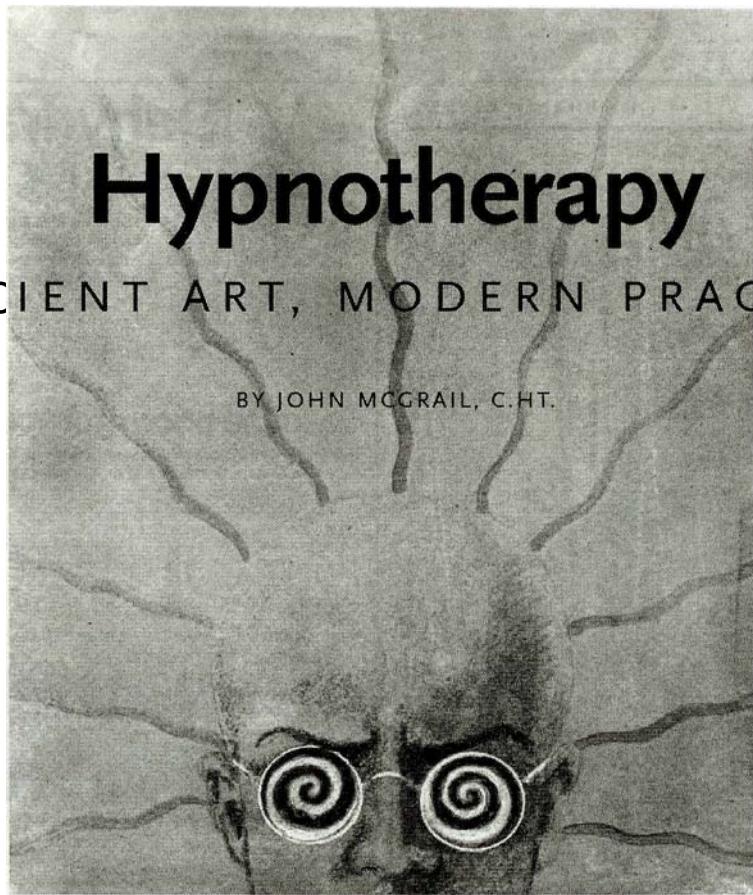


# Hypnotherapy

## ANCIENT ART, MODERN PRACTICE

BY JOHN MCGRAIL, C.H.T.



### It's not a panacea, but studies show that hypnotherapy can help you "snap out of" some kinds of limiting behavior patterns.

THE SETTING IS A TASTEFULLY DECORATED office; "Sally," a 32-year-old entertainment executive, leans back in a comfortable recliner and takes several slow, deep breaths. Her therapist dims the lights, then begins speaking to her in a lulling, dulcet tone of voice.

Within a few minutes, it is obvious that Sally is deeply relaxed; in fact, she appears to be asleep. Observing subtle physiological reactions in response to his patter, the therapist completes the induction: "...five, four, three, two, one, zero, deep sleep." Sally exhales with almost a sigh, signaling a final release into deep hypnosis. The therapist begins to work.

Hardly the stuff of a Las Vegas stage show, this. There is no cheering audience, no group of willing volunteers eager to have the hypnotist "change" them into human cartoons. The hypnotherapist will spend the next 20 to 30 minutes simply talking to Sally in a quiet, almost conversational voice. It is a monologue rich with stories, images, and metaphor—language designed to match Sally's personal linguistic learning patterns, and intended to connect directly to her

subconscious mind, the source of most human behavior and emotion, good and bad, desired and otherwise.

Sally's reason for seeking hypnotherapy was to overcome an almost paralyzing fear of public speaking that was becoming increasingly detrimental to a very promising career. She also wanted to reduce and control the stress that comes with her job. After only four sessions, she now conducts most presentations with ease and assuredness. Speaking to large audiences is still somewhat intimidating, but given her rapid progress, her fear will likely soon be a mere memory.

At the end of the session Sally "awakens" on cue, feeling refreshed and relaxed. Ask her and she will tell you that beyond the fact that she is successfully conquering her fear, in general she feels significantly better about herself than she did before she began her therapy.

These are common side effects of therapeutic hypnosis: improved self-image and confidence, and a profound sense of achievement and empowerment. Not surprisingly, Sally likes the feeling, as do

most people who experience contemporary hypnotherapy, a unique combination of an ancient art with modern behavioral science.

#### History of Healing

The use of hypnosis as a catalyst for behavioral change and physical healing dates back to the earliest periods of recorded history. From the time of the ancient Indian and Egyptian cultures, hypnotherapy has ebbed and flowed in popularity, sometimes flourishing, sometimes almost disappearing, but always surviving across cultures, geography, technologies, and time itself.

In the era of modern healthcare over the past 100 years and continuing today, hundreds of studies conducted at some of the most prestigious academic and medical institutions around the world have repeatedly and empirically verified the efficacy of hypnotherapy for many clinical situations.

A keyword search for "hypnosis" or "hypnotherapy" on the Web sites of the American Medical Association, the National Institutes for Health, the American Psychological Association, or the World Health Organization will lead to scores of

articles, abstracts and reports on clinical studies regarding the use of hypnosis in modern medicine and psychotherapy. Hypnosis is utilized in leading institutions like the Mayo Clinic, integrated into the practices of thousands of physicians and psychologists, and practiced by tens of thousands of lay hypnoterapists worldwide, and with good reason.

Hypnotherapy is extremely versatile. It can be applied to great effect across a considerable variety of vocational, avocational and clinical situations. It helps people eliminate fears and phobias; eradicate bad habits, negative emotion and attitudes; and improve their performance at work, in athletics, or in virtually any area of their personal, professional, or recreational lives.

In clinical settings, where lay hypnoterapists must work under the referral and supervision of licensed physicians, hypnotherapy is often an effective adjunct to conventional treatments for conditions like obesity, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Lupus, migraine, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, Tinnitus, Asthma, allergies, warts, HIV, infertility, bedwetting, and even some cancers.

"It is estimated that 94% of patients benefit from hypnotherapy, even if it is only linked to improved relaxation," says Joan Friedrick, Ph.D., M.A., writing on clinical hypnosis for ABC News Online's *Healthology*.

Hypnotherapy can help patients prepare for and heal faster from dental procedures, surgery and childbirth. It is used successfully to control chronic pain, and as an adjunct to, and sometimes a replacement for, chemical anesthesia. Many patients also find relief from the discomfort associated with harsh treatments like chemo and radiation therapy.

"Hypnosis is helpful to anyone going into medical treatment because it helps the person to stay relaxed and de-stressed," says Joanne Marrow, Ph.D., professor emeritus at Cal State Sacramento, hypnoterapist and licensed psychologist. "What the hypnoterapist does is make the patient more comfortable; the traditional hypnotic induction involves relaxing all parts of the body."

However, Marrow warns against viewing hypnotherapy as a cure-all. Therapists need to be very wise in selecting patients they are comfortable treating," she says. "No one can treat everyone." And though the traditional hypnotic induction for effecting relaxation can have practical applications for most anyone, the situation becomes more complicated when the therapist works with the patient's subconscious mind after achieving relaxation.

"That's where the therapist's experience is important," Marrow says. "Often, when you do start interacting with a person's subconscious, earlier issues surface: issues around child abuse or other traumas a person set aside in adult life that are still affecting him. An ethical hypnoterapist will attend to how a client is responding to the experience, and if it doesn't seem helpful, should discontinue therapy," she says.

### ***These are common side effects of therapeutic hypnosis: improved self image and confidence and a profound sense of achievement and empowerment.***

Despite the unequivocal proof of its efficacy, hypnotherapy still exists in a sort of netherworld between mainstream healthcare and metaphysical quackery, fenced in neatly by myths, fears and misconceptions around what it is and how it works. These misgivings are most likely born of the fact that most people's only exposure to hypnosis is through stage shows and bad melodramatic plot devices that may entertain, but also utterly misinform.

Certainly, watching a group of hypnotized stage show volunteers go through their paces might lead any rational individual to conclude that the subjects have indeed lost control of their minds, unequivocally the number one fear regarding hypnosis. After all, who in their right mind would act like that?

The answer lies in the fact that while we can all experience induced hypnosis if we so choose (and we must choose to or we won't), a small percentage of the population, is by nature especially suggestible to the hypnotic state. A trained stage hypnotist spots these personalities in the audience, then picks volunteers from the likely candidates and invites them to the stage.

These natural somnambulists never lose control of their minds, nor can they (or anyone) be forced to do anything they don't want to, or wouldn't normally do. So if those folks we see on stage flap their wings and quack like ducks, it's because they want to.

#### **Relaxed Body, Alert Mind**

"In truth, hypnosis is not a mysterious, unnatural state; it actually occurs quite regularly in our daily lives," says Marrow. A broad definition of hypnosis is "relaxed body, alert mind." Using that definition, everyone experiences hypnosis in their daily lives—watching TV, listening to music, and daydreaming are all trance states akin to hypnosis. Children are in a state of hypnosis quite frequently, whenever they use their imaginations during play. Not surprisingly,

they also respond quite well to hypnotherapy.

Second only to the fear of losing control is the fear of getting stuck in hypnosis if something incapacitates the hypnoterapist, a common ploy in B movies. Should that unfortunate circumstance arise, the hypnotized person will simply "wake up (and hopefully call 911)." That's the biggest myth: that hypnosis is [a state where you] lose control," Marrow says. "Your conscious mind is observing and watching everything that is going on."

There are many theories around personality and behavioral development. A recent study, published in the May 2003 issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, found that personalities continue to evolve in certain ways even after the age of 30. Still, it is generally accepted that most behavioral and emotional patterns are set fairly early in life. As psychologist Allen Wheelis writes in *How People Change* (HarperCollins, 1973), "So long as one lives, change is possible, but the longer such behavior is continued the more force and authority it acquires."

Once ingrained, most behavior becomes largely automatic; we experience a stimulus or trigger and react without conscious thought. This is why trying to change behaviors, emotions, or improve physical performance through the sheer dint of conscious intent or willpower often fails. It has nothing to do with lack of desire, character or personal weakness; our minds just, don't work that way.

For instance, upon hearing her name called to speak, Sally certainly didn't tell herself: "Heart: start racing, palms: get sweaty, throat: tighten up, voice: get squeaky, panic: set in." It was an automatic response. So how do we change that response?

We can make conscious decisions to adopt new behavior, but as Wheelis warns, "The new mode will [likely] be experienced as difficult, unpleasant, forced, unnatural, anxiety provoking [and] can be sustained only by considerable effort of will. Change will occur only if such action is maintained over a long period of time."

Hypnosis can accelerate and ease that process considerably by placing the mind in a condition of focused receptivity. While we are in hypnosis, it is believed that the inner critic of our conscious mind is held in abeyance, thus giving our unconscious mind a chance to accept suggestions for the changes we wish to effect. In other words, while in hypnosis, we re-teach the unconscious mind to react to given behavioral or emotional triggers in a new and desirable way.

In Sally's case, the subconsciously-generated feelings of fear and anxiety toward public speaking were replaced with feelings of calm and confidence. With reinforcement, the new response of calm soon became every bit as automatic as the old response of fear had been.

### Appropriate Use

There are, of course, limitations to the uses and applications for hypnotherapy; it is not a magic bullet. Success requires a client's conscious desire and commitment to change, a willingness to experience the state, and a belief in the possibility for success. Otherwise, hypnotherapy may not work very well, if at all.

Friedrick reports in *Healthology* that, "According to The World Health Organization (WHO), hypnosis should not be performed on patients with psychoses, organic psychiatric conditions, or antisocial personality disorders. Hypnotherapy is also not considered effective for treating addictions to mind-altering substances like drugs or alcohol, except perhaps when

combined with a 12-step program. Even then, its use is probably best limited to building motivation and promoting active participation in the program rather than actually trying to change the addictive behavior.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that for any medically-related or psychogenic conditions, hypnotherapy is an adjunctive therapy. It is not medicine or psychotherapy, and using it as such or as a replacement for such is both contraindicated and against the law. There are many beneficial medical and psychological applications, but lay hypnotherapists must first obtain a written approval/referral from the client's physician or licensed psychotherapist to legally and ethically work on such cases.

For anyone interested in trying hypnotherapy, the process of finding a good hypnotherapist is much like that of finding a good physician or psychotherapist: it's wise to do some shopping. For best results, an individual must feel comfort and rapport with the therapist and have confidence in the therapist's abilities, training and experience.

While California as yet has no standards for training, certification, or licensure of hypnotherapists (as do some states), a new statute governing all alternative healthcare practices requires that practitioners provide every client with written disclosure regarding the nature and limitations of the modality, as well as a summary of their training, qualifications and experience. This offers consumers some protection from incompetent practitioners, false expectations or illegal practices. If not offered this documentation, it might be prudent to look elsewhere for treatment.

Of course legislation that did prescribe standards for the training, certification, and licensure of hypnotherapists would obviously lend further legitimacy to the profession. It would facilitate the acceptance of hypnotherapy by health insurance providers, help rid the profession of incompetents, and help move this powerful combination of ancient art and modern science firmly into the mainstream of modern healthcare, a place where many believe it belongs.



*After two successful careers, first as a military and commercial pilot, followed by almost twenty years in mass communications where he held many positions including actor, writer/producer, instructor, and corporate executive, John McGrail decided to combine his passion for teaching, coaching, and mentoring with a life-long pastime—the study and practice of hypnosis. John earned his certification in hypnotherapy at the Hypnosis Motivation Institute, the nation's only federally-accredited college of hypnotherapy. He is also certified in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic-Programming), Timeline Therapy, and Therapeutic Imagery. As co-founding partner of the Los Angeles-based McGrail & Irwin Therapeutic Hypnosis, he enjoys a thriving private practice focusing on personal growth and change, as well as performance improvement in the workplace, sports, and academics. His clients have included celebrities, artists, writers, athletes, airline pilots, tradesmen, homemakers, corporate executives and sales teams, students; people from virtually all social and professional backgrounds.*

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