

The Inner Detective



Exploring reading we do for fun and relaxation as grist for the mill of our self-knowledge and spiritual growth.

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What Our Inner Detective Can Learn from

Miss Marple

The author of the Miss Marple detective stories, Agatha Christie, was born in 1890. It was while she was working as a nurse during World War I that she wrote her first detective story, *The Mysterious Affair At Styles*. Published in 1920, it introduced the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. Ten years later she wrote the first Miss Marple story, *Murder At The Vicarage*. In a career that spanned more than fifty years, Agatha Christie wrote eighty novels and short story collections, nineteen plays, one of which, *The Mousetrap*, is the longest running play in history, and five nonfiction books including her autobiography. In addition, she wrote six romantic novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. She is the most widely published author of all time. Her books are out sold only by the Bible and Shakespeare.

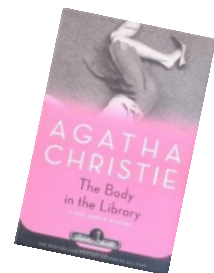
Miss Marple, an elderly spinster who lived her lifetime in the cozy English village of St. Mary Meade, is one of Agatha Christie's most popular detectives and was her favorite of the detectives she created. As a female detective, Miss Marple represents the feminine aspect of our being. As an elderly female, Miss Marple represents a specific expression of the feminine, the Crone. The Crone is the wise old woman of age, wit and wisdom who recognizes the truth and shares it with others. In the Gospels, we find a representation of the Crone in Luke's story of the birth of Jesus. Luke's story ends differently than the familiar ending in Matthew where Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus escape Herod's wrath by fleeing into Egypt. Luke's version of the birth story concludes with Joseph and Mary going to the Temple in Jerusalem for the ritual of purification for Mary, and for the circumcision and naming of baby Jesus. While they were there they encountered Anna.



“And, there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age...And coming up to the Temple at that very hour she gave thanks to God (upon seeing the baby Jesus) and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” (Luke 2:36-38) After this, Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus peacefully back home to Nazareth.

Our culture gives us few positive images of elderly females. Jane Marple accepts the wrinkles, frailty and grey hair that come to most of us with age. Because of our culture’s obsession with youth, today these signs of age are not accepted. The billion dollar industry of wrinkle removing creams and procedures, hair dye to remove the grey and plastic surgery, show our culture’s reluctance to embrace the elder/older stage of life. We have been given lives that unfold through stages from infancy to old age. Each stage is important and of value and must be accepted for us to live it to its maximum depth. In that way, we learn the lessons and receive the blessings of growth and full development of that stage of our life’s process. It is through the growth and development from each of life’s stages that we fulfill the true purpose of our lives.

When we are entertained by Miss Marple as she uses the wisdom and insight from her long life, we are honoring the elder stage of life the Crone represents. There is a great need for the wisdom of the *elders* in our lives today. Inspector Slack and the younger police officers see her as merely a gossipy old busy body and dismiss what she has to say. But, Sir Henry, head of Scotland Yard, knew the value of Miss Marple’s input. In *The Body In The Library* he recommends her to the invalid, Conway Jefferson, whose young friend had been murdered. *“You probably won’t believe me, but you’ve got an expert at solving mysteries sitting downstairs in the lounge at this minute.*



Someone who's better than I am at it...an old lady with a sweet, placid, spinsterish face and a mind that has plumbed the depths of human iniquity and taken it as all in the day's work. She's the goods, Conway." And thus she proved herself to be as she solved the mystery and saved Conway Jefferson's life.

Our inner detective can learn from Miss Marple the value of honoring and listening to the elders within us and our lives. In this age of modern technology and new information breakthroughs, we can become so involved in all things new that we fail to appreciate the *wisdom of the ages and the sages.*

Using this guided meditation, let us experience the wisdom of the elder within us. First, close your eyes. Sitting on a chair with your spine comfortably erect, relax your body for a minute or two, breathing deeply as you do so.

Imagine that it is a summer morning. You are in a valley. Gradually become aware of your environment...the air is clean and the sky is intensely blue, there are flowers and grass all around you. The breeze gently caresses your cheeks. Feel the contact of your feet with the ground. Take some time to become clearly aware of all these perceptions.

As you look around, you see a mountain. It towers close to you, and looking at its summit gives you a sense of extraordinary elevation. You know in your heart that you must climb the mountain.

To reach it you walk through a dense forest enjoying the pleasant aroma of pine trees as you reach a steep path. Walking uphill, you feel the muscular effort demanded of your legs and the energy that pleasantly animates your whole body.

As you approach the very top of the mountain, you become filled with an increased sense of awe and wonder. You are now on top of the mountain, on a vast plateau. The silence here is complete. The sky is a very deep blue.

Coming toward you is the elder within you, loving and ready to listen to what you have to say and tell you what you want to know. (Is the person a man or woman?)

You feel the presence of this person, giving you a deep sense of peace and well-being.

Now you are facing each other and you begin to talk about any problem, question or concern you have. Silent and attentive, you listen for the response. Then you speak again and listen again.

When the dialogue is complete the elder embraces you and withdraws into a circle of light.

As you bring your attention up behind your eyelids, easily move down the mountain to the valley. Take a couple of deep breaths and open your eyes.

Next, make a list of the elders in your life, both women and men:

- ◆ In your family?
- ◆ In your work place?
- ◆ Among your friends?
- ◆ In your community?

How can you become more open to receiving wisdom from these elders in your life?



In her own words, Miss Marple says that she is a “*noticing kind of person.*” Others said she was just nosy, and she was. In this she displayed an important detective skill — being curious. Being eager to learn and know what’s going on is required if we are going to be a detective. Miss Marple was inquisitive, knowing some clues would come to her and others she would have to go in search of. That is why she went with her friend Dolly Bantry (in whose library the dead girl’s body had been found) to the Majestic Hotel by the seaside. It was where the dead girl had worked so any clues to who murdered her would be there.



The importance of being curious and inquisitive is another lesson our inner detective can learn from Miss Marple. We must learn to seek out clues to what is going on within us and the situations that challenge us. We must follow up leads, hunches and insights. If they suggest action, take it; if they provoke questions, take the time to ask the elder within; ponder their significance for your inner life at this time. Be nosy. Be eager to learn and know more about you.



Being nosy, Miss Marple became aware of many aspects of typical human nature. In her investigations, she recognized the parallel to what she knew in different settings and on larger scales. When her insights were referred to as *women’s intuition* she denied it saying that they came from her specialized knowledge of typical human nature. Applying her specialized knowledge, she saw through the deception of the body in the library and set up a strategy that let the guilty parties reveal themselves.

Gaining specialized knowledge of typical human nature is work our inner detective must do. We gain this specialized knowledge by coming to

know ourselves. One of the illusions that can beguile us, as we seek to know ourselves, is that we are one consistent, always the same, self. Finding out that the contrary is true is among the first tasks that confronts the inner detective. The truth is, each of us is a crowd or multiplicity of “selves” or “I’s.” Each “self” or “I” has its own voice, attitude, and opinions. The many “I’s” may or may not agree with each other.



When we are not aware of them, they can take charge of us and control our behavior. We can easily see the multiple “I’s” within us by remembering a time when we went on a diet. We decided to give up desserts, for example, to reduce sugar in our diet and to lose weight. The “I” or “self” who makes this decision knows the health value of the decision and is committed to change eating behavior — no dessert. For several days, this “no dessert I” is in charge and we don’t eat dessert. However, a day comes when we’re tired and stressed and when the dessert cart rolls by, another “I” says, *“Go ahead and have one, it won’t hurt you,”* and before we know it we’re eating a sugar-filled dessert.

One “I” says, *“No dessert,”* while the other “I” says, *“It won’t hurt you,”* and they both live in us. They act out in our behavior in certain typical ways. At any time that we are unaware of them, we easily identify with them and they take charge making us think, feel, and do as they want us to. There are no inherently good or bad “I’s.” They are all expressions of vital elements of our being. They become harmful only when we are unaware of them and identified with them.

Since each “I” or “self” has a voice, we can become aware of it by listening to it’s voice in our head. This is self-observation and it is through self-observation that we gain specialized knowledge about our own typical

human behavior. When we are unaware of the voice of the “I” in our head, we identify with it. But, when we can hear and observe the “I” who is speaking in our head, we become aware we’re more than that “I.” There it is and here we are listening to it. As the listening observer, we can choose to go with it or say no to it. Knowing our typical behavior under the influence of certain “I’s” gives us a powerful detecting skill for gaining specialized knowledge of ourselves. Like Miss Marple, we will start to see parallels in other settings and on larger scales when we encounter them in others and the outer world.

In response to the popularity of Miss Marple, her stories are being retold on British television. However, in these new portrayals, Miss Marple is younger and more wrinkle-free than Christie’s character. Even as we enjoy the new Miss Marple, let us not forget the Miss Marple her author portrayed. That is because in Agatha Christie’s portrayal, there are important lessons and powerful insights for the work of our inner detectives.