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The Hypnotic State

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One of the often repeated truths of hypnotism is that no one knows exactly what constitutes the hypnotic state. That is, no one knows how to tell for certain if a person is hypnotized. This seems nonsensical, sort of like saying that you can't define an honest person. Well, you don't have to define an honest person, just need to know if you're dealing with the kind of person you expect.

Saying that you don't know the trance state is almost a contradiction in terms. Trying to define just one state reflects the myopia typical of the naive reductionist who tries to understand the whole as a sum of its parts. A conundrum akin to waking up a person in order to ask them what it's like to be asleep. Trance work is not about being in the "right state," it's about what you can accomplish in it whatever state you find yourself.

It's not reality that's important, but how you perceive things.

Neural State

I have been exploring for myself and training other people in Alpha-Theta neurofeedback for several years. This protocol is used to accomplish many things. It is used to accomplish anything that requires viewing one's situation from a deeply grounded and emotionally sensitive state of mind, which is basically what hypnotism accomplishes.

Alpha-Theta neurofeedback is an exercise that develops your ability to alternate between a state dominated by Alpha waves, and a brain state dominated by Theta waves. The way you define these waves, where on the scalp you measure the brain's state, and the way you measure the dominance of one state over the other determines how a person experiences this training. It also determines how proficient you become and the progress you achieve when you're in this state. Like going into trance or being hypnotized, people react differently to Alpha-Theta training.

Brain Waves	Frequency	Mental Condition
Delta wave	0.5 - 3 Hz	deep sleep
Theta wave	4 - 7 Hz	light sleep
Alpha wave	8 - 13 Hz	awake, relaxed
Beta wave	14 Hz	awake, excited

For most neurofeedback clinicians Alpha-Theta training is a mechanical procedure. It involves little more than attaching a person to an EEG amplifier and letting them experience the computer-generated feedback. The general state of the art in neurofeedback does not embrace subjective reality as an aspect of one's mental state. I suspect few clinicians do Alpha-Theta training to accomplish anything more than relaxation and the placebo effect.

In fact, Alpha-Theta training can be a subtle process of hypnotic suggestion. Those whom I feel know the most will say as much privately, but there are few words in the technical lexicon to describe the subjective process. As a result, neurofeedback clinicians have been doing Alpha-Theta training for 40 years without recognizing that they are inducing and then managing an hypnotic state.



The hypnotic state is the vision state, but it means more than being a witness to ones visions, it means being a part of what you envision. Being in what you imagine is the fundamental property of the hypnotic state. "Being in" means what you envision you feel to be happening now, as opposed to simply remembering something that happened in the past. In a sense, the hypnotic state is just a present state of consciousness built from past perceptions, instead of from perceptions in the present.



Objective and Reflective

The hypnotic state requires two alternating states of mind: the state in which one has a full somatic-emotional experience that requires no reflection, and a state of reflection that allows one to record in memory the impact of this experience upon one's self or ego identity. It is a state composed of two extremes: the fully subjective and immersed, and the fully objective and reflective. First you experience, and then you consider and in the process integrate, over and over.

You cannot do these two things at the same time, and you cannot accomplish anything transformative by experiencing only one of these two states without the other. You will not have experiences to remember, nor will you remember the experiences that you have, unless you continue to swing back and forth between the states of immersion and reflection. The immersive state is the Theta state. The reflective state is the Alpha state.

The hypnotic state is the same as the state one achieves when fully and flexibly experiencing Alpha-Theta training. Just as the Alpha-Theta training has multiple configurations with varying effects, so too has the hypnotic state. The reason hypnotists argue about the identify the hypnotic state is because they are looking for a specific presentation and are not able to recognize the state of mind directly. Seeing a person's EEG wave forms alternately dominated by Alpha or Theta waves provides a direct perception of the subject's state of mind. However, being in the hypnotized state does not ensure that you can accomplish all that is expected.



It's not the state that's most important, it's whether you can do what you are aiming to accomplish in this state. You need to tune your trance and tune your brain's state to the goal you're trying to accomplish. There is no particular "state" that assures success, there is only an acute aware of the unconscious, and the skill to use that awareness.

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