Harold P. Golan, D.M.D., was born on September 20, 1920, the first child of first-generation immigrant parents in Dorchester, Massachusetts. At Boston Latin School, Dr. Golan became a well-rounded classical scholar and grew to love the power, sound, and elegance of the English language. At the University of Massachusetts he majored in zoology, and he was later accepted into the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, among the premier dental schools in the country. After serving as a dentist in the Army during World War II, he entered a residency in oral surgery at Boston City Hospital.

Dr. Golan found himself drawn to clinical hypnosis, and studied with Milton Erickson, M.D., and Lawrence Staples, D.M.D. He always loved both the technical craft of dentistry as well as the emotional bonds forged with appreciative patients in a successful general dentistry practice. However, his activities in clinical hypnosis became his professional passion.

Dr. Golan became a pioneer in the development and use of clinical hypnosis for dental phobias, pain control, smoking cessation, and other problems. He taught the use of hypnosis in dentistry as a faculty member of the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine and the Boston University School of Dental Medicine. Among the first members of the New England Society of Clinical Hypnosis (NESCH), he was soon elected as President, and then served for many years as Secretary. He succeeded his mentor, Dr. Staples, as Workshop Director for the New England Society of Clinical Hypnosis, a position he held for twenty-three years. Over the course of his career, he
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mentored hundreds of residents, fellows, and practicing clinicians in hypnosis. He pursued the development and use of clinical hypnosis techniques with uncommon vigor and passion, lecturing and teaching regionally, nationally, and internationally. He was among the earliest members and served as President of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. For many years he was President of the American Board of Dental Hypnosis, helping dentists to achieve Diplomate status. Following in the footsteps of another of his mentors, Dr. Erickson, Dr. Golan was famous for his sensitivity to the needs of the individual patient, tailoring each hypnotic protocol to the unique circumstances of the individual. He forcefully advocated for the addition of academic courses and clinical experience in hypnosis to all levels of professional training curricula.

As a clinician and teacher, Dr. Golan embodied the powerful use of self. Early on in his hypnotic career, he developed a twenty-minute self-hypnotic protocol which he practiced daily. Long before the current interest in “energy medicine,” his technique involved mentally smiling at all of his body’s component parts. He believed the effectiveness of this technique was more than validated by his active enjoyment of his passions for tennis, sailing, and vigorous exercise into his ninth decade. Always interested in self-development and acquiring new skills, he learned tai chi ch’uan at the age of eighty to speed his recovery from an injury. Both personally and professionally, he balanced a respect for tradition with openness to innovation and development.

Dr. Golan felt that patients relied upon the doctor’s belief and conviction in the likelihood of therapeutic success. He believed (as Tip O’Neill said about politics) that all hypnosis is personal. Therefore, the active and ongoing pursuit of personal growth and change was a central theme of his teaching. As Director of the NESCH Workshop, Dr. Golan offered a special small group (the “Skeptics Group”) for those participants who were having difficulty going into trance. This experience would almost invariably be extremely powerful for participants, many of whom then became champions of hypnosis.

Dr. Golan was ahead of his time in many respects. Like Dr. Erickson, he believed in the central importance of results. He felt that hypnotic physiological effects (e.g., glove anesthesia) served as the most powerful ratifiers of trance experience. As a dentist, he was quite comfortable assuming responsibility for his patient’s physical and emotional safety. Feeling safe and sound, patients would be emboldened to make changes. He also agreed with Dr. Erickson’s position that the patient’s presentation in his office was a statement of readiness to change, and he wasted no time in diving into the therapeutic enterprise. Dr. Golan believed that the doctor’s authenticity (i.e., Carl Rogers’ “congruence”) was crucial to the establishment of a therapeutic alliance and the healing enterprise. His own use of hypnosis for healing, health, and personal growth was therefore a powerful foundation for his clinical effectiveness.

Dr. Golan was a fervent believer in the importance of scientific thinking and experimental evidence to shape clinical practice. He was a prolific author and actively contributed to the scientific literature on phobias, pain, habit control, anxiety management, healing, bruxism, and hypnotic techniques. Consistent with his belief in the importance of balance, he himself balanced his intellectual prowess with a remarkable capacity for clinical intuition. He considered his intuitive abilities to be among the most exciting ways to utilize his unconscious mind. In addition to his mastery of dental technique, he was an extraordinarily talented “natural therapist.” Dr. Golan routinely encouraged his students and patients to “trust the unconscious.” He also balanced his
prodigious intellect with noteworthy physical prowess. Furthermore, his capacity for rigorous thinking was balanced with a well-developed appreciation for sensory experience (especially, music.) It is no coincidence that, within his own family, half pursued medical/dental/legal professions, while the other half pursued professions in the musical world.

Harold passed away on February 26, 2003. He had recently suffered a series of health crises, but died peacefully surrounded by his family. He is survived by his wife Irene, their children David, Jay, Jeffrey, and Jeanne, and their seven grandchildren. Harold was laid to rest on March 2, 2003 and the chapel was filled to overflowing for the funeral. His children and grandchildren sang, played music, and spoke movingly about him. At the end, there was an overpowering feeling in the room of the strength and warmth of Harold’s “inner smile”.

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