

THE 10-DAY SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAM

DAY #0

LEARNING KINDNESS

Learning & learning to be kind.

THE 10-DAY SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAM





Learning

Integrating any spiritual practice you don't already do is a learning process.

And, most processes are easier if you understand the process.

Learning any task looks like this, step by step, from inability to fluidity.

1. Inability – you can't do the task
2. Lots of assistance – you can do the task with lots of assistance
3. Some assistance – you can do the task if you get some hints
4. Self-assistance – you can do the task albeit awkwardly, hinting yourself as you go
5. Fluidity – you can do the task seamlessly, without even thinking

NOTE: This work is based on the Theory of “The Zone of Proximal Development” by Lev Vygotsky

Learning the French Horn

Think about playing a scale on a French horn. (I'm going to assume this is something you can't do.)

If you were to learn, you would learn, one stage at a time.

You start at stage 1. Not being able to do it.

You would get a teacher to tell you where to put your fingers and how to blow on the mouthpiece. The teacher would instruct you on each note of the scale and you could get all eight notes in a row. That's stage 2. Doing it with lots of assistance.

With practice, you would get to stage 3, being able to play the scale only needing hints from a teacher or a piece of paper reminding you what you "ought" to do.

Soon, you could be at stage 4, not needing the instructor or note to remind you, but knowing enough to be able to, albeit painstakingly and awkwardly, get yourself through all eight notes.

Finally, more practice, and you can get to fluidity. Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do.

The Kindness of the Instructor

Think about our fictional French horn instructor.

If the instructor shamed you when you made a mistake, would you be as likely to pursue playing?

No one learns in shame.

Now, imagine that the instructor praised you and seemed to have great confidence in your ability. Wouldn't you be more apt to learn?

I taught high school mathematics full-time for seven years. My students consistently learned more in my classes than in parallel math classes. What was my secret? I did all I could to never shame and all I could do to be encouraging.

Being kind to yourself

Any spiritual practice you want to integrate into your life will follow the same pattern of learning – from inability to fluidity. And, how well you do at learning depends greatly on how kind you can be to yourself as you learn.

Let's look at the spiritual practice of being kind to yourself.

BEING KIND TO YOURSELF TAKES PRACTICE.

While it might seem like something you ought to be able to do without practice, it actually takes practice. You have to go, stage at a time. And, depending on how well you can be kind to yourself, you might need to get a teacher to help you with it.

1. Inability – you can't be kind to yourself
2. Lots of assistance – you be kind to yourself only with great amounts of help
3. Some assistance – you can be kind to yourself if you get some reminders
4. Self-assistance – you can be kind to yourself, albeit awkwardly
5. Fluidity – you can be kind to yourself

OPTIONAL BONUS MATERIAL

The effect of stress

I'm going to assume you can drive well – that you don't have to think about the individual steps involved – that you are at stage 5, fluidity. Steering, braking, changing lanes, signaling, and parking are such common actions that you no longer consciously think about them. They are automatic.

Now imagine you just almost got into an accident. A semi-tractor-trailer merges into your lane forcing you to pull into the shoulder and you brake hard to avoid running over an abandoned fender. You are sitting there. Pulse elevated. You put the car in park to catch your breath and to wait for your heart to stop pounding.

If you've ever been in this type of situation you might recall that you might start talking to yourself. "Ok, ok, OK. I have to put the car in drive. I have to put my foot on the brake, then shift the car into drive."

What's going on here?

When we are stressed our ability to perform a task falters and we go down a level of competence.

You start talking to yourself because you have gone from stage five, fluidity, to stage four, self-assistance – you can do the task of driving, but need to give yourself hints as you go.

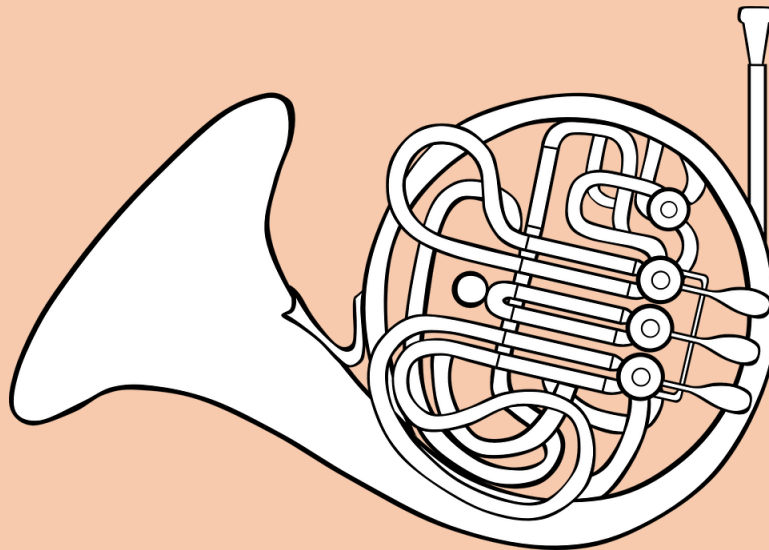
This explains why, when we're stressed out, we often talk to ourselves more. We're just a little bit removed from the automatic, smooth state. We coach ourselves to get things done.

Stress will bump us down a stage no matter which stage we are at. This happened with my students all of the time in math class. They could factor polynomials at a level four – being able to do so with self-assistance – but then on the test, wham, stress, and they faltered down to wanting me to give them a hint

What to do today:

LEARNING KINDNESS

Print this page & carry it with you today.



Let it serve as a reminder that the best way a student (you) learns with when is when the instructor (you) is kind to the student (you).