

“Is Hypnosis OK or a Problem?”

I was told by a man who is a new Christian that he quit smoking this past fall through hypnosis. I know that hypnosis is not a good thing, but could you tell me a little more about it so that I can know how to answer in the future?

Although hypnosis may be useful in some situations, there are a number of potential dangers as well. In what follows, I have simply cut and pasted from a teaching outline on hypnosis. The outline comes from a chapter on “Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression” in John Weldon and John Ankerberg’s book *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*. It’s important to realize that Weldon and Ankerberg are looking at hypnosis primarily as it relates to the occult and New Age Movement. It MAY be possible for a Christian therapist to make some beneficial use of hypnosis in treating patients. However, I am honestly not knowledgeable enough in this area to know for sure. At any rate, one must certainly be careful, for as Weldon and Ankerberg point out, there are many potentially negative effects arising from the use and/or abuse of hypnosis. Here are a few sections from my outline:

Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression

I. So what is hypnosis anyway?

A. It is a deliberately induced condition of deep mental relaxation, or trance (i.e. an ASC), in which a person becomes highly suggestible and potentially capable of being dramatically manipulated.

B. When the ASC has been achieved, “various therapeutic maneuvers in the form of suggestions or other psychological interventions are performed and are called the practice of ‘hypnotherapy.’” (310) C. Its New Age and occult applications include: psychic development, spirit contact, automatic writing, astral travel, etc. For instance, Harpers *Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* declares, “Self-hypnosis is used...by mediums and channelers to communicate with spirits.” (311)

II. What about hypnotic regression? What is that all about?

A. This usually involves using hypnosis to take a person back in their past to uncover buried memories and resolve hidden conflicts.

B. In New Age and occult applications, such regression may go back into a person’s alleged “past lives.”

III. How does hypnosis claim to work?

A. No one really knows for sure! There is still no generally accepted scientific theory about it.

B. “Daniel Goleman, who has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Harvard University, observes, ‘After 200 years of use, we still cannot say with certainty what hypnosis is nor

exactly how it works. But somehow it does." (310)

IV. Does the Bible have anything at all to say about the practice of hypnosis?

A. "Hypnosis may be related to the biblically forbidden practice of 'charming' or 'enchanted'; to the extent this relationship holds true, the practice should be rejected." (310)

B. Christians are to be "filled" and controlled by the Holy Spirit. To the extent that the hypnotic trance opens one up to the influence of other spirits, it has the potential to be quite harmful.

V. What is the susceptibility to hypnosis in the general population?

A. About 10-20% of people cannot be hypnotized.

B. About 10-20% can be easily hypnotized.

C. The remainder fall somewhere in between.

VII. Granting that hypnosis MAY be helpful and useful under some circumstances, we might still ask whether it is a necessary part of the psychotherapeutic process?

A. One psychiatry textbook states, "Everything done in psychotherapy with hypnosis can also be done without hypnosis." (314).

B. But if this is really so, we may ask whether the potential risks are worth the potential benefits?

X. What are some of the documented potential dangers of hypnosis?

A. Perverse motivations to satisfy ulterior needs on the part of the therapist or patient.

B. It may increase a patient's overdependence on the therapist.

C. Traumatic insight when repressed memories are uncovered.

D. Precipitation of a psychosis.

E. Sudden panic reactions occasioned by the experience of hypnosis.

F. Complications from miscommunication.

G. Unscrupulous use of hypnosis.

H. Difficulty in waking subject and unfortunate effects of incomplete waking.

XI. However, it must be admitted that in the Jan. 1987 *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, it was concluded that “other than in a few rare and isolated instances, hypnosis has proven to be one of the safest tools in the armamentarium of the healing professions.” (317). The dangers of hypnosis are usually attributed more to the therapist than to hypnosis itself.

XII. W & A suggest five variables to be considered when evaluating the risks of hypnosis:

- A. The religious, ethical, and philosophical orientation of the therapist.
- B. The emotional history and condition of the client.
- C. The degree of technical expertise and past experience of the therapist.
- D. The motive and purpose for engaging in hypnosis.
- E. The hypnotic state itself.

XIII. Dr. Shafica Karagulla, M.D., a neuropsychiatrist and member of the prestigious Royal College of Physicians. . . warns against possession from hypnosis in her *Breakthrough to Creativity*. . . She warns that hypnosis can open ‘. . .the door to your mind which can be influenced by other intelligences, some greater than your own. In such a passive state, an entity can get in and obtain control over you.’ (328).

XV. Christian scholars are divided over whether the use of hypnosis is permissible for Christians. “One of the leading Christian authorities on the occult, the late Dr. Walter Martin, accepted the medical practice of hypnosis, while warning against its occult use. Noted psychiatrist Paul Tournier, on the other hand, is opposed to any use of hypnosis” (332).

XIX. Can you think of any biblical prohibitions against hypnosis?

- A. It may be generally prohibited in a passage like Deut. 18:10-12 (e.g. divination, witchcraft, sorcery, casting spells, mediums, spiritists, etc.). But of course this is not entirely clear.

I hope this information helps you in your understanding of hypnosis. While it’s not a clear-cut issue, Christians should probably be very careful (and prayerful) before either recommending or receiving hypnosis.

Shalom,

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