

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 Sherlock Holmes

One of the most famous and popular of all fictional detectives is Sherlock Holmes. His creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, was a newly married general practitioner with ambitions to become a writer when, in 1886, he decided to write a detective story. However, the detective in his story would be very different from those in the stories then being published. Those detectives depended for success more on luck and the stupidity of the criminal than their own cleverness. His detective would employ scientific methods and logical deduction. He would have a practical, rational intelligence and be clever, resourceful and brave.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
1859 - 1930

In his first story, *A Study In Scarlet*, published in 1887, he brought to life a unique detective who clearly demonstrated those characteristics. In the story, Sherlock Holmes was sent for by Police Inspectors Lestrade and Gregson. They had been called to an unusual crime scene and they needed his help. In an old, abandoned hotel the body of a dead man had been found. Although there were no wounds on the body, the floor was covered in blood. On the wall of the room was a word written in blood. Sherlock Holmes used his remarkable powers of observation to carefully examine the body and the crime scene. Then he gave proof of his deductive powers.

“There has been murder done and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet tall, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off foreleg. These are only a few indications but they may assist you.”



Lestrade and Gregson, who had noticed none of these details, glanced at each other with an incredulous smile.

“If this man was murdered, how was it done?” asked Lestrade. *“Poison,”* said Sherlock Holmes curtly and strode off.

As Holmes used his powers of observation, so too, can we use ours. The things and conditions we see in the outer are the effects that have arisen from causes that are often invisible to us. For example, we begin our day desiring health, wealth and happiness but never notice that we spend the rest of the day thinking about just the opposite! There is no teaching in the world that can lead us to personal health and prosperity when we spend our days (and nights) inwardly indulging our emotions in feelings of lack, fear, and anxiety. We can't move ourselves out of these inner negative places if we don't know when we are in them.

Translating Holmes' skills in observation into the skill of “self-observation,” we can become aware of when we're in negative inner places. With awareness comes the power to choose and move to a better inner place. Self-observation is an important skill for the inner detective. We can observe ourselves because there is a dimension of our mind that is greater than our thinking self. This greater level of our mind can both observe and evaluate what the thinking self is doing. It is from this higher level of the mind that we observe ourselves.

What we are to observe are our thoughts and feelings. We do that by listening to the voice in our head and noticing the emotional response in our body. When we listen to our thought and observe the *feeling* response to it, in that moment we are in the level of mind greater than our thoughts and feelings. We are the presence which is listening and observing and we are empowered to choose and change ourselves on the inside.



- Start listening as often as you can to the inner talk in your head and notice its accompanying feelings in your body.
- Be a witness — there is the thought and feeling and here am I listening to and seeing it.
- Know you can choose to stay here or change to *a better place inside*.
- Choose to stay by letting the pattern of talk continue.
- Choose to move by using passages from scripture or other inspirational thoughts to help change what the voice in the head is saying.

Along with his powers of observation, Holmes used the power of *deductive thinking* to understand the meaning of what he observed. Using our power of deductive thinking, as he did, we can begin to understand the connection between what we're observing ourselves thinking and feeling on the inside, and what's going on in the outer conditions of our lives. Our personal world depends on our stream of thought for its prosperity, health, harmony and well-being in the same way a farmer's field depends on clean, unpolluted water to produce its maximum yield. We can look around our planet and see problems caused by pollution. Consider (using deductive thinking) what is happening in our bodies and affairs as a result of the polluted thoughts and feelings that we allow to reside in our minds and hearts. Mental pollution describes thoughts feelings, and attitudes that are basically negative.

The Bible states the importance of what we think in Proverbs 23:7, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*" A proverb from the Buddhist *Tripitaka* reminds us, "*All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts and is made up of our thoughts.*" Because thoughts are invisible, we may not be aware of their tangible existence. Also, the material manifestation of thoughts may come hours,

days, months after their inception, as ideas. It would be a mistake to underestimate the power of our thoughts and feelings. If we think negative thoughts we become negative, reactive and uncreative. If we think positive thoughts and seek the good in every person or situation we encounter, we will experience a positive attitude and disposition that manifest positive conditions in our lives.

Using our inner detective skills of self-observation and deductive thinking we can learn to discipline and direct our thinking. We can focus on thoughts and behavior that build up rather than tear down. *“Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* (Philippians 4:8)

There is no doubt Sherlock Holes possessed many wonderful qualities. He represents an archetype and by definition an archetype has both positive and negative expressions. Thus we see both positive and negative qualities in Sherlock Holmes.

His major shortcoming was manifest in behavior that the stories, and indeed our whole culture, glorifies as virtuous. He was a workaholic. With the conclusion of each case he was impatient for the next one to begin. Holmes would not let himself rest or play. Ruled by the focused and goal oriented masculine energies, he must be busy constantly. Working, which can be one of the most important ways we express ourselves, becomes a dysfunctional process when we don't balance it with rest,



relaxation, and play. It is dysfunctional because it keeps us from functioning in ways that are mature and healthy.

There is a difference between zestful work toward a cherished goal and workaholism. The difference lies less in the hours spent working than it does with the

emotional and mental quality of those hours. For a workaholic, work is synonymous with worth and virtue. The phrase, “I’m working” has a certain air of goodness and duty to it. It can make us feel important that we have *so much* work to do. The truth is we are very often overworking to avoid ourselves, others, and/or some aspect of our outer world. Let us evaluate our work habits by reflecting on some of the questions from “The Workaholic Quiz, in *The Artist’s Way*, by Julia Cameron.

1. I take work with me on the weekends, on vacation:

seldom often never?

2. My family and friends complain that I am always working:

seldom often never?

3. I try to do two things at once:

seldom often never?

4. I allow myself free time between projects:

seldom often never?

5. I set out to do one job and start on three more at the same time:

seldom often never?

6. I allow myself downtime to do nothing:

seldom often never?

To recover from workaholism, Julia Cameron writes, we must come to understand that it is a block between us and our good instead of being a building block of our good. If we have no time for rest and play, make some! It is more likely we have the time but are misusing it.

- Post a sign in your work area and where you will see it often if you are living in an overworking manner:

*“Workaholism is a block to my good,
not a building block of my good!”*

- Deliberately choose to bring into your life some ease, and space for rest, relaxation and play.

Arthur Conan Doyle created in Sherlock Holmes a believable character who has come alive in the minds and hearts of millions of people for over a century. When he grew tired of writing about Homes, he killed him off. In *The Final Problem*, Holmes and his arch enemy Professor Moriarity plunge to their deaths over a waterfall. There was such a public outcry that he had to *bring Holmes back from the dead*. He did this in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

The reason for the public’s love of this character was the combination of light and darkness, strengths and weaknesses he displayed. Awareness of his shortcomings did not diminish him, but endeared him to people as they saw in him some of their own strengths and shortcomings.

As a lesson for our inner detective today, *“The adventures of Sherlock Holmes become again what Doyle meant them to be: parables and metaphysical mirrors of life, case histories of the laws of Providence and karma.”* (From an updated review in *High Times*.)

