

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of November 19, 2003

Dear Reader,

How can one best establish a schedule for doing self-hypnosis? Those who are doing it regularly are experiencing changes that will bring maximal emotional comfort. While this process takes time to complete, people typically begin to feel better shortly after beginning, and continue to experience improvement all along the way.

As you have discovered, learning how to do self-hypnosis is not difficult, and some of you have also established a schedule without much trouble. For others, developing a routine has been a stumbling block. A schedule need not be rigid. Self-hypnosis can be done at any time, and at different times on different days. It can be done in many different locations, wherever external stimuli can be minimized. I know a person who is even able to do it on the train.

The reason why it is necessary to do self-hypnosis regularly is that the Inner Guide needs this time in order to bring new solutions into awareness. Whenever you are made uncomfortable, the Inner Guide can access a solution to the discomfort instantly. (When your Inner Guide first comes into being, it accesses the solutions to your ongoing, chronic disequilibria immediately.) It can also arrange fairly quickly for complex stimuli to occur so that a new solution can be locked in. It is bringing the solution into awareness that takes time. The more significant the change, the longer it takes for its novelty to wane sufficiently so that it can enter awareness.

Those of you who have practiced meditation regularly have already established that habit. But even you have had to change your procedure, so that you are wishing specifically for your Inner Guide to grow and strengthen, and so that you minimize all stimuli (no guided imagery, etc.) in order to enter the self-hypnotic state.

Those of you who have already developed the habit pattern of establishing routines as a way of decreasing discomfort have needed only to establish one more. That is even easier. Generalization of a habit pattern occurs naturally.

But what about the rest of us? Why have some of us done self-hypnosis regularly and others not? What has prevented some from establishing the habit? A person might wish to, and start out with good intentions. She might do self-hypnosis several times but then taper off.

We know from learning theory that behavior that is not rewarded becomes extinguished. When one begins self-hypnosis, changes do not occur immediately. There is only the sense of relaxation, and as one experiences it repeatedly, its novelty wanes. Self-hypnosis may become like a chore for which there is no reward.



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On the other hand, self-hypnosis can be seen as a wonderful adventure. What is this inner entity that can become so helpful? What will one's Inner Guide be like? How will it help? Will it communicate? Will it answer questions? Give advice? Which discomfort will it address first?

When I began doing self-hypnosis, I didn't realize what I would discover. I was hoping to find what has been called an "Inner Advisor," a part of the mind that would answer questions that I asked of it, answers that were based on all the knowledge that had been stored in my mind, more knowledge than I had access to in awareness. I was surprised to learn from my inner entity that it wasn't an Inner Advisor, but an Inner Guide. What is the difference? An Inner Advisor is passive. It responds only to questions that are asked of it. An Inner Guide is active. It perceives all of one's discomforts, including those that arose during infancy and childhood. It perceives how and why they began, accesses solutions to them, and works to bring those solutions into awareness so that we can act on them. An Inner Advisor can only respond to questions that we know to ask it. An Inner Guide knows the solutions to problems that we don't even realize we have, problems that create the discomforts that we are aware of.

For example, a man who feels unappreciated at work asks an Inner Advisor, "How can I get promoted?" The Inner Advisor, perceiving the reason for the man's failure, answers, "By being more assertive." The man is surprised, impressed, and appreciative. He hadn't realized that he wasn't sufficiently assertive, and he tries to be more so. But his timidity is there for a reason. It has become a habit pattern that has arisen (and been locked in) as a result of an early trauma. He strains to be more assertive, but finds it very difficult and anxiety provoking. He isn't able to overcome his timidity. If he asked an Inner Guide the same question, he might receive the reply, "I'm working on it." An Inner Guide would have identified the early trauma, accessed a solution (the trauma is over, you are safe now), provided a complex stimulus to lock in a new response of appropriate assertiveness, and be working to bring the new knowledge into awareness. This would take some time, because the implications of not having to be timid would be overwhelming.

Why did I develop an Inner Guide when I thought I was looking for an Inner Advisor? I was wishing for a helpful entity, one that would apparently have its own sense of identity, one that that would solve problems and therefore make me more comfortable. Without realizing it, I was looking for more than advice. The kinds of problems that I wanted help with involved comfort. That is what developed, the entity whose definition we are all familiar with now: an entity that is composed of all our experiences of restored comfort, a sense of its own identity, and a wish to be helpful.

I have come to realize that people who have trouble establishing a routine, those whose practice of self-hypnosis tapers off and ends, are those who experience it as a chore. One more thing to do during a busy day. Or one more task that seems less enjoyable or interesting than their other activities. How can they be helped to continue with it? How can self-hypnosis be experienced, not as a chore, but as an adventure?

If a person has a vision of what she hopes to achieve, a goal, it serves as a stimulus that evokes the response that will help her persist in the absence of immediate reward. Many children develop visions of accomplishments that they would like to achieve; visions that cause them to pursue goals that often aren't even realistic. How many young people spend years attempting to become professional athletes, ballerinas, movie stars, astronauts, or musicians? A vision serves as a powerful stimulus that can evoke responses of intense and prolonged effort and study. But if a child doesn't envisage becoming a musician, piano practice becomes a chore.

As one does self-hypnosis, just as the feeling of relaxation loses its novelty and becomes an insufficient stimulus, so, too, does the anticipation of solutions to one's discomforts. When one doesn't yet know what the solutions will be, there is nothing to hold the attention. One cannot think for long about an unknown. A vision is needed. It will help to think about the Inner Guide itself, because it is something that one can visualize. Although your image of it may be inaccurate, it is concrete. In most instances, its true image will be a representation of your ideal self. What would you like for that to be? What will it look like? What will it sound like? What might it say to you? What might you say to it? You can begin talking to your Inner Guide (silently, so as not to bring yourself out of self-hypnosis) even before it makes contact with you. And as you do, you will be providing it with additional stimulation that will facilitate its growth and emergence. Your vision of your Inner Guide can help to tide you over the first weeks or months of self-hypnosis until you begin feeling its effects.

QUESTION:

“In meditation, taking deep breaths helps me go deeper. Will that help with self-hypnosis?”

ANSWER:

No. Just as guided imagery or repeating a phrase would provide stimulation, so too would taking deep breaths. One wants to minimize all stimuli in order to enter the self-hypnotic state. Once your eyes close and your body relaxes, your Inner Guide has become dominant. That is all that is necessary. Whether or not you go deep on any given day depends on what else is going on in your mind out of awareness. The Inner Guide can do its work just as effectively whether or not you go deep.

I welcome your questions and comments, and will publish as many of them as possible. I look forward to hearing from you, either by post or at info@davis-foundation.org. If you would like to be anonymous, just let me know.

Cordially,

Judith M. Davis