

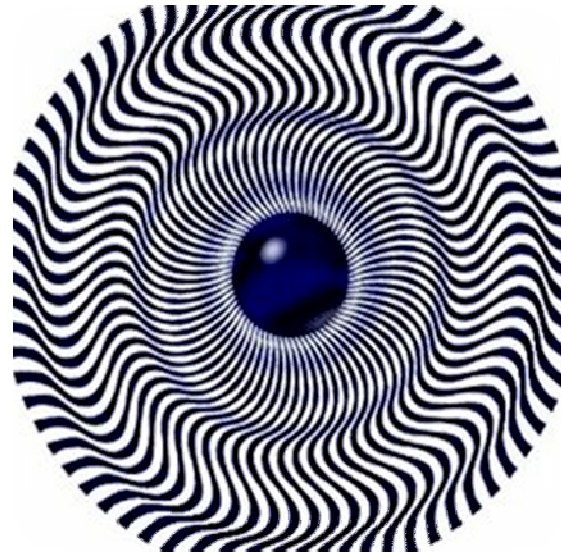
## Hypnosis

When we hear the word Hypnosis, we may picture the mysterious hypnotist figure popularised in movies, comic books and television. This ominous, goateed man waves a pocket watch back and forth, guiding his subject into a semi-sleep, zombie-like state. Once hypnotized, the subject is compelled to obey, no matter how strange or immoral the request, muttering “Yes Master”.

This representation bears little resemblance to actual practice of hypnotism. Subjects in a hypnotic trance are not slaves to their ‘masters’-- they are hyper attentive and have absolute free will. Around 1770 AD, Dr Franz Anton Mesmer, an Austrian physician started investigating on it referring it as ‘animal magnetism’ also called as ‘mesmerism’. Subjects of hypnotism are in a trance state characterized by extreme suggestibility, relaxation and heightened imagination.

Hypnosis does not start abruptly, the process needs to have few basic prerequisites-- the subject must be willing to be hypnotized, he/she must believe that he/she can be hypnotized and must eventually feel comfortable and relaxed.

Psychiatrists theorize that the deep relaxation and focussing exercises of hypnotism work to calm and subdue the conscious mind so that it takes less active role in our thinking process. In this stage, we are still aware of what is going on, but our conscious mind takes a backseat and our subconscious mind comes to fore.



Physiological tests have shown that the subject’s heart and respiration may slow down due to the relaxation involved in the process. The human brain seems to have changed activity. EEGs show a boost in the lower frequency waves associated with dreaming and sleep, and a drop in the higher frequency waves associated with full wakefulness. There is also a decrease in the left-hemisphere activity of the brain’s cerebral cortex, which seems to substantiate the hypothesis that hypnosis subdues the conscious mind’s inhibitory influence. Conversely, an increase in right brain activity supports the idea that the creative impulsive subconscious mind take the reins.

Various methods of hypnosis like fixed-gaze induction, rapid method, progressive relaxation and imagery and loss of balance have been very useful in controlling pain, ending tobacco addiction, treating psychological disorders, recalling details of a crime and improving athletic performance.

Be what it may, hypnosis still remains an enigma, much more romanticised than real.

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