

Why We All Need to Learn About Hypnosis

*Nature's Optimal Learning
and Programming State*



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Are you aware that you've been in a hypnotic trance today? Perhaps you're in a trance right now? I'm not talking about seeing a hypnotist, a hypnotherapist, or listening to a hypnosis recording, but referring to every-day hypnosis.

You see, we all go into trance several times a day. Indeed, it's a natural phenomenon and happens usually outside of conscious awareness. We might refer to it as daydreaming or being 'miles away', or concentrating, or being focused on something. Sports people refer to it as being 'in the zone' or in moments of 'flow'.

So this is the first thing to understand: hypnosis is an every-day occurrence of a narrowing of focus of attention. This is happening to greater or lesser degrees throughout the day so it could be said that we're going in and out of hypnotic states all day long. Reflect on these examples...

- concentrating at work
- playing a computer game
- having a text or facebook conversation
- watching TV/ a movie
- reading a good book
- surfing the internet
- enjoying a hobby
- playing a sport or musical instrument
- making love
- revisiting a memory in our minds etc.

These are just a few examples. When we become absorbed it is as if the world disappears. Think of those times when you perform something on autopilot, such as driving, where you reach your destination with little recollection of the actual journey. Whilst your hands are on the steering wheel, changing gear occasionally, accelerating and braking, looking in the rear-view mirror, your mind is absorbed in fantasy, thinking this or day-dreaming about that. Much of the journey is overlooked so that you can't even remember making certain manoeuvres.

Perhaps today you've experienced what I call a 'symptomatic trance', (the types of problems most people come to see me about) such as anger, anxiety, or fear. Maybe your mood has been a bit low or you're feeling depressed about something.

Other emotions, such as greed, jealousy, envy, sadness, hatred, aggression, desire, lust, all lock our attention, putting us into a hypnotic state. What I mean by this is that **any strong emotion narrows our focus of attention so that we're unable to see the bigger picture or a different perspective.** We end up seeing ourselves (and the situation) in only black and white terms; this or that, good or bad, right or wrong etc. When the emotional brain takes over we inhibit our ability to rationalise and be more logical about things. The situation can feel like a matter of life or death, especially if the fight or flight system gets involved so that we respond as if ready to do battle with a fierce tiger. With the emotional brain in charge we make erroneous assumptions about ourselves and other people such as, 'if I don't do it perfectly then I must be completely stupid', or, 'if he's not thinking about wanting to marry me he must be thinking about breaking up.' These are prime examples of black and white, emotional thinking. I'll talk more on this below.

So, along with understanding hypnosis to be an everyday occurrence (in which we become absorbed in an activity or hijacked by our emotional brain) perhaps the most important thing to understand about it is that **when in hypnosis we are accessing nature's most powerful learning state - the REM state.**



After about 27 weeks in the womb, the foetus spends 80% of its time in REM sleep (REM stands for Rapid Eye Movement, the dream state that we all experience for about two hours every night when we sleep), in which instinctive templates are laid

down in the baby's brain. Further templates are added through our learning experiences early in life; most children spend a vast amount of time in natural REM trance states as they learn and absorb information from their surroundings through what they see, hear, and experience themselves.

Indeed, according to the Human Givens Institute <http://www.hgi.org.uk/> in their seminal book '*Human Givens – a new approach to emotional health and clear thinking*', all subsequent learning we do throughout life is done in a waking form of the REM state – when we are concentrating, focused, or absorbed – in other words, when we are hypnotised. The point is that, **everything we learn in life is done through the REM/hypnotic state, where we are able to add to and refine pre-existing templates or change old templates that are no longer working for us.** What this means is that, rather than trying to change your thought processes (as in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), with hypnosis we are working on a deeper level, actually working with emotional and instinctive templates. And when instincts change, your thoughts will change naturally. You don't have to try to think positive, you just are.

Indeed, it is important to recognise that **the brain always processes emotions *before* thinking.** This is because emotions are governed by the limbic system which is always monitoring our safety for survival purposes. If it deems anything as a threat (or a potential threat) it will raise the alarm, preparing us to fight or run by flooding the bloodstream with adrenaline. And when the stakes are high this automatic fight or flight reaction happens *before* the conscious/thinking part of the brain works out what is going on.

This is why it's difficult to try to talk or think your way out of a phobia or a panic attack, or the urge to binge or indulge in some other addictive behaviour. **When emotions are strong, the thinking part of the brain is by-passed.** This is why humans are prone to doing stupid things. When the thinking/rational brain is by-passed we can't apply logic and reason. This is why I teach all my clients powerful ways to calm down so that they can get a different perspective on things through accessing the more rational, higher

cortex. What we need to develop is a more balanced relationship between our emotions and thoughts so that they work in tandem; we need emotion (because this is often what drives any behaviour we do) *and* logic.

Here's an interesting little quiz you can take right now to see if your brain is working in balance <http://www.brain-entertain.com/emotional-rational-test/en/>



Of course, as humans we have a whole array of different emotions, without which life would seem rather dull. As well as anger, sadness, depression, anxiety, and the like, think of those moments of bliss, joy, and happiness you've experienced. These too focus our attention to the point where we can lose sight of things; we've all heard the old saying 'love is blind'. In joyous, special moments we lose ourselves, surrendering to the experience so that we become one with whatever we are doing. This too is a type of hypnotic trance but obviously feels much more enjoyable than the more negative (symptomatic) trances. I don't see many people coming to therapy because they've fallen hopelessly in love (though I have seen one or two!)

The thing is this...

If an old, 'negative' template in the brain is still active we respond as if on auto-pilot (such as having a panic attack, getting angry, jealous etc.) which happens outside of our conscious control. In other words, we go into a 'negative' trance state without conscious volition. This is because the emotional brain has made a faulty pattern-match, linking up something in the immediate environment to a 'negative' memory. If the present situation closely resembles the details of that memory, emotions will

hijack your thought processes, putting you into a trance. (I put the word 'negative' in inverted commas because if the situation really required it anger and anxiety could be seen as 'positive' trance states, such as when facing a tiger or a gang of drunken yobs; in the right context anger and anxiety can be seen as gifts from nature, helping to ensure your survival).

But when it comes to the more 'positive' trance states - happiness, joy, bliss, ecstasy - it's as if (most of us) have more conscious control as to whether to enter the state or not and also how deeply we surrender to the experience. *Can you really let go?*

Because 'positive' trance states are not usually life or death situations (and thus don't completely hijack the rational brain) we seem to have some degree of control when we experience them. In other words, unlike emotions that are linked to our survival, 'positive' trances are not usually automatic reactions driven only by the emotional/instinctive parts of the brain. For sure, we all experience spontaneous moments of happiness, joy, awe, wonder, even peak mystical experiences, but these seem to involve more of a balance between both the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. (For more on peak experiences see <http://www.human-spirit.co.uk/Raising-Consciousness.html>)

The thing we need to understand at this point is that **in the focused REM/hypnotic state (whether positive or negative), the part of the brain that controls your emotional and instinctive reactions is highly suggestible and open to new ideas.** This is why learning about hypnosis and how to use it can help you make changes very quickly, such as stopping smoking, overcoming a phobia, boosting your self-confidence, changing your eating habits, and so much more. Once new understandings and associations are made in the hypnotic state you can change old habits and problems much more easily compared to consciously analysing them or talking about them with a friend or a counsellor. Indeed, I believe that **lasting change is only achieved by accessing and utilising the power of the unconscious mind through hypnosis,** where those inner, emotional and instinctive templates can be adjusted.

The problem of course, is that, if we are locked in negative trance states (such as anxiety and depression) the unconscious searches the environment for further supporting evidence, as well as trawling through our memories. We get caught in a negative spiral, stuck on ruminating about all the possible causes in the past and the problems in our lives in the present (perhaps involving our partner, family, work and financial situations etc.) and fearful about the future. Someone suffering from depression will focus more on negative life situations and have a negative expectation for the future because the emotional (black and white) trance of depression stops us from seeing any alternatives. Someone experiencing the trance of anxiety will view certain situations (and perhaps *all* situations) as full of fear and trepidation. **Depression and anxiety are made worse (and sometimes caused, especially in the case of depression) by the misuse of the imagination.** Further introspection and worry adds fuel to the fire. When a negative memory template is in operation the brain looks for matching evidence and this is one of the reasons why certain types of counselling can make you feel worse. If a depressed or anxious client is taken on long wallows through their past, looking for the causes of their symptoms, the active depression/anxiety template will simply look for more reasons to be depressed or anxious, bringing to mind a host of negative memories and expectations.

Thus we can see that hypnosis in itself is neither good nor bad. It is simply a state of focused attention, whether external (such as watching a film) or internal (such as strong emotions). The important thing to grasp is that it is through the associations made whilst in hypnosis that determines our emotional response.



When several people experience a traumatic event (such as a train crash or terrorist attack) how come they don't all become traumatised? The reason is that it is never the event itself that causes trauma but by how we respond to the event through the way we make meaning of it. Remember, frightening situations are hypnotising in themselves (we become 'locked' in survival mode), leaving our unconscious minds wide open to suggestion. The story we tell about the event (whilst hypnotised by fear) determines whether we later experience problematic symptoms, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. (This is one of the problems with 'critical incident debriefing'; someone who is already traumatised will worsen their anxiety by having to talk through the event, often repeatedly. Doing this embeds the trauma deeper into the emotional brain).

The good news is that PTSD (and other forms of anxiety), depression, phobias, addictive behaviours, low self-confidence, sexual and relationship issues, performance problems, and even physical health problems can be successfully treated with hypnosis because new associations can be established in the unconscious mind, helping you break free of the controlling trance of the emotional brain. *There is far more to you than those negative emotions.*

When you calm the emotional brain your perspective is widened and you can start to see other possibilities that were hitherto hidden from awareness.



With this better understanding of hypnosis – that it is an every-day state of focused attention where our minds are more open and suggestible – I hope you can see when and where hypnosis is already happening in your life and how you might begin to be more conscious of it when it does occur.

If you are a counsellor or psychotherapist hypnosis is already happening in your sessions with clients. Asking a client to focus on a feeling, thought, or memory is trance inducing. If you spend long hours in business meetings you'll no doubt drift into daydreaming at times. If you work in a factory doing repetitive and monotonous work you'll do the tasks on autopilot. Same if you're a sales-person spending hours each week on the motorways. Perhaps you're a professional or amateur musician who has to focus and go into the 'zone' when performing. Same applies to actors, artists, and writers.

Thus, knowing that trance is an integral part of every-day life it makes sense to think about how you might like to take advantage of this more suggestible state: What type of feelings and emotions would you like to focus on more and how could you use the power of these feelings to motivate you now and in the future? What type of thoughts would be good? How might you like to use your imagination more resourcefully?

The key to using hypnosis to help you make positive changes is in knowing how to utilise the trance when you're in it. This is one of the things I teach on my self-hypnosis workshops <http://www.human-spirit.co.uk/Workshops.html>

Hypnosis isn't a magic wand despite what TV shows would have us believe <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2984576/Don-t-hypnotised-fraudulent-nonsense-Therapists-savage-ITV-s-Room.html> and hypnosis itself doesn't produce the changes. We all go into trance every day – that's a given. The real skill is in knowing what to do with your mind once in the REM state, whether it's to free yourself from a negative trance or deepen and build upon the resources of a more positive trance.

Just imagine how good it would feel if you were able to...

- Resolve long-standing emotional issues that keep you trapped in the past
- Finally break old habits and live more healthily
- Calm your nerves in any situation, whether at work or when socialising
- Feel more confident during a job interview, a date, or a driving test
- Experience peak performance (in sport/business/education/exams/the arts)
- Develop a deeper intimacy with your loved one
- Awaken each morning filled with motivation to get on with the day and take action to help you move toward your goals

All these things – and lots more – can be achieved when you learn how to use hypnosis. This is why I believe it is a vital subject to understand and is, perhaps, the next step on the evolutionary ladder for us human beings.

I hope you've found this information useful and please feel free to forward it to anyone you think might be interested in finding out more. Further details about my next ***Successful Self-Hypnosis workshop*** can be found on my websites below. It'd be great to see you there!

To your success!

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