

Naikan Reflection

 Gratitude

 Intervention

 10 min

 Client

 Yes

Naikan therapy is a structured method of self-reflection that was developed in Japan in the 1940s by Ishin Yoshimoto, a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist minister. The literal translation of Naikan is “looking within.” Yoshimoto developed Naikan as a method that could be practiced by anyone, regardless of religious belief or affiliation. As such, Naikan is a ‘secularized’ contemplative practice (Ozawa de-Silva & Ozawa de-Silva, 2010).

Three questions, or themes, provide the foundation for Naikan therapy: (1) “What did this person give to me?” (2) “What did I return to this person?” and (3) “What trouble did I cause this person?” Naikan practitioners reflect on these three questions concerning one personal relationship at a time. For example, you may recall what your mother gave to you, what you returned to her, and what trouble you caused her when you were between zero and six years of age. Then, you may do the same with regards to your father, and so on. Reflecting on these three themes within personal relationships helps people cultivate feelings of gratitude and appreciation while also expanding their awareness of their moral relationships with others (in terms of giving, receiving, and hurting). Through helping people gauge the degree to which they have taken from versus given back to others, one learns how ‘indebted’ he or she is to the world, fostering a natural desire to give and serve others and instilling a greater sense of thankfulness and realistic humility.

Emerging evidence suggests that Naikan therapy is effective for numerous psychological disorders, including substance addiction and psychosomatic disorders (Ozawa-de Silva, 2006). Further support can be provided by the positive psychology literature, which illuminates the benefits of practicing gratitude, acting kindly, and developing resilience for mental health (Boiler et al. 2010; Fredrickson, 2004).



Author

This tool was adapted from Greg Krech’s Naikan reflection exercise by Lucinda Poole and Hugo Alberts (Ph.D.).



Goal

This tool aims to help clients develop a greater sense of gratitude as well as foster a natural desire to give and serve others through increasing their awareness of the extent to which they give and receive daily.



Advice

- This exercise can be adapted to be used/applied to a client's relationship; clients can reflect on the extent to which they have given to, taken from, and caused trouble within a specific relationship (e.g., one's spouse). This may help to broaden the client's perspective of the functioning of the relationship as well as potentially evoke feelings of appreciation for the other person.
- Be wary that clients may experience feelings of regret and/or shame upon discovering that they have taken more than they have given. If this occurs, help the client adopt a growth mindset by exploring what they could do differently tomorrow to 'restore the balance.'



References

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- Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Gratitude, like other positive emotions, broadens and builds. *The psychology of gratitude*, 145, 166.
- Ozawa-de Silva, C. (2006). *Psychotherapy and religion in Japan: The Japanese introspection practice of Naikan*. Routledge.
- Ozawa-de Silva, C., & Silva, B. O. D. (2010). Secularizing religious practices: A study of subjectivity and existential transformation in Naikan therapy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49(1), 147-161.



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Instructions

In this exercise, you are invited to reflect on what you have received, what you have given, and what trouble (if any) you have caused others in the past 24 hours. You can choose to reflect on these three themes with regards to one particular person in your life or more broadly with anyone who supported you during the past day. Spend at least 10 minutes on the exercise to come up with as many items as you can.

Step 1: What have I received?

Consider everything that you have received in the past 24 hours. How have you been cared for and supported by others? Was there hot water and soap available to you for your morning shower? What kind of food did you eat? Did someone serve you coffee? Did your partner pay you a compliment? Did someone open a door for you? Did someone wash your dishes? Write down anything and everything that you received today.

Step 2: What have I given?

Now consider everything that you have given to another person, or the world, in the past 24 hours. Examples include smiling at a stranger, picking up someone else's rubbish, giving up your seat on the bus, wishing someone happy birthday, washing up someone else's dishes, or asking the supermarket clerk how his day was. Reflect on your entire day and write down anything and everything that you gave.



Step 3: What troubles or difficulties have I caused?

Now take a moment to consider what troubles or difficulties you have caused another person or the world. Examples include dismissing or being short with someone, being late for an appointment, cutting someone off in traffic, criticizing someone, leaving the dishes in the sink for someone else to wash, and keeping people waiting for a response to their emails or calls.

A large, empty light gray rectangular box intended for the user to write their reflections on the questions posed in the previous section.