

Three Ways to Become Aware of Your Thoughts

Part 1: Three Ways

The first step of this process of life change and spiritual transformation is *Self Examination*. There are four parts or *levels* of self examination, each of which is reflected in its own column on the Step 1 worksheets. The *first column* of those worksheets asks you to record things you've done or said in one or another area of your life that you're examining. The *second column* invites you to record thoughts, opinions, or beliefs that *underlie* what you've done or said.

People who are new to this process sometimes find it difficult to fill in the *second column* of the Step 1 worksheets. They discover that their thoughts, opinions, or beliefs aren't readily apparent to them.

If this is true for you, don't be surprised. Thoughts are often unconscious to us. Certain ones of them like to *hide* from us, so they won't be noticed, known, or discovered.

If your thoughts are not readily apparent to you during Step 1 of this process, there are things that you can do to become more aware of them.¹ One thing you can do is ask God for help. God is present with you all the time. In fact, there's never a time when He *isn't* present or nearby. Anytime you wish to make a change in your life for the better, and you start into the process of self examination, God is actually the one who inspires you to do so. He's also there with you during self examination, disclosing things to you along the way. So ask for His help in knowing your thoughts. Record any that come to mind.

Another thing you can do is to look over the things you've written in the *previous* column of the Step 1 worksheet—*column one*. Read these things silently to yourself a few times over, remembering your experience of them as you do. While you're doing this, see if any thoughts, opinions, or beliefs bubble to the surface. Record any that do.

As an example, imagine a husband who's had a nasty fight with his wife. During their fight, he tells her that her way of thinking or doing something is stupid. He writes that down in *column one* of the self examination worksheets. When he gets to *column two*, he isn't sure what thoughts underlie his outburst. So he reviews what he's written in *column one* and remembers his experience of it. As he does this, a *thought* registers in his mind: "*My wife's idea is stupid!*" He writes that thought in *column two*.

¹ This article presents three ways to become aware of your thoughts during self examination. There may be others that you think of yourself.

If you try either of the above methods, and you're still unable to access your thoughts, you can try a method called *Speak with the Enemies in the Gate*.²

Imagine that you live in a big, beautiful city where God is king. You are standing in the gate of that city looking out over the landscape. It's a desert wasteland. As you look over the landscape, imagine that one or more demonic spirits appear. Imagine that *they* are the ones who've been inspiring the actions and words you're currently examining in yourself.

Take a good look at these spirits: What do they *look* like? What do they *sound* like? Etc. But don't worry, you're safe where you are. The gateway of the city is a "neutral zone" between good and bad, love and hate, heaven and hell. It's a place where you can experience things like this and not be harmed.

Next, ask the spirits any questions that you might wish to ask about the issue at hand—what would you like to know from these spirits? For purposes of this exercise, be sure to ask them what they *think*: What thoughts, opinions, or beliefs do they have relative to the issue at hand? What do they think about any of the *people* who are involved in this issue? Etc. Record their answers in *column two*, paying special attention to those that seem accurately to represent thoughts you've been having.³

These are three methods for becoming aware of your thoughts in *column two* of self examination. But there's more. Each of these methods can be used in *column three* and also *column four*. Any time you have difficulty discovering your intentions, aims, or purposes (*column three*) or what you would do if you could get away with it (*column four*), one or more of these methods can help—asking for God's help, reading and remembering what you've written in the *previous* column, or speaking with the enemies in the gate.

One final note: You may find these exercises particularly helpful when you're first getting started on the process. As time goes by, accessing your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs will become quicker and easier. But even then, you may experience times when you have difficulty accessing your thoughts, etc. Anytime this happens, one or more of these methods can help.

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² This method is based on the Bible—Revelation 21 and Psalm 127:5—"They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate."

³ This particular method is surprisingly helpful to people who use it. In fact, the "demons" in this visualization are often so forthcoming with information, it's almost as though God gives them truth serum—so that they *have* to talk. It's interesting, and somehow it has to square with the idea that God is actually the one who discloses things to you during this step. What do you think?

Part 2: Allowing for “Positives” during Self Examination

For just a minute, let’s go back to the example of the husband who had a nasty fight with his wife. As part of their interaction, the wife shared an idea with her husband for how to accomplish something. His thought was, “*That idea is stupid!*”

Well, imagine that in an *another* part of their conversation, the wife addressed her husband in a mean or hurtful way. As the husband is going through *column two* of self examination, one of his thoughts might be, “*She had no right to address me the way she did.*”

Notice: There may be *truth* in that thought. The wife may, in fact, have had “no right” to say what she said.

The point of this example is that not everything you record during self examination will be problematic or dysfunctional. Some of it may be true, useful, and functional. In the present example, the husband’s thought, “*She had no right to address me the way she did*” helps him realize why he’s feeling the way he is about that part of their interaction, and it alerts him to something he’ll want to raise with his wife later on.⁴

Continuing with this example, as the husband moves into *column three* of self examination, he discovers that one of his *intentions* is to get his wife to stop addressing him in the way she did. Then, in *column four* (the *Wants & Will* column), he discovers that he genuinely wants things to improve in their relationship. Each of these “positive” discoveries helps broaden his perspective on his own feelings and inner reactions, and it will help him resolve things with his wife later on.

Again, the point is that not everything you discover during self examination will be problematic and dysfunctional. Some of it may be true, useful, and quite functional. So let the process of self examination unfold as it will, using any information you gather to the greatest benefit possible.

But remember: The main point of self examination is not to discover all the positive things about yourself or your situation, but rather, to uncover any hurtful and destructive things that may be present and getting in the way of forward movement in your life and relationships. Self examination helps you discover these things, en route to a new and better experience of life.

One suggestion is that when you discover some of these “positives” in your thoughts, intentions, etc., jot them down in the appropriate column(s) on the Step 1 worksheets, and mark them with an asterisk. Doing this will set them apart from other things you record during self examination.

⁴ One method for deciding what to communicate when reconciling differences is to be sure it passes three tests: Is what you are about to say *kind*? Is it *true*? Is it *useful*? In addition, any communication you make has the greatest chance for success if it is *open, honest, complete, clear,* and above all, *kind*.