

What is Hypnosis? What is Regression?

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I have dedicated my life work to both conducting regression hypnosis sessions and teaching regression hypnosis. Hypnosis is a frequently misunderstood phenomena. Most people think that hypnosis is this very unusual state of consciousness, where you lose control of your will and become a puppet to the hypnotist's suggestions. This is largely a myth.

First of all, all hypnosis, to a great degree, is self-hypnosis. A person has to want to be hypnotized in order to even have the possibility of being hypnotized. Anyone who really doesn't want to be hypnotized, most likely wouldn't be. For a person to enter a trance state, they would need to feel safe, comfortable and open to the possibility of entering a trance state.

In most hypnosis situations, a person enters a dually conscious state. About 80% of people can pretty easily enter a mild to moderate trance state. In this state, they will remain aware of themselves and of the hypnotherapist's voice, but also have some sort of "experience". For most, the experience is visual - they will see something. For some, it will be feeling oriented - they will feel something. It's a bit like being seated in a movie theater. As the movie plays out, you may become

more involved in the drama of the movie, but you also remain aware, to varying degrees, of yourself in a theater, watching a movie.

One of my favorite explanations about hypnosis came from my pre-session interview with a client. I always ask a client about any previous experiences with hypnosis. She said she had and here is her paraphrased account:

“I saw a hypnotist for smoking cessation about 20 years ago. Didn’t work at all. I stayed completely conscious. But I have never smoked again since I left his office.”

I love this story because it really addresses the popular concept of what hypnosis is vs. the reality of how hypnosis works. I define hypnosis as the suggestibility of the mind that is achieved between wakefulness and sleep. I would add that we are suggestible even in the waking state. We take in about 5% consciously and our subconscious mind is taking in the other 95%. That’s how advertising works. Or how charismatic cult leaders work. They reach into the subconscious mind indirectly to make you want that cheeseburger, car or to get you to send in your money. But once we get in-between the waking and sleep states, the mind opens even more to suggestion.

I’ll use the words suggestibility

and hypnotizability interchangeably. Hypnotizability is a skill, and like any skill some people have a greater natural talent at a given skill. And as a skill, hypnotizability improves with practice. So some people are more easily hypnotized and some are more difficult. But the more you practice, the better you get at it. Edgar Cayce, for example, was pretty good at entering trance from the start, but with a lot of practice, he became a trance virtuoso!

So when someone comes to work with me, I explain that the session basically has two basic sections. The first part is called the induction. The induction will feel to the client like a guided meditation. I will talk softly and guide them in breathing and relaxation. I will check in with them and once they are in a relaxed state, I will begin to make suggestions. Here, I’ll explain my own regressions and how I experienced this transition. As we went from the induction phase to the second phase of being given suggestions, my thought was, “Am I really hypnotized? I feel relaxed but I feel normal”. I was

skeptical. Like the woman who stopped smoking, I, too, thought that hypnosis would require entering some exotic state where I had little to no conscious awareness. While some people do enter such a deep state, most enter the mild to moderate trance state, where you remain self-aware. I try to explain to a client that trance states are not exotic, as we experience them every night as we fall asleep or when we meditate, sometimes even when we are driving.

Then I'll explain that the conduit for a session is going to feel imaginative, as if you're just making something up. This is where some people struggle, as they have a difficult time going with imaginative processes. In the waking state, we tend to poo-poo the imagination as child's play. But people like Cayce, even Einstein and Tesla, put a high stock in the imagination. Cayce called it "the imaginative forces". He said that the imagination was the "bridge" to the psychic/soul realm and that anyone with a good imagination, could become a good psychic!

Next I relate my first session. My dear friend, Tom Baker, led me to a door and told me that behind the door would be an important past-life for me to remember. As I opened the door and went thru, I began to see a very old wooden ship with a well-dressed blond man on deck. Guess what my first reaction was? "What is this? Did I watch a Christopher Columbus movie recently?" I was trying to make conscious sense of something that was arising from the subconscious soul mind. Basically, my Peter self was trying to make sense of a soul memory. There was a cognitive dissonance created (a sense of confusion). But I was also talking to Tom about what I was seeing and next I told Tom, very matter-of-factly, "This well-dressed man is the purser of the ship." This changed everything for me as I had never used that word nor did I know what it meant. I have had nothing to do with ships in my "Peter" life, but I knew he was the purser, the banker of the ship, the person who paid the staff, bought the supplies, balanced the books. So this knowledge about something I wasn't consciously knowledgeable about helped me to "suspend my disbelief" and more fully engage this imaginative process. It then became a full story about this man's life, what I believe to be a previous life of mine.

Peter Woodbury, MSW, originator and instructor of A.R.E.'s popular Past Life Regression Hypnosis Certificate Training and Professional Life Coaching Certificate Training, is a graduate of Harvard University and of Boston University School of Social Work, and a former faculty member of Boston University School of Social Work and Atlantic University. Peter has become one of, if not, the most prolific regressionists in the world today. He has conducted approximately 6,000 regressions, between 350 to 400 regressions a year. His work has evolved beyond past life regression into what he calls 'Soul Contact'.

A student of Cayce material for over 30 years, he is a psychotherapist, hypnotherapist and life coach, a contributor and columnist for A.R.E.'s member magazine Venture Inward.