



THATfirst

Yoga Meditation Advaita

INTERNAL DIALOGUE

by Radhikaji

As a child, I curled up in my cosy bed under my blanket. From my bed I looked out of the window into the night sky and the countless stars. I asked myself: How big is the universe? Who am I? Why am I here?

Children often have such conversations with themselves until a grown-up or an elder sibling passes an unkind comment. Since mankind has inhabited our beautiful blue planet, we have asked ourselves these profound questions. We are deeply spiritual in our child-like and innocent nature. If your longing for spiritual Oneness has not been completely extinguished by the cynical ideas of worldly people then you can find the answers deep within through sweet conversations with your inner wisdom.

Even you can enter into an internal dialogue with your own inner self and That which lies beyond. One of the finest practices of Vedantic Meditation is Internal Dialogue. It is called Vichara in Sanskrit and means "to think, to contemplate, to introspect." Due to the nature of this practice it is extremely subtle and difficult to define.

THE ORIGIN AND VARIATIONS OF VICHARA

The great sage of South India Ramana Maharshi elaborates upon the practice of Vichara in the first question posed by a dedicated seeker, and published in the booklet Nan Yar: Who am I? Since then this practice has often been attributed to Ramana Maharshi. However, he did not invent or discover this practice, also known as Self Enquiry.

This practice has been mentioned in many ancient texts and was taught only to the initiated. It has been called Pratipaksha Bhavana in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. It has also been referred to in the Tripura Rahasya, a text the great sage Ramana regarded highly. The great Indian epic Ramayana refers to it as Atma Vichara. The Vedas recommend the finest and most advanced form of Self Enquiry that is based on Neti, Neti - Not this, Not this.

HOW TO PRACTICE VICHARA

You can do Vichara anytime, anywhere. Close your eyes if possible. And talk to your mind. It sounds like a strange idea to talk to oneself, in fact your first reaction might be, "I'm not crazy!" But on second thought you might want to try an exercise that the sages have been talking about for many millennia.

- 1. Begin by raising fruitful questions:

In the initial stages Internal Dialogue helps the practitioner to develop a relationship with his own mind. We know so little about ourselves, often not knowing what we want from our life and what makes us happy. This may relate to small things or to the purpose of life.

You can raise fruitful questions to get to know yourself.

"O Mind, What do you want? What is the purpose of life?"

Through Internal Dialogue you can ask your mind to remember the transient nature of the world.

"O Mind, observe the impermanence of those objects you long to achieve. What is the difference in the objects of dreams and the objects of the waking world? What reason is there for clinging on to the things of the world?"

With Internal Dialogue you can gradually convince your mind to change its ways.

"O Mind, Truth is unchanging and Absolute Reality is eternal. O Mind, do you not want to follow in the footsteps of the sages and tread the path of light and enlightenment?"

- 2. Learning to Listen

Generally the mind, that is engaged in a monologue, is lost in its own maze of words, thoughts, fantasies, memories and images. Vichara must not become a monologue. It is a dialogue between you and your mind. If you ask a question, just listen. Listening is the key to this practice.

"O Mind, please be my friend. Let us talk. I am listening."

"O Mind, I want to be your friend. Will you be honest with me?"

- 3. Developing a relationship with your mind

Do you speak to your mind as friend, mentor, mother, father, child or teacher?

Once we get in touch with our mind, we discover there are so many layers within. The process of self-discovery can in fact lead us astray, for the mind can be your greatest friend or your worst enemy. In this stage we learn to make friends with our mind and establish a relationship.

Don't order your mind around. Be a friend and cultivate a relationship as you would with your friend. Observe what kind of mind you have. Be patient, not judgmental. Be gentle and loving. Do not create conflicts with your mind.

"O Mind, do not condemn yourself. Be gentle and forgive yourself."

"O Mind, is this thought useful, is this thought healthy?"

"O Mind, all that is pleasant is not good, all that which is good is not pleasant. Is this desire good or just pleasant?"

- 4. Inviting the hidden to come forward

It is best to practice Vichara daily before you start with your meditation. Allow the mind to present you with all its doubts, questions and fears. Invite these to come forward so that the mind does not disturb you with these during your meditation.

The practice of Vichara or Self Enquiry helps the practitioner take a different stance. In this stance the practitioner "invites" the hidden and unrevealed to come forward. In this manner the practitioner begins to be unattached to the stream of thoughts that comes forward and is better able to maintain focussed awareness.

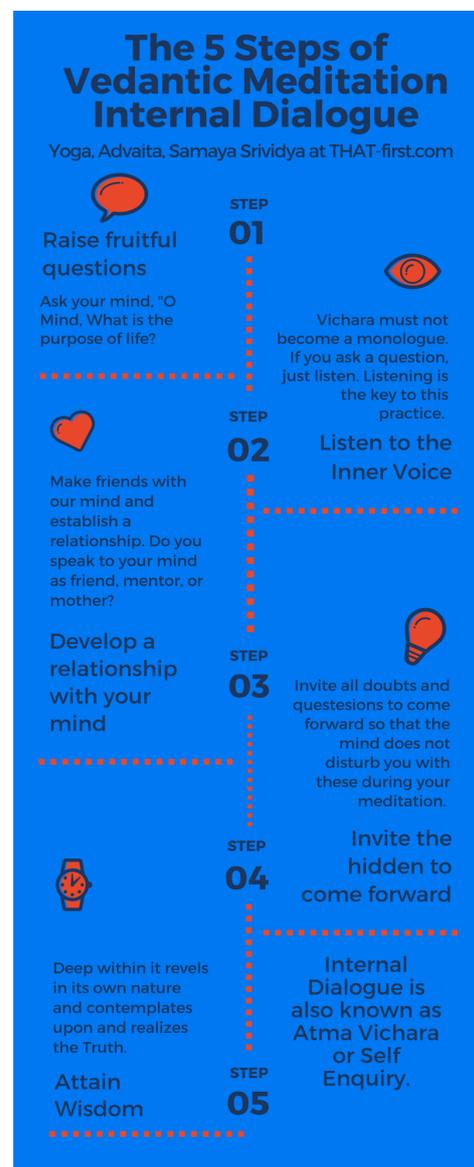
"O Mind, Whatever thoughts and images you present before me, I will not be disturbed by them. Come thoughts, come."

"O Mind, let all the questions and doubts come forward. Won't you share your secrets with me?"

Once a sincere seeker starts the process of self discovery with Vichara, the hidden part of the mind comes forward. It is similar to pulling apart a pullover. The initial dialogues are akin to pulling on one of the threads. As the artificial structures imposed upon the mind, by ourselves and the society we live in, fall apart, the question, "Who am I?" emerges spontaneously.

- 5. Attaining Wisdom

Once the hidden comes forward, the seeker begins spontaneously to ask questions. You do not have to attempt to practice, the practice takes over and has a life of its own. The practitioner is flooded by questions such as, "What is the nature of the mind?" or "What is the nature of the Universe?" One question emerges from the depths of the heart, a question that cuts through the layers of the mind. The question is "Who am I?" Now the seeker is well on his way to a deeper practice of Vichara, one that leads you to the centre of consciousness.



Vichara, in the form of a dialogue, begins with a dualistic aspect of "I am talking to my mind," until the practitioner rests within having realized the epitome of non-dualistic truth "We are all One." The practitioner revels in his own nature, contemplates upon and realizes the great Truth.

BENEFITS OF INTERNAL DIALOGUE

- Internal Dialogue sharpens the inner wisdom which then guides us and leads us in every area of life. Daily practice of Vichara strengthens the faculty of decisiveness.
- Vichara helps to build a definite philosophy of life; it is the foundation on which the practice of meditation is built.
- Internal Dialogue also replaces meditation when the practitioner is tired.
- Vichara is healthy for resolving conflicts that arise when the seeker remains stuck in his old habits patterns and the mind keeps traveling back to old grooves of unhealthy thoughts.
- Internal Dialogue is a preliminary exercise that will eventually become an essential part of your life and awake the inner wisdom in you.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH INTERNAL DIALOGUE

I have had the privilege of seeing how Internal Dialogue helps people and completely transforms their lives. One of my students is a young mother. Her son, a special child, will never lead a normal life. After the birth of her son, fears had crippled the life of M.J. Her husband lost his job due to her complete dependency on him. M.J. was so troubled when she came to me, she was unable to do even simple things like go for a walk alone. With this practice she built up her courage. M.J. was able to re-train herself to become a Montessori teacher. Today she can go to work everyday as well as look after her special child. It was a wonderful moment for me when she told me, that she can even sleep in the dark without a nightlight. I know this practice really helped her because her husband thanked me for the amazing transformation.

One of my first German students J.R. felt very lonely and isolated even though he had a good relationship with his wife. His two adorable children were healthy and happy, and he had many material comforts thanks to his well paying, secure job. J.R. had a remarkable experience with Internal Dialogue. After just a few short practices of Internal Dialogue he said, "I found someone who is always with me, to whom I can talk to anytime." J.R. had found his "inner friend" and with that the key to overcome the feeling of separateness that had been troubling him since childhood. J.R. continues to practice Internal Dialogue along with the other complementary practices that I guide him in. He is a healthy and balanced young man walking on the path leading to wisdom and enlightenment.

You too can practice Internal Dialogue. It can be practiced any time of the day (or night). Besides some of the suggestions already mentioned in the article, here are some more suggestions:

- Ask yourself if you want to know yourself and to choose your own habits.
- When sitting in meditation, ask your mind to heal aching parts.
- Remind yourself not to make dramatic resolutions. Instead ask your mind to take small steps toward health, happiness and enlightenment.
- Say to your mind, "Please be my friend." How does your mind respond?
- Ask your mind "How can I organize my life so that I can meditate daily?"

Internal Dialogue is a simple practice that will introduce you to your own self. You can use it to transform your life and feel the interconnectedness to all beings. Just a simple conversation has the power to transform you and awake the child-like wisdom in you. And the next time you gaze at the stars on a clear night, you may want to share this beauty with your new friend — your friend within.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Radhika Shah Grouven has been teaching and writing on Meditation, Advaita and Tantra since 1992. She is the author of *Mastering Pranayama* — a book on breathing techniques and energy practices. Radhikaji, as she is called by her students, founded the organization THATfirst in 2009 to promote the teachings of the Oral Tradition. She leads retreats and gatherings for students from different parts of the world. She grew up in India and is currently based in Germany.

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