

Indian Hypnotherapy in our shastras

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Abstract

Hypnosis and hypnotherapy have been in vogue from time immemorial in India and are closer to the Indian psyche in terms of format and treatment. In this paper, hypnotherapy is discussed in the Indian context with its socio-cultural and spiritual perspectives. It has been studied with reference to *Yoga Nidra* and *Dhyana*. Although there are hundreds of scriptures in our *Santana parampara*, the study is based primarily on 3 shastras – *The Gita*, *Vashishta Yoga* and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*. Certain concepts, like *Maya*, *Samatvam*, *Manoshuddhi*, *Viyoga*, *Advaita*, *Viveka*, *Shama*, *Vaktapas*, *Atmabodh*, and *Moksha* from the Indian shastras have been referenced to hypnosis, especially in relation to Eriksonian hypnotherapy. Various stages of hypnotherapy from trance induction to trance termination and post-hypnotic suggestion have been studied in relation to concepts from *Sanatana Dharma*. The qualities of a hypnotherapist have also been highlighted. The author who has been a practicing hypnotherapist for over 2 decades feels that it is very essential for all hypnotherapists practicing in India to have a proper understanding and assimilation of the phenomenological, ontological, and spiritual synthesis of this wonderful subject to derive the utmost therapeutic benefits.

(Keywords: Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, suggestion, trance)

1. Introduction

Indians are primarily knowledge and wisdom seekers and not blind believers of faith unlike the tradition of its colonizers. This subject of hypnosis and the practice of hypnotherapy has been always present in India since the Vedic times, which was essentially therapeutic and spiritual in content and form. Unfortunately, due to our colonial hangover, we still have a lot of internal and external resistance to relate this to our golden lineage and wrongly attribute to Europeans some centuries later. Our rich tradition is based on subjective and experiential understanding

Avasthi, Kate, and Grover (2013), rightly states that people practicing psychotherapy in India generally have a myopic approach that largely ignores the multi-diversity of cultures, languages, ethnicity, and religious affiliations, the role of family, eastern philosophy, and holistic treatment in understanding and managing problems. Bhawuk (2011) noted that in the past few decades, in India, “psychology moved away from its Indian roots to mimic Western method and theory”. The Western approach did not appear to fit to the Indian psyche and anything that did not fit the Western model was considered an anomaly”. However, it is heart rendering to understand that in recent times there has been a greater emphasis on subjective experience and a person-centric approach and psychology and psychotherapy is gradually moving towards a consciousness-based approach, the roots of which are in our *Shastras*. Psychotherapy and hypnotherapy are gradually becoming be short-termed, crisis-oriented, supportive, flexible, eclectic, and spiritual.

Anecdotes from the Indian *Shastras*, and mythological texts contain transcendental therapeutic wisdom which helps to explain better psychiatric symptoms, psychological principles, unconscious conflicts, defence mechanisms, automatic thoughts, or cognitive errors. Added to this, the philosophical belief of the transmigration of the soul, rebirth, fatalism, the different nature and quantum of guilt feeling, and the difference in the expectation as well as the environment manipulation are some of the glaring differences such practitioner or healer working in India should prioritize. An understanding of concepts borrowed from our *Shastras* is very essential for psychotherapeutic practice.

In this document, as far as practicable there has been a deliberate usage of Sanskrit words like *Dhyana*, *shastra*, *vasanas* and *sanskriti* instead of the wrongly attributed words like meditation, scriptures, desires, cultures, respectively as the latter miss out the very essence of the Indian ethos and culture which is essentially spiritual. The purpose of the document is to develop a sense of pride, relatedness and ownership of all hypnotherapists practicing in India so that one can understand the multidimensional nature of the subject.

2. Hypnosis reflecting stories of immense possibility

A very interesting story between a father and son described in the *Chandogya Upanishad* highlights the immense potential, as humans we carry within us. The father asks the son to peel off a seed progressively and the son discovers that in the end there is nothing left. It is wonderful to know that the whole tree grows from the nothingness of the seed and that the Self resides inside the seed, from which this enormous tree has sprung forth. We forget our infinite presence and unlimited potential and are often caught fretting over the finite and trivial. Thus, the meaning of existence is to be found in Non-existence – the significance of all things lies in No-things.

This knowledge is existential and is submerged deep within us and hypnosis and *Dhyana* are tools to unravel and discover deep-rooted hidden potentials of an individual by accessing the subconscious. In hypnosis, one also discovers intuitively that one is the happiness (Ananda), one seeks and that this state of happiness reflects our inner calling which is related to our *svabhava* and *svadharma*, of Being and Becoming.

“The wise person must live in accordance with their unique inner calling, or swadharma”.

The Gita, 3.35

It is this unique inner calling that is essential to one’s spiritual journey and the role of a practitioner or a healer is simply to trigger the latent possibilities of an individual by accessing the deepest recesses of the mind and the ultimate purpose of them as stated in the, the *Vaiseshika Sutra* is:

‘The highest dharma is to wipe out the tears from the eyes of living beings in distress’.

Ericksonian approach to hypnotherapy uses stories, fables and parables, allusions, metaphors, similes, etc. to elucidate understanding aimed at different levels of one’s spiritual journey. This is trance-inducing and insightfully therapeutic. Trance, as we know, is a common every day, natural phenomenon while hypnosis is a technique and a method for inducing trance (Boxtel, 2020).

Contrary to popular belief, hypnosis has been known to us since time immemorial.

3. Hypnotherapy and the Indian Connection

Our great spiritual gurus have considered that mankind is in a sort of hypnotic trance, hypnotized by situations, attractions from the external material world, and beliefs and that to wake up from it and make the mind multidimensional it is essential to de-hypnotize oneself. A guru, unlike a teacher, is one who helps a person in overcoming the bondage of the material world and is often regarded as the embodiment of devas, with strong moral and ethical character. The Upanishads say that the guru is beyond the physical body; he is Transcendental consciousness.

Hypnosis (Greek '*Hypnos*') originally meant sleep and is probably attributed to the practice of Greeks and Romans performing rituals concerning death and rebirth called, "Temples of Sleep". In India, however, since time immemorial the sick was taken to the local temple to get treated. There can be no wonder that the state of hypnosis was known to Indian sages from antiquity, much before what is commonly attributed to people like Anton Mesmer, James Braid, James Esdaile, and others, a fact which is also corroborated by the account of the famous Historian, Durant (1937).

According to Vyas & Vyas (2017), Hypnosis is a "naturally occurring altered state of consciousness and a fundamental attribute of mankind". They also concurred that Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* was a road map to *dhyana* and hypnotic skills that are generated automatically and that *The Gita*, they contend, is probably the first book on psychotherapy.

Manusmriti (the famous ancient *Shastras* of the Indian sage Manu) categorizes hypnosis into different stages. Based on its effect, hypnosis has the "Sleep-Waking" state, the "Dream-Sleep" state, and the "Ecstasy-Sleep" state. However, the earliest reference to hypnosis is probably the *Atharva Veda* which mentioned *Mantra Vidya* as the main technique for *manas chikitsa* or the treatment of the mind. *Mantra vidya* relied heavily on the meaning and vibration of sounds and were used in 5 types of therapies of which the following three were relevant to the study of hypnosis. They are:

- **Sankalpa:** *Sankalpa* means *atma-bal* or willpower and is similar to auto-suggestion or self-hypnosis. By this method of *sankalpa*, one's ego can be made very strong and energetic thereby ensuring no disintegration of psychic personality. This science is reflected much later in Hartland's *Ego strengthening* procedure used in modern hypnotherapy.
- **Sandesha:** This literally means suggestion by a therapist or practitioner. It was the refined application of symbolism, personification, metaphors, and aversion, the use of which is prevalent in modern Ericksonian hypnotherapy. In ancient India, it required the practitioner of *Sandesha* to be a *Brahma Gyani* or the knower of Brahman.
- **Samavashikarana:** This in true essence is hypnotherapy. It is a special intense type of suggestion used by the therapist and was used to enhance the qualities of personality to treat diseases in an individual, like epilepsy, hysteria, and consumption. Although there are many types of *samavashikarana*, in *Atharva Veda*, heightened verbal suggestions were most commonly utilized.

Max-Muller and Bloomfield (1897) mention the reference to hypnosis and suggestion in *Atharvaveda* (4:13:7): “Touching you with these two hands and ten fingers, by my influential speech I speak to you, disease removing words. By this, you will get healthy and all your diseases will vanish.”

We also come across the concept of *siddhis* in *Vibhuti pada* of sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* which include *vashita*, which is the ability to control the will of others. The concept of control, however, was essentially for therapeutic healing and did not imply any form of coercion.

References to hypnosis can also be found in Vagbhata’s *Ashtanga Samhita* which deals with the treatment of various forms of psychosomatic disorders. According to Abhay Charan De, popularly known as Swami Prabhupada (1955), the *Bhagwat Purana* has evidence of the use of *sammohana vidya* where Lord Vishnu in his *Mohini avatar* alludes to the asuras (demons) to procure the *amrit kumbha* for the devas (gods). This *Sammohana*, which was “a state of inner balance that radiates positivity around, influencing, and enchanting others” (Malhotra & Babaji, 2021) was prevalent since the Vedic times. It was generally practiced by people who were balanced and centered inside and who radiated a positive charismatic aura around themselves.

Dhyana and hypnotherapy

The word *dhyana*, derived from the root *dhyai* in Sanskrit means to think or contemplate and encompasses a much deeper connotation than the reductionist, over-simplified, and widely used term meditation. While *Dhyana* is a specific limb of *Ashtanga Yoga* revealed by Sage Patanjali, the term meditation is used indiscriminately to denote the latter 5 limbs of yoga, collapsing many technical aspects of the *sadhana* into one ill-defined word.

Historically and pragmatically distinct, hypnosis and *dhyana* share much in the way of phenomenology, neurocognitive mechanisms, and potential therapeutic prospects. Techniques of *Dhyana* are similar to hypnosis and while the path is the same, the direction is different because in hypnosis one is conditioned and *dhyana* assists in the de-conditioning process.

In their work, Patra, D. & Neelakandan, R. (2021) emphasizes the fact that the approach of hypnosis, being close to Indian Yoga and meditative *sadhana* is “suited to the Indian psyche, and works as an integrative and holistic treatment”. They strongly feel that hypnotherapy has its roots in *Yoga Nidra* (or Yogic sleep) which involves concepts of *pratyahara* (inward withdrawal of senses), *dharana* (engaging the mind on a particular area), *dhyana* (mind flowing in an unbroken current towards a particular point), from Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. They also included other concepts like *Shavasana* and muscular relaxation.

Yoga Nidra (Yogic sleep): the foundation of hypnosis:

Hypnosis is essentially spiritual. It is an illusion created to destroy another illusion. Indians believe hypnosis has its roots in ancient *Yoga Nidra*, which is indiscriminately spiritual.

Yoga Nidra is an ancient meditative practice that dates back to antiquity and can be traced to *Shastras* like Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, Kashmiri Shaivism, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, and Shankaracharya's *Yoga Taravali*. The hatha yoga texts contain few explicit descriptions of *Yoga Nidra* (*Vashistha-Samhita*, III.57-75; *Yoga Yajnavalkya*, VII-1-37). The *Hathayogapradipika* (IV.43–50) describes the process of *khecari-mudra*, which culminates in the attainment of *Yoga Nidra*. This is also reflected in *Shandilya-Upanishad*, (I.35). In Ayurvedic literature, the *Charaka-samhita*, a revelation that is partially ascribed to Patanjali, contains a discussion of the theory of sleep in the *Sutra-sthana*.

The contemporary description of *Yoga Nidra*, prevalent in parts of India and abroad is equated with a sort of lucid dreaming, popularised in the West by Stephen LaBerge (1990). In this state, the practitioner becomes an objective observer of their dream. Panda (2003) notes that the modern practice of *Yoga Nidra* can be traced back to a symbolic myth. Ancient seers imitated the *ananta-sayana* of the Lord of the Universe (Lord Vishnu) and gave the name *Yoga Nidra* to the process.

There are a host of similarities between *Yoga Nidra* and Dhyana. They include: the usage of trance; the demarcation of intensified liminal space for healing and the employment of a guide or a therapist who participates more intensely in the patient's phenomenological field.

However, there are the following differences between hypnosis and *Yoga Nidra* too:

Classification	Explanation of differences
Domain	Unlike Hypnosis, <i>Yoga Nidra</i> is predominantly spiritual and psychological.
State	<p>In <i>Yoga Nidra</i>, one is completely relaxed during verbal suggestions by the instructor, much like induced suggestions in hypnotherapy. However, it differs from dhyana, where usually a concentration on a single focus is required.</p> <p>There are some phenomena utilized in hypnosis, like time distortion, imaginal visualization, catalepsy, amnesia, or anesthesia which are utilized as convincers for a state of trance. In <i>Yoga Nidra</i>, however, such experiences are not accounted for as</p>

	ratification (Bowers, 1978; Yapko 2003). In the <i>Mandukya Upanishad</i> , this conscious awareness is called <i>prajyana</i> .
Resolution or suggestion	The practice of <i>Sankalpa</i> (resolution) utilized In <i>Yoga Nidra</i> , and the usage of suggestions, especially Post-hypnotic Suggestions (PHS) are similar. While in <i>Yoga Nidra</i> , such <i>Sankalpa</i> is pre-decided by the client, in hypnotherapy, suggestions are delivered by the therapist. Hypnotic suggestions attempt to access the unconscious by bypassing the conscious and rational faculties of the mind. (Yapko, 2003).
Attachment	Panda (2003) notes that phenomena in <i>Yoga Nidra</i> are different from Hypnosis. While hypnotic phenomena, like amnesia, may be prevalent, the practitioner in <i>Yoga Nidra</i> helps one cultivate non-attachment to anything. Some modern practitioners of hypnotherapy, like Stephen Brooks, have successfully integrated the Non-attachment theory from Buddhist Psychotherapy with Ericksonian hypnotherapy to induce a sense of dissociation and non-attachment as a therapeutic outcome.
Awareness	According to Panda (2003) and Henry (2005), the cultivation of awareness in <i>Yoga Nidra</i> is aimed at producing a state of witness or <i>sakshibhav</i> , which is between the 3 states of consciousness, <i>jagrata</i> (waking state), <i>swapna</i> (sleep state) & <i>sushupti</i> (deep sleep state). Some theorists find a distant similarity in the concept of a hidden observer mentioned in Ernest Hilgard’s Neo-dissociation Theory of Hypnosis.
Mode of application	Suggestions for rotation of consciousness and imagery used in <i>Yoga Nidra</i> are given quickly for the purpose of making the subject more alert. Hypnosis utilizes features of fractionation (taking in and out of getting a trance state) to deepen one’s trance experience. This therapeutic use of pauses in between suggestions are aimed at taking one’s trance experience deeper to influence “unconscious cognitive sets and influence behaviour” (Erickson, Rossi, and Rossi, 1976; Erickson and Rossi 1989).

Very recently, the term *Yoga Nidra* is popularised by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1976) of Bihar School of Yoga, which canters around the practice, which is very similar to hypnosis:

- Making a mental resolution or setting an intention (*Sankalpa*)
- Initiating rotations of consciousness through the body
- Practicing breath awareness (nostrils, throat, chest, counting the breath)
- Relaxing the mind and emotions,
- Visualizing various images
- Reaffirming mental resolutions or intentions

Yoga Nida is thus, similar to *dhyana* (*Dhyana*). However, it is worthwhile to understand the phenomenological differences between the two, as highlighted by Vyas & Vyas (2019) below:

Differences between Dhyana and Hypnosis

Hypnosis	Dhyana
Scientific and therapeutic	Spiritual
The subject of scientific scrutiny	Philosophical
Studied scientifically for last two centuries	Spiritual experiences since time immemorial
Fertile ground for research. Subjective. Difficult to quantify	A moral and ethical code of living is a prerequisite before initiation
Anyone can learn	Requires a guide, initially
Goal-oriented	Types of samadhi: goal-oriented, goalless & nameless experience
Relaxation and breathing awareness utilized during induction	The stillness of body and mind is essential; esoteric breathing exercises (<i>pranayama</i>) facilitate an experience
Utilized for therapeutic healing and overall development	Health-giving, disease prevention, and aids in spiritual growth
Self-hypnosis is easily taught and practised	Requires a guru or guide
Archetypal symbols and meaningful images may be utilised	Focalization on a form of sound, mantra, or visual symbol of a deity

Insight generation and creativity as a step-by-step process.	A pathless path where there is no destination. Enlightenment happens.
Guided hypnosis unlikely to cause harm	Hypnosis can be harmful if not practiced under a guru or guide
Freedom from affliction by hypnotherapy	Attainment of <i>kaivalya</i> – the journey of alone to alone

4. Learnings from *Shastras* about hypnotherapy

While there are thousands of *Shastras* prevalent in the *Santana* tradition, we shall restrict our discussions primarily to *Yoga Vashistha*, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* and *The Gita*.

Yoga Vashistha

Yoga Vashistha is a deeply philosophical, yet rational *shastra* that delineates an approach to life and ways to transcend it through dialogues between Lord Rama and Sage Vashistha. According to Acharya Sunya (2020), "It is a syncretic work containing elements of *Vedanta*, *Yoga*, *Samkhya*, Jainism, Pratiyabhijna, and Mahayana Buddhism". Usually, God teaches people in the *Shastras* but here, Sage Vashistha is teaching Rama, the God. The concept of *Yoga Vashistha* deals with profound topics like human intellect, spiritual seeking, the process of spiritual knowledge, liberation, *Jivanmukta*, and, Samsara & reality.

In terms of philosophical depth, the *Yoga Vashistha* is only comparable to *The Shrimad Bhagavatam* – The Book of God, and *The Gita*– The Song of God. In terms of length, it is second only to the Mahabharata but is easy to read and captivating in form and treatment. The first chapter, titled *Vairagyam-prakaranam* (exposition of dispassion) deals with certain existential questions raised by Rama on life and suffering.

For hypnotherapists, apart from the wonderful unparalleled philosophical and spiritual insights, what is captivating to them is how the narration which is made with stories, fables metaphors, and similes has a trance-inducing effect on the readers. Vashishta here is both a psychotherapist and a storyteller, much like Milton Erickson, the great hypnotherapist.

Yoga Vashistha starts with sage Sutiksna asking sage Agastya which of the two, work or knowledge is conducive to liberation. To this question, Agastya told Sutiksna the story of a similar question asked by Karunaya to his father, Agnivesya on the relevance of *Shastras*. Karunaya felt that while he was

taught to read the scripts, he was also taught that immortality could only be achieved by abandoning actions (including the *Shastras*). Agnivesya, instead of directly answering the question, told his son the story of dialogue between a nymph, Suruci, and a messenger of Indra who was on a mission. Indra had asked the nymphs to send for sage Aristenimi, who was conducting severe penance. When Agnivesya turned down the offer of Indra, he was referred to take the counsel of Sage Valmiki.

Sage Valmiki was asked what was the best way to go beyond life and death and instead of directly answering the question, he replied that he had composed *Ramayana* which was narrated to his disciple, Bharadwaj who told later the story to Lord Brahma. It so happened that Bharadwaj asked for a boon from Brahma to remove the suffering of all people to which Brahma requested Valmiki to tell the story of how Rama was freed from sorrow.

The story goes that Vishwamitra had asked Dasharatha that he needed Rama's help to fight the mighty demons, Khara and Dusana. Dasharatha initially had worried and avoided the request but later at the mediation by Vashistha, Dasharatha agreed and asked for Rama to be present. It was then that Rama asked Vishwamitra the same question and Vishwamitra, instead of directly answering the question, referred it to Vashistha. At this stage, Vashistha told the story of the changed behaviour of Rama after coming back from pilgrimage. Rama's mind was filled with dispassion (*Vivek* and *Vairagyam*) and the transcendental and existential dialogue between Lord Rama and sage Vashistha forms the essence of the masterpiece.

Our *Shastras* use stories, fables, parables, allegories, and metaphors to introduce concepts for different levels of spiritual readiness among us. In the story narrated above, one cannot fail to notice the multiple nested loops – stories within a story - induced to captivate the reader or audience. They have a deeper trance-inducing effect intended and are designed to appeal to different planes of consciousness within an individual. Nested loops applied in hypnotherapy are used both in trance induction and in therapy.

The Gita

The Gita along with the Upanishads and the Brahma sutra forms a part of *Prasthan Trayi* (scriptural trinity). According to Rao (1980), Gita is based partly on 2 Upanishads – *Ishavashyaupanishad* and *Kathopanishad*.

Scholars have identified various therapeutic components in The Gita which are also prevalent in other Indian *Shastras*, too. There are elements of *Samkhya Yoga* – relating to maladaptive cognition, *Karma Yoga* – relating to work with an attitude of renunciation, *Gyan Karma Sannyasa Yoga* – Intelligent approach to work without any form of anxiety, *Gyan Vigyan Yoga* – insight-oriented learnings, *Bhakti*

Yoga – therapy based on love, compassion, and total surrender. *The Gita* also contains other psychological techniques, such as Behaviour therapy, like, flooding – involving prolonged and continuous exposure to anxiety-provoking situations on the battlefield itself, Catharsis or ventilation, and finally, Cognitive hypnotherapy. In the Gita, Krishna addressed the cognitive and emotional issues of Arjuna, who is representative of the entire mankind. He leads him from the transitory to the eternal, from a false understanding of the ego to go beyond suffering. Like a cognitive hypnotherapist who corrects the cognitive error of the client through a dialect process involving thought, action, feeling, and behaviour Krishna too leads Arjuna to a deeper understanding of the self and actions.

From a psychotherapeutic perspective, Arjuna is the client or patient and, Krishna is the hypnotherapist. Their relationship is closer to a *Guru-Shishya* relationship (Reddy, 2012). One of the names of Krishna is *Mohana*, which means the one who enchants or hypnotizes. Swami Prabhupada (1999) refers to the enchanting tunes Krishna used to play on his flute for the gopis in Vrindavan who were simply mesmerized. Technically, the entire Gita is a single-session therapy where the therapist stays with the client throughout the therapy. The Kurukshetra war from a psychological point of view, represents a fundamental transformation in the psychological life of man, and in the end, the ultimate discovery is that the psychological problem resides neither in the object nor in the senses – it abides in the mind, which needs to be surmounted.

Mehta (1995) contends that The Gita indicates a way of life that is intensely revolutionary, for it speaks not merely of an extension of consciousness but most assuredly of an expansion of consciousness. It is a book of spiritual revolution and not of a mere social or behavioral reformation. He asserts that the journey of the Gita is from Mind to super Mind, and from Intellect to Intuition. While Arjuna stands for the mind, alert and active, Krishna symbolizes the Super Mind. Thus, it is a path toward divinity.

Fortunately, hypnosis is a platform that helps to give one this taste of divinity. Hypnosis is all about intuition and dealing with the subconscious. The teachings of *The Gita* abound in the role of the subconscious in the form of *samskaras* or acts done to purify the existence of a person and make one's body worthy for the *atman*. These acts or habits are the preceptors of human behaviour and often these *samskaras* can also come from our past impressions.

Yoga Sutra

The *Yoga Sutra* is a documented, disciplined 8-stage process (*Ashtanga Yoga*) and has deep relevance for developing the right attitude, skill, and knowledge for hypnotherapists. Of the eight stages, the first two, *Yama* (abstentions) and *Niyama* (observances) are essentially social and ethical.

Yama — comprises five abstentions. They are *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (not stealing or avoidance of misappropriations in thought and action), *Brahmacharya* (sexual control), and *Aparigraha* (non-acquisitiveness).

Niyama —comprises *Shauch* (purity), *Santosh* (contentment), *Tapas* (self-denial, not to pamper body), *Swadhyaya* (self-enlightenment, objective study of self), and *Ishwara pranidhana* (submission to God's will, being one with God)

The next three - *Asana* (Yogic postures), *Pranayama* (breath control, and *Pratyahara* (removal of undesirable thoughts and actions) are methods to discipline the mind. This is elaborated in detail in *Yoga Pradipika*.

Finally, *Dharana*, (concentration), *Dhyana* (dhyana), and *Samadhi* (contemplation and total detachment) are crucial for an enlightening and transcendental experience.

The process of hypnotherapy utilizes the process of *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Pranayama*, *Dharana*, and *Dhyana*. The outcome of hypnotherapy, especially for one who has a spiritual bent of mind is to go beyond a trance and experience *Samadhi*, which is a transcendental state of super consciousness where a person goes beyond the barriers of egocentric psycho-physical setup.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* can be considered to be a manual for practicing therapists for removing the five *Klesha* or suffering and reach *Kaivalya*. They are ignorance (*avidya*), egotism (*asmita*), likes (*raga*), dislikes (*dvesha*), and possessiveness (*avhineveshwa*).

Often, these sufferings originate from a habitual pattern from the past.

Therefore, the manifestations of patterns that habitually occur are caused by the fruition of past impressions.

Yoga Sutra, 4.8.

In hypnosis, one is spontaneously regressed to the past, and sometimes, to past lives. Our *Shastras* refer to unfulfilled desires leading to rebirth and reincarnation.

From the excess of samskaras, of Prakriti, one passes into other births to experience and fulfill desires.

Yoga Sutra, 4.2

Through hypnosis, it is possible to have a deeper understanding of one's past life samskaras which is therapeutically called Past life Regression therapy, which is getting increasingly popular due to its therapeutic efficacy.

From perceiving the samskaras, one's attitude and tendencies one can come to an understanding of previous births.

Yoga Sutra, 3.18

Sometimes the experiences in hypnosis may simply be a confabulation of the mind and memories and a hypnotherapist should be skilled and trained to identify such aberrations.

The fabricating mind creates images only because of the I-am-ness that it possesses.

Yoga Sutra, 4.4

But irrespective of the type of image one visualizes, such experience originates from one's deep-rooted belief system and fundamental nature.

The past and future exist in the mind in their different forms due to the difference in the paths followed, based on one's dharma and fundamental nature.

Yoga Sutra, 4.12

5. Important concepts from our *Shastras* related to hypnotherapy

Understanding the concept of *Maya*

"Souls' wisdom is veiled by ignorance. Hence human beings are deluded."

The Gita, 5.15

To explain the concept of *Maya*, the Upanishads refer to stories and anecdotes. There is an interesting story of two birds mentioned in *Mandukya Upanishad* which is also mentioned in *Yoga Vashistha* that highlights how *Maya* deludes us and how insightful knowledge frees us from *avidya* and delusion. In the story, both the birds sit on the same tree (our being). While one eats the bitter and sweet fruits eagerly (experience of the ego) the other simply looks on at the busy bird, calmly as pure awareness (Self).

Two birds are seated on the same tree. One of them (ego), sunk in ignorance (Maya) and deluded, grieves its impotence and is busy tasting sweet and bitter fruits. The other simply looks on peacefully. But when the sorrowful bird chances upon the serene, self-possessed bird, it realizes its glory and becomes free from sorrow and lamentation.

Mandukya Upanishad, 3.1.1-3

Malhotra and Babaji (2020) are of the opinion that even though *Maya* is a pivotal concept in Indian thought it is often mistranslated as "illusion", thereby creating a misconception that the Hindu

philosophy is world-negating, pessimistic, and unproductive. While *Maya* denotes the creative Shakti of Brahman or Bhagavan, the term illusion is merely a deceptive appearance, a false idea or belief. The function of May is to conceal the truth and to project something false in the place of truth.

Maya casts a hypnotic spell on us, strikes universally, and almost “bewitches” our minds. This experience often originates from a myopic view of our Self. Swami Vivekananda (1947) in discourse with his Western audience felt that in this material world, we are already hypnotized and that Vedanta can help us to de-hypnotized from the thinking that, “I am the body, I am a human being, I am so and so, I belong to this family and country”, etc. He said, “Hindus, de-hypnotize yourself. Let us proclaim to every soul: Arise, awake, and do not stop until the goal is attained.

Maya is related to our conditioning and all our experience of reality is a conditioning of consciousness. From the Upanishads, we know that the true nature of reality and also the true nature of consciousness cannot be known unless this conditioning is eliminated. The sages concur that if and when all conditioning is eliminated the true nature of consciousness (*Atman Gyan*) and the true nature of reality (*Brahma Gyan*) will merge into one. This conditioning in the Vedantic view is called *Maya* and in the Yogic view is called *Chitta* and it can be removed through spiritual *sadhana* or *dhyana* and of course through hypnosis.

Hypnosis is a powerful tool to access the deepest subconscious and unconscious layers of an individual. It is all about removing delusions within an individual through de-hypnotizing one from this *Maya* and it is also through hypnosis (and *dhyana*) that one realizes that the quantum of our happiness is related directly to our mental perception of our limitedness. This is because only through an experiential discourse at a deeper subconscious level, one arrives at a transcendental knowledge that frees from the spell of disempowering *Maya*, which contributes to the disappearance of *avidya* (false knowledge and delusion). The power of *Maya* is thus, nothing but the power of projection.

Sri Sri Paramhansa Yogananda (2002) refers to the verses in *The Gita* from verse 7.13 to 7.20 – describing *Viswarup darshan* - as a state of “cosmic hypnosis” and suggests ways to transcend it. He mentions that like a person in a dreaming state cannot capture the consciousness of his waking state, worldly men are in a state of “cosmic dream delusion which is imposed like a hypnotic spell on men from birth and they remain unaware of its insidiousness”. Thus, we need to be de-hypnotized from cosmic delusion and forsake the continuous cycle of birth and rebirth and for that, we need to surrender to the supreme hypnotist, Krishna.

Developing *Samatvam* (Emotional equanimity)

Samatvam relates to an insightful understanding of one's inner resources during therapy and a hypnotherapist needs to develop such qualities of equanimity and equipoise. Patanjali's Yoga Sutra refers to this regulation of the mind as *Chitta Vritti Nirodha*. Developing a mind free of unconsciousness can be achieved through mental purification by self-inquiry, self-reflection, and emotional equanimity. Thus, equanimity can only come when the mind is able to see the intrinsic worth of everything.

There are references in The Gita that exclusively highlights this state of equanimity one should develop.

Offer all thy works to God, throw off selfish bonds, and do thy work. No sin can then stain thee, even as waters do not stain the leaf of the lotus.

The Gita, 5.10

For one who has mastered their mind and who is tranquil, the supreme Self is self-evident. (The knower of Self remains the same in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow as well as in honour and infamy.

The Gita, 6.7

Emotional equanimity can be achieved by living in total awareness and through the practice of *abhyasana* (self-effort) and *vairagyam* (detachment) mentioned both in *The Gita* and *Yoga Sutra*. One signifies action, the other inaction.

Ensuring Mental purification (*Manoshuddhi*)

The second chapter of *Yoga Vashista* is called *Mumukshuvayahara-prakaranam* or the exposition of the behaviour of the seeker. Through the story of Rama, we understand the role of mental purification as a prerequisite to all spiritual pursuits and is also an essential quality a modern hypnotherapist should imbibe.

Mental purification involves identifying our thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions. In short, our life and our character become what we believe (*yad bhavam tad bhawati*). This knowledge dawns on one who develops a sanctity and purity of mind, which is reflected in a beautiful verse in the Mandukya Upanishad.

Whatever object the person who truly knows the Self desires, whatever desire their heart fixes upon, they will obtain. Therefore, one who is desirous of prosperity should seek to know their amazing self first.

Mundaka Upanishad, 3.1.10

Sleepwalking and mass hypnosis continue feeding the fire of our voracious delusions and the only way out of it is through *dhyana* and hypnosis. Thus, a hypnotherapist needs to develop an unalloyed nature of thoughts and behaviour. To achieve a gradual purification of the mind it is suggested that the guru (and the hypnotherapist) goes through the 3 stages of the gradual awakening process: *Shraavana* (involving senses), *Manan* (involving mind), and *nidhidhyasanam* (involving the heart) in both trance induction and actual hypnotherapy. Thus, hypnotherapy utilizes the components of sensory perception, emotional involvement, the cognitive factor, and of course, the spiritual component.

Viyoga: Cultivating detachment from possession and people

The third chapter of *Yoga Vashistha* is titled *Utpatti-prakaranam* (or the Exposition of the arising and birth). This describes the birth of all creation, in general, and the birth of the spiritual side of Rama, in particular, achieved by going beyond the suffering mind. This means that our happiness is tied to our subjective thoughts, emotions, and feelings and the disease of the subjective mind is cyclic.

The *Mahabharata* (3.3.27) also highlights that attachment alone is the main cause of unhappiness and the only way to go beyond is to be able to discriminate between healthy and unhealthy desires. Thus, the healthy desires (*purushartha*) consist of nonbinding, equitable (balanced), universal, pure, reciprocal, and unhealthy compulsive desires (*vasanas*) consisting of world *vasanas*, body *vasanas*, and knowledge *vasanas* are to be won over.

Thus, the first stage of attachment (*abhilasa*) is desire, consisting of attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dwesha*). Unfulfilled desire is transformed into grief, anxiety, self-pity (*shoka*), and then anger (*krodha*). Anger leads to temporary insanity called delusion (*moha*) and in this stage one is in a stage of spiritual forgetfulness (*smriti-nasha*) or corrupted wisdom (*buddhi nasha*). This understanding is the foundation of all forms of psychotherapy.

The problem of attachment is that it often gets disproportionately big in our mind and The Gita too emphasizes non-attachment as a way out of desire. Krishna tells Arjuna:

O scion of Bharata, the ignorant act attached to the results of their action whilst the wise act without those attachments, thereby inspiring the masses.

The Gita, Verse 3.25

Remaining unattached is the hallmark of happiness. It requires the development of certain qualities enshrined in the Buddhist and Hindu *Shastras*.

If you want liberation, fling away the vasanas, drink daily (cultivate) with great keenness, the nectar of contentment, compassion, forbearance, truth, straightforwardness, calmness, and self-control.

Vivek Chudamani (Verse 82)

Cultivation of non-attachment needs to develop a *sattvic* mind and hypnotherapy is a tool to intuitively develop that. In a therapeutic concept, the hypnotherapist ensures the following:

1. Guides one to resolve not to suppress
2. Identify the source of the intense emotions and make a list of them
3. Help make one accept their vulnerability and self-ignorance
4. Practice forgiveness and cultivate self-love.

Hypnotherapy helps one to go beyond cognitive bias and a cognitive hypnotherapist helps in cultivating and practicing controlled detachment (*viyoga*) from possession and people. He helps to cut the ropes of attachment and reclaim one's inner freedom, therapeutically. In cognitive hypnotherapy, the therapist needs to understand the type of attachment which leads to one's suffering and the position one resides in the cycle of *samsara*. It helps one to get rid of the *samsara* by cultivating awareness, during trance. This intuitive understanding during hypnosis helps one to realize that we all have free will to not allow anything to colonize our thoughts through attachments.

Development of the concept of Advaita (Non-dualism)

Hypnotherapy also helps one to break the cycle of hypnotic joy-seeking in transient objects and beings and this can be largely achieved through a proper understanding of the nature of our existence – a sense of non-duality. The main obstacles in the path of non-duality are our *vasanas*, which are innate psychological urges or subconscious pre-dispositions of desires. Fortunately, hypnosis helps one to access these maladaptive deliberations and move to an enlightened realization.

The cultivation of a sense of non-duality helps one to transcend the ego and develop a strong sense of emotional maturity. The fourth chapter of *Yoga Vashistha: Sthiti-prakaranam* (Exposition of the existence and settling), describes the nature of the world and many non-dualism ideas with numerous stories. It also emphasizes free will and human creative power.

This non-dual approach is the essence of Vedanta which essentially states the following:

- Consciousness alone is real (*Brahma Satyam*),
- The universe is unreal (*jagat mithya*), and
- Our essential and true Self (*Atman*) is one with the Universal (*Brahman*).

The Gita also elaborates that once a person can remove this *Maya*, one transcends duality and becomes in a state of eternal *Ananda* (wrongly translated as Bliss). While *Ananda* is fundamental to the concept of Indian philosophy and is multidimensional in concept with gradation in its meaning, Bliss refers to material happiness and has no gradations.

This spirit of non-duality is also reflected in the statement:

Just as fire, through one, assumes different forms in respect of different shapes, similarly, Brahman, inside all beings, assumes a form and yet remain the same in all form.

Katha Upanishad, 2.2.29

For a hypnotherapist, cultivating a sense of non-dualism helps one to transcend the ego mind and be nonjudgmental. Some of the statements in *Yoga Vashistha* (mentioned below) suggesting non-dual existence can be very effectively used as hypnotic suggestions:

- *As the moon reflected in water becomes many moons, the Self is the same in all and yet appears as many.*
- *Just like the millions of cells, tissues, and organs in our body serve only one purpose, all the diversity seen in the cosmic form serves only One Universal Consciousness (Brahman, Atman).*
- *Just like salt, when mixed in a bowl of water, makes the water equally salty at the bottom, in the middle, and on the top, the Self pervades all existence. The Self is the truth of truth. That Self is you.*
- With the cultivation of a sense of non-duality a transcendental reality dawns on an individual eventually, with a proper perception of the permanence or impermanence.

Understanding of the concept of *Nitya-Anitya* (Permanence-Impermanence)

The development of a sense of unity in all existence follows a deeper understanding of the impermanent nature of our being. There is a stage when one moves towards permanent cessation of misery (*atyantik dukh nivritti*) and everlasting bliss (*sadananda sukh prapti*).

When all else is asleep, time is awake, time is stoppable.

Youth, beauty, life, possession, health, and the companionship of friends, all are impermanent.

Mahabharata, 11.11.2

This acceptance of both misery and happiness, permanence and impermanence aspects of our being through an elevated profound vision of an eternal reality is the first step toward the development of higher and profound wisdom, and hypnosis is one of the powerful tools to access such wisdom.

A perfect healing or psychotherapeutic intervention can only happen if a hypnotherapist is awakened spiritually. It is only then through therapy he can make the client aware that their tears or smiles simply represent equal and opposite energy –of the Spirit Divine moving through us as pure emotion. No more, no less.

In hypnotherapy, the conviction comes to a client that suffering is as important as overcoming the pain. Sooner or later, the realization dawns that emotional pain acts as a great teacher as it illumines in us the ultimate lesson of the futility of seeking permanence in the realm of impermanence. It cultivates a sense of acceptance and compassion and moves beyond the permanence and impermanence nature of existence.

Cultivating Bhawashuddhi (Emotional intelligence)

The fifth chapter of Yoga Vashistha: Upashama-prakaranam (Exposition of patience and tranquillity), deals with dhyana and the dissolution of false dualism by inculcating emotional maturity. Rama, like Arjuna in *The Gita*, was in a state of advanced delusion suffering from false compassion and false generosity. Lord Krishna helped Arjuna develop a correct understanding of the Self and the dharmic duties. Emotional maturity wrests in one by having the right control of thoughts and emotions, as reflected in *The Gita*.

Absolute freedom exists on all sides for the self-controlled ones who are free from cravings and anger, who have controlled their thoughts and have therefore realized the Self.

The Gita, 5.26

To have a better understanding of the emotional content, a hypnotherapist needs to first classify the emotions as per the 3 gunas (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) mentioned in our Shastras, which were termed by Shri Aurobindo as Poise, Passion, and passivity. Viewed differently, *sattva* is a balance of opposites, *rajas* are a conflict of opposites, and *tamas* is the confusion of opposites. To be aware of the functioning of the *tamas*, *the rajas*, and the *sattva* and yet not interfere with them is to be free from all conditioning. It is essential for a hypnotherapist to understand the personality type of an individual based on the *gunas* before designing the route for therapy.

Hypnosis not only helps to break from all conditioning, but it also helps to transcend the 3 gunas too, an advice which is subscribed in *The Gita*. The hypnotherapist also has to understand that all emotions

have a specific purpose and the effectiveness of hypnotherapy is discovering such subjective delusory purpose and helping one to transcend such maladaptive emotions and behaviour. Compassionate Ericksonian hypnotherapy, popularized by Stephen Brooks reinforces one's sattvic behaviour in an individual.

Once the emotion is identified and classified, the hypnotherapist then attempts to diffuse negative emotions in a sequence because he understands that only a change in thoughts can lead to a change in feelings. Thus, in a therapeutic environment, the hypnotherapist:

1. Guides one resolve not to suppress emotions as it may cause psychological disorders
2. Identifies the source of the intense emotions and make a list of them
3. Helps make one accept their vulnerability and self-ignorance
4. Practices forgiveness and cultivate self-love.

Experiencing inner witness: *Sakshi*

Witnessing consciousness is a powerful *sadhana* as evidenced in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. To be a witness implies that one is watching and observing objectively, without identifying oneself with the object of observation. Therapeutically, they give the impression that emotions are just passing phenomena and not our true nature.

The most significant experience during hypnosis is being able to transcend the limited ego self and being a pure witness. Powerful techniques like age regression, age vivification, and visualization techniques involving multiple mirror exercises help one to drop all identity and become a pure objective witness, during hypnotherapy. Developing the right *sakshibhav* helps one to remain detached from one's thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions and become a slave to it. The outcome of the feeling of dispassionate dissociation as a result of being a witness is central to any form of therapeutic healing.

Moving towards *Vairagayam* (humility)

The sixth chapter of Yoga Vashista is called: Nirvana-prakaranam (Exposition of freedom and liberation) which describes the state of an enlightened and blissful Rama. This is achieved primarily by cultivating humility in oneself. Once a hypnotherapist can cultivate humility, he can practice gratitude and forgiveness, two essential qualities of a healer and a therapist.

Humility is transcending the ego state of an individual and grace is bestowed on anyone showing humility and compassion and it is a quality worth emulating by hypnotherapists Humility is the

foundation of one’s spiritual growth and the experience of hypnosis ensures one’s experiential understanding of it.

Practicing Viveka (Discrimination) and Hypnosis

Viveka is the willingness to listen to one’s deeper, sattvic voice over and above the default *tamasic* and *rajasic* voices. The practice of *Viveka* or discernment involves moment-by-moment deliberation before acting or reacting.

The hypnotherapist instills an intuitive understanding in the client that the means of escape from misery is constant discrimination that starts with monitoring of an emotional experience.

The means to liberation is uninterrupted discriminative discernment (viveka-klhyatir aviplava hanopayah).

Yoga Sutra, 2.26

Our *Shastras* highlight that the prerequisite to cultivating *Viveka* is to be able to distinguish the quality of mental experience of a person observed through the 3 qualities or *gunas* – *sattva* (illuminating *guna*), *rajas* (agitating *guna*), and *tamas* (dulling *guna*).

The knowledge enshrined in the *Upanishads* and *The Gita* speaks of the 3 *Gunas* which are very essential for a hypnotherapist to understand and apply in a therapeutic context. A hypnotherapist understands that each individual is unique and hence the prognosis and the treatment should also lend subjectivity. Also, each individual has a different approach toward the concept of happiness summarized according to the *Gunas*, mentioned as under:

Tamasic Mind	Rajasic Mind	Sattvic Mind
Momentary happiness	Short-Lived happiness	Long lasting happiness
Sensory happiness – seeking more comfort, pleasure, and leisure. Leaves behind regrets and sorrow.	Happiness ends at the removal of sense objects	Primarily arises from discernment – self-control, self-discipline, etc. leading to inner tranquility.
Happiness at the cost of duty, responsibility, and personal risk	Happiness is hard to obtain, difficult to maintain and soon turns to sorrow	This leads to more and more of happiness

Hypnotherapy is aimed at therapeutically building a Sattvic mind of an individual by helping one to find their resources of being: focused, discerning, decisive, mature, steady, expansive, unadulterated, subtle, sharp & spiritual. And all this starts with effective thought management.

Imbibing *Shama* (thoughts management)

One should uplift oneself by one's `efforts: One should not lower oneself. For the purified mind alone is the friend of oneself: the non-purified mind alone is the enemy of oneself.

The Gita, 6.5.

Shama is the foundation of Cognitive hypnotherapy. A hypnotherapist helps one to learn cognitive skills like thought management and the science of ethics. First, intellectually, then emotionally, one is led to the perception of unity over diversity. In an individual, the concept of bondage and freedom, power and powerlessness, all occur in the realm of the thought, and in hypnotherapy, one can be led to transcend beyond the realm of the mind and thoughts.

One of the powerful tools of cognitive thought management is *Pratipaksha Bhavan* or a method of deliberately thinking of the opposites. This is foundational to the subject of Neuroplasticity. In hypnosis, the hypnotherapist sometimes deliberately guides an aggrieved person to conceive of something opposite, constructive, and dharmic so that the mind of the sufferer expands from delusion to clarity, from selfishness to selflessness, from material to spiritual and this change happens unconsciously, which is more experiential than cognitive. One's conscious mind is deliberately distracted, confused, or overloaded to prevent it from analyzing the therapist's suggestions and controlling unconscious responses.

According to Prof Bhawuk (2011), it is worthwhile to reflect here that In the Indian tradition, "the wise can partition the world in opposite, then put them together into one whole and then again partition them to have the desired therapeutic effect. He truly believed that the West cannot conceive both X and Y can be true. The Indian *Sanskriti*, on the other hand, is comfortable with practicing both X and Y simultaneously.

Thus, the Isavasya Upanishad highlights the apparent contradiction between *vidya* and *avidya*. They ask if *vidya* or knowledge is the symbol of the past, how can the past which is dead understand reality which is ever alive and vibrant?

Those who worship avidya (ignorance or rites) enter into darkness, but those who are engaged in vidya (knowledge or dhyana) enter into greater darkness.

Ishavasya Upanishad, 9

Again, in the same *Ishavasya Upanishad* (12 to 14), it is mentioned that those who worship the *asambhuti* (unmanifested, Prakriti or non-becoming) enter into blinding darkness; but those who are devoted to *sambhuti* (manifested becoming, destruction or Hiranyagarbha) enter into greater darkness. The apparent contradictions and the opposites can lead one to immortality.

Similar examples are there in other *Upanishads* as well. One can note the trance-inducing effect as one recites it.

I don't think that I know it well; nor do I think that I do not know it. He who among us knows it knows it and he, too, does not know that he does not know.

Kena Upanishad, 2.2

Therapists commonly experience this feeling of “I Know” in themselves and in their clients. He intuitively understands that the moment one gets the impression that one knows, then nothing else will get into that individual. Therefore, the *Upanishad* says, ‘He who knows, knows not and he who knows not, knows.’

To whosoever it is not known, to him it is known: to whosoever it is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand it; it is understood by those who do not understand it.

Kena Upanishad, 2.3

Other examples of apparent contradictions and opposites can be seen in the *Katha Upanishad*.

While sitting, it travels far away; while sleeping, it goes everywhere. Who but I can know that Deity who is both joyful and joyless?

Katha Upanishad, 2.21

The self cannot be known through study, through the intellect, or through much hearing. It can be known through the Self alone that the aspirant prays to; this Self of that seeker reveals Its true nature.

Katha Upanishad, 2.23

Referring to such contradictor predicates mentioned above, Radhakrishnan (1953) rightly points out the impossibility of conceiving Brahman through empirical determination (*viruddha-dharmavan*). Vedanta believes that the highest truth can be known only through paradoxes. A paradox can be resolved but not solved. The Gita like all spiritual lore throughout the world abounds in paradoxes and one of the great paradoxes is Action in Inaction and Inaction in Action.

In Ericksonian hypnotherapy, ambiguous language is often employed along with various forms of confusion techniques both for trance induction and for therapeutic outcomes. Our *Shastras* abound

with shlokas, sutras, and mantras which appear to be apparently contradictory at the superficial level but intelligibly designed to cater to the spiritual seeker for having a deeper, intuitive understanding. A client or a patient subjected to such deliberate confusion has no other option but to dive deep within oneself to fathom the seeming contradiction and find answers.

An example of confusion is when Krishna narrates:

Amongst cheaters, I am a gambler.

The Gita, 10.36

Finally, one of the chief ways one can practice *Shama* is through having control of speech and silence.

Vaaktapas (communication protocols) and hypnotherapy

Lord Krishna stressed nonviolent speech (*anudveg karam vaak*), truthful speech (*satyam vaak*), pleasant speech (*priyam vaak*), and beneficial speech (*hitam vaak*) in The Gita. Also, The Gita speaks of silence with reference to the mind and not with reference to speech.

Nonviolent speech, which is truthful, pleasant, and beneficial and used to utter the Vedic truth is called austerity of speech.

The Gita, 17.15

The role of a hypnotherapist is to utilize the right kind of speech and also silence both during trance induction and therapy. He does this by carefully observing and analyzing the client by deciphering the nature and source of the client's thoughts. For this, the hypnotherapist needs to embody inner silence in himself first to support conscious speech. Mastery of the language is very essential, especially for one who is an Ericksonian hypnotherapist, and by practicing language skills, he soon realizes that while his words carry spiritual weight, the use of silence can become transformative. Indeed, pauses between hypnotic suggestions can be very effective in both trance induction and therapy.

A hypnotherapist eventually realizes that with practice when silence compliments mindful speech, the inner tranquility in him increases manifold and he becomes an empathetic listener, as well. These therapeutic benefits then become easy to be applied to his clients.

The ultimate takeaways in hypnosis: *Atmabodha* and *Moksha*

In the Indian tradition, *Moksha* is believed to be the ultimate end of a spiritual journey. *Moksha* (Sanskrit *muchyate*) means free or released from the bondage of *samsara* and is the ultimate solution for-end-of-world distress. It is a permanent experience and this awakening does not fluctuate. It is a stage beyond desires when one has a true understanding of one's true self (*Atmabodha*).

The Mandukya Upanishad describes such a state eloquently:

When he is seen both in the higher and the lower, the knots of his heart becomes united; all doubts are dispelled; and all his Karma is consumed.

Mundaka Upanishad, 2.2.8

This stage of ultimate, infinite freedom is also reflected in the *Maitri Upanishad*:

As water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the mind becomes one with the infinite's mind and thus attains infinite freedom.

Maitri Upanishad, 6.19-23

The experience of hypnosis and dhyana originate in 4th state of consciousness, called *Turiya* or the transcendental state. This is also called Supermind by Rohit Mehta and Overmind by Rishi Aurobindo. *The Gita* just mentions it. It does not describe simply because it is indescribable.

Although there are phenomenological differences between hypnosis and *dhyana*, both lead to ultimate liberation and self-realization. Vyas & Vyas (2021), emphasize the role of a fifth dimension or space-time consciousness continuum to explain the phenomenon of hypnosis and other paranormal occurrences.

Shri Aurobindo talks primarily of 3 planes of consciousness and research throughout the world has proven that hypnotherapy addresses effectively in all the planes of consciousness. He believed hypnosis acts on the subliminal sense of mind at the level of the inner being (Basu & Miovic, 2022). He stressed that the subliminal level is often mistaken for the spiritual because of “the failure to distinguish between the inner consciousness, which is behind the surface consciousness, and the higher consciousness which is above the normal consciousness” (Dalal, 2014).

It would be not out of place to note that Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* mentions 7 states of consciousness which is further elaborated in detail in *Yoga Vashishtha*. They are:

- 5th State: an experience of non-dualism.
- 6th State: an experience of being liberated while living and without conception or ideation.
- 7th State: described as a state of enlightenment – the experience of *Samadhi*.

Hypnotherapy deals with the subconscious and the unconscious realms of the mind by bypassing conscious awareness. Before any therapeutic outcome, the hypnotherapist's job is to understand the root cause of *klesha* or suffering and apply therapy accordingly.

Hypnosis can also access all 7 aspects of the subconscious and unconscious mind clarified by Vyasa, as a commentary on *Yoga Sutra*. These 7 stages include individual samskaras, specific samskaras (prenatal or hereditary), unexpressed data memories stored in the collective unconscious, preprogrammed reflexes, *pranic* or bio-plasmic energy, innate fluctuations of the mind designed to change with cosmic rhythm, and finally, the psychic or supernatural powers which tend to take place in the domain of the collective unconscious.

Finally, the realization dawns on both the hypnotherapist and the client that it is not the therapist who heals. Healing and recovery happen through him and not by him through divine grace.

6. The Psychotherapeutic Process

Trance Induction

For inducing a trance, a hypnotherapist often relies on slowing down and monitoring the breath. A lot of psychosomatic problems can be observed if a hypnotherapist cares to observe one's inhalation and exhalation, designed to induce a calm and relaxed poise. A reading of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* (and *Vigyan Bhairav Tantra*) would help a hypnotherapist equip with the various dimensions of inducing trance.

One of the methods to restore balance and tranquility by expulsion and retention of breath.

Yoga Sutra, 1.31

This process of trance induction is often aimed at one-pointedness or concentration at the point of focus and simultaneous peripheral dissolution. The Yoga sutras lay stress on the practice of concentration for the removal of obstacles in the process of concentration and holding the mind to one location is called *Dharana* (*Yoga Sutra, 3.1*).

For the removal of those (obstacles and accompanying symptoms) the practice of concentration on one principle (is to be done).

Yoga Sutra, 1.32

Often the process of trance induction involves multiple approaches used in hypnotherapy. Thus, the *Yoga Sutra*, advises that one should concentrate on sense perception (*visayavati va pravrttirutpanna manasah sthitinibandhani, 1.35*), or by inner illumination (*visoka va jyotismati, 1.36*), or by dhyana on pure light, or by detachment of matter (*Vitaragavisayam va chittam, 1.37*) or by the desire to meditate (*Yatha-abhimata-dhyanaad-va, 1.39*).

Yoga Sutra also mentions that the purpose of hypnotic trance induction as well as *dhyana* is one-pointedness (*tatra pratyayaika tanata dhyanam, 3.2*). After trance induction, the hypnotherapist focuses on the therapy. But before therapy, it is essential for the therapist to go beyond the surface

and superficial symptomatic levels and identify the deeper level that may arise due to ignorance of the truth, egoism, attachment, aversion, and fear of death (*avidya-asmita-raga-dvesh-aabhinivesah klesha*, 2.3). Through hypnosis, there is a dispelling of this ignorance, illusion, or *Maya*.

Ignorance is seeing the non-eternal as eternal, the not pure as pure, sorrow-producing factors as pleasurable, and the non-self as self.

Yoga Sutra, 2.5

And once that is done, it becomes natural for a hypnotherapist to understand the client's mind, both at the conscious and the unconscious/subconscious levels.

From the capacity to see that comes from samyama, one sees the other's intention and there is the knowledge of the other's mind.

Yoga Sutra, 3.19

The Therapy

In reference to a therapeutic context, it is essential for the hypnotherapist to understand the contextual reference of the therapy (in terms of space and time) and the nature of the problem of the client. This is expounded in *The Gita* which exhorts that all subjective perceptions distort the objects of perception and knowledge involves the knower, the known, and the process of knowing. Thus, Expression (*Kshetra*) and Experience (*Kshetragna*) are discussed with reference to the field and the knower of the field. Once these dimensions are understood, it becomes easy to commence therapy.

A hypnotherapist should also have a proper understanding of the nature of the 5-fold factors of actions mentioned in *The Gita*. They are *adhithanam* or motive, *karta* or actor, *karnam* or instruments, *chesta* or patterns of behaviour, and *daivam* or the unpredictable elements. Through *abhyasena* (practice) and *vairagya* (detachment), these need to be inculcated in therapy

From Ego Strengthening to Ego Purification:

The Gita stresses the need for control of the mind because the mind can both become the best friend as well as the greatest enemy (*The Gita*, 6.6). Even if the mind is difficult to control (*The Gita*, 6.34), the comforting news is that it can be controlled through suitable practice (*The Gita*, 6.35).

The Gita says that the mind is the 6th organ (*manah sasti indriyani*) and the Upanishads say that mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation of the human being (*manahi eva manushyanama, Karanam bandh-mokshabhayoho*) and one of the ways to address issues in the mind is through ego strengthening. Ego strengthening is a necessary step in hypnotherapy and although the Indian model may not substantiate it in the therapeutic process, in *The Gita* ego strengthening is used to bring

Arjuna out of his depressed state. We can see the process of ego strengthening through the use of Hartland's Ego Strengthening process, used widely in classical hypnotherapy.

Krishna, however, is not content with mere ego boosting. He not only uses psychoanalysis, but he also uses psychosynthesis -making the mind integrated and whole leading to ego purification. Like a true therapist, Krishna helps Arjuna to first comprehend and then transcend the 3 *gunas* – *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Throughout The Gita, we witness hypnotherapy in action.

Milton Erickson was a master in the usage of Indirect communication which he found to be more effective than other forms of hypnotherapy prevalent in his times. They include the use of indirect language patterns, implications, presuppositions, metaphors, analogy stories, similes, symbolic tasking, etc. Erickson intentionally wanted his language pattern to be "artfully vague", abounding with the use of ambiguity because he understood that such a linguistic approach helped one in both trance induction and therapeutic application. Erickson did not pre-plan his therapy and rarely treated his patients in the same way as he believed that every patient is unique and so are their perceptive nature and solution to their problem.

Erickson would use his intuitive capabilities and also rely on the principles of Observation and Utilization of the client's conscious and unconscious behaviour. This power of observation, very essential for hypnotherapists, is a measure of the level of an individual human being's ability to notice and therefore, structure a beneficial healing strategy. Therapy begins only when one is able to observe the conditioning process of the mind and once that is done, the process of deconditioning through hypnosis can be initiated.

In this regard, Patanjali's 5 levels of observational capability of the mind are worth mentioning. They are: a highly agitated or distracted mind (*kshipta*), an ignorant and dull mind (*mudha*), or a wavering mind (*vikshipta*). The concentrated and focused mind (*ekagrata*) and the poised or practiced mind (*nirodha*). In the Gita, there is repeated emphasis on the condition of poise between the opposites. The condition of poise is an inner state which comes into being naturally and spontaneously, for it is not the product of man's conscious effort.

A hypnotherapist primarily works on the level of the unconscious mind because he knows that as a multi-tasking system, the unconscious is trusted for its problem-solving capabilities, allowing it to work by providing only general, "artfully vague" commands. (Valenzuela, 2015). Sri Aurobindo observes that diverse aspects of spiritual life often lead to "partisan intellectuality" where the language and treatment may appear artfully vague, which has tremendous psychotherapeutic value, especially in hypnosis.

An example of an open-ended and vague suggestion is when Arjuna was told by Krishna that all the men he dreaded to have been killed were already dead. This has an effect of a double bind which is used effectively in hypnotherapy. A bind, we know, is a question or statement that gives the client an illusion of a choice because irrespective of whatever one chooses the results are designed to be the same. In Ericksonian hypnotherapy, binds and double binds are used to lead the client in a therapeutic direction while giving one an illusion of a choice. While a bind is addressed at a conscious level, a double bind is aimed at one's unconscious or subconscious. This gives the client a sense of power and freedom to choose one's way of changing and is therapeutically very effective.

Fight without any fear because I have already killed Dronacharya, Bheeshma, Jayadratha, Karna, and other brave warriors. You will win if you fight.

The Gita, 11.34

Also, in hypnotherapy, as a part of ego strengthening process, motivational epithets are carefully planted in suggestions. Throughout The Gita, one notices these motivational epithets which lend a trance-inducing characteristic. Thus, to motivate Arjuna, Krishna uses powerful adjectives, some of which are the following:

Anagha (sinless one), Bharatashreshta & Bharatsattama (Best of Bharatas), Dehabhritan Vara (Supreme among the embodied), Dhananjaya (Winner of wealth), Kirtin (Diademed One), Kurupravira (Great hero of the Kurus), Mahabaho (mighty-armed), Parantapa (Scorcher of foes), Purusharishabha (Flower among men), Purushavyaghra (Tiger among men), Sabyasachi (One who wields the bow with either hand), etc.

In Ericksonian hypnotherapy, often the therapists suggest that the client hold back a desired response, both in trance induction and therapy. Because a desired response is frustrated, it increases the motivation in a client to have it all the more. Holding back, one's desired state also validates the client's present state. Arjuna wanted to see the Universal Form – the visible embodiment of the Unseen Divine. He has understood the mystery of the seen and now he wants to understand the embodiment of the Unseen Divine. But while Arjuna requests Krishna, the hypnotherapist, to demonstrate his cosmic form, Krishna does not immediately oblige. Krishna has to prepare him with the extension of sensory perception into the realms that are extra-sensory because He understood that for Arjuna to explore the Timeless Moment and to see all in One the vast expanse of Time and Space need to be explored. Krishna had to grant a special vision – a cosmic vision to experience a cosmic hypnosis.

Thou cannot behold Me with this human eye. I will bestow on thee the supernatural eye. (Divyam dadami te chakshuh).

The Gita, 11.8

Krishna while demonstrating his huge *Viswarup* form, first instils and then removes the frightful experience to address Arjun's phobia. This is a technique of hypnotic desensitization used by Cognitive hypnotherapists to handle phobia in patients where the therapist gradually exposes the object of fear (often on an imagined object) while experiencing relaxation. This is an effective procedure as the hypnotherapist uses relaxation, dissociation, or time distortion to counteract any possible relapse of fear. Krishna however, soon takes Arjuna out of the trance once he realizes that the therapeutic goal is achieved.

Do not be troubled; do not fear my terrible form. Let your heart be satisfied and your fears dispelled by looking at Me as I was before.

The Gita, 11.49

Here, there is also the experience of ratification of the trance phenomena by Arjuna in the form of catalepsy, anesthesia, and amnesia. Thus, Arjuna is transfixed with fear in visualizing the terrible form of the Lord. He has no feelings about who he was and nowhere to go. As powerful convincers of a good trance experience, hypnotherapists often use strategies like amnesia, symptom substitution, hypnotic confusion, etc. They are very effective therapeutically also.

Having seen Your many mouths bearing Your terrible teeth, resembling the raging fire at the time of annihilation, I forget where I am and do not know where to go.

The Gita, 11.25

Another technique used by hypnotherapists is forward progression and future pacing. Effectively during hypnosis, the client gets acquainted with one of the dominant future possibilities which arise from the core of the subconscious, which obviously has immense therapeutic benefits. During *Viswarupa darshan*, a frightened Arjuna could visualize the future of the people for whom he was so concerned to fight. It is the *Viswarupa darshan* where Arjuna is given a preview of the Great War and what lies in the future so far as the Kurukshetra war is concerned. This is an experience of pre-cognition.

I see all the sons of Dhritarashtra and their supporting kings, with Bhishma, Drona, and Karna and also our soldiers, hurtling helplessly into Your sinister mouth. Your terrible teeth crushing their heads. I see

our warriors and all the kings who are here to fight. All are rushing into your awful jaws; I see them crushed by your teeth.

The Gita, 11.26-27

The use of repetitions – stories, concepts, and words – is widely used as a technology in hypnosis – used both to reinforce depth in trance and generate positive therapeutic outcomes. In The Gita, Krishna uses the same idea repeatedly in all the chapters to reinforce a therapeutic effect. The second chapter of The Gita, *Samkhya Yoga*, is in a sense the essence and summary of the entire Gita which contains ideas repeated throughout *The Gita's* remaining chapters.

The use of repetition (*punarukti*) is skilfully used by the therapist to transplant an idea into the subconscious skilfully and without the client's conscious awareness. The concept of the soul is repeated in many places in The Gita. For the guru in Krishna, repetitions are often done to ensure that the spiritual principles are grasped deeply.

Also, the topic of transcending the three kinds of *gunas* (*sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic*) is explained in Chapter 17 and also again in Chapter 18.

Likewise, the idea of surrender is repeated in *The Gita*, 9.34 and 19.65.

Always think of Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, and offer obeisance to Me. Showing such devotion, you will surely reach Me.

The Gita, 9.34

Focus your mind on Me. Become my devotee. Worship Me. Offer your obeisance to Me. Then certainly you will attain Me. It's my promise to you because you are very dear to me.

The Gita, 18.65

It is worthwhile to note that while there are similarities in both sentences, in the later verse Krishna stresses the context and content. He explains specifically what the seeker needs to do to attain Him. Krishna also mentions what He was going to offer as a guarantee because his devotees are very dear to Him (*priyo si me*). This feature is called Reframing Technique in hypnotherapy, which is a technique of changing mental frames, ideas, and beliefs and is widely used by Ericksonian hypnotherapists. When Krishna was asked by Arjuna how to control the mind, he was advised to practice *abhyasena* (practice through repetition) and *vairagyam* (detachment).

Like repetition, another effective technique used by hypnotherapists is the principle of distraction and pattern intervention. These have a trance-inducing effect and has also great therapeutic significance.

In the first chapter, when Arjuna was overwhelmed with grief, guilt, fear, and hopelessness, Krishna had to apply the principle of distraction and pattern intervention to therapeutically address the objective by directing Arjuna to the rightful action. This was done by deliberately switching topics and changing Arjuna's focus and attention.

A hypnotherapist has to be a master of words by playing with symbols, similes, analogies, metaphors, stories, fables, parables, etc. to captivate the interest and then guide one into a deep trance. An Ericksonian hypnotherapist uses metaphors extensively creating stories that somehow match the client's experience. Thus, metaphors must be isomorphic in the sense that somehow, they should resemble the client's situation, problem, experience, goal, etc. (Gordon, 1978). Also, analogies are used extensively to tell stories about other people who have had similar problems or issues. One such technique is the 'My friend Jack' technique used effectively by Ericksonian hypnotherapists when they use analogies of the therapist's friends to subconsciously drive a point to a client.

Symbols are similar to metaphors in that they represent something else. They are, however, concrete objects or representations, standing for abstract ideas or concepts. The example of symbolism in The Gita starts from the very first line and the first two words itself. The first two words – *Dharmashetra Kurukshetra* - start symbolically representing the conflict at various levels which is to follow in the entire Gita. They refer to religious and spiritual duties and activities as contrasted with mundane responsibilities and activities. It starts with duality – *Kurukshetra* represented by Dhritarashtra's narrow mentality – about being concerned about his son's welfare only against Dharmashetra of the Pandavas and Krishna Himself.

It would be interesting to note that most of the names in The Gita represent either a psychological tendency or metaphysical principles, designed to subtly touch the unconscious. Some of the examples are:

Dhritarashtra is one who upholds the kingdom (of the senses); *Sanjaya* represents one who is completely victorious; *Duryodhana* is one who is hard to be countered in any way or one who uses unscrupulous means to get what he wants and *Drona* implies that which remains melted – a powerful force of habitual tendencies.

Some examples of the use of metaphors, similes and symbols are outlined below:

Like a tortoise pulls his limbs into his shell, one keeps his senses under one's control.

Just as the rivers entering the ocean cannot disturb the ocean in any way, desires to enter the mind cannot disturb the steady mind of a sage.

The Gita, 2.70

Excessive desire can cover the mind's clarity just as smoke covers fire, dust covers a mirror, and the womb covers a foetus.

The Gita, 3.38

A sensitive mind is like a mirror – it reflects but does not gather dust. Here, it is to be noted that the usage of a mirror represents consciousness, and only an individual who is clean like a mirror can be unattached and aware of it. Mirror exercises are also used by hypnotherapists in visualization trances to therapeutically unravel different dimensions of one's personality and experience dissociation at multiple levels. This dissociative effect helps one to objectively view the context of one's problem along with the myriad solution possibilities.

The Gita is replete with the usage of symbols in all 18 chapters. They can be very effective if they are included as part of subtle and embedded suggestions. Some examples are:

Just as we discard old, worn-out clothes, the soul casts off worn-out bodies to enter a new body at the time of death. A body is for the soul what clothes are for us.

The Gita, 2.22

Just as a big lake can minimize the importance of a small well, so does the knower of the absolute truth proficient in Shastras serve better than the Vedas.

The Gita, 2.46

If the mind hankers for fulfilment of a desire, any of the wandering senses can carry away the intelligence as easily as the wind blows away a ship from its course in the sea.

The Gita, 2.67

Bharata, cut through this doubt in your heart with the sword of spiritual wisdom.

The Gita, 4.42

With this kind of detachment, the embodied soul lives happily in the city of nine gates, neither being the doer nor the cause.

The Gita, 5.13

When ignorance is destroyed by true knowledge, God is revealed. Just as the sun heralds visibility in the daytime.

The Gita, 5.16

There is nothing that exists separate from Me, Arjuna. The entire universe is suspended from me as my necklace of jewels.

The Gita, 7.7

Out of compassion, I destroy the darkness of their ignorance. From within them I light the lamp of wisdom and dispel all darkness from their lives.

The Gita, 10.11

As the air carries fragrance from place to place, so does the soul carry its mind and perceptions from body to body.

The Gita, 15.8

No one should abandon duties because he sees defects in them. Every action, every activity, is surrounded by defects as a fire is surrounded by smoke.

The Gita, 18. 48

In chapter 15 the first few verses refer to the symbol of an inverted banyan tree which has its roots growing upwards and branch downwards. Nurtured by the three gunas, the branches spread downwards and upwards. The roots are bound by karma, the fruitive activities of human beings.

The Closure of Therapy

In *The Gita*, Arjuna in the last chapter wakes up from a deep trance-like state. He gets his memory back (*smriti labdha*). It would be interesting to note that during a session, the Ericksonian hypnotherapist often uses an amnesia gap by using the same word or phrase before and after a suggestion. To keep a client from blocking, disturbing, or even destroying unconscious changes, Ericksonian hypnotherapists often create amnesia for the trance experience, unlike traditional hypnotherapists. Thus, the imagery of the hair is skillfully used to create amnesia for the therapy. While it was used at the beginning of the first chapter (*roma-harshash cha jayate*) during trance induction, it was also used again in the last chapter at the time of trance termination (*roma-harshanam*) thereby creating amnesia of the therapeutic context in between. The changes that occurred within Arjuna during the period of the entire 18 chapters (single session therapy) operated at a deeper subconscious level.

In terms of meeting the psychotherapeutic outcome in *The Gita*, the last chapter is a manual for cognitive hypnotherapists whose primary vocation is to trigger possible solution options from the client without being directive and specific. Lord Krishna played the role of a catalyst in clearing all

forms of doubts in Arjuna's mind and ensured that he is equipped with perfect clarity in taking the right decision by choosing from a variety of options. Once all doubts were cleared, Arjuna decided to pick up the bow and fight and Krishna concurred with his decision. This was the insightful and intuitive spark of wisdom in Arjuna – the ability to have a perception of the whole which transcends knowledge which is the seeing of the parts.

Thus, the Wisdom which is a greater secret than all secrets has been declared to you by Me; having reflected upon it fully you now act as you choose.

The Gita, 18.63

Krishna was indicating to Arjuna his *svadharma*, which he was resisting because he was not able to see his own *swabhava*. Once the perception of his true nature came to him, he spontaneously chose the path that was indicated to him and this is the intuitive realization that happens in hypnosis.

First, Krishna not only articulates the goal of therapy but like a perfect therapist, explains the consequences of a wrong decision.

If you still refuse to fight this dharmic battle, you are sinning by not performing your duty. You will lose your reputation too.

The Gita, 2.33

Sometimes, the hypnotherapist needs to cross-validate the therapeutic outcome from the client.

O Partha, have you been hearing my words with concentration? Are your ignorance and illusion destroyed as yet, O' Dhananjaya?

The Gita, 18.72

And eventually, it is followed by a grateful response from the client.

My delusion is gone! I have regained memory of my soul through Thy grace, O Achuta. I am firmly established; my dubiousness has vanished. I will act accordingly to thy word.

The Gita 18.73

The Gita closes with a universal, transcendental message for all mankind and all ages.

Wherever there is Krishna, the master of all mystics, and wherever there is Arjuna, the supreme archer, there will also certainly be opulence, victory, extraordinary power, and morality. That is my opinion.

The Gita, 18.78

This assertion is a form of post-hypnotic suggestion used in hypnotherapy, which is a condition in which one who has been previously deeply hypnotized, will accept suggestions similar to hypnotic ones, without having been subjected to any further hypnotic process or having passed through any state resembling sleep or trance. This is the impact on us and anyone (like Arjuna, Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra, and others) who has cherished the profound message of The Gita.

This was earlier reflected in the most oft-quoted shloka:

Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion – at that time I descend Myself.

The Gita, 4.7

3. Qualities required of a hypnotherapist

Mind is not the source of consciousness because it can be perceived as an object. The mind does not illuminate itself.

Yoga Sutra, 4.19

In a psychotherapeutic context, the capability to understand the mind is central to a hypnotherapist and the essence of finding relief from a problem starts with choosing the right hypnotherapist having the requisite attitude, knowledge, and skills for therapeutic healing. As is reflected in The Gita, the client needs to be able to have humility and total surrender.

Overcome by anxiety and weakness, I am confused about my duties. I surrender to You as Your disciple. Please instruct me in my best interest.

The Gita, 2.7

Along with the attitude of total submission, a client also needs to repose totality in trust and *shraddha*, which is reflected by Krishna's words. *Shraddha* is associated with feelings of awe and reverence for the object and is used in the context of the divine and is associated with a surrender to the unknown. *Shraddha* is wrongly translated as faith which refers loosely to the association of confidence or trust. It is motiveless.

Leave everything and Trust me, I will rescue you from all the problems, do not Worry.

The Gita, 18.66

One of the causes of the superior therapeutic efficacy of hypnotherapy is the establishment of a strong rapport. This is what Vyas & Vyas (2009) describe as a “communion in consciousness”. Thus, trust of the client in the competence of the counselor is a necessary condition for the success of therapy.

Krishna, the therapist however cautions that therapy is to be provided to only the one who seeks it intently. Although, unless there is a Karmic communion there can be no communion between the therapist and the client, the knowledge and therapy should be judiciously applied by the therapist to only the needy and deserving. The client should voluntarily seek help. In The Gita, Krishna says:

This confidential knowledge may never be explained to those who are not austere, devoted, or engaged in devotional service (seva), nor to one who is envious of Me.

The Gita, 18.67

Easwaran (1997) notes that in the Hindu tradition, until we ask the teacher to be our guru, showing our readiness to receive his guidance on the path of dhyana, he does not offer to do this for us. It is the wise who can seek help. The wise ones insist upon not deluding the minds of those who are not ready, unprepared, or unwilling for counseling and psychotherapy (*na buddhibhedam janayedajnanam karmasanginam*).

In truth, the efficacy of a true and successful therapy and the skills of the psychotherapist spreads more effectively by word of mouth.

But sharing this topmost secret qualifies as the highest form of work in devotion and such a devotee will surely come back to Me.

The Gita, 18.68

The hypnotherapist utilizes his intuitive understanding more effectively to understand the client. Intuition is a faculty that is cultivated through long association or spiritual *sadhana*. Through the client and therapy, the therapist develops a transcendental intuitive knowledge about a deeper and sublime meaning of life. This understanding is intuitive and beyond the realms of the five senses.

Krishna describes:

Some look on the soul as amazing, some describe him as amazing, and some hear of him as amazing, while others, even after hearing about him, cannot understand him at all.

The Gita, 2.29

This is also echoed in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*:

Having developed intuition, everything subtle can be seen and understood.

Yoga Sutra, 3.33

Along with intuition, insightful sensory understanding is of paramount importance in hypnotherapy. *Intuitive hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling of all the indriyas are heightened as a result.*

Yoga Sutra, 3.36

To become a good hypnotherapist, one needs to be knowledgeable in various disciplines and have multiple strategies in his armoury. The Gita also stresses one having the right knowledge of the *Shastras*. Thus, Intuition and insight along with *swaadhyaya* (self-learning) or guidance under a guru are very essential for one's spiritual growth. Krishna recommends the *Shastras* to be the manual for the psychoeducation of people in distress.

Let the Shastras be your authority in determining what should be done and what should not be done. Understand the scriptural injunctions and teachings, and then perform your actions in this world accordingly.

The Gita, 16.24

But all knowledge is incomplete and ineffective without the judicious application of principles, techniques, and patterns, best exemplified in the workings of Milton Erickson and much later by Stephen Brooks, the pioneer of Compassionate Ericksonian hypnotherapy. Thus, the scriptures contain observations of who have walked along the spiritual path but mere observation has no value whatsoever if there are no practical therapeutic applications of it.

In chapter 16 of The Gita, Krishna highlights the *gunas* of a happy man, most of which are in essence a pre-requisite of a therapist.

They are: fearlessness (*abhyam*), purity of heart (*sattva samshuddhi*), almsgiving (*dana*), self-restraint (*dama*), right study of the *Shastras* (*svadhyaya*), self-discipline (*tapas*), straightforwardness (*arjavam*) non-injury (*ahimsa*), truth (*satya*), absence of wrath (*akrodha*), peace (*shanti*), absence of fault finding and calumny (*apaishunam*), compassion towards all things (*daya*), non-covetousness, absence of greed (*aloluptvam*), modesty (*hri*), patience or fortitude (*dhriti*), purity of body and mind (*shaucha*), non-hatred (*adroha*), lack of conceit (*na atimanita*), etc.

Hypnotherapy is essentially spiritual and Swami Sivananda in *Sadhana Chatustaya* mentions about 4 spiritual qualities as per Vedic knowledge, which the Vedantins believe will lead to *Brahma Gyan* or transcendental knowledge:

- *Viveka* (spiritual discernment),
- *Vairagyam* (Non-attachment),

- *Mumukshutvam* (intense yearning for self-realization) and
- *Shadsampat* (6 cognitive virtues: thought control, sense control, lifestyle stability, forbearance, *shraddha*, and inner tranquility)

They are essentially a sequence of steps or means of practice that are outlined in the teachings of *Vedanta* and *Jnana Yoga* which is essential for hypnotherapists. They must be cultivated on the path to self-realization, and form the foundation for deeper therapeutic understanding and development.

Conclusion

Hypnotherapy is gradually generating interest among psychotherapy practitioners and there is a positive movement towards intervention which value innate human and subjective experiences. Compassionate Ericksonian hypnotherapy popularized by Stephen Brooks has been able to garner a lot of interest throughout the globe because it has been successfully able to marry Western psychotherapy with Eastern mysticism. Psychology and psychotherapy cannot be effective without the spiritual and "*psyche*" (In Greek meaning soul) component. Also, there is a lot of positive interest generated in areas like Psychoneuroimmunology and the psychobiology of beliefs along with Consciousness based studies in healing and therapy. Indian universities and Medical colleges should include Indian Hypnotherapy in course curriculum for medical practitioners, psychologists and psychotherapists so that the future generations can reap the benefits of the art and science of this wonderful domain.

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