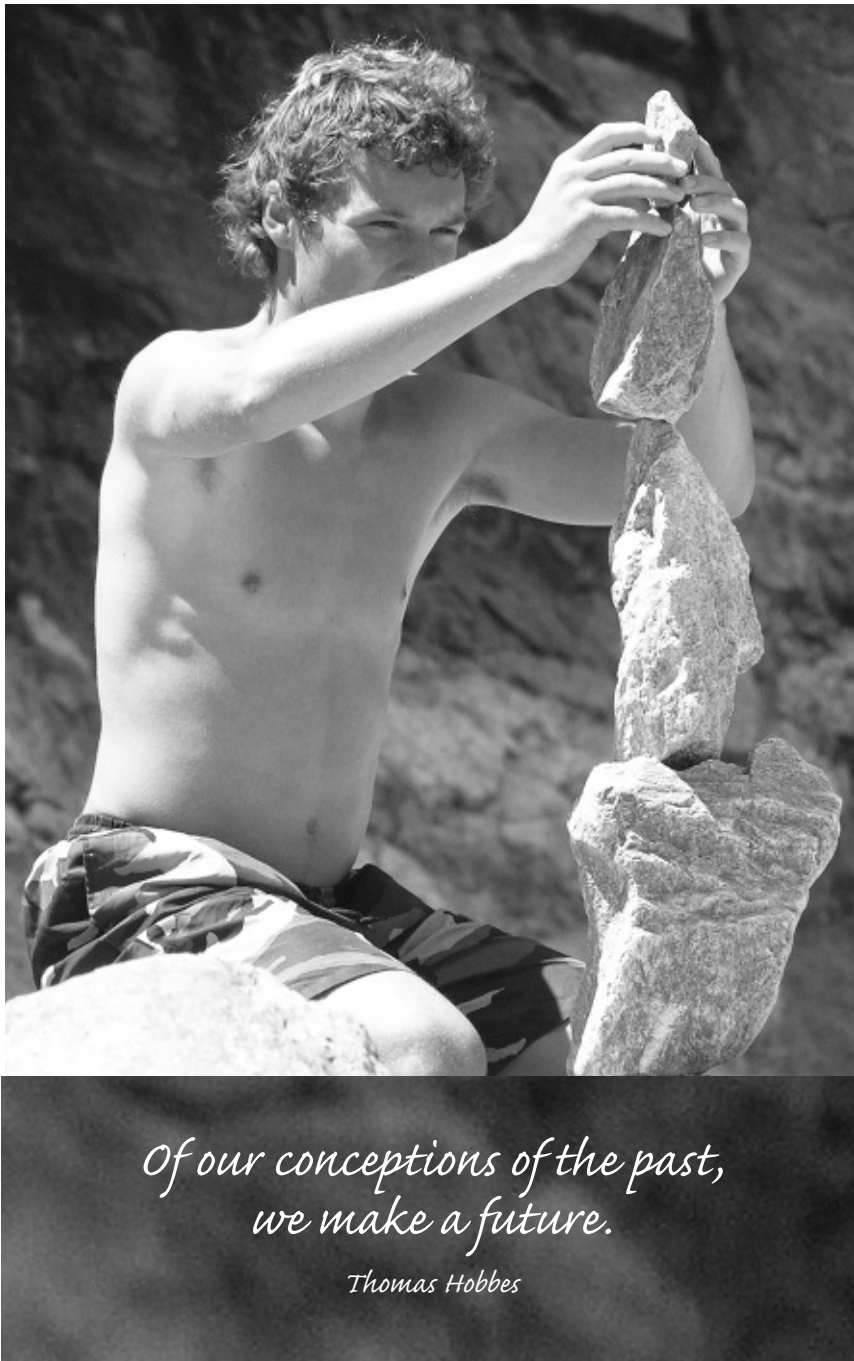
1st Naikan question: Who is doing something for me right now? What am I receiving from other people or my environment right now?

2nd Naikan question: What am I doing for other people or my environment right now? What can I do and what do I want to do for other people or my environment right now?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties am I creating right now?

Naikan primarily examines what you have already experienced. You have a lot of material to better see, understand, and be able to accept how you are.

If you already have some experience with the Naikan questions, then you can use this as mindful practise in the here and now.¹⁵



Naikan with the focus on the future

Can you also ask the Naikan questions about something in the future? Yes. However, there is a difference: Naikan is largely based on facts, and if you examine the past then you have material that is based on facts. The future, however, is precarious and one can only use a realistic estimate as a basis for Naikan.

If you want to prepare for something using the Naikan questions, then you first make a realistic estimation of what is to come.

For example, in preparation for a work meeting, you could ask the following questions: what is the topic? What are the conditions and procedures like? Who is involved? What is my role? What would I like to contribute or enforce?

Then ask the Naikan questions: According to my estimation...

1st Naikan question: Who and what is going to support me in this matter? In what way can I count on support? Who is expectedly going to do something for me, and in what way?

2nd Naikan question: What can I do to implement this matter? Who can I ask for assistance? How can I prepare?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties do I see arising? Will I cause someone difficulties through this matter?

Things always happen differently than you expect, but preparation can be very helpful.

*What's inner freedom?
specifically, recognizing the general
and the necessary.*

Hugo von Hofmannsthal



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Naikan annual review and outlook

The Naikan annual review:

1st Naikan question: What have I received in the past year? Which people did something for me?

2nd Naikan question: What have I given in the past year? What have I done for other people?

3rd Naikan question: Which people have I caused difficulties for in the past year?

The Naikan outlook for the following year:

1st Naikan question: Which people will be in my life in the coming year? Who will most likely continue to support me, what can I continue to count on?

2nd Naikan question: What do I want to give in the coming year? Who do I want to do something for? What do I want to do for myself?

3rd Naikan question: Which people will I probably cause difficulties for? Can I alleviate these difficulties? If so, how?



*If you cannot
get rid of the family skeleton,
you may as well make it dance.*

George Bernhard Shaw

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Naikan biography work

You want to work similarly to a Naikan retreat and explore your life systematically?

Then do it like this:

- You should reserve at least 30 minutes per day for Naikan biography work because it takes some time to recollect the distant past. In addition, findings cannot be forced, but rather show up on their own if time and space is provided.

- Biography work needs a protected environment. It is helpful to not undertake your Naikan considerations on the way home or when listening to music, but to retreat to a quiet place to do so.

- Begin by focusing on your mother. On day 1 you explore your memories with the 3 Naikan questions in your pre-school years, that is when you were 0-6 years old. On day 2 you explore experiences from the age of 6-10 years old, 10-14 years on the 3rd day, and so on until today. Time periods of 4 to 6 years are recommended. If your mother is no longer alive, then your Naikan observation ends on the day of your mother's passing. Please select the person who took on the mother role if you did not grow up with your birth-mother.

- Always ask all three Naikan questions. Always ask the same three Naikan questions for each time period in which you remember your mother. 1. What did my mother do for me? 2. What did I do for my mother? 3. What difficulties did I cause my mother? You can, for example, allow yourself 10 minutes for the 1st Naikan question, the next 10 minutes for the 2nd question, and the last 10 minutes for the 3rd Naikan question. Write the answers down in your Naikan diary.

- Go through your life story relating to your mother from start to finish. Only then do you go onto the next person. It is very important, in Naikan biography work, to always chronologically consider a person from the

first contact up until the present. Even if memories sometimes wander off to other people, the focus remains on the same person.

- You focus on your father as the second person in Naikan. Proceed just as you did when you were focusing on your mother.

- Thereafter, you select a person from your family of origin. For example, grandfather, grandmother, brother, sister. Preferably someone who was close to you and with whom you had a lot of contact.

- Then we recommend that you focus on your mother once again. Firstly, you have now created an easier access point to your memories. Secondly, you will learn that you gain new perspectives if you observe something more than once. This is comparable to a work of art: You can observe a picture, a sculpture, a movie, time and again, and it will be inspiring every time.

- Which person from your family of origin would you still like to focus on? You can choose from your grandmother, grandfather, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, etc... You can look at as many people in succession as you like.

- Now choose your partner or a person from your current family. The first choice is your current relationship, so significant other, partner or spouse. You can also select other members of your current family for Naikan, for example, your son, daughter, grandchild, partners of your own children, in-laws...

- Now you have done basic biography work. Of course, you can continue with Naikan from here on. Any person or topic is suitable for Naikan. You can focus on people who you have already focused on with Naikan a second time, or even more often.

- If you want to complete your biography work, then we recommend Naikan to do so. Look back at the period in which you practised Naikan. 1st Naikan question: What have I gained through the biography work with Naikan? 2nd Naikan question: What did I do for the Naikan biography work? 3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused in connection to the Naikan biography work?

- Naikan biography work requires about three months of daily practise.

If you require support during Naikan then contact a Naikan centre or a Naikan guide.

Naikan Diary

Date:

I practise Naikan about:

in this period of time:

1st Naikan question: What has done for me?

2nd Naikan question: What have I done for ?

3rd Naikan question: What difficulties have I caused ?

*Reading maketh a full man;
conference a ready man;
and writing an exact man.*

Francis Bacon



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Written Naikan

If you practise every-day Naikan then it may be useful to write your Naikan answers in a diary. You can buy a diary, in which you make your notes, or make your entries in a computer.

What is a Naikan diary for?

It motivates you to practise Naikan. We often lose our interests in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The Naikan diary helps you to remember the Naikan practise and allows you to stay on it.

Writing sometimes causes thoughts to become more clear because you have to formulate them. Valuable insights come to some people through writing.

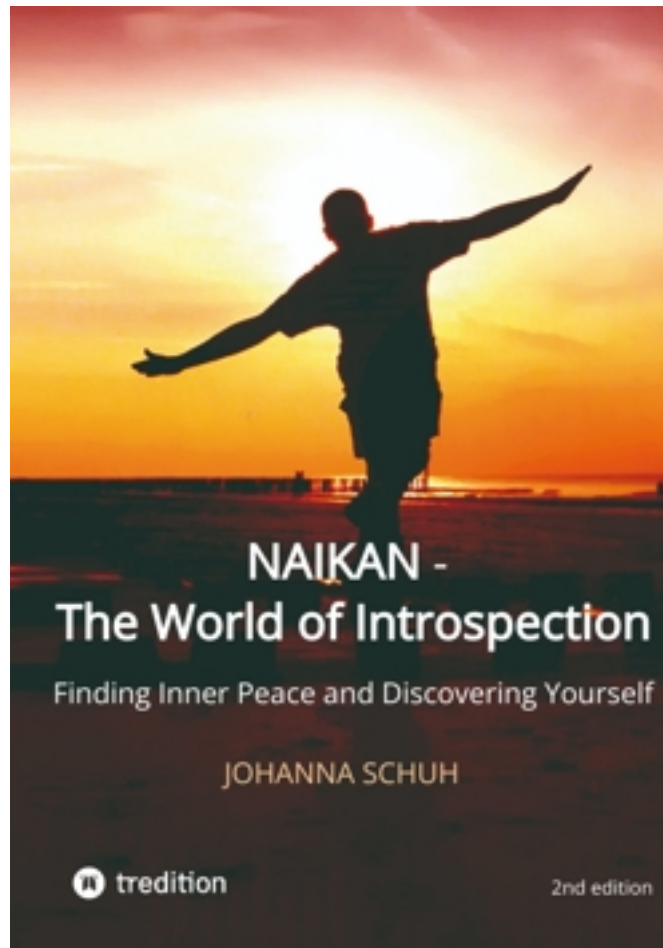
Does one have to write down the Naikan findings?

No, of course not. The most important thing in Naikan is DOING. Valuable time is every single minute that you devote to self-reflection. It is irrelevant whether you write it down or tell someone about it.

Observe what type of person you are. If writing feels rather annoying and distracts you from the actual Naikan exercise, then avoid writing things down. If you find writing to be helpful, then a Naikan diary is a fine thing.

If you practise Naikan for a longer period, then your Naikan diary can show you the findings and changes that have come up. As a kind of afterthought.

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