

Jewish Herald-Voice June 17, 2004

Clinical Hypnosis Makes Headway

If you've ever seen hypnosis used in a television program or a movie, particularly some of the older black-and-white thrillers, you may have seen a menacing hypnotist—often a Bela Lugosi type—swinging a disk in front of his subject, chanting words like “you are getting sleepy,” or once the subject has “gone under,” the hypnotist will say, “you are under my spell.”

Depicting modern hypnotists, television talk shows will bring unassuming audience member to the stage, have them undergo “group hypnosis” after which the therapist asks the subjects to perform outrageous acts, such as clucking like a chicken or barking like a dog.

Certified Hypnotist Mike Schuman dismisses these techniques as “strictly show biz.” “hypnosis is a natural event,” he explained. “Every evening before we go to sleep, we experience hypnosis.”

Schuman emphasizes that in the clinical setting, everyone undergoing hypnosis remains in control. “If the hypnotist makes a suggestion the client disagrees with, they can immediately emerge from the hypnotic state any time they wish. It is not mind control in any form.” Certified as an advanced clinical hypnotist as well as a forensic hypnotist to hypnotize witnesses for recall in legal cases, Schuman said the majority of clients he sees are seeking to relieve stress, to stop smoking or to lose weight.

He also works with parents and their pre-Bat/Bar Mitzvah children who are experiencing major stress. “I don't attempt to diagnose or treat disease or mental disorders,” Schuman pointed out. “Hypnosis helps to create strong, positive expectancy and reduces stress, which in turn normalizes the action of the autonomic nervous system. It is not unusual for the hypnotist to see clients through physician referral and he often works with patients suffering from Fibromyalgia, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Also, Schuman works with people who have fear about medical procedures or dental procedures as well as those who are suffering from continued stress. “In every case, clinical hypnosis is a pleasant, relaxing experience,” he said, “and the more you do it, the faster and deeper you go and the more benefits you receive.”

The aim of hypnosis is to access the subconscious, the seat of all memory. Human memory is nondiscriminatory, remembering positives as well as negatives. In the case of the individual seeking assistance in shedding a few pounds, Schuman said most people are pretty much aware of why they gain weight. “For everyone, there are 2.5 reasons why we gain weight and everybody knows what they are – they've eaten the wrong foods, they've eaten too much and they've eaten too much of the wrong foods. That's consciously.”

Schuman noted that to access the subconscious reasons an individual may gain weight, the therapist does what is referred to as a regression. “Under hypnosis, I take them back

to birth and to early childhood, looking for various subconscious reasons they've gained weight – and then I attempt to release those reasons so they no longer control the client. In the second session, I do another regression with a slightly different approach, looking for reasons why people retain weight.” He notes that sometimes reasons for gaining and retaining weight are the same. Through regression, Schuman is able to look for reasons and release them so they become memories that no longer affect that person, then gives the individual positive reinforcements so their eating habits and self-esteem are enhanced.

Generally, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis. The most the therapist can do is 50 percent, while the client must do the other 50 percent. Working together, the therapist counsels and teaches the technique of hypnosis so each person can do it for himself. In cases where the client is seeking to lose weight or stop smoking, the therapist also provides an audiotape or CD to use at night before he goes to sleep.

“After exploring various medications and other modalities with their physicians, we often find hypnosis to be especially effective for people who have a hard time relaxing or difficulty sleeping,” Schuman said. There are essentially three criteria needed before anyone can be hypnotized: First, the client must be able to understand and respond to the suggestions; second, the client must genuinely want to be hypnotized; and third, the client must agree to be hypnotized and to cooperate in the therapy.

“In spite of what anyone has seen on TV or the movies, no one can be hypnotized against his will...and no one has ever been harmed by hypnosis. Unlike the usual depiction, the client is not asleep or under some spell,” Schuman said. “The person hears everything the hypnotist says and can emerge from hypnosis anytime he wishes. A person in hypnosis is in deep concentration on a particular subject.” Furthermore, he points out that meditation is very similar to hypnosis. According to Schuman, they differ in that hypnosis is directed while meditation may include many random thoughts. “Hypnosis is anywhere from 65 to 75 percent effective, Schuman said. I have clients who have done very well while others have done essentially nothing. Most of that depends on motivation. Whatever the problem, the individual must want to resolve it.”

While under hypnosis, the client may or may not speak to the therapist and sometime responds with a head nod or finger response. “The answers I look for are either ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ or no answer at all. I may ask questions, such as, ‘Did fear contribute to your gaining weight?’ or, ‘Was there more than one fear?’ I don’t necessarily need to know what the fear or other experiences or emotions are to release them from controlling the client – so hypnosis is never personally intrusive.” Schuman believes a person can go back and view the events or emotions as if he or she is watching them on a movie or TV screen as observers or reporters so they don’t have to be experienced again. “They can report on them but they don’t have to feel them,” Schuman notes, “and I don’t necessarily know where they are because you don’t have to know the fear to get rid of it or alleviate it so it won’t affect the person.” With smokers, the therapist usually conducts three sessions, depending on the individual’s motivation. Some smokers stop on the first session. Others take longer to be successful.

Medical insurance almost never covers hypnotherapy, but hypnosis was officially

accepted by the American Medical Association as a viable treatment modality in 1958. In California, Blue Cross/Blue Shield has been covering some hypnotherapy for several years but many carriers still consider hypnotherapy “experimental.” Schuman claims that hypnotherapy is becoming more accepted and more people are turning to it as an alternative solution. “It is becoming more accepted by the medical community, as well, and therefore is becoming more accepted by society at large.” Yet, hypnotherapy still suffers from its role in movies,” he notes, because “it is much more dramatic on the screen. Factually, however, one can be hypnotized against his will or can be made to do or say anything against moral judgment.”