

## NLP and Guided Meditation

On the level of physiology there is little difference between meditation, guided meditation, hypnosis and mystical experience. All of them share a general change in consciousness to either an intense inward or intense outward focus; activating parts of the brain that favor positive feelings over negative, wholeness rather than fragments and suspend disbelief in favor of present experience and suggestion.

These altered states of consciousness can be used to foster healing and to create inspiration or insight. They can provide a respite from the world's problems or a safe place of personal refuge and refreshment. Depending on the frame, they can be used as portals to spiritual experience—whatever that means—and almost any other thing that can be imagined.

All of these states begin with the simple transformation of ordinary consciousness into a clearly altered state. Permissive suggestion in the Ericksonian mode follows the pattern of mindfulness meditation in which the attention is gently drawn back to a center of attention or focus. In my practice, I begin with the memory of a single, specific, positive experience of love or joy or competence. Sometimes it is a state that is particularly relevant to the needs at hand. It should be something complete in itself and without baggage. The group or individual is asked to focus on the best few seconds of the experience and to associate fully into the state, noticing the difference between thinking about the experience and experiencing it from within.

*... And as you step all the way into the experience, see what you saw, hear what you heard and feel, from within your own body and senses, the experiences you were experiencing, NOW.*

Because the brain preferentially attends to bright moving objects we can follow Richard Bandler's good example and have them begin by making the experience bigger and brighter and closer. Have them turn on the sound and turn up the brightness: "*... in a way...that's right.... for you.*"

As we give them a little time for each experience to settle in, we can suggest that they *... notice whether the image of the experience is moving or still and if it is still, you can notice how it moves, and as you notice how it moves, turn on the sound, turn up the volume, and notice, really notice, how the sound and the picture move together.* ... In doing this we take advantage of the way the brain's superior and inferior colliculi mark auditory visual synchronies as particularly worthy of our attention.

By this point, our language will have already shifted so that we are no longer talking about the memory but about the present time experience of manipulating the experience. Steve Andreas points out that even if we started with a memory, by shifting our language to the present time experience, we ensure full, present-time association, by talking about this experience NOW.

As with all good NLP, the quality of the experience depends crucially on the presenter's ability to evoke a powerful, multisensory experience. Once more, the more senses that the experience incorporates the more value (salience) the brain accords it. Multi-sensory experiences are treated by the brain as more important than less fully represented experiences.

Crucially, language, pace and rapport can make or break the quality of the experience. For persons aspiring to evoke powerful experiences, all of the subtleties of tone, inflection and wordplay are crucial. In general, meditations should use the command inflection—the sentence ends on a lower tone than the rest of the sentence. Metaphors of depth should be modeled in tone and voice position:

**all the way down**

Ambiguities of structure and punctuation should also be used. Long pauses between phrases can aid the induction significantly.

During the initial access, emphasize that the process is gentle and easy. Tell them to *“Gently turn your attention to the very best part.”* You might also try, *“Allow your attention to gently rest on...”* They might also *“Begin to notice all of the aspects of the very best part of this experience that you have not yet noticed before, now.”*

Meditation and hypnosis rely heavily on the limited capacities of conscious attention. As a result, one of our foci is attentional overload. Since we can only attend to about seven things at once, we need to fill up consciousness so that unconscious process can take over. Have the group turn their attention to the center of the feeling. Let them begin to notice how it moves. *“And I don’t know whether it moves clockwise or counter clockwise, whether it moves like a wheel or like a turntable.”* However it moves, tell them to *“... reach out with imaginary hands and trace the loop or the circle so that it loops back upon itself and begins to increase in intensity. If the pattern is incomplete, let those imaginary hands complete the full pattern.”* Then add in the impossible dimensions of the feeling: color, sound, sparkles and whatever else you can come up with.

As in classical hypnosis, fractionation significantly impacts the depth of state and the comfort level of the participants. After a period of working on the initial state, bring them back to talk about it. Leave them with a suggestion that they can allow the state to continue to grow and increase as they JUST open their eyes and talk to you for a minute. Stop for a minute, remind them that the state will continue to build all by itself for the next 20 minutes and get them to tell you about how good the experience is. Then have them shut their eyes and zoom back to the very best part.

Spiritual experiences arise when the frame or style of suggestion incorporates mystical, religious or spiritual themes into the induction or the ongoing trance narrative. These elements might range from the overtly religious descriptions of the life and sufferings of Christ, or one of the saints, to a classical Buddhist deity meditation in which the qualities, attributes and spiritual implements of the god are described in detail.

Less religious and more mystical or spiritual experiences can be generated by focusing on complex images, nature images and metaphorical images. Imagining a stone dropped in a pool of still water and the resonant radiation of waves of relationship and positive feeling resonates strongly as a mystical image. Just so, multiple raindrops falling into a quiet pond radiate and interrelate and communicate,

crossing and meeting and connecting so that the whole is comprehended in the movement and resonances as each falls into its own place in the pattern of the eternal dimensions of interconnected wonder.... Similarly the image of the net of Indra, the interweaving pattern of holographic connections in which each line in a web of connections is imagined as a jewel which is reflecting every other jewel in every other part of the net, all reflecting each and each reflecting all, is a powerfully evocative image.

In a recent meditation, I used the image of a seed, growing down into the solid earth to draw nourishment and stability as its essence joins and interweaves and interpenetrates with the warm, moist, nourishing earth; reaching down into unknown depths to find exactly what it needs. Simultaneously, the shoot reaches out towards the sun and sky, and making its way through the darkness, past or through every obstacle, it finds its way to the warm, eternal, life giving light. Natural metaphors can awaken deep experiences of nature spirituality.

Images from classical spirituality can also be valuable. In the spirit of a confusion induction, the impossible spiritual complexity of angelic visions can awaken powerful experiences. ...And if you listen carefully, you may begin to hear the rustle of the rainbow-hued wings of angel choruses, sparkling and singing impossible harmonies in complex rounds of living energy, swirling in circles of perfect order, winding and turning in the exquisite dance of eternity....

Every tradition has a set of canonical images that can be used to awaken appropriate responses for meditation. There are also fairly formulaic phrases that, although separated from any kind of religious or spiritual language, are strongly evocative. For any Christian raised with the King James Bible, the simple dimensional words, "*breadth*, and *length*, and *depth*, and *height*" are *inextricably linked to the passage from Ephesians*, "*And that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.*" Dropped into a description of an internal state, the state is inevitably and unconsciously understood as spiritual.

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