

Taoist Hypnotherapy

It was my intention to explore some of the parallels between Taoism, one of the world's oldest "religions", and the way that I have increasingly been drawn to utilize and understand effective hypnosis. But right away there seems to be a slight problem. Laotzu, the semi-mythical source of the *Tao Teh Ching* - (The Way of Life), warns us "The Tao which can be spoken of in words is not the real Tao."

In a greater sense (chunking it up, in NLP terms), no essential truths or perceptions can be expressed in words or concepts. What we can do is paint a picture of what we have seen, or write a musical composition of what we have heard, and hope that others will have some sense of our reality. Hmmm...

My favorite translation of the words of the legendary Laotzu is by Witter Bynner. There are other inspiring and imaginative translations in print as well, but mostly I will be referencing the Witter Bynner, originally published in 1944, and still in print.

Mr. Bynner says in his introduction that Laotzu (c. 600 B.C.) had spoken wisdom which attracted followers, but that... "Aware of the dangers inherent in dogma, he was reluctant to leave a set record of his own spoken belief, lest it become to followers an outer and formal rather than an inner and natural faith, an outside authority rather than intuition."

William Hudson O'Hanlon says (*Taproots*, Norton Publishing, 1987) of the legendary hypnotherapist Dr. Milton H. Erickson "In his seminars, published articles, and recordings, he roams over much territory, and his wandering, anecdotal style has seemed obtuse, obscure, or overwhelming in its diversity."

Was Erickson deliberately refusing to write down his methods and understandings in any sort of recipe or set of instructions? Erickson himself warned those attempting to follow him: "Develop your own technique. Don't try to use somebody else's technique. ...Don't try to imitate my voice or my cadence. Just discover your own. Be your own natural self. It's the individual responding to the individual... I've experimented with trying to do something the way somebody else would do it. It's a mess!"

O'Hanlon muses that "Erickson was concerned that his approach might be codified and reified. Therapists learning these reified procedures might try to apply them inappropriately. In so doing, he felt, they would not be responsive to the individual variability and needs of their clients; they would merely imitate Erickson mechanically, not expanding or developing their own procedures and approaches."

In contemporary presentations of hypnotic interventions, the hypnotist is frequently encouraged to be almost aggressive in making suggestions and generally in taking control during sessions. Traditional

Freudian psychoanalysis is at the opposite end of the spectrum, with analysts trained to be completely nondirective... almost non-interactive. Where is the middle ground? Perhaps it is in what is described in Taoism as "creative quietism".

In another seeming parallel, Bynner writes, "...saddened by men's tragic perversity, their indisposition to accept 'the way of life,' to use life with natural goodness, with serene and integral respect, Laotzu rode away alone on a waterbuffalo into the desert beyond the boundary of civilization, the great wall of his period. It is narrated that when he arrived at one of its gates, a warden there, Yin Hsi, who had a dream of the sage's coming, recognized him from the dream and persuaded him to forgo his reluctance and to record the principles of his philosophy. The result is said to have been the *Tao Teh Ching*...a text of five thousand words, comprising eighty-one sayings..."

To digress for a moment, the image of water is often used in the Witter Bynner *Tao Teh King*. In Verse 8, for example, it says,
*"Man at his best, like water,
Serves as he goes along:
Like water he seeks his own level,
The common level of life...."*

If you have ever observed a stream of running water, you may have noticed that the element of water has the ability to flow around, under, or over just about anything in its path. So, these two qualities - first, seeking its own level, and second, finding a way to pass without necessarily moving that which is in its path, are subtle clues as to the elusive nature of Taoist Hypnosis.

In ancient alchemical work one of the great esoteric secrets that was sought was the "universal solvent". In fact, the element of water comes closest. The multiple meanings of "solving" hold curious and perhaps far-reaching implications. Taoist hypnosis would emphasize that although each individual must retain their own individuality - in fact, many who come for help suffer from 'boundary issues' - it is of paramount importance for the hypnotist to be able to blend with the client. To achieve rapport in the deepest sense is to begin to look out through the eyes of another, to hear with their ears. "Joining with" the client is a phrase used by Rogerian therapists.

Whatever it is, it is most definitely *not* what could be called "Grunt-work hypnosis". There are some practitioners out there who approach hypnosis sessions with their clients as a type of arm-wrestling. As if the force of their will or personality could be imposed on the subject, to subdue in a gross manner, objections or resistance to change. This Taoist hypnosis is something quite different, although it is difficult to define exactly what it is. It is almost easier to delineate it by saying what it is *not*.

Some 10 years ago I had the opportunity to watch Dr. Ernest Rossi work with a number of people in a 3-day seminar. The seminar was entitled "The Symptom Path to Enlightenment", and observing Rossi work *was* most enlightening. Rossi sometimes calls his work Minimalist Hypnosis, and in retrospect, what was most impressive was how *little* Rossi did. One woman offered to work with Dr. Rossi in front of the rest of us (about 25 people) only because she had been to a number of his trainings and, she said, she "trusted him". Like an old Aikido master, Rossi nimbly sidestepped and said, "Well, I trust the process...."

It is the ego of man that leads him away from the spiritual path and true happiness and into maya or illusion. It is the ego of the hypnotist who wishes to take credit for changes that the patient goes through as a result of the trance-work.

Verse 17:
*"A leader is best
When people barely know that he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worst when they despise him.
'Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you;'
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, 'We did this ourselves'."*

Is it not true that we cannot - not even the most influential and charismatic hypnotist - change another person one iota? No more than we can walk to the top of a mountain for another person. Yes, we can give them directions. We can point out the way, draw a map, etc., but they must move their own feet to get there.

There is an organic way of co-creating or co-discovering a hypnotic state for solving problems, for having a deeper grasp of the basic interconnectedness of all things, for accessing the resources of the unconscious which flows naturally out of the relationship between guide and traveler.

Can the way of Tao be taught? Perhaps each person must discover the jewel within, and then spend a lifetime polishing it.