This article will illustrate how effective hypnotic communication closely resembles the Haiku form. Working with the Haiku form is an effective and dynamic approach that encourages the therapists to keep their awareness sharpened and observation astute. Haiku is not just a type of poetry; it is a way of looking at the world with a heightened level of attentiveness. Crafting effective and evocative hypnotic suggestions requires that the therapist become immersed in the world of passion, images, sounds, sights, opposites, humor, creativity, and perceptive consciousness. Enhancing our skills of observation is an important aspect of the continuing experience of the hypnotherapist. The Haiku method can help us enhance our observation and utilize what we observe in developing evocative hypnotic suggestions that help the client access their internal representational systems to stimulate their healing response. A systematized method for learning to write Haiku is presented.

Keywords: Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, language, observation, utilization

Introduction

Hypnosis relies on both the power of observation and the effective use of words to evoke healing responses. Often, when approaching the learning of hypnosis, people feel intimidated by the complexity and sophistication involved. In order to establish a foundation of skill and confidence, therapists need to first come to trust their own observation skills and their intuition regarding their response to what they observe in the therapeutic process. When examining what means can be used as a model and a discipline to help sharpen skills of observation, develop and deepen intuition, and hone skillful word usage, I choose to use the Haiku form.

This article will illustrate how effective hypnotic language closely resembles the Haiku form, and by learning to utilize this form, hypnotherapists will sharpen their skills of observation and the use of image-evoking words to express that observation.
via the hypnotic suggestion.

It is well documented that the hypnotherapeutic experience is one based on skilled and keen observation (Barber, 1985; Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976; Gilligan, 1987; Katz, 1985; Lankton, 1985; O’Hanlon, 1985; Rossi, 1987; Wilk, 1985; Zeig, 1985). Rossi states: “Observation is the most important aspect of the early training of the hypnotherapist.” (Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976, p. 15). I would add that enhancing our skills of observation is a most important aspect of the continuing experience of the hypnotherapist.

Often, training in hypnosis focuses on the learning of techniques. This often leaves students of hypnotherapy with the impression that if they could master such “techniques” they would be able to “do” hypnosis. The learning of techniques, however, is not as important as the therapist’s concentrated immersion in observation of the present moment with a client. Learning to develop hypnotic suggestions requires that therapists develop confidence with the experience of observation, their own intuition, and the resulting trance experience.

A word of encouragement: This article does not suggest that the reader must be versed in poetry or even like poetry. Rather, it invites clinicians to be open to learning something new that will serve to enhance their creativity, skills of observation, and ultimately their effectiveness as both psychotherapists and hypnotherapists.

**Haiku: A Brief Background**

Haiku originated in Japan as early as the ninth century. It was derived from what was popularly known as “court poetry.” This court poetry was referred to as tanka. The tanka has a specific form which consists of five lines with a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable per line count. Over time, the first three lines of the tanka (the lines with the 5-7-5 syllable count) began to develop its own significance. Poets would spend a great deal of time working on creating these first three verses. These starting three verses were referred to as Hokku, which was later changed to Haiku.

With the evolution of this style of poetry, there was an emerging emphasis on capturing the here and now experiences. To this extent, the seventeenth century Haiku poet and Zen monk Basho believed that Haiku must be simplified in order to describe the world as it is; to cut away the frills and get to the bare-boned observation (Shirane, 1999).

Haiku was embraced in the United States in the 1950s predominately by the Beat generation. (Keroac, 1992) The arrival of Haiku in North America in the early twentieth century was heavily influenced by the blossoming interest in Zen. This influence continued to strengthen the importance of how one’s immediate experience was recorded.

Haiku underwent a necessary adaptation in the United States. The 5-7-5 syllable count was very well suited for the Japanese language structure, but was not as well suited for English. Therefore, the strict adherence to the 5-7-5 was softened. Shirane (1999) maintains Haiku in English should not attempt to replicate the rules that apply to the Japanese language. To strive to fit concepts into the Japanese composition brings about artificial constraints which detract from power and purpose of the Haiku. Shirane cautions against spending too much time counting syllables rather than enhancing our observation.
How Is Haiku Important to the Hypnotic Experience?

Haiku is more than a form of poetry. It is a way of observing the world and our experience in it (Andreyev, 2003; Davidson, 2003; Du Pont, 2001; Hardy, 2002; Missias, 2003; Reichhold, 2003; Sahn, 1992; Shirane, 1999; Speiss, 2003; Basho, 1985). Writing Haiku is a process of utilizing a modicum of words to promote an intimate connection with our direct experience. Just as wood is to a fire, the words in Haiku are consumed in the process of creating the experience to which the words refer. The fashion in which words are used in Haiku is unique in that they provide a vehicle to enrich observation and subsequently communicate that observation. Each word resonates with an emotional valence that is often reserved for sentences, even paragraphs.

Here are some elaborations which capture the way observation and communication are expressed in the Haiku form:

1. A short poem
2. about nature
3. that juxtaposes two images (Trumbull, Gura, & Spiess, et.al. 2003).

Haiku is the experience of a temporary enlightenment in which we see into the life of things” (Blyth, 2003, p. 1).

Many of the best Haiku present unexpected and contrasting images. These can arouse profound and subtle emotions and can convey layers of elusive meaning (Morden, 2003, p.1).

Haiku is not in the business of trying to discover totally new things, but in perceiving things in a totally new way (Spiess, 2003, p.6).

You have to show new ways of seeing things to be real (Reichhold, 2003, p.4).

Notice the way in which some of the concepts of Haiku are similar to concepts used in Ericksonian hypnosis.

“The juxtaposition of two images,” “unexpected and contrasting images,” and “conveying layers of elusive meaning,” are similar to the techniques of the apposition of opposites and the confusion techniques found throughout the Ericksonian literature (Erickson, 1964; Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976; Gilligan, 1987; Hammond, 1999; Zieg, 1985). Haiku will juxtapose an image and an experience in a way that depotentiates the conscious mindset along with building an inner sense of exploration and curiosity as to what possibilities may emerge.

“Convey layers of elusive meaning” is similar to the techniques of multiple embedded suggestions, double entendre and puns often utilized by Erickson and others. (Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976; Gilligan, 1987; Hammond, 1999; Lankton, 1985; Spencer, 1985). The economy of words challenges the listeners to infuse their own meaning into the conceptual spaces created by the Haiku. The sparseness of Haiku leaves space for readers to feel their own responses.

“Perceiving things in a totally new way” is similar to the Ericksonian approach

“Haiku exemplifies the possibilities inherent in limitations.” “You have to show new ways of things to be real.” These are analogous to the generation of possibilities inherent in the Ericksonian approach; the way that hypnotic interventions assists in depotentiating rigid mindsets, thereby facilitating a creative search of healing possibilities (Bertolino & O’Hanlon, 1999; Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976; Gilligan, 1987; O’Hanlon & Bertolino, 1999)

A Haiku challenges therapists to look deeply into their experience of awareness, with no references to the personal self of the writer. “It very succinctly is a moment recorded of an observation…in which human nature is revealed however subtly” (Davidson, 2003, p.1). A Haiku does not use personal narratives, allegory, or excessive language in order to create a powerful experience for the reader (Andreyev, 2003; Davidson, 2003; Hardy, 2002; Missias, 2003; Reichhold, 2003; Shirane, 1999). Its unadorned approach to language leaves space for readers to feel their own responses. It does not try to describe, put forth an opinion, or perspective of the writer. It simply allows experience to be viewed as it is in its own right (Davidson, 2003). This emphasis on awakening the readers awareness, has given Haiku the name of “psychological” haiku.

an aging willow
its image unsteady
in the flowing stream
(Speiss, 2003, p.47)

stacking firewood
scent
of the old forest
(Dallas, 2002, p.68)

Words that speak deeply
A moment that resonates
Knowing beyond the known.
Roberts (2003)

The Haiku form creates images that resonate, change, shock, giving the reader a moment, a sensation, the reader could not name or describe. (Andreyev, 2003). Reichhold (2003) writes, “To express an image or two so well that the reader ‘sees’ them in his/her mind and then! you add another image that demands a leap or twist so the two previous images are seen in a new relationship. You have to show new ways of seeing things to be real,” (p.4). Notice how this is achieved:

Who made the crooked pine?
How many trees are on the garden path?
How much does the gentle breeze help you?
(Sahn, 1992, p. 66)
winter morning stillness
chopping wood
between the echoes
(Jackson, 2002, p. 63)

the other way
looking but not seeing
a swing still swinging
(Roberts, 2003)

Language of Hypnosis and the Experience of the Now

While the Haiku method is not a therapeutic technique in and of itself, it is an effective model to communicate observation in the form of hypnotic suggestions. This serves to engage the unconscious so that it can release the clients from their rigid mental and emotional sets, facilitating the restructuring and reorganizing of self-systems. (Gilligan, 1987). In fact, Haiku-like suggestions can be interspersed throughout the conversational induction and hypnotic process in a way that “…serves only as a means of stimulating or arousing within their subject’s past learning’s and understandings…. Every effort should be made to direct the subject’s attention to the process within himself” (Hartland, 1971, p. 375). Overlade (1985) discussed the “resolution-seeking set” as the unconscious eagerness to resolve emotional and psychological disequilibrium. The “resolution-seeking set” can be satisfied through abstraction or generalization; a proverb, pun, a bind, a non-sequitur, shock, or surprise all serve to generate the resolution-seeking process.

The naturalistic/utilization approach to Ericksonian hypnotherapy rests upon developing skills of observation. “The more therapists are able to observe about the specific regularities of the individual patients, the more they will be able to facilitate therapeutic responses in those individuals” (Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976, p. 16).

Observation is ultimately about seeing thing as they are rather than attempting to shape our perceptions through the distorted lenses of a theory and technique. It is important for therapists to suspend their attempts to fit their own feelings, perceptions, and behaviors into a convenient theory. Therapists must stay intimately connected to the client’s ongoing experience by minimizing their own conscious interference. Therapists cannot attend to their observation of the client experience and attend to their own inner conscious dialogue at the same time (Gilligan, 1987, p.73.). Observation requires the willingness of the therapists to maintain their external focus, letting go of their internal frame of reference, and attending to the cues and signals that the client is continually imparting. “The structure of therapy is determined by the structure of the client’s “reality,” and not by some a priori frame held by the therapist” (Gilligan, 1985, p. 197; Griffith & Griffith, 1994.).

Observation skills not only require a keen external focus and sense of observation but also the acceptance of what is observed. Accepting and utilizing the individual’s behavior, inner realities, and resistance, in order to make therapeutic use of the presenting symptoms (Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976; Gilligan, 1978; O’Hanlon, 1985, Roberts, 2000, 2001, 2002; Rossi, 1987).
This sort of observation is akin to the Buddhist notion of observing the observer, as well as “keeping that don’t know mind!” (Epstein 1995, p. 14). This sort of “bare attention is impartial, open, nonjudgmental, interested, patient fearless” (Epstein, 1995, p. 126.). Gilligan (1987) states, “the therapist fully orients attention to the client in a relaxed, uncritical, but intent fashion” (p. 122). The connection between Buddhist mindfulness (Vipasssana) and non-attachment and the Ericksonian notion of observation has significant implications for learning observation skills, but this is the topic of an altogether separate article, and will not be explored further here.

**Bringing the Two Together**

Ericksonian hypnotic language includes the use of ambiguity, grammatical violations, pauses, and various non-traditional forms of language usage. Words chosen by the therapist need to be vague and ambiguous enough to cover the many possibilities of client response yet be direct and specific enough to provide broad guidelines.

Grammatical violations produce a depotentiating effect on the conscious mindset. Such violations are created by pauses in mid-sentence or by pauses before and after single words, to suggest multiple meanings that leave the client wondering how the sentence will be finished, and they can depotentiate conscious sets by overloading the client’s capacity to pay attention.

Let us juxtapose some Haiku with Ericksonian phraseology and observe the similarity between the two:

When you become enlightened
You will know that you’ve
Been enlightened all along
(Kerouac, 1992, p. 66)

And sometimes the answers
Seem to be one thing
And turn out to be another
(Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976, p. 33)

quieting the mind
deep in the forest
water drips
(Hosha, 2002, p.42)

You will in due course say
Something long forgotten
Now remembered
(Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976, p. 91)

above the noise
of the motorway
wind in the poplars
(Lucas, 2002, p. 51)
In my voice you can hear
the whispering wind,
the rustle of leaves
(Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976, p. 91)

Milton Erickson, a Haiku poet? Maybe, maybe not. What he was was an astute observer and orator of remarkable power, brevity, and impact.

Often Erickson employed long conversational stories in which he would insert suggestions that closely resemble the Haiku method (Erickson & Rosen, 1992). Therapists can utilize pithy Haiku-like hypnotic suggestions throughout the overall hypnotic experience. Employing the Haiku method, therefore, is not a hypnotic technique but rather an approach to developing suggestions to maximize the client’s unconscious problem-solving and healing resources.

How can therapists begin to work with the Haiku form to develop their skills of observation with the here and now and to develop a repertoire of sensory rich, image-evoking words? There are specific methods that help cultivate awareness and observation using the Haiku pattern.

DuPont (2001) has systematized a method for learning Haiku. The first step is to read Haiku, not necessarily as poetry, but as an avenue of observation and connection; as a method of experiencing how words can be used economically and powerfully at the same time. Be open, allow yourself to reflect upon the trickles of awareness that the haiku drips into your mind. Reading Haiku is not like reading a book. Read Haiku, pause with it, and let it percolate, resonate, frustrate, intimidate, initiate, and start the spark of observation and awareness.

Next, find what DuPont calls the “Haiku moment” (2001, p. 45). Therapists can adjust awareness so that they can become one with the moment and the emotions of that moment. The therapist can accept that their expression will be as brief and simple as possible. Remember that the Haiku will be the finger pointing at the moon; do not get lost looking at the finger and miss observing the moon.

Finally, DuPont suggests a format to express your observations in three lines: Do not be concerned with making the 5-7-5 syllable count. Stay focused on finding sensory rich words which bring to mind images, with as few words as possible. Work at making each word count. At first, try to keep your expression around the 17 total syllable count. Let each line carry a specific image, experience, or observation. Stay away from memories. Do not retreat, for example, into recalling the time you spent in San Francisco last year. That will only disconnect you from observing your immediate experiences. Take a walk in the city, in the country. Stop and notice aspects of right where you are now. DuPont suggest that each line have a focus. For example:

Line one: Where?
Line two: What?
Line Three: When?

Some illustrations:
and so why not let
yourself explore in a very
personal fashion
(Gilligan, 1987, p. 199).

a lonely leaf left
right there on that wintry tree
sipping hot coffee
(Roberts, 2003)

your unconscious can
take in and let go, expand
out back and forth
(Gilligan, 1987, p. 231)

If I don’t use the cork
I may spill the wine-
But if I do?
(Kerouac, 1992, p. 166)

it may be surprising
how deeply detached you
become like a wise friend.
(White, 1985, p. 500).

during the sermon
I clean this week
from my nails
(Gorman, 2002, p. 158)

Line one: Sight
Line two: Sound
Line three: Feeling

I see something that
Sounds familiar like home
Feet tight in my shoes
(Roberts (2003)

Or:

Line one: Tree
Line two: Color
Line three: Water
Crooked branches reach
Grey clouds pressing down hard
Is the faucet on?

Roberts (2003)

The subject matter for each line must reflect an important aspect of the client’s view of their world. Do not just make things up; make sure the words reflect the client’s way of looking at the world, their symptoms and their possibilities for change and healing.

Finally, relax and be creative. Do not be concerned at first with doing it right; just play with observing and with the words that capture observation.

Conclusion

Learning to utilize the Haiku form, hypnotherapists will sharpen their skills of observation and the use of image evoking words to express that observation via the hypnotic suggestion. We all have a wealth of knowledge, understanding, and experience that we can draw upon to help enhance the way we craft hypnotic language thus maximizing our client’s response to hypnosis. Utilizing the Haiku pattern is an effective way to keep our awareness sharpened our observation astute, and our word usage evocative.

References


