

Hypnotism has been around for thousands of years and has been practiced by priests, mediums, medicine men, and doctors. There is a newfound popularity in our culture, particularly by specialist in the mental health profession. Today it is used for pain management, as an anesthesia before surgery, to assist in working with addicts, to help individuals dealing with emotional difficulties to uncover the root of their problem and for entertainment purposes. The resurgent recognition of this age old practice begs the question, "Should a believer ever get involved with hypnotism?"

WHAT IS HYPNOTISM?

One Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist says, "Hypnosis is the Greek word for sleep chosen by scientist James Braid in 1840 to describe the very natural process of opening our subconscious minds for a period of time."¹ According to another source hypnosis is, "a mental state of heightened suggestibility, characterized by trance-like sleep. The basis of hypnosis is the fixation of the subjects attention upon a gradually narrowing source of stimulation, until he is attendant upon only the directions of the hypnotist. This is variously achieved by repetition of instructions in a low, level voice, or having the subject fix his gaze upon a light in an otherwise dark room. The subject remembers nothing of what he did during the hypnotic period. Certain effects may be suggested to continue after the subject returns to consciousness; these are called post-hypnotic suggestions."²

THE METHODS OF HYPNOTISM³

The Braid Method

"Dr. Braid, who gave hypnotism its name, used the method of focusing the attention of the subject on some mechanical object, held a few inches above the eyes; so as to create an optical strain, which would aid in making the eyelids heavy, and in inducing the hypnotic sleep."

The Candle Method

"The subject is seated in a comfortable chair, and told to relax completely. The operator holds a lighted candle in his hand and stands about three feet in front of the subject. He instructs the subject to gaze at the candle, and tells him that soon he will begin to feel drowsy and sleepy. And then, the operator says in a quiet, firm voice, "You're beginning to feel yourself getting sleepy —your arms and legs are beginning to feel numb and heavy—your eyelids are beginning to feel heavy—your eyes are closing—you feel yourself going deeper and deeper asleep—your body feels like lead—sleep—you are sound asleep.""

The Reclining Method

"In this method of inducing hypnosis, the subject is told to stretch out on a couch with his eyes closed. The operator then gives the suggestions for sleep, which were explained a moment ago in the Candle method. The suggestions are given until the subject seems to be asleep. Then the operator should place his thumb between the eyes of the patient, and press downwards quite hard, saying, "You cannot open your eyes—Try— Never mind—Sleep.""

The Counting Method

"In this method the subject is either seated in a chair or reclines on a couch. He is told by the operator to take slow deep breaths, and as the operator counts out loud, the subject is instructed to open his eyes on the count of one, close them on the count of two, open them on the count of three, and so on. In between the counting, the operator gives the suggestions of sleep, as described in the previous methods, until the subject is asleep."

The Ralph Slater Method

"I begin by having the subject stand with his back to me, and his feet together. I stand directly behind him, and with my hand I tilt his head back as far as possible, and tell him to close his eyes. I then tell him to relax his body completely. I put my hands

on his shoulders, one hand on each shoulder, and say that in a moment I am going to withdraw my hands, that I want him to think he is falling backwards, and as I withdraw my hands from his shoulders, I say, "You are falling back— Do not be afraid—I am going to catch you."

As the subject falls back, I catch him and turn him round with his feet together, and his eyes looking into mine. I put the tips of my fingers on his temples, and instruct him to gaze into my eyes, and tell him that when I remove my fingers, he will fall forward. I remove my fingers slowly from the temples, and then I repeat several times, "You are falling forward—You are falling forward", and, as he does, I catch him.

Once I have reached this stage of the falling backward and forward tests, I stand in front of the subject and instruct him to clasp his hands and interlock his fingers, and to keep his eyes fixed on mine. I then instruct him to think to himself that his fingers are locked together tightly, that he cannot take them apart. I tell him to place them together, tighter, tighter, and when I see them pressed together tightly, with my eyes fixed on his eyes, I say, "You cannot take your hands apart— You cannot take your hands apart."

... After these preliminaries, in most cases the subject is completely ready for hypnosis."

THE STAGES OF HYPNOTISM

Stage One (Superficial Stage)

The patient is under the control of the hypnotist but only slightly. He is unable to do simple arm and hand movements, but is still aware of his environment. During this stage, the patient is still able to reject the hypnosis.

Stage Two (Alpha Stage)

The patient goes into a deeper level of hypnosis and is open to a wider range of suggestions. When awoken from this stage, the individual will remember everything that went on.

Stage Three (Deep Stage)

If the second stage does not work, the hypnotherapist will move to this stage. During this stage the patient is completely unconscious and unaware of what is going on around him. He is under complete control of the therapist and will not remember anything that happened during the hypnosis.

THE BIBLE AND HYPNOTISM

1. Hypnotism is mesmerizing a person into another state of consciousness which is a form of enchantment. According to Webster Dictionary, the word enchantment means "to influence by charms or incantation." Enchantment can be likened to hypnosis from the standpoint it lures a person's conscious mind into a subconscious state. God forbid the Israelites in Leviticus 19:26 to practice enchantment.
2. Hypnotism is surrendering the control of the will to another person for the purpose of them influencing the mind. The Bible tells us over and over that the only person believers should surrender to is the Lord (Rom. 6:13; James 4:7).
3. Hypnotism is opening the subconscious mind to another individual for the purpose of heightened suggestibility. When the believer opens his mind to the influence of someone else there is the chance to be negatively influenced. This is true on two accounts; first the hypnotist is a man with a sinful proclivity capable of making a mistake (Rom. 3:10-18) and second, some people use their knowledge and power for evil (Eccl. 3:16).
4. One purpose of hypnosis is to help an individual stop doing a bad habit. God has given Christians everything needed to

overcome bad habits; the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), the Spirit of Christ (Phil. 4:13) and prayer (Matt. 17:20; 2 Cor. 5:4-5).

5. Hypnotism deals with the symptom, changing one's thoughts and behavior by the hypnotic suggestions. God wants to get to the root, total transformation by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-12).
6. Hypnotism wants a person to remove the barriers around the mind and open up to receive suggestions from the hypnotist. In the Book of Proverbs Solomon said, "Guard your heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23). Peter said that the believer should gird up the loins of the mind (1 Pet. 1:13).
7. Hypnotism puts a person in a condition where he is not in full control of his thoughts and behavior. Paul told the Thessalonians they should control their body, as well as their minds, in a way that is holy and honorable (1 Thes. 4:4).

CONCLUSION

Hypnotism has been shown to help patients who are dealing with emotional issues, addictive behaviors, pain management issues and athletes in training. Many individuals swear by it and attribute their improved well-being to the suggestive power of hypnosis. However, with all of that said, it is best for a believer to avoid any involvement with the practice of hypnosis. The Bible is very clear that it is something God's people should not be involved with on any level.

¹ Paul Gutafson, What is Hypnotism?
<http://www.thehealthsuccessite.com/hypnotism.html> [Accessed on December 15, 2010].

² The University One-Volume Encyclopedia; 1967-Franklin Dunham; p. 421.

³ Information in this section, The Methods of Hypnotism is quoted directly from Ibid, What is Hypnotism?

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