

Recommendations for Naikan

Prof. Akira Ishii



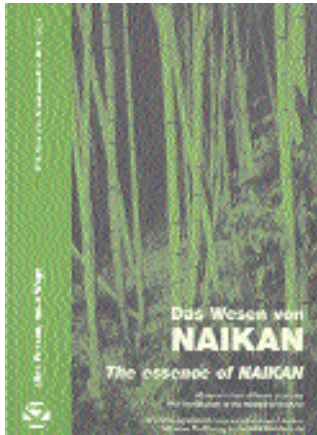
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Chapter 1: A stop in the flow of time

We barely have time to pause anymore, to stop our lives and see ourselves. We are always busy, without knowing why we were born, where we came from, or where we are going. We do not have time to think about our destination, and most of the time we do not even notice that we cannot know it. Is your life also too busy for you to notice that there is a beautiful flower on the path?

Usually, the nature of our problems and worries leaves our heads crammed with the things around us. Therefore, our view has narrowed.

Some people kill themselves because they are not successful in their profession or enterprise, or because they fail the entrance examination at university. Such people are able to see only the choice between two alternatives: success at work, or death; passing the exam, or dying.

At such a point in time, if we look back at our lives we will see that we exist because many people in our environment have supported us at one time or another. As a consequence, we can acquire a broader view at the problems in front of our eyes, and the choice will no longer seem as narrow.

Therefore, it is important to stop in time and look at one's past up until this moment, to look closely at the person we have been so far.

But when we look at our past, we usually give in to the feelings we had back then; we often see only aspects which have been of interest to us at the respective time. That means to look back from our point of view. We can compare our life to a cruise down the river, from the spring to the mouth. So the usual way of reminiscing is influenced by what we have been interested in, according to our respective emotions: this spot was beautiful ... that spot was very interesting ... it was fun to travel along here ... that experience was a bit dangerous and I was scared, etc. We remember things that seemed impressive to us.

But we can also choose another perspective, and look at our life from the beginning, looking through a camera that is placed in the sky or at the bank.

Then we can see clearly because we can watch without distraction where we have been and how we behaved in a specific situation. It is important to take the time to reflect upon our lives from the beginning on, looking at our character from the other side, from another perspective.

Looking at the past up to the present through someone else's eyes, stopping the time of life, that is NAIKAN.

Chapter 2: Liberation from prejudice

Sometimes our perception is colored by prejudice. It is a prejudice to say that the sky is blue or the blackboard is black; it is not a fact. Only on a few days in the year, the sky is as blue as we imagine it; sometimes it is white, there are sunsets, and at night the color is different once again. Even so, we think that the sky is blue; that if it is not, it does not deserve to be called 'sky'.

We try to make the world fit our prejudices; we perceive a thing only by label and value we have assigned it. And we notice the discrepancy to our expectations and hopes and grow angry, when something does not match our prejudices and expectations. Although it may be the mother, the father, the child, the husband, the elder brother, the younger sister, the boss, the president, the employee, the teacher – we do not care: we consider others merely as tools which give us satisfaction.

Once we evaluated the others with respect to our prejudices, we tend to see only this one aspect. Once we have come to dislike somebody, we think that we never got anything from this person – even if this somebody is really friendly. Once we have come to believe that the other one is mean, we keep looking only for proofs of malice.

As it is, the first judgement already shows a notion of self-centeredness. If someone is nice to us, we think of this person as a good one. If this person is even friendlier to others, we think that this person is not that good after all. If it rains on the day of the excursion, we are unhappy, but if it does not rain for a whole month, we pray to the heavens to let it rain again. We are inclined to put forward such an attitude.

That means we always see things from our point of view and through our filter. The feeling which springs from such a point of view is what stays in our memories.

This habit also influences our perception of ourselves – I am no exception. Being late for a date, we may use the excuse: "I am sorry, there was too much traffic." But the street in Tokyo which I live in is always busy. Saying that "I was stuck in the rush hour" is not really an excuse. The times of rush hour do not change. If we take that into account and leave home a little earlier, we will not be late. If we notice too late that it is the time of rush hour, that is our own carelessness.

When our train had to stop because of an accident and we say: "There has been an accident", the others will show compassion. But that does not really have anything to do with the people who have been waiting for us without knowing what was going on. It does not change the fact that the people waiting might have feared that something had happened, or that they were waiting in the wrong spot. But we do not notice such things; we tend to be ignorant about things like that.

As I said before: usually, we have our own excuse, even if we are the source of difficulties to others in one way or the other. "The phone rang as I was just about to leave the house." – "I have been very busy lately." – "I am pretty exhausted because my child is in the middle of the examinations right now."

Therefore, our self-portrait and the picture that others have of us, are separated by a rather wide gap. We suffer from this gap and claim that the others do not understand us.

But in reality, the others understand us quite well. At one glance, they can tell whether someone is a little stubborn or a little depressed, but the person in question does not notice it. Yet, this person thinks that it is the other people who do not understand. In turn, a feeling

of stress develops, which turns into sickness. Therefore, it is important for us to look at ourselves from the other side; not, like usually, from the side attached to our emotions.

NAIKAN is a method which enables us to get rid of this one-sided point of view, and to see ourselves from another perspective. NAI means 'inside', KAN means 'looking', therefore NAIKAN means looking inside, or inner reflection. Since we generally look outside through our value judgements, we engage in 'outer reflection'. Because we practice outer reflection, we cannot see ourselves. Therefore, the inner reflection (NAIKAN) becomes important, because it knocks off with this attitude toward life, enabling us to see ourselves. That means, NAIKAN is important because usually we live our lives without NAIKAN, without inner reflection. So I think it is important to once take the time to look back at oneself.

Chapter 3: The NAIKAN-method: How to practice NAIKAN

During a NAIKAN seminar, we work with three questions in order to reflect upon how we have behaved toward others:

“What has a specific person done for me?”

“What have we done for this person?”

“What difficulties have we caused this person?”

Practising NAIKAN, we reflect upon our behavior toward persons in our environment. Persons in our environment are especially the ones closest to us, such as mother, father, grandparents, brother, sister, partner, children, etc. Of course, we can also reflect upon our relationships with friends or colleagues. It is important to look also at relationships from which we suffer.

We analyze our relationships with the persons of focus from the beginning to the present, or to the end of the relationship.

Normally, we start with the mother. The mother is usually the closest person during one's childhood. Therefore, she is the one from whom we received the most. People who have not lived with their mother during childhood may start practicing NAIKAN with regard to the grandmother, the father, or the elder sister.

We look at our part in the respective relationship during certain time periods: from birth to the beginning of school (in Japan: until third grade), until the end of elementary school, junior high school and high school, until age twenty, twenty-five, thirty, and so on. Usually, we start like this: first – what has my mother done for me, second – what have I done for her, third – which difficulties have I caused her, during the time from my birth to the beginning of elementary school.

We think about these questions for a while and try to find a concrete answer. After one or two hours, the guide visits the participants and asks them what they have reflected on and what they have remembered. The participants tell the guide what they have come to think of with respect to the three questions. The guide thanks them and asks, what period they will reflect upon next, or gives them advice as to what to concentrate on next. Then the guide leaves. Normally, the next period is the time from first to fourth grade (age six to ten). Again,

the guide comes to see the participants after one or two hours and asks, what they have remembered. In that manner, one analyzes oneself for a week by way of thinking about these questions with regard to mother, father, etc.

Now let us give some thought to the meaning of these three questions:

1. What has the respective person done for us?

Usually, we remember things we did not receive: my mother did not stay home ... she did not prepare the meals ... my father left us ... my parents died early, etc. We concentrate on things that did not conform to our expectations, or things we lost. Sometimes we do not notice what we got or what we had.

We are convinced that our world consists merely of things we did not get. Some people hate their parents because they did not let them study abroad. Once we start to think about their not building a house for us, their not sending us off to a trip around the world, there is no end to it. That means only that the parents did not fulfill the expectations we had projected on them in our minds, that they did not act like we wanted them to. Those are all things taking place in our heads. Saying “My mother did not wake me up” is the same thing.

During NAIKAN, we do not analyze the things in our heads, we examine events that really took place. Some people say “There was nothing special”, when thinking about what their mother had done for them. But during NAIKAN, we do not look at ‘special things’. There are, for example, barely people who say, when asked about what their mother had done for them, that she woke them up in the morning or prepared the meals. We remember that she made us compresses when we had the flu rather than what she has done for us in everyday life. We are not aware that she cooked soup. Whenever an aunt or some other woman cooked, we expressed gratitude, but when our mother did, we did not notice because we took it for granted.

But when meals are being prepared three times a day, it amounts to one thousand meals a year, more than ten thousand meals in ten years. Whether it rains or storms, the mother goes to different stores, buys different goods and carries them home. She prepares the meals, cuts, cooks, fries, bakes, and cooks rice. She makes tea and pours it, puts food, bread, and drinks onto a tray and carries it to the table, puts everything on the table, together with the forks and knives. After the children have eaten and gone off to their rooms to play or study, she puts the dirty dishes onto the tray again and carries them into the kitchen, washes and dries them, and puts them back into the cupboard.

To do all of this ten thousand times, that takes up a lot of time and energy. But we do not see it as something that has been done for us, since it was nothing ‘special’.

“My mother left us when I was ten years old, therefore she has done nothing for me.” There are people who will say that. But the reality is quite different. If the mother has prepared the meals until she left, she has done it ten thousand times. Even so, we think that we did not receive anything. Therefore, it is important to see our past in a realistic light.

2. What have we done for this person?

That is a hard question. Sometimes we think only about receiving things, not about giving things to, or doing things for others. We do not immediately recall what we have done for the mother. There are people who say that they did not need much. But even if we do a lot

ourselves, that does not imply that we are thereby doing anything for someone else. Before we were able to dress without help, someone else had dressed us, and finally we learned to do it ourselves. So even if we do not need other people's help, we used to need a lot of help until we were able to take care of ourselves. That means, until that point in time, things have been done for us.

So what things have we done for others? Many people say: "I was a good student", "I was the best sprinter in school and my mother was proud", etc. But we did not study for the mother, we did not run for her. We ran because we wanted to win. The reward was to be winner, and the mother was as happy as if she had done it herself.

If we are happy because our mother has a good experience, we do something for her. But if she is happy for us, as if it was herself who had won, she does something for us. That means that just because something good happens to come along for us, we do not necessarily do something for others.

Another example: on the way home from school we find a beautiful stone. We give it to our mother as a present, but she is angry. Even if she is angry about us giving her the stone, we have done something for her. Not only things that make her happy are things we have done for her. Compare: not only things we were happy about were things that have been done for us. There are, for example, very few people who enjoy going to the dentist. There are people who detest it. But that is something that our mother made effort with, so our pains would not grow worse.

3. What difficulties have we caused?

The next question concerns the "difficulties caused by us". But usually, we remember the "difficulties caused to us by others". We do not easily forget how we have been hurt. But we do not notice the troubles we are responsible for at the time we cause them. And if we do, we forget them immediately. We remember only the difficulties we have been caused by others, for twenty, thirty years. We become victims and think that we are unhappy because of the person who made us suffer. If that is the case, one cannot say that we are taking the initiative in our lives. Therefore, we think about the difficulties we have caused. That is the third question.

To say it briefly: NAIKAN is an exercise to see oneself in the perspective of the three questions: What have others done for us, what have we done for others, what difficulties have we caused.

By the way, the object of reflection does not have to be a person. A woman practiced NAIKAN with respect to her dog and noticed, how self-centered she had behaved. Whenever she had felt lonely, she had woken the dog to play with him, when she had been in a bad mood, she had beaten him.

During NAIKAN, we look at our part in the relationship with a person from the past until the present, or until the person has died. In the beginning, we reflect on the mother or the person who has taken our mother's place. We deal with ourselves in periods of three to five years. Afterwards, we reflect on the father, the grandparents, the siblings, the partner, the children, the teacher, the boss, or the colleagues.

Chapter 4: What concretely is it one remembers during NAIKAN?

One may remember the following:

Japan, the period from birth to third grade, reflecting on the mother:

“What my mother has done for me, was to come to the sports event at my school. She got up very early and prepared a picnic for me.”

“What I have done for her, was to regularly massage her shoulder.”

“The troubles I have caused her: when I was in kindergarten, I fell ill for a week and my mother took care of me.”

That is the first day. In the beginning, one cannot concentrate, and the things we remember are superficial. It happens regularly that people do not remember anything. But on the third or fourth day, we gradually remember the details. Therefore, it is necessary to practice NAIKAN for a week.

Here is an example of a participant, who had reflected upon his relationship with both parents, and who reflected upon his mother a second time on the third day.

What she has done for me:

“She came to the sports event when I was in kindergarten.”

“The day of the excursion she dressed me in a long-sleeved shirt, because she feared that it would turn cold.”

“She came back from work and left again to buy pants and a white sweater which I could wear to the theater festival at school.”

What I have done for her:

“In kindergarten I made a paper brooch and gave it to her.”

“I painted a picture and gave it to her.”

Difficulties I have caused her:

“When I woke up in the middle of the night and wanted to go to the bathroom, I often woke my mother although she had been asleep.”

If one continues to practice NAIKAN, more memories will surface.

What she has done for me:

“She cut my nails with a special clipper.”

“Back in kindergarten, I had a favorite book – ‘My Clothes’. My mother read it to me very often.”

“When I had the flu, my mother took me to the hospital for a blood test. She praised me for not crying, although I got an injection.”

It continues.

If one keeps reflecting:

“My mother took the day off when we had a physical examination at school, and came with me.” That shows, that she took the time although she had work to do.

“Before I entered elementary school, my mother took me to school so I would be able to go there myself.” That means, she practiced the way to school with her son.

“She bought me a bike with extra-small wheels. I was sitting on the bike and my mother took me home.” In this case, the participant remembered very subtle things.

“At the sport event at school, she participated in the parents’ race.”

“After we had bought a book she gave me a piece of cake on the way home.”

“Back in kindergarten, when we went to the public pool, she let me sit and play on the air-mattress.”

“In summer, she inflated a children’s pool in the garden and let me play in it. On that particular day, she dressed me in a blue-and-white bathing suit.”

“One night, there was a loud storm. I was scared and slept in my mother’s bed.” This sounds as if the person can feel the warmth of the mother’s bed.

At the NAIKAN center, we look at ourselves, as mentioned before, until age six, and then report to the NAIKAN-guide, who has come for an interview. The conversation lasts about three minutes. Then we look at the period from age six to age ten, the time of school, etc., always in periods of three to five years, up until now, or until the person of focus has died. Afterwards, one reflects on the next person, again by thinking about the three questions, from childhood on. Thereby, we reflect on our life repeatedly for a week.

The NAIKAN-guide will merely listen politely and carefully to the findings of the participant. He does not evaluate or comment on the content. Neither does he give advice as to how to solve specific problems. Therefore, during NAIKAN we discover only things we have really come to think of ourselves. We have not “learned” from anybody how to analyze. So it is truly our own experience.

Chapter 5: Solving problems

How can NAIKAN solve problems?

Everybody remembers and profits from different things with the help of this method. Therefore, we do not know what we will get before practicing NAIKAN. But I believe that I can give an outline of what happens during NAIKAN, although we can never know exactly what we will get or how we will change. Practicing NAIKAN all senses become clear, and we are freed from entanglements.

Some people do not acknowledge the facts of the past and try to act as if certain events never took place. But if we try to deny our past, we also deny our present existence as the result of these events. By looking at reality from another perspective, we can accept this reality more easily. Thereby, we will be freed from the past.

In that line of argumentation, ‘the problem’ is also a kind of entanglement. If something does not work out as we expected, we hate the others and suffer because of that. Many people are being freed from hatred with the help of NAIKAN. At least, we are able to accept what has happened. A situation of hating somebody is not a happy situation. It would be better for us to get rid of the hatred and become happy, instead of claiming that the others deserved being the object of hatred. Freeing oneself from hatred is a source of psychic and physical health.

Some people suffer from the habit of judging others according to their own criterion, then trying to change the people so they will match their criterion. Criticizing an inconsiderate person for being inconsiderate is also inconsiderate. When we meet people who are blind, we give them our hand. We do not criticize someone for being blind. But we criticize the inconsiderate for being inconsiderate. That is nothing else than criticizing the blind for not being able to see. It is like criticizing the dog for not being a cat.

One participant in Germany had a mother who was an alcoholic. He could not remember what she had done for him. But on the fourth day he finally became aware that his mother

had been drunk and had prepared a meal for him. Afterwards, he came up with many more things that his mother had done for him. In the beginning, he had a hard time to remember anything at all, since he was looking for something that his mother had done for him in a sober state. His mother had done a lot for him; she had raised him drunken. After one week of NAIKAN, he noticed that his mother was, and is, an alcoholic. Theoretically, he had known that from the beginning. But for the first time he realized that his drunken mother had raised him for twenty years. We can say that he met his real mother for the first time.

Sometimes we are not able to accept ourselves. We are caught up in the thought that we should be better, and that we are not really ourselves. As a consequence, we may develop hatred for ourselves, negative feelings of guilt, or an inferiority complex. If we choose an imaginative 'better' self as criterion, and then look at our real self for a little while and do not accept it, we may get into such a situation. But doing NAIKAN, we see ourselves so clearly, that we cannot destroy this realistic picture of ourselves anymore; consequently, the discrepancy between the realistic self and the ideal, which we take to be the ultimate goal, dissolves. Since this discrepancy is being dissolved, we lose our hatred for ourselves, our inferiority complexes, our negative feelings of guilt.

In a nutshell: To look at reality through NAIKAN means to get rid of such entanglement.

The more we discover in the course of NAIKAN how much we had, the happier we become. A psychoanalyst says: "By doing psychoanalysis, the illness may be cured, but one does not become happy." Therefore, psychoanalysis does not have a future, if we do not integrate NAIKAN into the process. NAIKAN is designed on the basic principle of making people happier. Therefore we can say that "NAIKAN is a way to happiness".

In the long run, we determine ourselves whether we are happy or not. The question is whether we feel happy right now or not. Collecting examples of what others have done for us means to collect proofs of happiness. Therefore, NAIKAN is the 'search for happiness'. By practicing NAIKAN we become happy. That is NAIKAN.

I read a poem by Karl Busse. The content is as follows: "It is said that happiness lives behind the mountain. I walk a long way with other people and come back crying. It is said that happiness lives even further behind the mountain." He walked a long way in his search for happiness, but he returned in tears. He says that happiness is still far away, and he has not found it yet.

In contrast to this a Chinese poem says: "I have been looking for spring all day and could not find it. I returned with damaged straw-sandals." Until now it is equal to the poem of Karl Busse. "As it happens, I am walking under cherry blossoms on the way back." Maybe the blossoms were in his own garden. "The spring is upon a branch, and plenty." Spring was here, and he noticed it.

The situations and reactions were the same, but the result is a different one. To look for, and find, the cherry blossoms in one's own garden, that is NAIKAN. That means, the exercise is to realize that we are happy right now.

If we practice NAIKAN, not only will we be happy ourselves; the experience influences our environment in many ways. If we are happy ourselves, we can make happy the people around us. If we are in a bad mood and our face is sad, if we are dissatisfied, we make the people around us unhappy, and our environment will be an uncomfortable place to live in.

If we drag a problem with us, our descendants might inherit it. A woman said that whenever she came home from school, her mother would sit next to her, help her with the homework,

and make her practice calligraphy – that was something she hated. But she got the best grades in her class, and the teacher pinned her calligraphy to the wall. Even so, she hated her mother. She did not want her daughter to feel the same way about her, therefore she did not study with her as intensively. So she was called to school, and the teachers told her that her daughter could not fulfill the school's expectations.

One can assume that once this daughter has grown up and has become a mother herself, she will try to help her child with studying, feeling that her own mother has not done anything for her. In that manner, it continues from generation to generation. Nobody does it really for the children. Someone has to stop this repetition, or the circle will continue forever. Therefore, we can say that if we do NAIKAN, it will have an effect on our environment and our descendants.

As described so far, we can gain many important insights by practicing NAIKAN. We are enabled to see ourselves as we are now, to see our environment in a realistic light and in dimension.

Thereby, we learn to see the present situation, the source of problems, from the other side. As a result, we get rid of many different afflictions.

By NAIKAN we do not only get rid of suffering, sometimes psychosomatic illnesses disappear as well. NAIKAN also helps the treatment of alcoholism and eating-disorders. Therefore it is regarded and respected also as psychotherapy and is being used as 'NAIKAN-therapy'. Once a year, a NAIKAN Congress takes place in Japan, addressing, among other issues, the progress in research concerning the therapeutic success of the 'NAIKAN-therapy'.

Since 1991, an International NAIKAN Congress is organized every three years. NAIKAN-weeks are also held in Europe and America by now. More and more European and American psychologists, psychiatrics, and psychotherapists have come to acknowledge NAIKAN.

While the traditional western psychotherapy and psychiatry focuses rather on our 'feelings' in the past and the difficulties we had, NAIKAN concentrates on the 'facts' in our past. NAIKAN works with things someone has done for us, and with difficulties that we have caused. Therefore, NAIKAN is regarded in professional circles as a method which exceeds the limits of western psychotherapy and psychiatry.

Chapter 6: Question and Answer

I have talked about NAIKAN so far, but since the following questions are frequently asked, I will answer them in the following.

Question 1: Since I am doing reflections regularly, I do not see any point in practicing NAIKAN.

Some people say they do not need NAIKAN since they are doing reflections and keep a diary. But reflection, except an extraordinarily intense one, is not the same as NAIKAN. The reflection we usually know, we do only if our success is not sufficient and to tell us about our weaknesses. The difficulties we caused and try to reflect upon during NAIKAN, do not necessarily relate to whether we are successful or not. Even if we are studying for the entrance examination at university, we cause our environment difficulties. We study until

midnight, do not help with the household, are restless. The family has to turn down the volume of the television or dispense with an interesting program. If we pass the exam we grow proud, sometimes arrogant, as if we had passed it for the family's sake. If we fail, we feel alone and depressed, as if we were the main character in a tragedy.

During the 'normal' reflection we do not concern ourselves with the fact that we have been only studying; consequently, there are many things we do not realize, things we would have seen with the help of NAIKAN. This is illustrated by the previous example. The questions of NAIKAN are clear: they deal, among other topics, with the difficulties we have caused, independent of our success.

Question 2: Is one week enough for making profound discoveries?

Maybe there are people who think that one cannot make progress in a week's time. But if we seriously go about reflecting for a week, that makes ten hours a day, amounting to seventy hours altogether.

Usually, we do not look at our life from a different perspective for ten hours every day. If we do it for one hour each week, it takes over a year. Therefore we can say that one intensive week will last for a while.

Question 3: One week is too long.

Some people say that a week is too long. Why does it take that much time? But considering that we reflect upon our whole life, a week is not very long.

On pausing for five or six days, looking at the past, we will sometimes even remember the color of our tricycle. One will barely remember something like that after only one day. Additionally, NAIKAN is over after one week. While we are considering whether or not to do NAIKAN, a week has gone by very fast.

After doing a week of NAIKAN, one can get everything done, therefore a week is not a long time.

Question 4: I do not want to look back at my past.

Some people do not want to look back at their past because there are events they prefer not to remember. But avoiding to look at something means that one is carrying a burden.

We are carrying the facts from the past, when we have difficulties to accept them and wish that certain events had never taken place. It may be things that we observed as a burden, that we did not agree with. But to deny a part of the past is nothing else than denying our present self, since this is the result of the past. In that case, we cannot say that we live in the present. We live with denial and different fractures of the past:

Failed the entrance examinations two years ago.

Lost love five years ago.

Ran away from home twenty years ago.

Thirty years ago, the husband had an affair.

Forty years ago, the parents divorced.

And so on.

But denying these events, if 'only' subconsciously, means to deny everything, and life stops at that very moment. That is really horrible.

So we spend the rest of our life believing that the reason for our unhappiness lies buried in that incident.

When we practice NAIKAN, we will be confronted with such facts from the past.

We can acknowledge and accept them as what they are by exchanging the one-sided point of view against different perspectives. Only when that happens can we really forget these things.

Then we do not need to fear remembering any longer.

Therefore, looking at the past through NAIKAN is successful, in that we are freed from the chains of the past and are able to live in the present.

Question 5: The fear of recognizing oneself.

There are people who admit that they are afraid of realizing who they really are. That would be a convincing reason for hesitating to practice NAIKAN. It is a horrible thing to recognize oneself, for sure. But it would be much worse to live without ever getting to know oneself.

NAIKAN makes us recognize ourselves by looking at ourselves, not by someone else's telling us. Our image of ourselves is not being destroyed by others but by the fact that a new image is being constructed. It can be compared to a caterpillar, breaking through the cocoon from the inside, instead of having someone else break it from the outside.

If we claim that this is terrible, we will not turn into butterflies and fly into the amazing, wide sky in our whole life. This is a fact, no matter whether we look at ourselves or not.

I wish that you will look at yourself with courage.

Question 6: I fear being changed.

Some people say that they fear change. This may imply that they have no self-esteem.

If we really have confidence in ourselves, we will check whether we have weaknesses or disadvantages, and how we can improve. If we are afraid of changing, we might spend our whole lives like now, trying to protect ourselves. That would be worse, wouldn't it?

Maybe it is better to change the part that can be changed within a week as early as possible.

Question 7: Since I am suffering right now, I am not ready inside to practice NAIKAN.

Some people say that they cannot practice NAIKAN at the moment because their problems at present are too great. But if we are in a phase that leaves us unable to think about something else than the current ailment, our view is very narrow.

As I said before, people who commit suicide because they failed the exam have only had the choice between two alternatives – passing or dying.

If we practice NAIKAN at such a time and reflect upon what we have gotten from our parents, we will learn that we exist as a result of these things. Therefore, our value increases. And when we see that a self that exists here and now as the result of things rooted in the past, is suffering, we will perceive the problem as merely a problem that has to be solved.

Thereby, we are being freed from the narrow choice between passing or dying.

In the middle of suffering, we usually do not notice that the cherry blossom had been before our eyes and fallen from the tree. But NAIKAN helps us to achieve a broader view on life.

Therefore: when we think that we cannot commit ourselves to something like NAIKAN at the moment because the suffering is too great, it is the perfect time for NAIKAN.

Additionally, once we have experienced NAIKAN, we are able to solve the problems quietly, even if we will come across the big problem in the future.

Question 8: I do not need NAIKAN, but I would like someone else to practice NAIKAN.

When being told about NAIKAN, some people say that they understand how someone can profit from it; they feel they do not need to, but they want someone else to practice NAIKAN.

It is okay to put it like that, but still it would be better to look at oneself before, in order to get rid of one's own problems first. Sometimes we aim at letting other people do the changing so we will not have to improve ourselves.

That's why it could be important to examine why we want this person to do it. If you experience it first and recommend it to other people afterwards, we can do it with more conviction.

Question 9: There is a person that I don't want to look at during NAIKAN.

There are quite many people saying that they are ready to do NAIKAN toward the mother but not toward their father.

Even if we don't want to practice NAIKAN toward the father, because we don't like him or detest him, that means that we run away from reality.

We cannot say that we did not receive anything from the other person because we don't like her.

There is also the case that we absolutely cannot stand a person, even if we have been done a lot from her.

If we respect the other person or like him, we try to cause her not so many difficulties. But if we dislike or disdain her, it is possible that our manner how we answer when she talks to us is already offensive. It also can happen that we behave as if we had not heard when she talks to us.

So, to see the fact has nothing to do with liking or disliking a person.

Once a man gave me as reason why he didn't want to do NAIKAN: "I never talk to my father, I only say, "give me money". For this reason there is nothing he does for me and nothing where I cause him difficulties, so I don't want to do NAIKAN toward him." He usually does not talk to his father and only says, "give me money", if he needs money. And he says that there is nothing that he had been done.

But there is a possibility that the whole point of view has changed to this; that's why it is quite necessary to practice NAIKAN if you dislike or detest somebody.

There are people who can't sleep because they hate other people, but the persons who are purpose of this hate sleep very good. That means, those who hate are suffering.

Even if we hate somebody because of something that had happened twenty years ago and the person has apologized for that, the hatred would not disappear. This could also be the

case if the person is no more part of this world.

That's the reason why we have to free our heart from our own hatred.

By examining in such a point in life what we have been done from such a person and if we have caused difficulties, it becomes easier to accept the facts happened in our past being facts of our past. Even including events where we think we had been hurt from other people.

The successful outcome is being freed from the past.

Question 10: When, where and from whom NAIKAN has been developed?

The three questions of NAIKAN have been developed in Japan by Mr. Ishin Yoshimoto (1916-1988). Mister Yoshimoto developed the NAIKAN-method from the practical experiences collected during thirty years of working with people, as well as from the wish that all people in the world should be happy.

Through having developed NAIKAN, he gave the humans a method to fulfill our longstanding task: "understanding ourselves".

By now, NAIKAN is also established in Europe and America. Meanwhile, four NAIKAN centers have been founded in Europe, and many people practice NAIKAN each year.

Hereby, I have answered the questions most frequently asked with respect to NAIKAN.

Chapter 7: Epilogue

I have now introduced the sense and method of NAIKAN. There is little left to say. NAIKAN is a method and a means of looking at oneself. It makes no sense to know about the existence and the use of a tool if we do not use it. At present, there are more than twenty NAIKAN Centers in Japan. I hope that you will find the time to practice NAIKAN for a week. Because the things one discovers practising NAIKAN are individual, one never knows what will be revealed by NAIKAN. But it is beyond all doubt to say that one will lose the present sufferings, or at least make a huge step toward losing it.

When looking at the disposition of the more than 500 people to whom I have recommended NAIKAN, this is still obvious to me, whether they practiced NAIKAN last week of NAIKAN, or twenty, thirty years ago.

While thinking about whether one should practice NAIKAN in order to improve one's situation, a week passes by very fast. But simply doing NAIKAN, one is freed from one's afflictions after a week and new steps can be taken. There are innumerable instances of thirty years of suffering being ended with the help of NAIKAN. Yet, there are many people who are interested in the method, and put off their decision to do it for five or ten years. If such people make up their minds after five years to practice NAIKAN, they say afterwards: If I had done NAIKAN five years ago, I would have been spared five years of suffering.

European NAIKAN-guides have been asked several times in a critical tone, why they have not imported NAIKAN to Europe ten years ago, because in that case, the questioners would have been spared many problems.

Practicing NAIKAN means: pausing for a week, making a stop in the flow of time, and seeing life from the other side. If one is able to take the time to look at oneself, while other people restlessly strive forward, this is a very fortunate situation.

Of course it is not easy to take one week off for oneself. We might need the help of our environment. If one person changes, the people around might become happier as well.

I would be glad if you, too, would once pause for yourself and the ones around you, and stop the flow of time to look at yourself. This will lead to getting rid of your worries; it will result in your happiness and that of the people around you.



Prof. Akira Ishii is the person who introduced Naikan to many countries all over the world. He has a smooth and profound way to guide Naikan.

Prof. Akira Ishii ist vice president of the Japanese Naikan Association JNA. Prof. Ishii continues his work for Naikan in Europe and all over the world giving Naikan workshops, Naikan lessons and guiding Naikan retreats.