

*The Theosophical Society's
position on hypnotism*



First published in *Jenness Miller Illustrated Monthly*, New York, August 1893. The article was only slightly revised from an earlier article submitted by Mr. Judge to the *Omaha Daily Bee*, and printed on March 30, 1891. The present edition has been excerpted from: Eklund D. (Comp.) *Echoes of the Orient: The Writings of William Quan Judge*. 2nd ed. Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 2009-11 [4 Vols.]. Vol. III, 2010; pp. 212-15.

Is hypnotism understood?

What is the attitude of the Theosophical Society to hypnotism?

It is thought by some that magnetism and hypnotism are identical; for many have said this new force or power is only the old practice of Mesmer revived in this century, after long years of contempt, and labelled with a new name, which will permit doctors to take it up. This is not, however, altogether true. Dr. Charcot, of Paris, and his followers, may be credited with the revival of hypnotism; for, in consequence of their investigations, it has been accepted by the medical profession. I have seen the prominent doctors of the Atlantic coast change their views on this subject in twenty-five years. Dr. Hammond and others laughed at the credulity of those who believed that the phenomena, now so well known among hypnotizers, ever took place; today they write articles and admit the facts previously denied.

Many years ago, Dr. Esdaile, a surgeon of the British army, conducted a hospital in India, and there performed many difficult operations by using magnetism as an anaesthetic, even instructing native assistants to use it on patients in his stead. His book, long ago published, gives all the facts.¹ There is plenty of testimony in all countries to the reality of the mesmeric and hypnotic states and powers.

The great question which arose after the proofs about hypnotism were in was a very different one from any which has previously been brought forward. As soon as the process was described and admitted, experiments proceeded with rapidity, and the great subject of "suggestion" was laid bare. It was found that the hypnotized person could be made to do many strange things after recovering from the hypnotic state, provided the suggestion had been made to him when he was in the state. The subject was told to murder Dr. A or B; to steal a pocket-book. He was then taken out of the hypnotic state, and, at the appointed time, would take the suggested weapon — a paper knife or harmless thing — and go through all the required actions, or would actually steal the object he was told to steal. If this power could be used by a doctor in an experiment, it was argued that an actual murder might be planned and executed through a hypnotized person. Hence it was dangerous. Crime was possible of perpetration with impunity by the real culprit. Dr. Charcot gave an article to an important New York magazine in which he admitted the probabilities of suggestion to patients, but denied that there was danger from suggested crime, and yet also said

¹ [*Mesmerism in India, and its Practical Application in Surgery and Medicine*, Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, London, 1846]

there ought to be laws against indiscriminate hypnotization. In the latter conclusion, most of the Theosophical Society's members fully concur, but they also think that there is, and will be, danger from crime suggested to hypnotic subjects. Not in the immediate present, but in the future.

This is because hypnotism is not understood nor its dangers appreciated by the medical profession; still less do they credit the public with a correct knowledge on the subject.

The very best hypnotizers know very well that there are points at which the hypnotized subject escapes their influence, continues in the hypnotic state, and remains under some influence not known to the operator nor distinguishable by the subject. Here is one danger — the danger of ignorance and of a blind guide's leading one equally blind. Such writers as Braid, Binet, and others are only statisticians. They simply give facts and methods, all being equally in the dark as to causes and possibilities. Again, the operators in the forefront of hypnotic fame know, too, as Dr. Charcot has said, there is a danger that hysteria will be developed where it never existed, and a long train of other evils. This is why he demands the suppression of indiscriminate operating. But the real rock of offense is this, and well known to theosophical students, that as the force and power of hypnotism are better known, it will be seen that whatever the influence is, the process going on in hypnotism is the contracting of the cells of the body and brain from the periphery to the centre. This process is actually a phenomenon of the death state, and is the opposite of the mesmeric effect; and this point is not known to the medical profession, nor will it be as they now proceed, because post-mortem examinations never reveal the action of a living cell. Magnetism by human influence starts from within and proceeds to the outer surface, thus exhibiting a phenomenon of life the very opposite of hypnotism. And the use of magnetism is not objectionable, yet it should be limited in practice to competent members of the medical profession. The more studious and careful members of the Theosophical Society, then, are against the use of hypnotism. In all its anaesthetic phases it can be duplicated by mesmerism without any bad effects. Dr. Esdaile has abundantly shown this. Laws ought to be passed making it a misdemeanour to have a public or private hypnotic séance. And these laws should also be aimed at even those doctors who, under the plea of science, put subjects into absurd and undignified positions. Such practices are not necessary, and are deliberately against the desire of the waking will and judgment of the subject. They only exhibit the operator's power and add nothing to knowledge that cannot be otherwise obtained.

But even with the remarkable cases recorded by Binet and others in France, the laws governing man's inner constitution, and which especially govern in hypnotism after a certain point, are not perceived by the learned writers. Some give only facts — either facts about strange recurrence of states, and others like Dr. James of this country assume that there is a hidden self who does these queer tricks with the mortal shape. Theosophists know that the extraordinary alterations in mind or mental power, the strange "recurrence of states," and the apparently distinct division or separation of intelligence in a single human subject, are all explained by the ancient eastern method of reducing the inner powers of man into seven classes, in each of which

the hidden self — the *Ego* — can and does act independently, the body being only a gross instrument or field for the action of the real man.

This theory divides him into seven planes of action, in each of which the *Ego* or hidden self can have a consciousness operating in a manner peculiarly appropriate to that plane, and also partaking of the consciousness and experience of the planes above it but not below. And each of these layers or fields for consciousness is further divided into other sub-fields, in every one of which there may be a separate experience and action, or all may be combined. Now in the cases taken up by Dr. James, the peculiarity noted was that when the subject acted as No. 1, she had no recollection of a state called No. 2. No explanation of this was offered, only the fact being recorded. It is explained by the localization of the consciousness of the *Ego* in one or the other of the sub-fields of action of the first of the great class of seven.

The failure to recollect from one to the other was due to the fact that the *Ego* was forced into that particular field, and was thus unable to carry recollection with it. Hence it was entirely automatic in its action on that plane. This effect was due almost entirely to the specific contractile action of the hypnotic process, which, as said above, is essentially a contraction of the cells from outside to the centre. This will always prevent the *Ego* from educating itself to remember from state to state and field to field the experience of each, which education is however possible in the mesmerized or magnetized state, and of course in the normal waking life.

The cases where the subject escapes from the operator's control are all explicable under the same theosophic theory; that is, those are instances in which the *Ego* retreats from the first plane or field of consciousness made up of seven divisions or sub-fields, to the next one of the whole class of seven, instead of entering one of the sub-divisions of the first. And, as the medical practitioners do not know of, nor admit the reality of the higher inner sub-divisions, they are not acquainted with the means for reaching the *Ego* when it has escaped further from them into a field of consciousness where they are in ignorance of causes and conditions; that is to say, the hypnotizers are not examining the *real* field of operation of the force, but are looking at some of its phenomena merely.

These phenomena are exhibited in the body or outer shell while the psychophysiological process, going on within, and causing the visible phenomena, is hidden from their view.



For in an in-depth analysis of the subject matter, look up “Magnetism, Mesmerism, Hypnotism,” in our Confusing Words Series. — ED. PHIL.