

Connect with your Sixth Sense

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology*

BY MATHILDA WATERS



According to our expert on well-being, Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology, sixth sense is not only real but also key to emotional well-being.

MW: What do you mean by 'sixth sense'?

Dr. DD: Traditionally, we think we have five senses: vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. These senses put us in touch with the external world. But there is the sixth sense - called interoception - that allows us to experience sensations inside our body. Our bodies are loaded with feeling receptors that allow us to physically feel pain, discomfort, anxiety, hunger, pleasure, excitement, and so on.

MW: Why then do we commonly speak of five senses, and neglect this inner sense?

Dr. DD: My best guess is that we neglect to talk about the inner sense because we generally neglect to experience it. Language reflects how people in a particular culture experience the world. In Western culture, we are used to living in our heads and are relatively unaware of our bodies. We value thinking over feeling.

MW: How does thinking make us neglect the inner sense?

Dr. DD: You can't physically feel thoughts in your head, because there are no feeling receptors in your brain. So when you are deep in thought, it is possible to be unaware of the physical sensations altogether. This is frequently what we do.

MW: It's like your mind is disconnected from your heart?

Dr. DD: Yes. All emotions are physical states that can be experienced in our bodies. Paying attention to the body is the most direct way of bridging the gap between the mind and the heart.

MW: What happens when the mind and the body are disconnected?

Dr. DD: We make bad decisions. The best decisions are made when we pay attention to our emotional responses and think carefully. Emotions tell us what is and isn't good for us, for others, for the planet. Thinking provides us with sophisticated ways of analyzing complex situations that might otherwise overwhelm us emotionally. Thinking also creates a more stable perspective to rely on at times of emotional volatility. We need both to make sound decisions. For example, if we allowed ourselves to fully experience the

suffering we've been causing this beautiful planet, we'd be moved to rethink our behaviour and make different decisions.

MW: In your experience, what are the greatest obstacles people face when trying to regain access to their sixth sense?

Dr. DD: Most people are in the habit of avoiding unpleasant sensations altogether. They try to change, escape, judge, or suppress 'bad' feelings. They do anything but what is most effective, which is to completely accept, stay with, and experience the unpleasant sensations.

MW: Why would anyone want to experience inner pain, anxiety, or sadness?

Dr. DD: For two reasons. First, these emotions help you understand yourself and empathise with others. Second, when these emotions are completely accepted and embraced, they typically subside, just like a crying child will calm down when soothed. You can avoid sadness, anxiety, anger, etc. in the short-term, but negative feelings will stay with you until they are addressed and their causes resolved. Negative feelings also tend to intensify with time unless they're dealt with, leading to depression, anxiety disorders, interpersonal problems, etc.

MW: How can people become more connected with their bodies?

Dr. DD: It's a matter of practice. Many techniques are available to help people connect with their feelings. At first, it might be difficult to overcome old habits on your own. A good first step is to find someone to guide you on your journey inwards.

* DAVDA Psychology is a psychotherapy and personal coaching clinic. For an initial consultation call 253-2832 (253-DAVDA). Visit www.davda.ca for free SLEEP QUIZ with SLEEP TIPS or for more information. To find other Manitoba psychologists, visit www.mps.ca