

The Evolution of Hypnosis Generative Process in Contemporary Practice

by Michael Watson

Nothing happens in the world without some intention behind it. Hypnotherapists often presuppose this concept in an effort to uncover the source of many client conflicts and difficulties. To figure out the reason behind the unwanted habit, or the cause of a particular limitation. Most of us have learned enough about the power of intention to realize that our inner objectives will insist upon finding expression in the world.

And when we chose our professional paths, we were guided by a deep intention as well. As an adolescent, I set my sights on the priesthood inspired by a self-declared, youthful and naively exalted mission to “lessen human suffering and bring some peace to those in distress”

I ambled into hypnosis. My evolving practice of trancework has been the result of an unfolding path that led me through monasticism and meditation, guided imagery processes, spiritual practices and past life regressions to NLP and hypnotherapy. Yet through all of these changes, the original mission remained essentially the same. Still aimed at helping people overcome their difficulties, my work began to reflect a greater interest in expanding self-awareness for those in my care.

When I was first trained in hypnosis some twenty five years ago, it seemed that the “bread and butter” for most hypnotherapists was weight loss and smoking cessation. I believe that this may still be the case for many of us. But as time went on, and as the public perception of hypnosis grew away from the limiting misconceptions of the past, hypnotherapists we called upon for assistance with a variety of unwanted habits and phobias, resolution of traumas, family troubles and more. I had set my sights on “human suffering” and I found it all around me.

So I was delightfully surprised one day when a client came to see me who didn't seem to have a problem at all. A client who didn't need “fixing”! All was going well for this artistic young man (a successful creative writer) who wanted to use hypnosis to stimulate his creativity. And then another client came to me who wanted to explore her dreams. And one who wanted guidance to find her purpose.

I had become so accustomed to doing remedial work with clients that it was a major paradigm shift for me to consider that troubles weren't a requirement of the process. This realization opened up a new and rewarding dimension to my

practice to that been a source of professional enthusiasm and satisfaction ever since.

In practice we are often called upon to uncover a client's resources and apply them in ways that can be used to achieve the goals of therapy. The purpose is to resolve some difficulty. This is remedial therapy.

As we let go of the assumption that our clients are broken and in need of repair, we can begin to utilize our clients' resources differently. Generative hypnosis involves processes that "generate" new options and understandings. Once initiated, these understandings seem to take on a life of their own and unfold through time in accordance with the inner needs and intentions of the individual.

Unlike the old understanding of hypnosis as a means of planting suggestions in the unconscious mind and programming it to conform to a consciously chosen directive, generative hypnosis invites the unconscious to come forward and express itself in the world. It utilizes the wisdom of the unconscious to make better choices than we can make consciously, and it invites further exploration and self-discovery.

The human potential movement has been maturing steadily since the 1960s when young people started to turn to non-traditional spiritual paths, meditative options, transformational training programs and other self-help and self-development choices. It has called us to take deliberate and conscious control over the direction of our own evolution. And to do so requires skills and tools.

The invitation to self knowledge and self unfoldment can be answered by a variety of techniques for which hypnotherapists are especially well equipped. Rather than the mistaken stereotypical notion of hypnosis as the imposition of the hypnotist will on a subject, we have the opportunity to use our expertise in ways that are ultimately respectful of the client. We create the context for change and growth and trust the nature of the client's unconscious mind to use that context appropriately.

In the descriptions to this work offered by NLP developer and researcher Robert Dilts, generative process involves finding some quality that already exists within the individual and enhancing it, making more of it, or finding more uses for it. And the real difference between one practitioner and another is how we go about finding those qualities.

Before I studied hypnosis, my own experience with altered states of consciousness began with meditation and I still appreciate the value that sitting daily in silence, openness and expectation offers me. Consequently I often find it worthwhile to teach my clients how to meditate. As a hypnotist I know how to induce deep meditative states and to install mantras, mudras or other anchors as a means for the client to re-enter these experiences on their own

Some of the expansive processes available to the hypnotherapist such as past life regression or meetings with “inner guides” or “guardians” for example, have a more esoteric or spiritual presentation, yet equally effective results can be achieved by the use of more secular metaphors as well.

When we are invited to assist our clients in generative ways, we are given the rare honor to participate actively in the process of human evolution. The work involves the stimulation and encouragement of the client’s desire to expand ... to become more. Not because he needs to, but because he can.

One of the most basic generative practices takes the form of personal and professional coaching, and the great success of the coaching industry in the past decade is evidence of the public interest in this kind of service.

As an instructor of hypnotherapy, and as a friend of the holistic and “new age” communities, I’m often asked to provide supportive services for new professionals as they establish their practices or create their businesses.

Another generative application involves guided meditation or structured processes that draw information out of the client. This could involve hypnotic dream incubation or a walk through the library of history or any compelling open-ended process that allows the client’s unconscious to fill in the blanks in a useful way.

Milton Erickson taught that the reason for most client difficulties is that, on some level, they have lost rapport with their own unconscious mind. Another way to say it is that they are in a state of internal discord and that aspects of themselves are working against one another. Bearing in mind that all aspects of self have value, I especially like to use a process called “The Parts Party”. Based on the work of Virginia Satir and embellished by numerous practitioners and trainers through the years, this process invites a dialogue between different “parts”. Some parts that we especially like, some that we especially dislike, and some that serve us well are brought together to gain a better understanding and appreciation of one another so that they can develop more harmonious and cooperative relationships – freedom from conflict and peace within. These new relationships often result in creative expression as a result of the new collaborative possibilities they open up in the lives of our clients.

Erickson also said that hypnosis is a relationship and is a process of communicating ideas. However, in some approaches, the frame is “take these suggestions and ideas that I (the hypnotist) am giving you and make them your own.” Sadly, the suggestions are often part of a script that is used for all clients with a particular issue and don’t reflect any personal understanding or deep rapport, nor any individualized tailoring or true interpersonal communication. In

such approaches the client is essentially told to “Go where I send you and do as I say.” In more generative applications the client is encouraged, guided by her unconscious mind to “Go where you need to, and let me know what happens as the process unfolds”

Our training has equipped us to facilitate the hypnotic process, while the client has the capacity to use whatever leadings her inner self has to offer as she proceeds to makes progress within. She knows far better than we do what would make that inner adventure meaningful, and her unconscious mind knows even more than she does to lead her through the greatest of transformational adventures. Our clients resourcefulness is the single most valuable tool in our work and it is the unconscious mind which many of us are trying to muscle into compliance that needs to be given freedom of expression if our work is to be generative.

I’m all for doing whatever works to get the client what he wants, and the more traditional approaches can do that nicely up to a point. They are quite effective for the many people we see who are searching for remedial work with specific issues. These remedial protocols can be the backbone of a highly successful practice of hypnotherapy and save us from the need to re-invent the wheel with each new session. But when we find a client who is trying to re-invent himself it’s time for us to create the space and the opportunity and to support and encourage him to find his own way.

Rather than developing dependencies, the generative client knows that she has not changed because of the power of some hypnotist who said the magic words and without whom she couldn’t have succeeded. But because we’ve assisted her to establish a new and empowering relationship with her own creative and resourceful self. We have the professional opportunity and deep privilege to participate in human evolution and do so we need merely develop the willingness to step back from the need to control the process as we support, encourage and witness the beautiful unfolding that has been waiting to occur.