

Introverts, Extraverts, and Spirituality

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In daily speech, an introvert is a shy, reticent person, a recluse, a lone wolf, a hermit, or an outsider. It is considered a bad thing to be in our culture. The extravert, on the other hand, is outgoing, expressive, sociable, a mixer, a mingler, a social butterfly, and a party animal. It is what every introverted wallflower is thought to aspire to.

Although these meanings dominate our understanding, they are not what Carl Jung had in mind when he originated the terms. Jung was more concerned with defining a spiritual, psychological, and intellectual orientation or inclination than with rating social aptitude. He asked where a person's interest is focused. What captures a person's attention?

The introvert looks inward. Its Latin roots—“intro” and “vertere”—mean to turn or look inward or within. The introvert is focused on his or her inner life, on what's going on inside. For the introvert, the entire outer world is a projection of what is within. That is, even when an introvert is looking outward, she sees a symbolic representation of herself. Her outer world is one of signs and symbols that reflect the energies and qualities that live within.

Hence, the introvert's world is an intangible realm of ideas, images, and values. It is fluid and easily changed. And since all is ultimately abstract, there is little difference for the introvert between time spent waking or dreaming or daydreaming—or for that matter, time immersed in literature, art, or music. Each of these worlds is ultimately that person's inner reality--or a representation of it—a screen where the inner being is projected so it can be seen. Material “reality” has little intrinsic value for the introvert; it is not important as an independent, free-standing existence.

This is why the introvert seems withdrawn or detached from outer reality and its values, issues, and presences.

The extravert, however, looks outward, as the name suggests. The extravert is focused on the material world of things. She defines herself by how she fits into this world. The material world is the ultimate reality for the extravert, and it must be adjusted to. What is inside is of secondary importance and is shaped or defined by what is outside. The subject's thoughts and dreams are airy nothings compared to the solid material world of daily life and the people who inhabit it. Where the introvert contemplates herself, the extravert reacts to her world. It is her defining reality.

This quick sketch of introversion and extraversion is based on extremes. And Jung once wrote: "There is no such thing as a pure extravert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be in the lunatic asylum." Jung believed that people existed along a continuum between pure introversion and pure extraversion and most are not near the poles. Indeed, some may be ambiverts right in the center.

In his book *Psychological Types*, Jung argued that each of us fits best in one of the two categories—which he saw embodied in Apollo and Dionysus. They are suggested by the masks of Comedy—which treats humanity thinking--and Tragedy—portraying humanity feeling. Comedy invites us to judge while tragedy demands empathy.

Jung chose Apollo, who symbolized contemplation, inner vision, reason, and the mind, to represent the introvert. He chose Dionysus—who symbolized energy, irrationality, chaos, joy, and pleasure—to represent the extravert.

According to David Langness, "Jung believed that the true difference between these two types of people was the head and the heart. Introverts

see the world subjectively; extraverts see it objectively. Rather than a measure of how outgoing and sociable a person tends to be, Jung viewed extraversion as a characteristic most prominent and useful in the first half of life, which involves ego building and making one's way in the world; and introversion as a virtue that arose and dominated in the second half, when we try to figure out who we are and what our lives mean. As he once wrote: 'Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.'

This reflective, meditative faculty of introversion, Jung believed, exists to allow us to contemplate our mortality, to explore our inner being, and to hear the true desire of our hearts. It prompts us toward introspection, to turn within and tend to our souls. That "soul-tending" can incorporate our dreams, our intuition, our myths, and our innate love of mystery into our inmost reality—including the aspect of ourselves that exists outside space and time."

Further, whole cultures are either introverted or extraverted. The USA is an example of an extraverted culture, and India is an introverted one. Similarly, different ages also fall on the spectrum. Our scientific era is extraverted while the more spiritual Middle Ages were introverted. When I suggested earlier some think it better to be extraverted, it was simply because we live in an extraverted time and place. There are advantages to being in the majority.

All of this begs the question: What does it matter where our focus lies? It matters in two ways. First, it determines whether we spend more time in the abstract world of spirit or in the concrete, scientific world of fact and matter. Second, it determines the character of the world as we see it.

Is it fluid and easily changed, or is it rigid and seemingly permanent? That is, we tend to be as rigid or as flexible as how we perceive our world to be.

The introvert's world is abstract and fluid. It evolves, and all sorts of possibilities pop into the imagination. Since all is a flow, the future is always the focal point. The extravert is tied to the concreteness of the present. It's hard to imagine the future being any different from the present, but we can look back at the past. Anything that cannot be counted, weighed, and measured is suspect.

Spirituality is naturally introverted. It is personal and involves a dialogue with the Divine through interpretation of the material world as symbol and archetype. The spiritual person speaks with all around him about who he is.

Organized religion is naturally extraverted. It is concerned with behavior governed by objective and external rules, authorities, and texts shared by many. Again, there are spiritual extraverts and religious introverts, and I am here only talking about the nature of these forms of spiritual practice.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that an extraverted Christianity centers on Jesus, a God made flesh or material. It relies on physical authority in the form of a Bible, a Creed, or a Pope. It describes heaven as a physical city with mansions and streets of gold; evil is personified in Satan. Introverted spirituality centers on an abstract Holy Spirit. It relies on contemplation and intuition for abstract guidance. It tends to shy away from anthropomorphic embodiments of God, and it thinks of individuation or enlightenment rather than a physical heaven as a goal.

Finally, Jungians think our goal in living is to become that person we were born to be, sorting ourselves out from all the distractions of our culture

and surroundings. We must also confront our inner shadows and come to better understand the swirl of emotions, memories, perceptions, and wishes that frame the key issues in our lives. A first step in this process is to learn if we are introverted or extraverted. Carl Jung wrote, “As the man is, so will be his ultimate truth.”

Please take the little test quickly to see if you are an introvert or an extrovert—if you don’t already know. All “A”s are extroverts and “B”s are introverts. All As go to there and all Bs or introverts there. He is David to tell you a little more about yourselves.

Are You an Introvert or an Extrovert?

Please read the statements below and choose either set A or B.

*Which set carries the most weight for you, even if only slightly? Some statements in both sets will ring true for you. The question is, which **set** is most basic to you. Which set, though it might not fit perfectly, fits a just a little better than the other?*

Set A (*Extrovert*)

- Though I sometimes need time alone, my life energy usually feels strongest and clearest when I am doing things with other people.
- Though I do take note of my own thoughts and feelings, I tend to be even more aware of others' expectations and feel best when I can meet them.
- My active side tends to be stronger than my reflective side; I usually welcome stimulation from outer life and tend to get depressed if I am alone too long.

Set B (*Introvert*)

- Though I like being with other people from time to time, my life energy usually feels strongest and clearest when I am by myself following my own interests.
- Though I do take note of others' expectations, I tend to be even more aware of my own thoughts and feelings and feel best when I can honor them.
- My reflective side tends to be stronger than my active side; I usually welcome privacy and tend to get overwhelmed by too much stimulation from outer life.