

Over Your stuttering in ...days

A self help manual
for adults who stammer

Dr Satyendra Srivastava

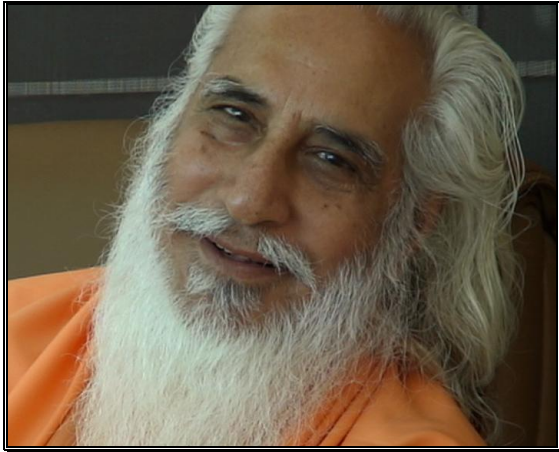
The Indian Stammering Association
<http://stammer.in>

Version 2, Dt 30th Dec 2011

“There is no magical cure; but there is something equally good, even better - cure for the stammering mindset. Coupled with communication skills, which can be learned, you can reach, where mere fluency rarely takes you.”

“Courage and hard work- this is the only secret! Nothing else. Are you ready?”

Dedication



Sri Sri Chandra Swami ji Udasin
Sadhana Kendra Ashram
Dumet, Dehradun

“Selfless Service is a limb of Spiritual Sadhana.”

Table of Contents

Preface.....	2
Origin & nature of stammering	4
1. Do you really stammer?	6
2. What do you know about your stammering?	9
3. Play with your speech	12
4. Some More Play.....	16
5. Watching your thoughts.....	24
6. Values and Beliefs.....	28
7. Self-Motivation & Beyond.....	32

Nomenclature: Following the modern convention of “people first-then disability”- we have used “People who stammer (pws)”, in preference for stammerer in many places. We also accept that when the stammering mindset has been cured, such conventions mean little.

Copy left: You are free to copy, quote, use, share- above all, practice the ideas contained herein- which have been gathered from diverse authentic sources- as long as it is not used for commercial purposes.

We wish to sincerely thank all the pws who participated in TISA communication workshops, wherein these ideas were tested and the manual took concrete shape.

Preface

This is a self help book consisting of seven core themes and a lot of self paced activities. But it makes no claim to cure your stammering, nor does it claim equal benefit to all. Some may benefit more than the others by this manual. Today we know that many factors contribute to cause the beginning of stammering and its continuation in adult life. These factors are different for each one of us. But we do believe that everyone will benefit to some degree from the ideas contained herein.

This self-help manual is no substitute for proper speech therapy. If you can access, go for therapy with a speech therapist that specializes in fluency disorders. If you cannot, then do try self-help. Self help requires self-discipline and a supportive self help group. It also needs a long term commitment and courage to try out new ways of thinking and acting. This is why the title is : *Over Your stuttering in...days*. Dots represent your commitment, courage and hard work! Still, be ready for a long commitment.

But before we begin let us make sure of basic facts:

1. **Do you stammer?** You can be sure of this if you can speak normally under some conditions (like when alone, talking to younger children, whispering, shouting etc.) or when you can sing well but have lot of difficulties in talking, in some situations particularly - in class, in market, during interviews etc.

Page 3

2. Secondly and more importantly- **do you really want to overcome your stammering?** Here, answer may not be simple and straightforward. Many of us feel pain & discomfort on a daily basis due to stammering- but it goes away as quickly as it comes. *Kam chalta rehta hai (life goes on)*.. and therefore we dont feel committed to long hard work needed to deal with stammering.

Have you suffered enough and reached a point of no return? Have you discovered the uselessness of all the denial or tricks you have discovered so far?

But why do things have to be so desperate, before they can change? But an enduring change is not easy to achieve and maintain for many of us because stammering is not merely a habit. It is a habit plus *much more than that*. You can understand this if you understand the nature and origin of stammering. Here is a brief description.

Page 3 a

Origin & nature

The current scientific beliefs are: there is a neurobiological glitch in our brain, in the area dealing with speech, especially articulation- joining of two syllables (sounds). This glitch in many cases is transmitted by certain **genes in some families**. In others, there could be other reasons- not yet fully understood. When children learn to speak, every child passes through a phase of normal disfluency (difficulties) which lasts for a few months. But the children with a glitch in the **speech nerves of brain** may continue to have these difficulties for a longer period, may be years.

Another explanation is: some children inherit greater sensitivity, react strongly to negative comments from parents and others, in response to their normal disfluency and therefore **learn** to struggle when they speak. In other words, belief that *certain words or situations are difficult and I must use force or struggle* - is a learned reaction to normal events in growing up years.

Yet another explanation is: some children inherit “fast talking” **genes**, stumble over words and develop a lifelong pattern of reacting to “perceived” stress. But since 80% of children recover and become normal speakers- some inherent difference in our brains has to be there, which cannot be just explained away as a bad habit or purely psychological

phenomena like poor self-esteem or a 'complex' arising out of early childhood trauma. In certain families, even though children may have similar upbringing, still the eldest or the youngest child may develop stammering while other siblings may grow up to be “normal” speakers. Check internet for various theories and discoveries ([link](#))¹.

Now, once we have developed this mindset (“*I will have problem saying this or that in that particular situation*”) and have developed a physiological (& psychological) reaction (of using excessive force, blinking, struggling, holding breath etc.), it becomes a regular unconscious pattern. It starts shaping our perception of the world, of our self as social beings. We start to develop small tricks to cope with the problem on daily basis: we may pray to God to rid us of this problem; we may try to become very moral thinking that stammering is a punishment for “every time I speak a lie or do something mean”. We may start thinking that stammering is a “punishment” from God and we are some kind of “sinner”, who does not deserve anything good in life.

Another aspect of this development is learning to avoid, words, situations, people, task, roles, relationships etc. Over the years, we develop an elaborate system of avoidance. The ultimate avoidance is avoidance of THOUGHT of stammering itself. We start denying it. We stop the thought of stammering from entering our conscious mind. We start living in total denial: *Stammer? who? me? what rubbish! OR No, I dont stammer. I just hesitate sometime..etc.*

¹ <http://www.stutteringhelp.org/Default.aspx?tabid=17>

If there is any talk about stammering in class or office, we freeze. Since the whole issue is painful and repulsive, we don't phone the therapists or the self help group, about whom we may have been reading again and again for months or years. In other words, we lock ourselves up in a prison and fight off any one who may try to help us out.

We may suffer on daily basis but soon learn to accept it, as fate or whatever, and carry on with life as best as we can. Since stammering is not a CONSISTENT, visible disability and since it does not kill us, it is quite possible for us to deny it, forget it, and postpone it. Since society too does not understand the issue well, it often ignores the whole thing politely and asks no questions. Since most children get spontaneously "cured" of stammering, world assumes that everyone should get over their stammering by the time they are adults. A stammerer is assumed to have failed to master a very basic skill- communication, through carelessness or a habitual hurry. He is often given this advice: *Calm down; Take it easy; You think faster than your tongue can cope- slow down*. No one takes into consideration the fact that for many of us stammering DOES have a biological basis.

This scenario is further worsened by those therapists who think that unless they advertise "CURE", stammerer will not come to them. This is not true ([see](#))². Then also, some "ex-stammerer" find it convenient to claim a "cure" rather than share the fact that they have learned to manage their problem. They feel that they can be a role model for other

² <http://www.stammering.org/cure.html>
Page 5

stammerers, ONLY if they stop stammering in public, and claim a "cure". The fact that "normal" speech DOES have a certain amount of dis-fluencies is conveniently ignored by both parties. This is how, following the law of demand and supply, commercialization of stammering begins and continues. The overall effect is- stammerers find it difficult to say that they stammer, that it hurts. They are made to look like losers and delinquents. Some stammerers, as a reaction, go to the other extreme and claim: stammerers are very talented and intelligent people! Holding on to such comforting beliefs, they spend their life in a deeper denial.

Now, what breaks such a sleep? Yes, fortunately there are Job Interviews and Group discussions! They act as demolition charges under our Tazmahal of denial and complacency! We mostly wake up when we finish college and start tackling the campus interviews. Then, we confront the reality, as it is. Then, we start looking for solutions rather than tricks. But many of us manage to go back to sleep again! Such is the nature of stammering, alas! This is why we left those dots in the title :-)

This manual will take up principles of self help in seven main chapters. Every chapter will close with some suggested activities. First finish those activities, and then get back for the next lesson, instead of reading the whole book like a novel.

"You are changed, not by what you know, but by what you do."

1. Do you stammer?

Accepting this fact is the most important and difficult step. If a beggar does not accept that he is poor, will he ever try to find work and earn money? This is why many pws fail to benefit from many therapies: deep down, they have not yet accepted fully that they stammer, its seriousness, nor have they accepted the need to change anything about themselves. They just want the world around them to change- magically!

Accepting is difficult and is made difficult by our own past efforts at avoidance and masking (behaving as if we are trying to remember something, while actually facing a block, or using starter sounds etc). But it is not impossible. If you are desperate and if you have suffered enough, you will not turn away from this last pain. But start with easy to complex situations as you go about accepting the fact that you stammer SOMETIME and that it causes you LOT of suffering and inconvenience.

Here are suggested steps, which you should go through, before you go to next self-help lesson:

1. You may write an essay about your stammering life.
2. You may repeat it to yourself: *I stammer sometime and*

it has pained me a lot..etc. etc.

3. You may say the same to a tree, flower, pet, a child; or to God while praying etc.
4. You may share this with your very close and trusted friend.
5. You may say so to your close relative once- mother, wife, brother, sister etc. - and see how they react. If they react as if they were pained, dont repeat it. But if they act normally and ask questions, try to answer truthfully and WITHOUT too many emotions.
6. Introduce the idea in your office in an indirect way: stick a TISA poster or have a coffee mug with some stammering related inscription or quote (“Haklao, magar pyar se”, “I belong to a VIP club- of Darwin, Newton, Churchill, Bruce Willis, Ritik Roshan..” etc.)
7. Write a post on some blog about your stammering experiences. Self record a 2 minute video, while talking about stammering (with a smile), and put it up on Youtube. Write your life-story and share online.
8. Talk about stammering to a small group of friends..
9. Take permission from the teacher and talk about your stammering experiences with a group of students in a class.

ALL the above methods have been used by many members of TISA over the years. Their feedback has been exclusively **positive**. They found that taking the first step was difficult but once they got going, it became EASY and they felt much lighter and whole afterwards. Accepting that you stammer and being comfortable while accepting it, talking about it, is the first step on a long journey. It is not that you accept and then sit tight. Acceptance is not “giving up”; it is not resigning oneself to FATE. Acceptance only means giving up denial, giving up living in fool’s paradise forever. It also means that you no more over-react if someone questions or teases you about stammering. You accept your stammering in the same way as you accept your surname or your mother-tongue. Nothing more, nothing less. It requires humility and practical common sense. After all, how long can you run away from a daily obvious fact of life?

Now, acceptance matures over a long period and therefore you need to repeat and revisit above activities over many months, until a time comes when you can answer the question “do you stammer?” with just one simple “yes” and feel no urge to explain, specify, justify or rationalize any further. Yes, you state the fact without getting excited about it.

Story : A little boy and the sapling

A little boy in a metro city had never seen a plant growing. One day he brought a seed, and as told by his father, stuck it under the mud in a pot.

He poured a little water on top of it and then waited impatiently for the tiny leaves to sprout. He waited and waited for the miracle to unfold. But nothing happened for a full one hour. He got worried. He poked his fingers in the mud to check the seed: has it gone dead or what! Well, nothing was wrong with the seed. So he put it back under the mud again and waited for another one hour.

Oh, what misery! What impatience! Or just lack of faith in father's words? Anyway, he checked the seed again, put it back and waited. This process continued many times throughout the day. What do you think happened to the seed eventually? Of course nothing! It just died. This is what happens to many of us. We practice acceptance and start wondering after a week: I have been practicing acceptance. I have told everyone that I stammer. I have even blogged about it. But my speech is still the same. What has gone wrong?

Moral of the story: If you truly accept, you will go beyond such worries and doubts. Of course it will take many months. Having gone beyond this constant preoccupation with stammering and fluency, you will devote yourself to communication skills which serve you better in the long run.

Now, how practical are these ideas? They can be most daunting, until you begin. But if you begin and fail, you may retreat in a deeper denial. So, it is important that you succeed by starting from simple tasks. Here is a suggested routine:

1. While in the shower (or anywhere private) whisper or say to yourself for some days - *I stammer. Yes, I stammer. And this is fine...*
2. When you are comfortable with the above, say that or

something similar to your pet (dog, cat, bird, lizard or mamba!) or a child - *You know, sometimes, I feel totally stuck; I can't say my own name..*

3. Now say the same thing, after some days, to your nearest relative or friend (wife, mother, friend- but not to your boss yet!)- *You know, sometimes, I get totally stuck; can't say the simplest things..*

If they ask a question, answer it briefly and objectively without excitement.

4. After you are comfortable with the above steps, try doing the same with a colleague, a chance acquaintance, someone sitting next to you in a bus. Make sure that you sound casual and that the occasion is appropriate, that the other person is not in a big rush. Having said it, make a note of their reaction. Was it different from what you expected?

5. Next, after some months of constant practice, when you have to give an informal presentation or group talk, start casually with something like this: *You give me just five minutes. Unfair, because with my tongue (or my stammer) I am sure I am going to take ten minutes. How many of you are willing to give me ten minutes? Please raise your hands...*And then begin full steam ahead, with a smile..

Experiment with this and other ice breakers and 'humorous' opening lines for PWS listed on Judy Kuster's home [page](#)³ and [humor](#)⁴ page. An important thing to remember, while talking about your stutter is to keep an eye on your emotions and remain calm. This will become easier as you do it frequently under different circumstances. Also, take note of your listener's response. Almost always, they accept it as a matter of fact.

In the meantime, you can continue with other initiatives, as discussed below. Let us repeat, Acceptance is difficult but without it, no technique is really going to work. For some of us, true acceptance is both the technique and the reward- nothing more needs to be done. For others, stage is set to learn **communication skills**, which for many of us can be as useful as being able to read and count.

³ <http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/publicrelations/pr.html#presentations>

⁴ <http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/humor.html>

2. What do you know about your stammering?

You will be surprised to know that average PWS knows very little about his/her own stammering! All they know is the occasional strange reaction from their audience. Most of them blink and close their eyes during stammering- and therefore may not even see people's reaction to their stammer! Is it just accident or is it by some sub-conscious design? Our subconscious mind erases stammering moments from the inner memory tape and therefore we cannot recall what did we actually do (eye blinks, holding breath, sudden hand movement etc.), how did we actually **feel** and **react** in that moment. And therefore, we are unable to do anything about it. In fact, many of us believe that it is not something which *I do*- it is something mysterious that *just happens to me*. It is a visitation from some kind of supernatural power- it seems!

Some of us, start projecting the entire responsibility on to outside circumstances and actors: *I was talking fine, when I saw the teacher looking at me closely..I began stammering then*. Some of us may blame our fathers or teachers. But

the fact remains- it is something which we are doing and only we can do something about it. But what is it that we are doing in that hurried and blurred moment?

To find this, you need a lot of courage to face the truth about yourself. If you have it, go ahead and record yourself with a video camera and review it. Here are the steps, in the order suited to most:

Step 1 (Play with a tape or a video camera)

Record your speech under different circumstances: reading a newspaper or a book; talking to yourself or children, talking with a friend, sharing something in a small group, talking to a "senior" on phone, telling a joke etc. Arrange these in an order from easy to difficult tasks, before starting (this is very important). Begin with the most comfortable situation, like reading alone. Use a simple cell-phone with camera or a proper video-camera on a tripod, whichever is convenient and available. If possible, try and capture the facial expressions and the body language as well.

For the first few minutes, you might be too conscious of the recording but later you will get used to it and speak in your natural style. So let the recording be long enough, 10 minutes or more. If you are using the phone camera, you may request a friend to help. If this friend is a PWS, all the

better. Essentially it can be anyone you trust. Save all the recordings, if possible, on a computer.

Step 2 (replay and review)

Replay the recording- listen to your speech (words, nuances, volume, pitch etc.), study your body language, facial expressions, hands etc. Review these even in those moments when you are speaking fluently. Compare this, with those moments when you are having a little hesitation or a big difficulty. As a listener now, try to guess how you are coming through as a speaker. Confident? Comfortable with yourself and the subject? Enjoying every moment of it? Or in a hurry to finish? Based on what you see and hear, try to guess, and feel, your emotional states as you were speaking those words.

Replay the moments when you think you were not very comfortable. Pause & replay the tape frequently to see and hear: did your pitch go up as you came across a 'difficult' word? Was there a struggle to push out a difficult sound? Did your lips press together with greater force and for longer duration than you would normally expect, for example, while saying words starting with a B or P sound? Did your head go back? Hand jerked? Eyebrows went up? Record your observations in a diary. Make this list as exhaustive as possible. Remember, whatever you note down here is what you can finally change. Whatever you ignore, will stay with

you- unfortunately. So be very honest and brave.

Step 3 (get in touch with emotions)

Review these recordings over a long period: 3-6 months and try to note down, what you do differently, in the moments of difficulty as opposed to when you are speaking fluently. It will be even more useful, if you could review these tapes with a trusted friend or a recovering stutterer. You could go a step further and fake your stutter while alone- and stay in that moment for a couple of minutes- to know what it actually feels like, in mouth, in body and in mind. In other words- consciously reproduce a moment of *your* stuttering and hold it (freeze) there: My name is S-----
-----achin. I live in K-k-k-k.....Kanpur. etc. This is Voluntary Stuttering and an important tool of knowing your stammer and overcoming it. Yes, it is not meant for weak hearts and should be attempted only **after** 3-4 months of starting on this path.

If you could do it in a normal conversation with a pet, children and friends (in this order), you would even discover unique emotions associated with your stuttering, but completely unknown to you till then; buried deep in your core. So, later on, when you start to deal with your stutter, you address not only what your mouth does, but also what your mind and your emotions do in those moments of difficulties.

Step 4 (wider explorations)

Meet other PWS, read their posts on chat groups, their biographies on the web. While reading, try to compare your life with theirs; your observations with theirs; your problem-solving approaches with theirs. This will help you to understand that:

1. Your experiences as PWS are not unique even though you sincerely thought so!
2. Your responses to your problems are also not unique.

You can learn from their experiments. Knowing your 'speech' is not enough; you must know yourself as a total human being: your attitude towards life, relationships, responsibilities, career, recreation, creativity - and how these have been influenced by your speech; your deepest fears and aspirations. One way is to meet others on the same path and compare notes and the second complimentary path is diving within yourself: sitting quiet and reviewing your life, contemplation, meditation.

[Vipassana](http://www.dhamma.org/en/vipassana.shtml)⁵ meditation & [Brahmavidya](http://www.brahmavidya.com/)⁶ has helped some people in this regard.

Steps 1-3 should be repeated as often as you want, with your review and analysis becoming deeper and deeper. It needs courage, determination and some 'quality' time to go

⁵ <http://www.dhamma.org/en/vipassana.shtml>

⁶ <http://www.brahmavidya.com/>

deeper. Finally, a time should come when you know your stammer so well that you can reproduce it 100% at will in a mimicry contest among friends! This signifies complete emotional healing- an important stage in the long journey. But there is more to be done, so that your audience is able to understand what you are saying. You still have to become a good communicator, if not 'orator'.

To summarize, you cannot change your manner of speaking until you know what it **looks & sounds** like, what it **feels** (the emotions) like. To know that, video-recordings and review is a very popular and effective method. But this needs lot of COURAGE. If you have read this manual so far, we are sure that you do have that quality and commitment. So, go on- *lights, camera and action*.. let the camera roll and yourself rock.

3. Play with your speech

It has been seen that if you can change your stammer a little bit- just a wee bit, you can eventually change it a LOT over a period of time. You can almost modify it to appear normal! Yes! So, can you modify the way you talk? Just for fun? Just for few minutes? If you talk in a fixed, frozen way and believe that this is the only way you can talk- if you believe that you can stammer just one way, your way- then, path ahead is difficult. But in our experience, every PWS is capable of making small changes at a time- and a lot of changes over a period of time.

You must have tried your hand at mimicry or taken off the boss in the office just for fun- or maybe you like to deliver the famous dialogue from *Deewar*, in Amitabh Bachhan's style and his baritone. May be you think that you are not good at these things- but if you have tried a little bit, you can try a little more, especially if you know, that this is the key to your problems. Yes, it is. Your throat is capable of much more than just stammering!

A) Vocalization exercises:

It will be good if you begin with some relaxation exercise- Inhale deeply and tense all muscles, beginning from feet, going all the way to neck and face, hold the tension for 2-3 minutes and then gently relax whole body in the reverse order- as you breathe out slowly. Next, you sing out consonants in all combinations of vowels (Ka, ki, ke, ku, ko, mi, me, ma, mo, mu etc.) in a relaxed and stretched way: kaaaaa... Kiiiiiii..... etc. (Look at this [video](#)⁷ for better understanding.)

After one full cycle of all consonants, start a new cycle, wherein you add variations in **volume** (low, almost whispering and then raising it to a loud shout and then again back to a whisper). Next, add variations in **pitch**- put a hand on your throat to get the feel, as you manipulate your vocal cords to get a high note (kiiii...), followed by a very base note (**kiiii**).

Most attempts at personal change fail to sustain, because they are often devoid of FUN. A fun way of beginning this journey would be SINGING. First, sing alone, record it and review it. Begin with simple popular songs. Try to pay attention to notes, melody and rhythm. After a few recordings, you will feel good about your singing abilities. Next, sing for a friend, who stands a little away. You may also try reciting

⁷ http://www.ehow.com/video_2385250_the-mi-ma-mo-mu.html

shloka, chants, poetry, *shayari* etc. Consider learning classical vocal music. All this will help you explore your voice and be friends with it.

B) Play with your stammer:

Now, let us try and change the way we stammer. There are many ways of doing this, but two very simple and effective methods are **bouncing** and **stretching**. In bouncing, we just repeat the first sound of a word gently couple of times before saying the full word in the normal way and at the normal speed. We don't slow down; we say rest of the word at normal speed. In stretching we, start the word but hold on to the first sound till we are ready to say the rest of the word, again at normal speed and in normal style. Learn and approach both these methods systematically as given below.

Bouncing

We have noticed that sometime, under stress, our mouth just runs away with words and we feel helpless, as if we have absolutely no control over our sound box (throat & mouth). Bouncing is a technique which gives us back the control over our speech mechanism and related emotions. It also teaches us to stutter in a relaxed way- as very young children do. *This* is the purpose of the self-therapy here: to teach us to stammer

as a four year old child does – no struggle, no secondary behavior, no shame, no fear. That effortless stammering is less tiring to us and less distracting to the listener. Lastly, it is a nice way of letting people know that we stammer and getting used to their reactions. Here are the main rules:

1. Start with easy, simple words. Bounce on difficult words only after 2-3 months of regular practice with easy words. By difficult words we mean sounds which pose problems regularly- for example for some of us, it could be K (as in Kanpur); for others it could be B (Bimal), P (People) etc. Don't start with these difficult words. Speak them as you have been doing all this time. Start bouncing on easy simple words first in easy situations.
2. Practice alone for a few days; When comfortable, do it with a friend or in the self help group or on phone with friends or strangers and *after many months*, in the work-place or in a bus or train etc. You may have to reorganize this protocol depending on what situation you find least to most stressful where speaking is concerned. Start a new exploration or technique in that particular order: easy to difficult situations.
3. Read a story book or news paper and bounce on every

second or third word in every sentence. *Finance m-m-m-minister has d-d-d-decided to l-l-l-lower the interest r-r-rates...*

4. You just repeat the first sound (syllable) slowly. SLOWLY is the key principle here.
5. Avoid bouncing rapidly, which happens sometimes during uncontrolled stammering:

Finance mmmminister has ddddecided to llllower the interest rrrrates..

This is bad bouncing. This can be avoided by stopping completely and being totally relaxed between two bounces. If this happens, don't get discouraged. Start all over again with easy words and with less stressful situations.

6. Vary the number of bounces. Start from 6 or more bounces and then gradually reduce it to 2-3. Then, again increase it to 5-6 or even more. The idea is to get totally comfortable with this technique and develop good control.
7. Keeping relaxed while bouncing in a controlled way is important. When you achieve this target, only then

increase the level of difficulty by choosing longer / difficult word in a more challenging situation as mentioned above. If you have difficulties, go back to the lower level and practice for a few days before taking up the challenge once again.

8. Finally after some months' practice, you should be able to say a word with just one small relaxed unnoticeable bounce: *Finance m-minister has d-decided to lower the interest r-rates...*

If you watch TV carefully, you will notice many speakers, anchors using this little (sometime even bigger) bounce frequently.

9. While learning to bounce, pay close attention to your emotions. Bounce as a child does. No fear, no struggle and with total acceptance. *Give me a ticket for Ha- Ha- Herbertpur.*
10. Gradually, try to bounce on a difficult word in a spontaneous conversation on phone or in person. Remember: failing to bounce on a word in a given situation is only a temporary setback. It does not mean that this technique is not for you. Whenever you fail to bounce properly on a word go back couple of steps

and start again. Bounce on that very word, alone, then with a friend and then with strangers.

You have stammered for many years and therefore you must give some months to yourself while trying out a new way of speaking. Also, don't get influenced by unthinking feedback from friends or relatives. Since they know nothing of your stammering and speech therapy, they may say that your new way of talking seems unnatural etc. Remember, you will not be bouncing like this for ever. As your fluency and comfort level improves, need to bounce will reduce and manner of your bouncing will become unnoticeable.

11. What decides your success is (a) following a plan (easy to difficult words, easy to difficult situations) (b) consistent practice over a long period (at least six months) and (c) keeping your moral high over this long period in spite of setbacks, which are bound to be there for everyone.

Gentle onsets & Prolongation

Gentle onset means that we pay close attention to the way we begin a word or a sentence. PWS often tense up, tighten their lips and jaw and start in a jerky uncontrolled fashion. With some practice and conscious attention, it is possible to start a

Page 15

sound gently. And then, prolong the sound. To the beginner it may seem like speaking with a foreign accent. It involves prolonging the vowels, especially the initial sounds. It helps us to slow our speech down and be comfortable with the act of speaking itself.

1. To begin the practice, read a newspaper or book with prolongation of vowels in every second word or more: *Aai weel go too Kaaanpooor toooomorrow* (I will go to Kanpur tomorrow).
2. Then, practice it with a friend in general discussion. To understand what does prolongation mean, you may have to talk to some PWS already practicing it or watch a video of the technique. The latter is available on [web](#)⁸.
3. You begin with non-feared words and situations and VERY gradually move to feared words and situations over a period of some months (same as above for bouncing). For example you may talk like this to your pet dog and then gradually to your friends and family members for increasing durations. You may slide back once in a while, which is okay. But regular and

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8biSBPsoeg>

motivated practice is very much needed to turn this technique into a useful skill, you can rely on.

4. Gentle onsets may even mean, to soften the hard consonants at times: *Khum on- leeet us plaaay* (Come on- let us play). Similarly, sounds consisting of double consonants may have to be separated in the process of prolongation: *Perroompt* (Prompt); *Currocin* (Crocic), *Burrave* (Brave).
5. Initially speaking like this might seem very strange to us but if we observe, many nationalities speak English (and other languages) in significantly different ways and are understood well enough: Pay attention to a Russian speaking in English, for example.

Your colleagues will get used to it quiet soon. It definitely sounds no stranger than your old way of stammering!

Common Mistake: Many people short circuit the whole process- by starting to bounce on difficult words, straight away in difficult situations like workplace, hoping to master the process in 2 days and finish the whole cycle in one week! Obvious result is- what starts as a bounce becomes uncontrolled stammering or block, soon; they lose all hope of mastering it ever and give it up. Sometime, they get totally

demolished by a chance comment from a colleague and make a U-turn: *yaar, your old way of talking was so much better- what is this new thing you have picked up? sounds weird!*

In this case, it is time to find a better coach than such friends, to help you in this process. TISA has many such coaches!

4. Some More Play

If you have been bouncing joyfully or singing along the activities covered in the last chapter, it would mean that you have courage and stamina to change some of your oldest habits and thought patterns. It would also mean that you can push yourself a little further! In this chapter we will take up a few more issues, which though central to act of talking, have always been taken for granted by all of us: Breathing, pausing between words, looking in to the eyes of the other person and above all listening carefully. Many people believe that LISTENING attentively constitutes more than ninety percent of good communication!

Have you ever had difficulty recalling the name of the person you met the other day? Stood in market scratching your head,

trying to recall what you were told to buy? Do you feel breathless whenever you stammer? If yes, read on carefully and PRACTICE these ideas. Yes, you change, not by what you know, but by what you DO- actually do.

Breathing

There is medical evidence that different types of breathing achieve different physiological goals- for example belly breathing ventilates the lower lobes of the lungs and this promotes more efficient exchange of oxygen. There is also proof that when we anticipate stress, we tighten our chest and belly and our respiration becomes shallow, irregular or even ceases completely for short periods. Since we are no more breathing out, we are unable to speak. Some children, on the other hand discover that breathing out might help them during a block. But when they breathe out, sometime, lungs get totally emptied and still the phonation (sound) does not begin. Finally, they may be able to whisper just a few words with great difficulty with the little residual air.

It has also been noticed that there is a reverse cycle too: relaxed deep breathing can calm down a PWS and help her/him gain better conscious control of the speech. Watching one's own breath can also induce deeper states of inner

consciousness, wherein one might see his or her avoidances, fears, habitual responses to anticipated (not real) stress and other emotional/ psychological issues associated with stammering- and deal with them as they arise in our mind. Over the months or years, it may be possible to heal oneself through this path. The technique of watching one's breath should be learned from a qualified teacher or practitioner of meditation or in a formal Vipassana course. The technique does not require one to believe in any supernatural deity. It only demands that one has faith in one's own senses, mind and observation.

In practice, it means becoming aware of your breathing at different times of the day; In a traffic jam, were you using the chest (upper? lower?) or the belly muscles to breathe? As you thought of an important deadline, did you tighten your chest and stopped breathing for a few seconds? As you approached a feared word, what happened to your breath? etc.

To develop this awareness:

1. lie flat on the ground and practice two different kinds of breathing;
2. Put one hand on chest and the other on navel (belly).

You can even use two books instead of your hands.

3. Now breathe in and out slowly and normally. You will see both the books (on chest and on navel) moving up and down with breath.
4. Now take a deep inhalation and try to raise the book on your chest vigorously, without moving the book on navel. You will succeed in doing this after couple of attempts: this is chest breathing and useful for strong muscular efforts, like running fast or shouting out etc. Normal speech should not need such effort.
5. Now, try the other method: Take a deep breath and try to raise the book on your belly as far up as possible- WITHOUT moving the book on your chest.
6. If you practice belly breathing correctly, the hand (or the book) on the chest will be still or will move very little. After a few days, put a thick book (or couple of bricks) across your stomach and try pushing it up, with every inspiration. Later, you may discover the fine difference between breathing from chest and from belly. Now onwards, whenever you notice that your breath is irregular, shallow or stopped, promptly and consciously

go into gentle belly breathing- ie. pushing the belly out and letting it fall back on its own.

7. Another benefit of focusing on your breath is: it brings your mind to the present moment in a blink! Your mind is no more ruminating on the worries of future or regrets of past. You become calm, collected and rooted in the reality of the present moment. Over a period, you may find it very relaxing- to switch your attention to your breath, every now and then, during work, while driving and even while making a presentation at work!
8. We dont mean to say that chest breathing is bad or has no role in speech; You may have to fill your chest with lot of air, before you shout out an instruction to a large group in a big auditorium or open field. But for normal conversation, group presentation, interview etc. belly breathing is the best and sufficient.

Now, why do people tend to hold their breath and struggle when they are in a block? Why dont they just relax and let words come out? Impulses from the brain tell us to hold our breath when we are anticipating strong physical effort- like lifting a heavy box. This is done so that the chest and abdomen become an airtight chamber, which can act as a

fulcrum of a lever. Speaking can & should never be such an effort.

It is believed that somehow, brain in some circumstances, mistakenly perceives speaking to be such an effort – let us say, during a decisive interview. The impulses traveling down from the brain, therefore, are transmitted to wrong set of nerves and we suddenly find ourselves struggling and straining to speak as if the particular word was a piece of cork stuck in our throat and which could be expelled ONLY by force. Normally one will strain in this fashion (called Valsalva maneuver), only if one was constipated or was picking up a heavy weight. But our brain, due to past experiences, considers speaking to be such a threatening ordeal, that it orders a Valsalva reflex. So instead of talking, we find ourselves straining and struggling in a block. To appreciate this theory by Perry read [this](#)⁹.

To appreciate what Valsalva reflex is, do this exercise: Stand up; bend your knees as if sitting in an imaginary chair; Hook your fingers in front of your chest and now try to pull your hands apart. This should generate great muscular effort. While maintaining the high tension in your fingers and hands-

⁹ <http://www.valsalva.org/valsalva.htm>
Page 19

try to say your name. It will be very difficult. This is what happens during a stammering block.

The overall, message for you is: train your mind to think of speaking situations as beautiful opportunities (not life & death situations), maintain gentle belly breathing and nip any tendency to STRAIN in the bud, ie. as soon as it surfaces in your consciousness. As soon as you feel an urge to strain - smile, take a deep breath, consciously relax your belly and use gentle onset and a technique you have used consistently and are comfortable with.

Pausing

Communication is a complex skill. Intellectual and physical, both components of speech require coordination and effort. So, obviously you perform better when you give yourself sufficient time for this effort through frequent pauses. Many of us labor under this false notion that communication means talking non-stop! We think that a silence in a conversation must be an uncomfortable moment for both parties and will be considered a weakness on the part of the speaker. PWS often feel under pressure to prove themselves by talking continuously! Truth is just the other way around. Silence is an essential and natural part of good communication. People

who talk non-stop are considered rude and poor conversation partners. Pause should be practiced consciously as meaningful breaks in the flow where:

1. A clause ends, signified by a comma, colon etc.
2. A sentence ends, indicated by a full stop.
3. A new concept or thought is being introduced, often indicated by a hyphen, dash or a new paragraph etc.
4. A word expressing emotions (exclamation mark!) or question (?).
5. Ellipses (...) indicating unsaid thoughts.
6. Brackets [] or Parentheses () indicating additional information.
7. You wish to give a few moments for the information to sink in.
8. You expect a response (verbal or non-verbal) from your audience.

Listening attentively to your partner is equally important. Many PWS are so caught up in formulating their response that they hardly listen to their partner, leading to confusion and communication failure. The other person gets the impression that you are just not interested in what he or she has to share. Pausing should be unhurried, relaxed and can be used for

taking a deep breath, formulating our thoughts and reviewing audience response, especially during a formal presentation.

Such conscious meaningful pauses help a pws by stopping his speech mechanism completely; otherwise it tends to gather momentum and become uncontrollable after a couple of sentences, leading to moments of stuttering or a block eventually.

To practice pausing,

1. Begin with reading a newspaper or book, with full attention to punctuation as discussed above.
2. Stop completely and take a deep breath at every punctuation (comma, colon, semi-colon, full stop, hyphen etc.) - and then proceed further.
3. After regular practice for 2-4 weeks, practice conversation with a friend in a similar fashion: stop and breathe in gently wherever you think a punctuation mark should be, if you were writing it down. During the unhurried pause, maintain the eye contact, smile if appropriate, be aware of the time pressure but do not react to it.
4. Still later, practice it with a larger group and under

different circumstances. While speaking in a formal setting, resist the time pressure. If you have been given only three minutes to present a long report- set up your priorities, leave out all the un- (or not so) important details and present only the most salient information in a relaxed way, interspersed with meaningful pauses. You may preface your presentation with something like this: *Since I have just three minutes, I will share the most relevant information with you.* To ensure understanding though, you may give handouts at the end.

The most important thing to remember is: during a pause your speech mechanism should really come to a stop and you should be completely relaxed. Your pause should not be like an idling engine on a red light.

Here is a group exercise to develop power to resist time pressure, while speaking: Sit down with some pea-nuts in the center, with members of your self help group. You have to ask a question from the person sitting next to you (what is the color of your shirt? What is the day today? Are you not Rahul? Etc). That member must answer AFTER eating one pea-nut completely and then carry on asking the question from the

next person and so on. Whoever forgets to eat the pea-nut before answering is out. Whoever lasts till the end could be titled 'King or Queen of Pausing'. This can be a fun game both for adults and children. (*From 'Fifty Activities for the Children who stutter', by Dr Peter Reitzes.*)

Eyes- the doorway to the soul of communication

During conversation, whenever we feel uncomfortable or face a difficulty- like having to speak an untruth, or say something uncomplimentary about a colleague, we tend to look away. This is the most common give away sign. PWS do it frequently but unconsciously. There are other signs too: moving restlessly, scratching your head, touching the side of the nose or covering your mouth with the back of your hand under some pretext etc. While these mannerisms do not help in saying the feared word, they do distract the listener. The listener is left wondering about these secondary behaviors rather than focusing on our message.

But can good body language be faked? Yes. Even if you are not feeling very confident, you can convey a positive image by looking into the eyes of the other person, EVEN when you are stammering. In fact, many people find it very difficult to stammer while maintaining a good eye contact with their

audience! Even listeners feel communication to be better when the pws does not look away. So, you dont have to wait for a cure before you start looking into people's eyes while talking.

Here is a simple exercise:

Take a small pad and paper in your pocket and go on the road or a park:

1. Meet strangers and greet them in a happy fashion (Hello, Ram-ram, Hi etc.). Just greet them.
2. Take the pad out soon after and note down the color of their eyes, eye-brows and other facial characteristics: wearing glasses? Bifocal? Moustache? Big or small? Clean shaven? Bald? Hair dyed? *Teeka* on forehead? Any head gear? What colour? Etc.
3. Greet the next person and again make a note.
4. Do this for ten strangers everyday for some weeks till you become good at recalling color of the eyes and other details (eg. names) of the people you talk to even for a few minutes.

But always remember, eye contact does not mean staring. It is just telling the other person through your eyes that you are okay with your own stammer and that you are listening to him or her very carefully; you are very interested in what they are telling you. So, you dont stare. You move your gaze around in a normal fashion- but keep coming back to their eyes. How to move your eyes around is explained very well by Steven Aitchinson, a life coach:

“..When breaking the eye contact don't look down as this might indicate the ending of your part of the conversation. Instead, look up or to the side as if your are remembering something. Try it just now: don't move your head, and think about the first time you started school. You will notice your eyes might move up or to the side as you try to remember this. So when your listener sees this they will think you are trying to remember something and keep on listening to you. [\(Link\)](#)¹⁰

Eye contact is part of overall body language, which can be best studied and improved by frequent video recordings of self (and others) while talking to people- alone or in a group, or talking to someone on phone etc. Review these recordings

¹⁰ <http://www.stevenaitchison.co.uk/blog/6-ways-to-dramatically-improve-your-eye-contact-skills/>

with a friend and ask yourself: Am I coming through as a genuine person, comfortable with myself and the subject matter? Do I look and sound convincing? Inviting? Open? Aggressive or caring? Approachable? Also, do little role plays or mimicry and video record and analyze it later. Role plays offer fun opportunity to experiment with your body language and improve it.

Read more about body language and how to use it effectively on [web](#)¹¹.

Active Listening Do you remember how your whole body strained to listen to your exam or interview results on a poor phone line? Or your boss telling you about that much deserved increment? Or the last boarding call announcement for your flight? When we are highly interested in the information, our body and mind adopts an attitude, which is called active listening. This attitude can be learned and consciously applied, whenever you want to convey that you are listening and interested. Since listening is almost 90% of communication, you should be using this approach almost all the time! Here is how you practice it:

¹¹ <http://www.dumblittleman.com/2007/04/how-to-improve-your-body-language.html>
Page 23

1. Face the speaker, maintain eye contact; lean towards him (if appropriate).
2. Focus on the whole message and its meaning.
3. Repeat the words mentally as you hear them (it will help in recalling it later).
4. Take your mind OFF every other distraction (cell-phone, surroundings, what you want to do next etc.)
5. Dont interrupt or make counter-arguments, even in thoughts. Just listen, as if your life depended on it!
6. If you think you are getting bored- keep those thoughts under check and consciously GET INTERESTED in what is being said.
7. Give a nod, or say, “Yes” “Okay” etc. to let the speaker know that you are listening and understanding.
8. Use other ways to acknowledge: ask intelligent

questions; recap or rephrase or summarize what you just heard at appropriate intervals.

9. Seek clarifications if needed.

Active listening requires a deep level of awareness, ability to pick up one soft word against a noisy background. Also the ability to switch yourself into active listening mode **at will**. This comes with constant practice and observation. Recall the last time when you were trying to make sense to a bored clerk or an indifferent colleague. They can teach you all the things, which YOU should NOT be doing.

Here is an interactive exercise for a group: Divide in pairs and let everyone tell each other certain basic facts about themselves: name, occupation, zodiac sign, one hobby, education etc. After ten minutes, in a plenary session, let everyone introduce their partners one by one. Let the partner correct wherever needed and keep a simple score for comparison. In the next round, they can share more complex details like birth place, graduation subjects and marks and work experience. Finally ask if anyone can recall these details about each and every participant? This will be tough but recalling these details later, will exercise everyone's active listening skills.

5. Watching your thoughts

The inner game! As we mentioned earlier in the discussion on breathing and pausing - communication like all other activities has two components- the external act of talking & listening- and the inner consciousness of it. Most of the problems begin at the level of inner consciousness and only then manifest in the external world. Unless we don't learn to deal with this inner game efficiently, becoming good communicator will be difficult.

We all have noticed that before we actually stammer, there is a sudden thought ("what will it be like if I stammered NOW?"), a sudden fear and a sudden obsession not to stammer at that point at any cost; A determination to resist and struggle against the coming moment of difficulty; Yes, it is a game, to be played and won at the level of inner awareness. Like any other game, you master it by constant practice.

Let us first understand a few basic facts about our brain. First, it does not hear (-fails to register-) negative commands and finds it difficult to obey them. If you say to your mind: *you must not stammer in this interview*, chances are your mind hears: **you must stammer in this interview!** ("Not" is simply dropped, ignored). This is why most therapies which directly

or indirectly ask you not to stammer in pursuit of fluency, fail sooner or later. You suffer a relapse within weeks or months.

On the other hand, it is easier to get the brain to focus on a positive idea or command: In the above example, if you said to yourself couple of times- *I must look in to the eyes of the interviewer and smile*, Chances are high that you might actually do so and improve your over all communication. But being “positive” does not mean saying: “*Who, me? No, I dont stammer. It is nothing. It is no issue at all- not for me.*” The gap between being positive and running away(-denial-) from the problem through FEAR is rather fine. Living in denial and hoping that the interview will go fine on its own- is not being Positive. It is being unrealistic and foolish.

But practicing a positive affirmation in such a situation may not be easy at times if we have made a habit of approaching interviews with a long face and a thumping heart, as if we were going to face the death squad! This brings us to the second important fact about brain: Good habits are made the same way as the bad habits: through repetition over a period of time.

The third important fact in this connection is: you can change only what you are aware of. So developing awareness in the

act of talking, listening, relating to upcoming presentation etc. is critical for success. But this cannot be an isolated exercise once in a while. You will succeed only if there is a round the clock awareness at maintenance level throughout the day much before the interview in question. In other words, being more conscious of our thoughts and actions, should actually work like an anti-virus scanner, resident in the computer memory and ALWAYS active in the background.

This brings in the need of reviewing our life style and bringing daily practice of some form of calmness and awareness in our life - meditation, prayer, breathing exercises (Brahmavidya, Vipassana etc.). If you have studied round the year, a crash review of a day or two might be enough to prepare you for exams. But if you have not studied at all, what chances a one day crash course has, to help you score 90% in the exam? So, some kind of background “awareness”, running at maintenance level round the clock, is very much needed to help you during the crisis.

Such a life style will help you summon heightened level of awareness during a formal presentation in class, to help you consciously relax, smile, take a deep breath, maintain eye contact, start gently, pause frequently and use all those techniques which have helped you in a clinic or in your self

help group. If you don't chat in English in your day to day life, can you suddenly start talking in English during a high pressure interview? So, are you willing to review and modify your lifestyle? Here are some small adjustments which have worked for many:

1. Go to bed early and read some inspiring book to sleep. Ensure that you get 7-8 hours sleep per day. Early morning hours are best time to meditate or to write your personal journal.
2. Begin and end the day with 40-50 minutes (or more) of deep meditation or any activity which internalizes your attention, develops intense awareness and helps you to relax deeply. Even being totally quiet will be good. Put everything-TV, computer, music etc.- off for these 40-50 minutes.
3. Once a week or ten days take a complete day off for the above purpose- silence, meditation, Vipassana, prayer etc.
4. These activities become easy if you do it with a group. Find such a group and formally join it. Or start one.
5. Your friends and family can help your efforts, if you tell them what you are trying to do and why, in advance.
6. Keep a journal- write down your experiences with

stammering and your reactions and thoughts. It can be private or it can be in the form of a public blog. Once in a while read the old entries. It will help you realize the progress you have made.

7. Once in a while challenge yourself by taking up the activity which you fear most.
8. Develop a long term relationship with a life-coach. Share your thoughts and listen to his interpretations seriously. A good coach will act as a mirror, provide feedback and challenge you, when needed. Our thoughts are so close to us that we cannot see them. This is why we need help from a friend, or a coach or a counselor. Talking to them, helps us to understand our fears and deal with them.
9. If you consistently practice these (especially meditation), a time might come when you may experience separation of **Awareness** and **Thinking**. You will be able to see your reactions to your stammering as something separate from YOU. From this point onwards, you can truly start healing yourself. One of the signs of this stage is: you will be much less over powered by moods, criticism, sadness, anger, disappointment etc. Your recovery from such negative emotions will be much faster. Read more on this theme: <http://emersonandtolle.blogspot.com/2010/04/clarity.html>

A few words about why some people who start on this path,

may not succeed:

1. PWS start with the idea that by practicing Vipassana etc. they will become fluent like Mr XYZ. It is like learning Java only to be able to play Solitaire on your computer! Your true goal should be to learn to deal with your mind, rather than becoming fluent etc.
2. Many people dont thoroughly plan the required changes in life style. They dont turn family and friends into ally. OR they attempt too many changes suddenly.
3. Few people are ready for the long haul. They stop after a few weeks on some pretext or the other. Dealing with mind is a long term effort than letting status quo persist.
4. The structured experience over a long time needs a supportive atmosphere: few people have it or try to set it up consciously. Those who are part of a SHG or meditation / faith network fare better in the long run.

In our experience, Vipassana (or consistent practice of any meditation practice) can help you develop **Awareness**. In other cultural traditions, going in to long silence, spiritual retreats or solitude can serve the same purpose. When there is nothing to distract the mind- no external stimuli - it collapses on itself, turns inwards automatically and we develop inner

awareness over a period of time. (More discussion on [web](#)¹²)

To summarize, communication is a “sport” and like every sport, it has two components – the external and internal. Unless we dont get the hang of the inner workings of this sport, we cant hope to excel at it. To understand how a thought forms within, is shaped up by our beliefs and fears, converted into nerve impulses and finally converted into audible sound- we need to turn our attention with in. We need to become more AWARE of our thoughts. For this, we need to be silent, our bodies still and our attention turned within. A supportive atmosphere and life style can be a great help.

¹² <http://www.philosophyonline.co.uk/philosophy-forum/index.php?topic=72.0>

6. Values and Beliefs

"I am a cool guy. Happy go lucky sort.."

"People have never judged me fairly. It is their loss. Who cares?"

"I am two people living in one. My private self, is not known even to my wife. And there is a happy public self- laughing and joking all the time. These two self dont get along too well. I am having difficulties now- being one.."

"I am a fighter. I never give up. I had to fight for everything in life. But it has made me strong. I will fight o my stammering too. I don't need any help.."

"I am alone but never lonely. I dont care for human company. I would rather spend time with a good book.."

What do you think of the above statements? of yourself? What do you guess people think about you? Do you think others have been unfair to you? Have you been a victim all your life? If you could HONESTLY answer these questions or write it down, you will be surprised to see the predominantly negative content of your self-image. If you believe this image, why

should the world think any differently about you? If the parents think that their son is worthless, why would neighbors think otherwise of the young man? You get the point?

Now, where has this predominantly negative image come from? One main source is the off-hand comments from people around us- family, teachers, friends, colleagues; their chance reactions. Stereotypes in media (stories, movies, plays, folk-tales etc.) also strengthen such negative ideas. Later, we too start passing severe judgments on ourselves- often in the form of critical self talk : *I dont deserve it. It is sheer chance. This good luck may not continue for long. Something bad is bound to happen to me. etc.*

When a job interview has gone bad and you return home, what kind of thoughts pass through your head? What kind of things you say to yourself? THAT is a good example of obsessive negative self-talk, which only worsens the problem.

Once we develop a particular image of ourselves (stammerer/ unsuccessful/ unsocial/ socially inept/ unlucky/ martyr/ victim), we maintain this self-image by selectively interpreting what we 'hear', read, believe, understand, remember, recall, do etc. It becomes part of our long term memory and perpetuates itself. In other words, we may go through hundreds of new experiences, meet hundreds of new people, BUT it only

strengthens our pre-conceived image of ourselves. Can any therapy or self-effort succeed in the face of such strong beliefs? Self image is also known as **self-schema**, because it is a collection of many strands of thoughts about ourselves. Here is a definition:

“This high-speed mental "highway" that takes us rapidly through life may appear to be externally generated and perpetuated (i.e., by the fast-paced society in which we live). However, if we were to examine it more closely, we would find that it is constructed primarily of habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that uniquely characterize each of us as individuals. Psychologists refer to the underlying structure of these habitual patterns as 'self-schemas.' (see [more](#)¹³ on web)

If we recall Sheehan, his theory of stuttering Iceberg is pointing to these difficulties only. This explains why relapse is so common and why many therapies don't succeed in the first place. Now, what do we do? Here are two, among many, practical approaches to know ourselves more deeply and consciously - and then work on it.

Take a test

¹³ http://info.med.yale.edu/psych/3s/3S_overview.html
Page 29

There are many on-line tests and self-help resources. Here is one from [web](#)¹⁴:

Answer these statements as “true” or “false” for yourself on a paper.

1. My glass is always half-empty, not half-full.
2. I'm always apologizing for things.
3. I'm always telling myself I "should" be doing this or that.
4. I constantly criticize myself.
5. What other people think about me dictates how I feel about myself.
6. I am critical of my mistakes and relive them over and over.
7. I always let the people who care about me down.
8. I feel like I have the weight of the world on my shoulders.
9. A partial failure is as bad as a complete failure.
10. I bend over backwards to please others.
11. I am not sure I have done a good job unless someone else points it out.
12. It's hard for me to forgive and forget.
13. I have to work harder than others for relationships and am afraid that the relationships I have will fail.
14. If I don't do as well as others, it means that I am

¹⁴ <http://www.mtstcil.org/skills/image-test.html>

not as good as them.

15. If I can't do something well, there is no point in doing it at all.

Results:

Give yourself 1 point for each question you answered with a "true".

0 - 4: You have a generally positive way of thinking and should feel good about yourself. Keep it up!

5 - 8: You may be struggling with some negative emotions. Take time to review your good qualities.

9 or more: You can be very critical of yourself. Challenge yourself to change your way of thinking!

This same website (link above) gives you many ideas for self help using positive thinking skills. Check it out.

JO-HARI window

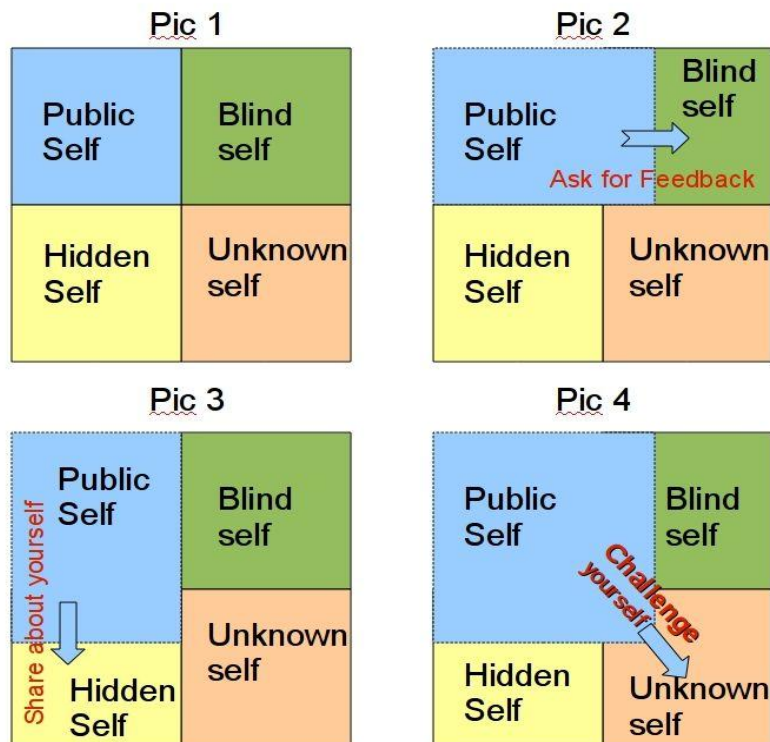
Jo-Hari window is a broader tool to understand yourself and work on it. Take a big paper and draw the matrix as below, on it. Fill it with your qualities, or whatever you know about yourself- according to the labels of the quadrants. Google JO-HARI window and read more about how to fill the matrix. After filling it, keep it safe for quite some time, review it after some weeks and keep on adding to it and editing it for 2-3 years or more. Think of it as an ongoing PROJECT. If need be,

photostat it and stick a copy wherever you spend lot of time.

1. Public Self what is known to the person about him/herself and is also known to others eg. <i>Anil is a good programmer; everyone knows it, including Anil himself.</i>	2. Blind Self what is unknown by the person about him/herself but which others know eg. <i>Kamal is very short tempered but he doesn't realize it. His colleagues complain about it.</i>
3. Hidden Self what the person knows about him/herself that others do not know eg. <i>No one knows but Vijay is a good singer.</i>	4. Unknown Self what is unknown to the person about him/herself and is also unknown to others eg. <i>A pws may have potential to be a good facilitator- but no one knows about it, including himself. It is just waiting to be discovered someday.</i>

Obviously, Unknown self quadrant will remain blank- because these are the potential traits, neither you nor the world knows about yourself. To fill Blind self quadrant, you will have to seek feedback from others – family, friends, colleagues, even strangers at times (Pic 2 below). Information under Hidden self will be your personal and private thoughts. Now, the purpose of the exercise is to bring more and more area under the first quadrant (Public self). Sincerely seeking feedback from others and making self disclosure (pic 3 below), gradually and thoughtfully, will enlarge the first quadrant and

reduce the second and third quadrant. To reduce the 4th quadrant, you must put yourself in challenging situations and constantly explore yourself (Pic 4 below). Maybe you did not know that you could do good mimicry, till one day, when you tried it reluctantly in the office, on being challenged by a colleague. Every “problem” is an opportunity to know something new about yourself.

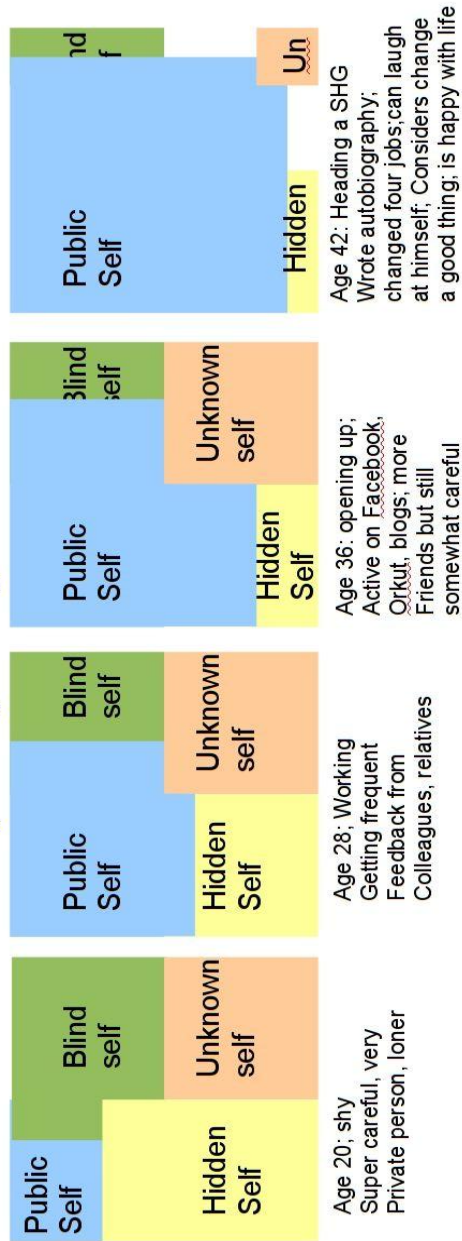


can be very helpful. Repeating it again after some months can help you change your self-schema gradually. Over the months or years, your window may undergo transitions somewhat like this (picture on next page: A Journey- Progression of SELF).

As you become aware of your self-image, you will find it easier to change it slowly, one small step at a time. In this process, there are two very important ingredients: To change your negative self-image, you must learn to accept and love yourself. Love, not in the sense of self-indulgence, but more as compassion towards a hurt child. Secondly, reading and thinking about self-image, beliefs, values is fine but the change comes through ACTION alone. If you want to be a social person, you must act like one and accept the invitation and go to your friend's birthday party, even if you find it very challenging or just “waste of time”! You change through hundreds of action, you undertake every day, not by wishes and thoughts you entertain. Best wishes on this life time journey of knowing who you truly are!

Doing this exercise in a group, with a trusted friend or coach
Page 31

A Journey : Progression of SELF



NB: This is a typical development of an individual. Ages are just examples. Some people can fast forward rapidly, depending on the risk taking and circumstances.

7. Self-Motivation & Beyond

Self-therapy has a big dis-advantage: when you are down, there is no therapist or counselor around to motivate you. There is no one to challenge and remind you of the goals set by you, just a few days ago. You have to fight your demons and help yourself. It is like climbing your own shoulders to get out of the pit you have fallen in. Is it possible? Is it doable? For disciplined & creative people, YES. So how does a stammerer, who is already facing frequent setbacks, bad moods and worry, motivates him or herself?

Power of environment

If you are growing up in a family, where everyone is mistakenly trying to help you through denial: *You are fine. You dont need to join that group of stammerers. Your problem is very minimal...etc.* - then, it will be nearly impossible to remain motivated on a long course of self-therapy. Sometime even colleagues and friends may put you off by a chance comment: *what is this funny way of speaking you have picked up. Earlier you stammered occasionally and that was fine by us.*

Now, you cant give up your family and friends - or change them overnight. But you can certainly have another family,

which motivates you, makes you feel accepted, understands the struggles you are going through- and which may even help you by providing the right atmosphere for practice. This is the group of pws, meeting physically, or through phone or even a web-based group. Joining such a group and interacting regularly can psychologically help you very much.

When you join such a group, keep a few things in mind: Many pws don't want to receive help- they WANT to help others! This is unrealistic and a little childish too. To help others, you have to have certain skills, knowledge and some experience.

On the other hand, even a novice can help by listening respectfully to other pws. This you should try to do as often as possible, rather than trying to teach every one the technique or trick that may have helped you. Ideally, a SHG is the best place for sharing about yourself honestly, so that you can come out of that burden of shame and isolation. Once you have participated in a group for some months or so, try the next step: setting up and leading a SHG.

Leading a SHG

Whether this SHG is physical, phone based or web-based, leading it would develop your initiative, communication, people-skills, planning, facilitation, problem solving and above

all- you will be FORCED to learn more about stammering and self-therapy.

It is only, when they take up such a role, many pws discover that stammering is their last and least problem. What has actually been slowing them down in life are other personality traits like: procrastination, lack of initiative, lethargy, avoidance of conflict at any cost, refusing to plan ahead, not sharing information with other team members, trying to micro-manage everything on their own, not trusting others etc. The SHG becomes gradually the play ground where they learn these and many more skills. Their focus shifts from Cure and Fluency to effective and efficient communication. Their vision broadens to a larger slice of humanity instead of just worrying about themselves. From “loners”, they transform into excellent “team players” and “leaders”. This kind of transformation is rarely achieved by traditional therapy.

Inner Transformation

No change is complete until it touches your deepest core. Otherwise there is a danger of RELAPSE even after years. This inner transformation happens through just one act: Accepting yourself as you are. Acceptance of the PRESENT moment. If we recall, as a child, we hated being called a “stammerer”; we went to great lengths to PROVE that we are

not one. Harder we tried to prove, worse the problem became. In fact, as a therapist said: stammering is what you do, in order not to stammer. An elaborate set of avoidance behavior and attitude took over our personality.

This non-acceptance, this kicking against an obvious fact took many forms over the years: we often questioned God: *Why me?* We refused to associate with other people with disabilities, we became obsessed with our own issues and problems and went deeper and deeper, in a dark hole of *me and my stammering and my hurt and my this and my that...*

Even when we went for therapy, we did not accept whole heartedly, our stammering and the obvious need for help. We would reason like this: *I dont stammer- not like so and so; I just hesitate a little. If this therapist can just teach me how to say those difficult words, I will be okay. I dont need to follow these other things which are meant for stammerers..*

Whenever the topic of our stammering comes up, in the office or elsewhere, we are very surprised. If it is even mentioned in the annual performance appraisal, we feel so insulted that we resign and switch job. If we analyze, all our hardships emerge not from stammering but from our refusal to acknowledge and accept it.

Over many years, and after much suffering, a point comes when we can no longer deny the obvious- we accept our stammering and associated issues, dump all the emotional baggage and are ready to move forward. This is the point, when any therapy, any event, any practice will help us tremendously. More maturity comes over us, as we raise our head- for the first time, consider other people and genuinely ask: *Why not me? ie. if others can suffer so much, what is the big deal if I stammer?*

Things begin to fall in proper perspective. We get more concerned about others. We learn to show our love and concern for others through service, self-less acts of sharing and helping others.

At last you are truly able to say and feel that stammering was a boon in disguise: you would not be the person, you are today, if you did not stammer. You still sometime have those moments of difficulty while talking, but they no more matter. You have learned the art of deeper communication, where spoken words are only a hint, a medium, not the essence of communication. You have become not just a good communicator but a WHOLE person at last. You have been healed completely. You feel no need to go out and prove that. You are at peace with yourself and with the world.

Two big changes attending this inner flowering are: All kind of fears have almost totally subsided now. You are no more frightened of FAILURE or of people's reactions. You try out all those things, which you wanted to do all these years, but never had the courage to go ahead. Second related change is- for the first time in life, your inner creativity takes over your life: you explore new ingenious ways of doing meaningful things in life. You may write a book, become life-coach to someone, work for a social cause, give up job and start a new venture, go on a world tour, join *Vipassana* and explore inner world with deep commitment etc. Yes, anything is possible, once you acknowledge, accept and transcend your stammer. This is the moment, for which Gods and your eternal Self, have been waiting for ages with baited breath..

You may still be asking me: *So...tell me once for all, is there a cure or not?* Okay, listen to this story and decide for yourself:

Akbar drew a line on the ground and challenged his courtiers to shorten it- without touching it. Many came forward and tried but failed. Finally Birbal came, drew a bigger line next to it and said: *There! Done!*

Akbar agreed. Courtiers said- *My Lord, but it is there!* Akbar smiled at Birbal and asked him to convince the courtiers. Birbal cleared his throat

respectfully and started: *My Lord, if you look carefully for a few seconds, the smaller line will disappear- as if by magic- and you will notice only one line, the bigger one. Yes, I can see only one line- the one I made, the bigger one.*

Courtiers, coughed louder, with more respect and said: *My lord, he is a liar. How can YOUR line disappear? There are two lines and yours is certainly bigger in our humble opinion.*

Finally Birbal took Akbar to one corner and said: *My lord, even you will agree with my observation. Eyes will see only that which is bigger. But your courtiers will need a GO -Government Order- to see that!*

They both had a good laugh. The debate continues to this day. If you are able to communicate and deal with all the needs life places on you, if you are okay with yourself, if you live life fully- you are CURED. Let no one tell you otherwise. It is not their business. Draw a bigger line in your life, excel at what you do, reach out to others, make your life meaningful. Look inwards- not outwards for any approval.

Author



I am sachin and I am a person who stammers. Why do I say that? Because I feel no need to hide that. Stammering now, is neither a blessing nor a curse for me. Just a mile stone- nevertheless an important mile stone, because it helped me learn about myself, cultivate good communication skills, meet some great friends and write this manual in the process.

I am a social worker and counselor.

Peace!

Dr Satyendra Srivastava
Herbertpur, Dehradun

18th Dec.2011