

# Hypnosis - Helpful, Harmful or Hoax?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | August 12, 2010



*I would greatly appreciate your views on the following: I have been investigating the medical aspects of hypnotherapy, to be more specific hypnosis as an adjunct to chemical anesthesia.*

*Would you be kind enough to advise what the Adventist Church views are on this subject, and can hypnosis be used in stop smoking program's.*

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I cannot speak to the “official” position of the SDA church, but will share my thoughts about hypnosis.

Many of my patients have asked to be hypnotized or have asked if hypnosis works. In fact, it can have profound impact on the mind. The more important question relates to whether hypnosis actually brings healing or instead enfeebles the mental faculties.

Hypnosis is the process of suspending one’s reasoning abilities and allowing a third party to make suggestions, give direction, implant beliefs, or affect memories that the mind will then accept without critical examination. It is the process of bypassing the highest faculties of reason and conscience and directly accessing the beliefs, memories, morals, values, and imagination. Further, it detaches the

spiritual nature from its role in overseeing the formation of our beliefs, values, morals, and use of imagination. Hypnosis trains the mind to accept suggestions without critically examining them for reliability.

This is quite profound as the things we believe have powerful effects on our overall well-being. Therefore, to the degree that hypnosis can change our beliefs, it can significantly alter a person's experience. One of the most fundamental problems related to hypnosis is that it alters beliefs without utilizing one's God-given reasoning powers to examine one's beliefs, weigh the evidences, and freely choose the better course, one that would strengthen reason and ennoble the individual. Instead, hypnosis puts others in charge of the mind and surrenders individuality to them. This weakens the reasoning powers, making it more difficult to establish and maintain the mental hierarchy that God has designed.

Scripture teaches (Heb. 5:11-6:4; Eph. 4:14, 15) that mature Christians are those who have developed the ability to discern right from wrong, the healthy from the unhealthy, the good from the bad. Hypnosis impairs this ability because it trains a person to sideline reason and conscience, while trusting another to direct the mental faculties.

This makes individuals more suggestible and therefore more vulnerable to surrender their individuality and decision making to a third party. So, while I do believe hypnosis can have significant impact, I do not recommend its use because I believe the overall consequence of this practice to be deleterious to the mind.

There is a technique that people often confuse with hypnosis, but unlike hypnosis, can be helpful. The technique is guided imagery. During guided imagery, rather than another directing the faculties of one's mind, the individual retains control over them. Reason and conscience stay in charge, directing the will to activate the imagination. A person can use guided imagery to meditate on God's creation, character, and presence. Guided imagery can be a valuable part of our meditation and spiritual development. (Portions of this response adapted from Dr. Jennings' book *Could It Be This Simple?*).