

TRANSCENDING

STUTTERING

JOHN HARRISON

HYPNOSIS WITHOUT THE TRANCE

A couple of years ago my wife and I went to the San Mateo County Fair south of San Francisco.

I've always liked county fairs because I get to see things a city slicker doesn't bump into very often like cows, 4-H exhibits and working sheep dogs.

Plus there are always a few surprises.

We were just about to leave the fair when announcer on the loudspeaker over by the main stage announced that noted hypnotist George Somethingorother was going to start his show in just five minutes. Ever since I was a kid, I've been fascinated with hypnotists. Doris, too.

So we plunked our butts down on a bench and

waited for the show to begin.

The hypnotist was pretty good. He had klutzy teenagers doing slick Tony Orlando imitations and hulking linebacker types hopping around the stage like Peter Rabbit.

But what I remember best is a big, strapping motorcyclist, the kind who could play volleyball with my refrigerator. The hypnotist told him that when he woke him up, he'll be stuck to his seat. Sure enough, the fellow was awakened, and a few moments afterward, the hypnotist asked everyone on the stage to stand up and stretch. They all do except this one poor guy. Although he tried and tried, he just couldn't lift his butt from the chair. The audience was hysterical.

I suddenly had a flash. Maybe that's what happens when we have a speech block. We're hypnotized.

"C'mon," I can hear you saying. "I stutter and nobody has ever put me in a trance."

Not so fast. Let's look at how we go about hypnotizing someone.

It calls for getting the subject's complete confidence and trust. We get him to focus totally on what we're saying, and at some point his concentration is so focused that he loses his sense of self. Our voice is his only reality. At this moment he WANTS to believe whatever we tell him, even if it contradicts his own

experience.

Any of this sound familiar? It should. It's similar to how children are "hypnotized" by adults. Like the hypnotic subject, the child is extremely impressionable. He perceives the adult as an authority figure, someone who knows The Truth. He wants to trust and please. And he wants the adult to take care of him.

Consequently, he is inclined to believe as truth what the adult tells him...whether it's true or not.

Voila! Hypnosis without the trance.

These post-hypnotic suggestions from childhood are carried into adult life and control the way we feel and act. Obviously, a great deal of what our parents tell us is necessary if we are to become socialized and well-adjusted. But sometimes a well-meaning parent or other authority figure gives us suggestions that are not in our best interests; for example, good children "should be seen and not heard," good children shouldn't cry or get angry or want what they want, etc.

These suggestions separate us from what we truly think and feel and if left unchallenged, serve as guidelines for our entire lives.

LOSING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN CONTROL

But why don't we know we're hypnotized? Easy. We forget where our beliefs come from.

Over time, we have come to believe that the compulsion to be nice, to hold in our feelings, to speak perfectly, to always satisfy other people's needs at the expense of our own are all things we really want.

We forget that we're following someone else's commands.

So when we go to express our true desires...like asking someone in a non-smoking section to put out his cigarette...we block and we don't know why.

See how similar in concept this is to the motorcyclist in the hypnosis demonstration? You tell him he won't be able to unstick himself from his chair. You also tell him to forget all knowledge of what has just transpired. Then you wake him up and ask him to stand up and stretch.

Try as he will he can't get up.

On one hand he does want to stand up. That's his own will asserting itself. Yet, on a deeper level, he really doesn't want to stand up. He wants to follow your directions to the letter. He wants to please you. Your will is more important than his. The only reason his inability to rise seems like voodoo to him is that you've previously told him to forget all knowledge of the

suggestions you've given him.

He doesn't know that he's the one who's choosing to stay seated.

Let's look at this in terms of speech blocks. Have you ever noticed that whenever you block, you seem to be pulled in two directions -- to talk and not to talk? That's not very far removed from wanting to stand and sit and the same time. You want to do two opposing things, and it leaves you frozen and unable to move.

But that's silly. Why wouldn't you want to talk?

When your lips are locked and you can't say "butter" to the lady in the cafeteria, it could be that you're acting off an internalized, unspoken directive that says you shouldn't be assertive. Or as a child you may have picked up the belief that every word that came out of your mouth had to be perfect. It could be any number of different reasons.

Your inability to speak could also relate to the FEELINGS associated with the words you want to say. If the serving lady looks like your hated sixth grade teacher, and you're operating off a suggestion that it's not "right" to express (or even feel!) anger or some other strong emotion, you're caught in that same do/don't-do situation. You want to talk at the same time that you're afraid of revealing what's really going

on.

It doesn't feel safe.

Consequently, one inner voice says, "Oops, we better close up shop until it feels less dangerous." while the opposing voice cries out, "But...but I gotta say this RIGHT NOW!"

You're in a similar situation to the biker who can't get out of his seat. You want to do something, yet at the same time you're acting off of a belief (implanted years ago) that says you shouldn't...a prohibition that you've totally forgotten about.

This theory of conflicting intentions explains why 99% of us can talk just fine when we're alone and not likely to be confronted with opposing demands.

The actual "hypnotic suggestion" is hard to pinpoint. The only point I want to make is that when you're trying to speak and not speak at the same time, it's as if you've been hypnotized.

WE'RE CONSTANTLY BEING HYPNOTIZED

Most of us don't recognize the degree to which we are constantly being "hypnotized" by suggestions from the media, our business associates, our friends and loved ones. Here's a typical example.

You're out shopping with a close friend whose opinion you trust. In the sportswear department of Macy's your friend finds a shirt she says would look just great on you. At first, you don't like it. Not your colors. But the more she talks, the more you begin to come around, until you suddenly decide you like it and buy the shirt. You've been hypnotized. You're foregoing your own experience and seeing something you don't really see.

We've looked at how other people's suggestions can effect our perceptions. Let me demonstrate the way in which suggestions can affect us physically.

Let's say you're on a connecting flight from Pittsburgh to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and 30 minutes into the trip you need to pee in the worst way. It's a dire emergency, because, like many small commuter aircraft, there is no bathroom on board. (I've been on that flight; I know.) Your seat-mate (of the same sex) jokingly suggests that in an emergency you could use the airsickness bag to pee in. (I'm assuming you're a guy.)

Would you do it if you had to?

If you're like the rest of us, you'd rather die first. Our parents, those early childhood hypnotists, gave us repeated prohibitions about peeing anywhere other than in the john or behind a bush. Those proscriptions are so strong that they allow us to perform amazing feats

of self-control, which is why you're able to hang on.

At last, the plane lands. As you race through the terminal toward the john, you notice something curious. The need to pee and the fear that you won't make it increases in direct proportion to how close you are to the john. The closer you get, the more you feel like you're losing control. As you frantically unzip your jeans, the last three seconds are sheer hell. But you make it...just.

Just?

You were on the flight for almost an hour. Could it be that you actually timed it down to the last critical second?

Highly unlikely.

You're simply experiencing how your unconscious programming causes you to lock and unlock your sphincter. Your resolve not to pee weakened the closer you got to the john, because you knew that in a moment it would be socially acceptable to let go. This is why you unconsciously started to relax control of your sphincter and why it suddenly felt that you couldn't wait a second longer. *It only seemed like you had split-second timing because the whole locking/unlocking process took place outside your conscious awareness.*

From my observation, this is similar to what happens with a speech block. We unconsciously lock our

speech muscles when it seems threatening to express ourselves, and we don't allow those muscles to release until the intensity of our feelings subsides, and it feels safe to talk again.

No matter how hard we try to force out the words, our will to hold back is stronger.

GETTING ON YOUR OWN SIDE

As you can see, then, other people's suggestions can exert powerful controls over our thoughts, feelings and behavior. Let's sum up our observations about hypnosis and stuttering.

- Someone can hypnotize you without putting you in a trance. You are hypnotized when someone else's reality becomes more "real" than your own.

-- When a hypnotic suggestion comes in conflict with something you want to do, you will become blocked. Being blocked is a conflict of will--yours and someone else's.

-- A post-hypnotic suggestion is nothing more than taking on the other person's will and making it more powerful than your own. Be perfectly clear that this does not happen to you. You CHOOSE to believe

the other person and give him or her this power.

-- A speech block may represent the same kind of conflict as that experienced by the motorcyclist who couldn't get out of his seat. There is an unconscious command not to do something.

-- What we call chronic stuttering (or speech blocks) may really be struggle behavior in which we try to push out a word which, at that moment, we don't want to say.

-- There are any number of reasons why we might not want to say that word. The reasons can relate to particular emotions associated with that word, emotions that we're afraid to show, or we might be afraid to speak up because of how we might appear to others.

-- We usually don't know when we're hypnotized. Therefore, we're likely to do things, or be blocked from doing them, and not understand why. Because we've forgotten that we've made all the original choices, the block appears to be outside of our control, and we feel helpless.

-- We cannot be hypnotized without first having a **NEED** to believe. There can be many reasons for this need, such as wanting another person's approval or love, being afraid to act forcefully in the presence of an authority figure, believing that the other person's reality is more "real" than our own, etc.

-- Hypnosis involves a loss of will, and in the case of speech blocks, it can involve losing our will to speak.

If all of the above is true, then how can we un-hypnotize ourselves?

Doing it takes hard work. The concept is simple, but doing it takes time, effort and commitment. It calls for reversing the process.

If being hypnotized is a loss of will, then becoming "awake" requires you to discover what is truly going on and reclaim your will.

You need to begin getting in touch with what is TRUE for you, rather than what you imagine others want you to believe or feel. Notice your actions, opinions, feelings. Through extended observation, you may discover that your speech blocks reflect a conflict between two powerful opposing forces:

- * Your belief to submit to the will of others.
- * And your desire to speak your mind and express your true feelings.