



History of Hypnosis

This is a fascinating look into the past...remarkably noting that the healers of ancient times understood the power of the mind and the body as an interwoven piece that needed to be simultaneously tapped to attain a shift into the healing state. In ancient times there were no sophisticated laboratory or radiologic tests available, and surgery was in it's infancy as well. What the ancients did recognize was that the mind worked inseparably in harmony with the body to exact a healing change, and if they could tap into the subconscious mind then this would likely result in a positive change in the physical body. In order to tap into the subconscious mind one had to shift the consciousness of the individual into a state that was relaxed, and free of judgment to unleash the information stored there and direct it towards a healing for the person/patient.

As far back as 4,000 years ago the ancient Egyptian priests practiced this method. Hieroglyphics from this era depict the Egyptian priests inducing trance like states in sleep and dream temples, to remove negative states of mind and relieve suffering. In China and Greece 2500 years ago there were similar sleep/healing temples used for the same purposes. A notable Greek physician Asclepius described his patient coming into a soothing dimly lit stone temple where the patient was prepared with purifying waters, baths and fasting to await Asclepius who would whisper his intention to them to be free of the illness or condition and suggest a disease free healthy state. His patients carved testimonials into the walls of the temple telling of their cures.

Through the ages there were many who used this method including the brilliant Arabic physician Avicenna around 1000 BC, Paracelsus the Swiss physician in the 1500 BC era, and progressing onto Anton Mesmer an Austrian physician who became fascinated with the possibilities of the mind body connection used for healing and tried to apply scientific reason to understand the process creating the concept of magnetism to define the possible exchange between the healer and the patient. His relaxation/trance inducing methods including touching and stroking patients, staring into their eyes, ions for healing, and passing magnetic wands over their bodies to influence their bodies to alleviate illness and suffering. He had success with these methods, but came under scrutiny when Benjamin Franklin and physicians in the court of King Louis XVI created an investigation and determined that despite the outcomes that Mesmer achieved, there was "not a scientific basis for his work". Despite these methods being "discredited" due to lack of scientific understanding by this inquiry, the fascination of and search for the understanding of the principals behind the mind body connection continued.

Progressing rapidly to modern times the Scottish Surgeon Dr. James Braid (1843) working in India noted that he could use similar techniques successfully to obtain an unconscious state so that the patient could painlessly/successfully endure surgery in a time when pharmacologic anesthesia had not been invented. Though the patient was not truly asleep and was in an altered state of consciousness, he none the less coined the term hypnosis linking his work back to the Greek God of Sleep, Hypnos. He

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recognized that the effect was not due to “magnetism”, but rather working with the subconscious state of the patient to effect the outcome.

Dr. Sigmund Freud and Jean Martin Charcot in the late 1800’s also used hypnosis in their practice. With keen observation and scientific inquiry through their studies, they built the framework of modern understanding of the different aspects of the mind’s function; which included the conscious mind that attends the daily details of life and the subconscious mind which controls the autonomic function of the body, as well as being the repository for all experiences of the individual during their life.

Emil Coue, a French pharmacist wrote the first book on “autosuggestion” or self-hypnosis in 1920 and offered the advice to use only positive statements in self-hypnosis as the subconscious mind cannot functionally recognize a negative statement. For instance, if you say, “I do not want to smoke” the subconscious interprets this as “I want to smoke” and therefore sabotages the intention to cease smoking. Psychologist Clark Hull in 1933 contributed a scientific inquiry into hypnosis and determined that it was not a sleep state, and added that the effects of creating trance/relaxation with self-absorption was a result of suggestion and motivation influencing the subconscious mind. Hull’s work was used on the battlefields of WW2 when morphine was not available to limit pain and suffering. This powerful work led to the development of the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis (SCEH), which created the beginnings of professional standards for hypnosis.

Dr. Milton Erickson, a psychiatrist further advanced the professionalism and methods of hypnosis used in a medical setting and founded the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) which included the development of certification standards for clinical hypnosis work. Practitioners must have an advanced degree in a medical or mental health care field and be licensed to practice in a medical or mental healthcare field in the state in which they reside in order to become a member and go through the detailed training to certification process.

In the last 50 years, there have been numerous contributors to the scientific body of knowledge of hypnotic practice. Through their efforts, hypnosis has evolved into a proven effective and safe tool for alleviating physical and mental suffering.