Chapter Eleven

Self-Hypnosis & The Power of Suggestion

Begin with the study of self, which may be best done by suggestive forces to the body through hypnosis. Edgar Cayce 3483-1

No doubt you have heard stories of the dramatic power of hypnosis. Hypnosis has been used to remove warts, stop bleeding, and eliminate pain.

After undergoing a period of scorn, hypnosis was accepted in 1959 by the American Medical Association as a useful adjunct to medical analgesia. Hypnosis can be so effective as a pain killer that it has been used in place of surgical anaesthesia in both Caeserian section deliveries and amputations.

These miracles of hypnosis reveal the powers of the mind. Yet such amazing stories make hypnosis look like some deeply mysterious and magical potion. It makes hypnosis seem far removed from our ordinary life. One moment we glimpse the powers of the mind, then they disappear behind the veil of a secret process.

The truth of the matter is that hypnosis is quite ordinary. We enter states of hypnosis every day. Each night as we fall asleep, we pass through a hypnotic state. We become lost in thought, hypnotized by our daydreams. Our favorite television show absorbs our attention. The story is real to us and we laugh and cry. We are hypnotized by the electronic reality in front of us. We are subject to the suggestions implicit in television commercials. Our days our filled with the events of hypnosis. Three very ordinary processes are involved in hypnosis: relaxation, suggestion and imagery. Under the right circumstances, any one of these processes may create a hypnotic effect.

Hypnotic effects occur through the action of the subconscious mind. The subconscious operates through suggestion and imagery. When the conscious mind is relaxed, the subconscious mind can be reached directly. It is thus easiest to work with hypnosis in a special state of relaxation. Hypnosis is simply a way to communicate with the subconscious.
The Pre-Sleep State: Self-Hypnosis Every Night

The time of falling asleep at night, Cayce noted, is the most natural hypnotic state. You’ve experienced hypnosis every night of your life!

As we fall asleep, you may recall, the body relaxes and the senses shut down. The conscious mind dims. As external reality fades away, our own thoughts become reality. The subconscious mind emerges as the dominating consciousness. The subconscious accepts its imaginings as reality.

The time of falling asleep is a perfect time to make suggestions to the subconscious mind. Cayce often recommended the pre-sleep state as a golden opportunity to plant thought seeds of a new life. We will learn how to use the pre-sleep state ourselves, to give our subconscious mind positive programming. It can become a major tool in using deeper mind power to achieve our goals.

Cayce also advised parents to use the pre-sleep state to the child’s advantage. It is a natural extension of the bedtime story and bedtime prayers. It is a time to help the child establish a positive outlook on life. It is also a time to plant positive alternatives to problem behaviors.

Cayce prescribed to parents the use of pre-sleep suggestion for children’s psychological, psychosomatic and physical problems as well. Nightmares, bed-wetting, bad habits, as well as conditions such as hyperactivity. The subconscious mind controls the operation of the body. It stands in between our thoughts and their physical consequences. Thus Cayce recommended the use of pre-sleep suggestion to shape the influence of the subconscious in bringing healing to the body.

The Miracle of Jennifer

One of the most dramatic cases of the use of suggestion in restoring a child to health is told by the child’s mother, Cynthia Pike Ouellette, in her book, *The miracle of suggestion: The story of Jennifer*. Because of her mother’s own sudden, severe infection, Jennifer was born eleven weeks prematurely. She weighed only two pounds and was infected herself. The doctors said she had no hope of survival, as she was severely jaundiced, suffered from seizures and hydrocephalus, and was experiencing occasional cardiac arrest and difficulty in breathing. Jennifer’s mother, however, had reasons to believe that her baby daughter would survive. The next day Jennifer almost died and was saved through a blood transfusion. The doctors were now predicting that if
Jennifer survived, she would be severely handicapped, with damage to her eyes, brain and lungs, and would very likely be mentally retarded.

Almost every day in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit, Jennifer suffered some type of setback. Almost every day the doctors discovered another malady in Jennifer’s tiny body. Jennifer’s faith in her daughter’s recovery was unshakable and she found herself constantly talking to her. She couldn’t touch her, as Jennifer’s body found touch painful, so mother’s only way to be in contact with Jennifer was through talking. She reassured Jennifer that everything would be fine. Then she began to describe for Jennifer how her body was healing itself. Without knowing it at the time, she was giving her daughter suggestions of healing.

By one month, Jennifer weighed three pounds. She was able to leave the intensive care unit and move into an observational unit. By nine weeks, weighing about six pounds, Jennifer left the hospital to go home with her mother. The problems were not left behind, however, and there were further discouragements. By the seventh month, the doctors’ prediction that Jennifer would develop cerebral palsy was confirmed. In a moment of despair, when Jennifer’s mother was wondering how her daughter was managing to survive all these problems, it occurred to her that it was because of all their talks. She was convinced of it and began to research the power of suggestion. It was at that point that she discovered the work of learned to say that nothing was wrong, that Jennifer was perfectly healthy, and to believe it.

Against terrible odds, having only the will to live, the atmosphere of positive suggestions, along with the massages and other forms of tender loving care, Jennifer gradually evolved into a healthy young girl.

**Subliminal Suggestion & Self-Help Tapes**

Positive thinking and auto-suggestion has been a popular self-help strategy since the early 1900’s. Today it has taken on more sophistication. Pre-recorded audiocassettes containing self-help suggestions has become a mass market item. Especially appealing are the tapes that offer subliminal suggestions hidden within pleasant background music.

Stick a portable cassette player in your pocket. Place an tiny earphone discretely in your ear. As you go about your business, at work and at home, you hear soothing music. All the while, you realize, subliminal messages are silently nudging your subconscious. You are free from smoke, you are thin, you are healthy,
wealthy and wise. As you pursue your normal routine, your subconscious mind is imprinting a new program for living. It requires no effort on your part. You simply reap the benefits of the principles of dynamic psychology applied with the latest in modern technology.

It sounds too good to be true. Although based on sound, and established principles, subliminal tapes promise more than they deliver. Cayce would suggest, on the other hand, that these deliver something that they don’t mention. The issue of commercial tapes, offering suggestions and subliminal suggestions deserves some detailed discussion.

It is true that the subconscious mind is capable of detecting information that is invisible to the conscious mind. It is quite sensitive to subliminal stimulation. We have already examined some of the research that indicates the incredible extent of this sensitivity. Subliminal stimulation definitely is a way to bypass the conscious mind and communicate directly with the subconscious. That much is true.

One problem, however, is that subliminal stimulation is a fickle process. For example, to place a voice script into some music so that the voice functions as a subliminal message requires experimental testing to get it right. If the voice is too loud, anyone can hear the message. It’s no longer subliminal. If the voice is too soft, only the most discriminating subconscious mind detects it. Many others miss it. The conditions under which the recording is then listened to will also influence whether or not the subliminal message will get through.

Laboratory research on subliminal stimulation requires extensive pretesting to find the exact intensity needed to create the subliminal effect for the average listener. Because any melody will vary in loudness from moment to moment, the laboratory must calibrate each insertion to fit with the loudness of that part of the music. These seemingly minor technical considerations are very important. They are also time-consuming and can be expensive.

Assuming that a commercial producer of subliminal tapes performs the necessary experimentation to properly calibrate the subliminal message, another question then arises. What is the effect on the listener of the subliminal message? As of this writing (Spring, 1988) no commercial producer of self-help subliminal suggestion cassettes has published any studies to indicate that their product does indeed produce changes in people’s behavior.

Laboratory research has established that subliminal stimulation affects how a person experiences the foreground stimulation. If I show you a picture of a person’s face, for example, I can use subliminal stimulation
to affect how you will interpret the expression on that face. If I subliminally flash the word, “angry,” superimposing it over the face, you will interpret the person’s expression as being more angry than if I flash the word, “happy.” Earlier we saw how subliminal messages hidden in a piece of music affected the listener’s daydream and associations to the music. In other words, what researchers have learned most about subliminal stimulation is how it influences conscious experience. It tends to bend our conscious perceptions in a direction suggested by the subliminal message. That fact is quite well established.

Contrary to popular opinion, however, most of the research on subliminal stimulation has not focussed on motivational suggestion. It is commonly assumed that research on subliminal stimulation has studied the effect of messages like, “buy popcorn!” on people’s popcorn buying habits. There have been very few published studies, actually, of that sort and they have yielded contradictory results.

The popular imagination may assume that Big Brother has been working hard in secret laboratories learning how to influence people through subliminal suggestion. Big Brother, however, has not published the results of this research.

Mommy and I are One

There has been, however, a substantial body of published research investigating the positive effects on behavior of one particular subliminal suggestion. To be effective, it requires a situation where a person is already motivated toward a particular goal and is already making active efforts to reach that goal. In such cases, exposures to this subliminal message have proven to substantially improve a person’s success. Mathematics students scored higher on their math quizzes. People in therapy for depression experienced an elevation of their mood. People in treatment for drug addiction, alcoholism or smoking were able to abstain for much longer periods of time. These are just the sort of subliminal suggestion effects we would desire.

What was the suggestion? It will surprise you. It’s not the sort of suggestion you would think to give to yourself. In fact, Lloyd H. Silverman, Ph.D., the psychologist who invented the suggestion, has indicated that the suggestion works only because the conscious mind is not aware of its contents. The suggestion is, “Mommy and I are one.”

Arguing from a psychoanalytic point of view, Dr. Silverman explains that the suggestion activates an
unconscious fantasy of returning to the womb. It is a fantasy that most of us would not consciously find appealing. Planted as a seed thought in the subconscious mind, however, it inspires visions of blissful union with mom. The visible result is an overall positive one. There is evidence of increased relaxation, improved mood, decreased dependency upon drugs and improved competitive performance. You couldn’t ask for more.

A commercial firm advertising a “Mommy and I are one” subliminal tape could promise, with some validity, that listening to its product will produce profound effects. No such tape is available commercially. It’s uncertain whether or not such a theme would have public appeal. It doesn’t have the ring of success.

In his book, The search for oneness, Dr. Silverman states, “Unconscious oneness fantasies can enhance adaptation if, simultaneously, a sense of self can be preserved.” It is interesting that, even though coming from a different point of view, Edgar Cayce made a similar proposal. On many occasions his psychic source said that the purpose of each human life is to realize oneness with God while simultaneously developing one’s true individuality. The conscious mind, as we have explained, has difficulty understanding and accepting this seemingly paradoxical statement. Presented as a subliminal suggestion, however, it bypasses the conscious mind to find an exhuberant reception in the subconscious.

I find an important lesson in Silverman’s research. By using subliminal stimulation, motivational suggestions can be given to the subconscious mind in a way that totally bypasses the desires of the conscious mind. These suggestions, however, must appeal to the mentality of the subconscious mind. When they do, the subconscious has a strong response. The response can not always be predicted. Psychoanalytic reasoning, based upon the peculiar logic of the subconscious, is necessary to adequately steer the suggestion process. Thus when we use subliminal tapes we are dependent upon the insights and wisdom of the manufacturer in their choice of suggestions. Even then we are not certain of the outcome.

**Side-Effects of Subliminal Suggestion Tapes**

Cayce’s readings on the possibilities of influence through the subconscious mind suggest another reason to avoid subliminal tapes until such time as they might be made in a different fashion. When we listen to a subliminal tape, we are giving permission to our subconscious mind to be influenced by outside stimulation. Cayce indicates that the influence is not limited to the actual verbal message that might be subliminally imbedded on the tape. The influ-
ence goes much farther than that. The thoughts, feelings and subconscious motivations of everyone involved in
the manufacture of the tape is a potential source of subliminal influence upon the listener!

A similar situation may exist in the reaction the postal delivery person receives from many dogs. Dogbites
are the most serious and frequent occupational hazard of the postal delivery system. Our dog barks and threatens
to attack most every person who approaches our house, but he saves his most menacing welcome for the postal
worker, regardless of who that might be. No salesperson or UPS delivery person receives the kind of treatment
that the postal workers has to endure. I’ve asked around for some explanation to this phenomenon. The most
convincing explanation that I uncovered was that the problem was the bag of mail. A couple of hundred letters,
each one handled by several different people, created a very confusing sachet. The postal worker arrives with an
ambiguous and mixed message bombarding the dog’s nose.

Our subconscious mind can be as sensitive to the emotional vibrations of others as a dog is to scents.
When we open ourselves to influence by listening to a tape containing suggestions, subliminal or otherwise, we
can pick up the emotions and thoughts not only of the person who voiced the suggestions, but also from the people
who handled your particular copy of the tape when it was manufactured.

Those experienced in hypnosis will verify that a hypnotic subject often picks up on the thoughts of the
hypnotist. I once experienced a dramatic example of this phenomenon. I was attending a hypnosis workshop and
was entering a hypnotic trance following the suggestions of the hypnotist. As I became more relaxed and his
voice became my only thoughts, I suddenly had a brief dream. I was in a room that was totally empty. I noticed
that one wall was developing a hole in it close to the floor. It was as if the wall were a curtain and someone was
lifting the curtain at one spot. Then a person came through that hole and entered the room. I found that curious,
but then returned to listening to the hypnotist’s voice. As I listened, however, I was startled to discover that there
was now a difference in how I was experiencing the voice. I was having my own thoughts, and I was thinking
the suggestions myself before the voice spoke them. It was hard to believe, but as I allowed it to continue, I was
able to verify that I was indeed thinking the suggestions, word for word, before I heard them.

Afterwards, I discussed this experience with the hypnotist. He explained that what I had experienced was
telepathy, that we had entered into a mind lock together. I reflected on my dream. A room can represent a state of
mind. Under the relaxed, hypnotic state, my mind was empty. The wall, or mental barrier, was flexible, like a
curtain. The hypnotist had penetrated that wall and had entered my mind. He told me that I should remember
that experience when I used hypnosis when working with others. The subject will be influenced not only by the suggestions that you verbalize, but also by your silent thoughts.

In giving instructions on the preparation of healing materials and devices, Cayce indicated that it was necessary for those involved to first purify themselves with meditation and prayers prior to starting each work session. Those handling the physical materials as well, such as the blank tapes, the copying machine, and the packaging of the tapes, should also be involved in these purification practices. Until such time as manufacturer’s produce tapes in such a manner, it would be better if we made our own suggestion tapes, or with the help of a like minded person.

Cayce’s instructions about the manufacture of healing aids are no different from what was traditionally practiced among spiritual healers among so-called primitive groups. Native Americans, for example, would dip their healing objects in sacred smoke to purify their vibrations. Such practices only seem strange to someone who doesn’t appreciate the power of the subconscious mind to be influenced by the thoughts of others. Evidence for psychometry, or the ability to read someone’s thoughts by holding an object that person has touched, further supports the wisdom of Cayce’s advice.

To appreciate how open you are when you avail yourself to a subliminal suggestion tape, you might try observing your responses to listening to such a tape. My first exposure to such a tape was with one offering suggestions to quit smoking. Playing in the foreground was the sound of the ocean. It was quite a pleasant listening experience. I couldn’t hear, of course, what subliminal suggestions I was receiving. But I found that I was constantly thinking about what they might be, wondering what my subconscious was hearing. Not knowing what the facts were, I found that my imagination went wild, supposing all sorts of suggestions. I also found that any resistances I had to the idea of quitting smoking were revealing themselves to me. I felt my ability to smoke was being drained away from me involuntarily and I was not necessarily willing to have that happened. I would smoke during the tape and would also feel guilty about doing so. Was I defeating the purpose of the suggestions, or was their subliminal power so strong that they would overtake my willful continuation of smoking? I realized that even if there were no suggestions on the tape at all, I was submitting myself to a potent placebo treatment. The very idea that you are listening to a tape containing subliminal suggestions is a very suggestive experience in itself! I found that one clear value of listening to a subliminal suggestion tape was to discover, by monitoring my thoughts, whether or not I was actually willing to have the suggestions take effect.
Suggestion and Pretending

In the second chapter, we noted that Cayce emphasized that we respect the subconscious mind. He noted its special qualities. In particular, he noted that in contrast to the conscious mind, the subconscious responds to suggestion. Let’s examine what that statement means.

Let me suggest to you, for example, that this book is as light as a feather.

What happened?

You probably checked the weight of the book, feeling it in your hands and noting its weight. In other words, you automatically attempted to evaluate my suggestion. The response of the conscious mind to statements is to immediately evaluate it. It attempts a verification. The conscious mind tests the statement for truth or accuracy.

Unless it chooses to ignore a statement, or doesn’t understand it, the conscious mind automatically tends to agree or disagree with it. It checks it for logic, for consistency with past experience, or with information from its senses, and then either denies or affirms the statement. The conscious mind can not accept suggestion. As Cayce pointed out, the conscious mind can only respond to a statement as a proposition. It must evaluate the statement, and either validate or deny it.

Let me now instead ask that you pretend that your book is light as a feather. Pretend that the book is so light, that you can relax your hands and arms and the book will simply rest in your hands, suspended by itself. Try that and see what happens.

If you pretended, could you experience the book as light? If you did, then try it again, and notice how you go about pretending that the book is light.

How did you do it? You probably focussed on certain things and purposefully ignored others. To pretend that the book is as light as a feather, you might focus on how relaxed you hands and arms feel. You might notice the book sitting in your hands, but ignored any sensation of pressure from the book sitting upon your hands. You could then imagine the book sitting weightlessly in your hands.

While pretending, your conscious mind doesn’t respond to the statement as a proposition. Instead, it agrees to accept the statement as true and acts accordingly. It focuses its attention on aspects of its experience that would be consistent with that assumption. It ignores contrary data.
Pretending is the best way to explain to the conscious mind what is meant by a suggestion. Otherwise, the conscious mind has no way to respond to a suggestion other than taking it as a proposition.

Recall from our earlier discussion about attitude change, that we presented Cayce’s idea that behaving as if you were experiencing a certain attitude, that attitude would come about. We are seeing this principle once again, this time as we see how pretending is a way for the conscious mind to cooperate with the power of suggestion. We can see now how Cayce’s advice that we take actions consistent with an attitude we would like to adopt is actually based on an understanding of how suggestion operates.

**All Suggestions are Affirmations**

There is nothing about a statement itself that qualifies it as a suggestion. A statement becomes a suggestion when it is accepted, when it is acted upon, when a person is willing to pretend that it is so, or believe that it is so.

The subconscious mind automatically accepts statements as affirmations of what is true. This characteristic of the subconscious, however, comes with a particular proviso. The subconscious mind does not understand the meaning of the negative, no, or not. If you are given the suggestion, “you will not think about the eye of a camel,” the subconscious mind drops the word not from what it hears. The phrase, “eye of the camel” is implanted in the subconscious and you can’t help but think about it. Recalling the experiment in thought stopping we described in the last chapter, we realize it would be more effective to suggest instead, “if you think of the eye of a camel, you will immediately begin thinking about a red volkswagen.”

Understanding of the logical of the negative, not, is the sole province of the conscious mind. In Chapter Three I described how the creation of the conscious mind arose from an act of negation, separating itself from the subconscious by saying, “no.” It was likened to child going through the terrible two’s who separates from the parents and establishes its own will by defying the parental will with a constant “no.” It is another reason why statements made to the subconscious mind become suggestions, whereas the same statements made to the conscious mind are taken as propositions. The conscious mind always has a no ready, and will be quick to use it if the statement doesn’t ring true.

The subconscious mind can not be directed away from an undesirable focus by asking it not to do this
or that. Instead it must be re-directed by asking it to do, or to look at, something else. Here again we have the general Cayce principle of supplanting negatives with positives. Suggestions must be phrased in an affirmative manner. What is it you want the subconscious to believe, to do, to experience?

I have witnessed the use of suggestion to redirect the smoking habit, for example, into other avenues of expression. In one case, this suggestion was gradually established: “When you have the urge to smoke a cigarette you will experience the taste and smell of vomit and you will reach for your polished stone and feel peaceful while holding it.” In another case, the suggestion was based on a spiritual ideal: “When you feel the need to smoke you will take a deep breath and feel grateful and at peace as the Spirit of God enters you, filling you with love and warmth. You will sigh a deep sigh of relief that the Comforter is so close at hand.”

In both cases, there was real motivation to stop smoking, reinforced by their doctor’s warnings concerning immanent health dangers. There was also a sincere willingness to quit. Both people had quit smoking except for two or three times a day during moments of stress. At those moments, they couldn’t get the mind off having a cigarette. The use of these suggestions planted a different thought habit for those moments. The suggestions didn’t have to create a willingness in these people, only a new route through which to express that willingness. In each case, the suggestion was phrased in terms of creating an alternative habit.

A good place to begin learning about how the power of suggestion works through affirmation is with your statement of an ideal. Try wording your statement so that it reads as an affirmation of a fact—not a wish, or a desire, but a fact. Rather than, “I want to be a loving person,” affirm, “I am a person created by love and expressing love.” An alternative might be, “Only love is real.”

Working with suggestion does not mean pounding the thought into your mind in an attempt to drive out other thoughts. A suggestion, as an affirmation of truth, is expressed in a casual, matter of fact manner, in a normal tone of voice, as if to imply, of course, no doubt about it. If you announce your affirmation to yourself, shouting it in your mind, as it were, you challenge your conscious mind to take it as a proposition to evaluate. You invite negative reactions.

Repeat your ideal to yourself gently from time to time, willing to pretend it is true, willing to believe it as fact. Let yourself feel it in your body, let your imagination play with the implications of the affirmation. Let it grow on you. In this way, you will discover for yourself how suggestions operate through affirmation.

Pretending Your Way into Hypnosis
One of the major difficulties in learning self-hypnosis is not fear of the unknown, but the habit of the conscious mind to evaluate. It’s hard not to ask yourself, “Am I really hypnotized now?” You can learn to hypnotize yourself more easily if you are willing to pretend that you are hypnotized.

Choosing to pretend that a proposition is true is not the same as evaluating it and deciding it is true. It means to accept the statement as true and direct attention in such a way to help make the proposition appear true. The conscious mind pretends by focusing on what is consistent with the proposition and ignoring any contradictory information.

Pretending is a good equivalent of suggestion. When the conscious mind becomes so active in its pretending that it forgets that it is pretending, when it begins to now believe what it was pretending to be true, it has come the closest it can to accepting a suggestion.

Entering hypnosis is simply the process of accepting one suggestion after another. Hypnosis is the state of mind of accepting suggestions. As in other suggestions, the conscious mind can help the process of entering hypnosis by the use of pretending.

Researchers have found that instructing people to pretend that they are hypnotized can produce as good hypnotic results as does actual hypnosis. Some argue that this fact shows that there is no such thing as hypnosis. Don’t be fooled by this argument. When the conscious mind pretends, it is performing the conscious equivalent of what the subconscious mind does when it accepts a suggestion.

The conscious mind can cooperate with what the subconscious mind is doing. If the conscious mind is still active under hypnosis, it will experience its response to suggestions as pretending. That doesn’t invalidate the experience. It only helps.

Traditional hypnosis theory maintains that people vary in their ability to be hypnotized. Cayce maintained that anyone could learn how to enter a hypnotic state, simply because it is a natural state of consciousness. Modern thinking about hypnosis is changing in favor of Cayce’s point of view. Research has now demonstrated that the conscious mind can cooperate with the induction of hypnotic suggestions by agreeing to pretend. By being willing to imagine the suggestions, the conscious mind can pave the way for the subconscious to accept suggestions.

The ability to pretend, to imagine or act, initiated by the willingness of the conscious mind, is good for hypnosis. Learning how to become absorbed in an imaginative activity, in fact, is a close equivalent to hypnosis. As we will now discover, a willingness to pretend or imagine can be used as a method of entry to the more traditional hypnotic state of deep relaxation.
Deep Relaxation

Learning to relax is the first step in learning self-hypnosis. The vitality of the conscious mind depends upon the activity of the body and the alertness of the senses. If the body relaxes and we ignore information from our senses, the conscious mind loses the stimulation it depends upon and it begins to evaporate. This is what happens as we begin to fall asleep and it is what happens when entering hypnosis.

There are number of ways to begin to learn deep relaxation. None require doing anything. Relaxing is the opposite of doing. It is a process of letting go. Relaxation is another example of “setting self aside.”

To relax, it is best to either lie down or sit in an easy chair that leans back. Having a pillow under your knees and ankles, as well as under your neck, helps support those areas of the body and adds to your comfort.

An excellent way to begin is with the eyelid method described by Henry Bolduc in *Self-hypnosis*. Cast your gaze upon a spot across the room and close your eyelids slowly, as slowly as you can. Then slowly open them and close them once again, very slowly. Repeat this process ten times. By the tenth time, the area around your eyes will feel very tired and relaxed. The sensation of relaxation can then spread to the rest of your body.

You can focus on the breath and to imagine the whole body breathing. Relaxation naturally occurs in the chest and abdomen during every exhalation. Begin by focusing in that region of the body and then moving out to other areas. With each exhalation, for example, pretend that your knees are also exhaling breath. Imagine your knees relaxing as they exhale tension along with the air. Continue this process as you move along to every part of your body.

Some people enjoy saying to themselves, “RE” as they inhale, and “lax” as they exhale. It provides a mental focus. It also helps to prevent falling asleep until such time as sleep may be the goal.

Another approach to relaxation is to focus on one limb at a time and imagine it as feeling heavy. The sensation of heaviness is what happens when a limb relaxes. It doesn’t feel like a lead weight is bearing down on it with pressure. Instead, it feels heavy as if it were made of lead itself and were melting. It feels very good to let it go and allow it to relax. Here is a way to relax that is based on suggestion and that automatically introduces you to a self-hypnotic state.

Begin by experiencing your right arm as heavy. Say to yourself, “my right arm is heavy.” Don’t do anything to make it heavy. Simply imagine it as heavy and be willing to experience it that way. Why don’t you try that right now?
Put down this book, rest your arm on your lap or on the arm of the chair. Close your eyes and let yourself imagine that your arm feels heavy. Pretend that it is heavy by noticing any sensations in your arm that feel like heaviness. Let those sensations spread through your entire arm. After you’ve enjoyed the experience for a moment, wiggle your fingers and the heaviness will go away.

Wasn’t that easy? It’s a very natural experience. It’s also one of the most common suggestions a hypnotist gives when first beginning a hypnotic induction. You can easily do it yourself.

To go further with this procedure, don’t stop at the right arm. After a minute or so, move your attention to your other arm, thinking “my left arm is heavy.” Then move along to each of your other legs. You can go back and summarize your experience with suggestions such as, “my arms are heavy, my legs are heavy, my arms and legs are heavy.”

By imagining your body as relaxed, then experiencing relaxation, you’ve successfully responded to suggestion. You are on your way to even deeper levels of hypnosis. By imagining your arm as feeling heavy, you have begun, without realizing it, to use imagery in your auto-suggestions. As we now turn to the topic of imagery, remember this experience. You do have imagery and can use it to control your state of consciousness and your body.