

HYPNOSIS AND DECEPTION

By Abby Eagle

There is a common misconception that a hypnotist has the ability to gain power over a subject and make them do anything. The truth, being known to the hypnotist, is that the subject willingly enters an altered state of consciousness and willingly accepts the suggestions made to them, is completely aware of being in a trance and in most cases has full recall of what occurred while in trance.

Another misconception, generally developed by those people who have attended a stage hypnotist show, is that they might not be hypnotisable. This indicates that most people have not the faintest idea what hypnosis is, and lest it is pointed out to them they would have no idea that they have ever been in a trance.

Aside from the fact that people live their life in a trance, trance occurs when consciousness is shifted in some way. In this article I would like to open some points for discussion regarding hypnosis in the field of spirituality and religion.

A magician is one who uses sleight of hand to produce unaccountable or baffling effects for entertainment such as card tricks, pulling a rabbit from a hat, sawing a person in half and putting them back together again, and freeing themselves from handcuffs and locked chains.

A mentalist expands upon the tricks of the magician and includes telepathy, mind reading, psychokinetic touch, prediction and levitation in their repertoire. They rely upon sleight of hand and deception which they expand upon to create a mental effect.

A stage hypnotist is one who practises the art of hypnosis for entertainment, whereas a hypnotherapist is one who uses hypnosis for therapeutic purposes. The magician, mentalist and hypnotist all induce trance but as the context changes so does the meaning of the experience. Trance at a stage show, hypnotherapist's office, in a church or temple, all have different meanings defined by the context and by what the subject brings to the experience. For example, one may give a little prestige to an ordinary stage hypnotist, or one can give maximum prestige to the 'greatest hypnotist in the world', or one can give prestige to a minister of religion, or a guru.

And as the context shifts from magician, to mentalist, to hypnotist, to hypnotherapist, and into the field of spirituality and religion the relationship between the hypnotist and the audience becomes more intimate and open to exploitation.

We are amazed when a magician pulls a rabbit from a hat, and stunned when a mentalist makes a prediction. We are filled with gratitude when a hypnotherapist facilitates a healing but when a guru like Sathya Sai Baba produces holy ash (*vibuthi*)

from the air; when he materialises gold rings, necklaces and watches - millions sit at his feet and worship him.

Studying the videos of Sathya Sai Baba one can clearly see that he uses deception to create an effect. The holy ash is produced by pulverising a tablet of chalk between his fingers, while the gold rings which he vomits for effect are produced by sleight of hand.

Whether Sathya Sai Baba uses tricks to create an effect for a positive outcome, in the way that a hypnotherapist would use hypnosis for healing, is open to conjecture and not the subject of this article, but he is not alone in India. Hoodoo guru men, godmen, magicians and hypnotists have flourished in India for thousands of years. Who has not read about the Indian rope trick in which a rope remains suspended vertically in mid air? Who has not seen a photograph of an Indian yogi levitating about two feet above the ground in the reclining position, leaning against a walking stick?

The East has perhaps become so artful at combining hypnosis and deception that in Western books on the history of hypnosis there is usually only a passing reference to the fact that sleep temples existed in Egypt and India in ancient times. When in fact hypnosis has been refined to a fine art in the East. How else could so many intelligent Westerners be entranced by the Eastern Guru?

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