



"The right path of learning to a brighter, better future."

History of Hypnosis

By Tina Taylor

The phenomenon known as hypnosis has existed since the beginning of recorded history, stories being found in the folklore of many ancient cultures. In those times as today it was associated with religious ceremonies, magic, the supernatural and the occult. Even in the 1980's Dr Richard Bandler (co-creator of NLP) found that his books were filed in the occult section of book stores!

The ancient Egyptians and Greeks had dream centres where people came to fast and pray with the hope that their dreams could be interpreted to solve their problems and guide them to a solution. We now think that their dreams were probably hypnotically induced. Magicians in the time of Genghis Khan practiced group suggestion to obtain hallucinations and according to Marco Polo, medieval men used hypnosis in mystic rites to produce fear and intensify beliefs in the supernatural and occult. With this kind of background it is obvious why peoples belief and attitude towards hypnosis is one of misunderstanding.

Healing in a trance state is one of the oldest medical arts, it was believed to be divinely inspired and that the miraculous cures obtained were from the Gods. That a mysterious force produced the trance state and that they, the Gods, were unpredictable in their cures. If a cure didn't work they looked to their Gods to find ways to appease them so that it would work and if it still failed they thought that it was due to their lack of faith or that a new bigger sacrifice was needed.

Every culture has used hypnosis, the earliest evidence being found among Shaman, who were also called Witch Doctors, Medicine Men and Healers.

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734 – 1815); a Viennese physician thought that magnetism healed and used his "mesmeric techniques" in the treatment of psychiatric patients. His use of suggestion therapy consisted of what he called "the natural qualities of animal magnetism". He used magnets and placed these on various parts of the body, whilst giving his patient suggestions of how they will heal (today this are called post hypnotic suggestions). He claimed to have decreased haemorrhoids, cured blindness, convulsions, and spasmodic paralysis of the legs. He "magnetised" trees and had people hug trees that he had "magnetised" suggesting to them that by doing so they would be cured..... He later came to the conclusion that we all had magnetic properties within us that can affect the bodies of others and stopped using magnets preferring to use his own "animal magnetism" to place his clients in a trance before delivering his suggestions.

The next notable figure in hypnosis was an English physician, John Elliotson (1791 – 1868). who was a physician at St Thomas's Hospital who was considered to be a liberal and a radical, and was dismissed from his post at the University College Hospital, London because he gave a public demonstration of mesmerism.. He became interested in Mesmerism in 1817 and employed it extensively on his patients; and left excellent records of its



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therapeutic effectiveness especially for pain control. He performed many successful operations on patients under hypnosis. Unfortunately, with the advent of chemical anaesthesia in 1846 it was no longer considered necessary as a medical anaesthetic.

James Esdaille (1808 – 1859) was directly influenced by Elliotson's writings and became an advocate of mesmerism. He held a medical appointment in India and was successful in having the British government build a hospital in Calcutta which gave him the freedom to experiment with the effectiveness of mesmerism. Mesmerizing, the locals whilst performing various medical procedures. In a six year period he kept a diary that reported the use of mesmerism successfully in over 300 major surgical procedures.

James Braid (1795 – 1860), a highly regarded English surgeon, initiated the first attempt at a psychological explanation of mesmeric phenomena. After his first opportunity of conducting a medical examination on a mesmerized subject he became very interested in mesmeric trances and began his own experiments. It was due to his research that hypnosis was accepted by the British medical profession and for this he is considered as the "father" of hypnosis.

He wanted credit as the discoverer of a new cure for nervous disorders so he adopted new terms to prevent an association with magnetism. He initially called his discovery neurypnology – a word derived from Greek meaning nervous sleep. This was later changed to neuro-hypnotism derived from Hypnos the Greek god of sleep. After a while his discovery was referred to as hypnotism or hypnosis.

Milton H Erickson MD (1901 – 1980) is considered to be the most creative and innovative hypnotherapist and psychotherapist of the 20 century.

Milton went through a very lengthy process whilst learning how to use hypnosis with his clients. He would have a first long initial interview with them wherein he would gather all the information he needed for a comprehensive case history. At the end of the interview he would say something like "I am going to have to study all your material carefully for a while so that I can develop some understanding on how to help you the best. So why don't you give me a call in a few weeks and when I am ready I will give you a call to arrange your next appointment time".

Milton would then study the patients material very carefully for days and sometimes weeks. He would write out pages and pages of suggestions that would cover all aspects of the patients problem. These were then summarised, re-written and brought down to about twenty pages and he studied them some more. They would then be summarised further to about ten pages and these ten pages down to five. He would then call his patient and the five page manuscript would be clearly visible on his desk. These suggestions would then be delivered to the patient. The patient usually felt perhaps for the first time that someone had paid attention to their personal problems and from this find an unexpected source of strength within themselves that would allow them to experience new possibilities within their lives.