

Trance Deepening

A transcript of demonstration by Milton H. Erickson, M.D.

Demonstration 12

ERICKSON

I want now to demonstrate a technique that can be used in deepening trances. Is Doctor L here? Do you mind assisting me, Doctor, while I'm talking.

Will you step up here, please? Just face the audience.

Now, you're well aware of the fact that Doctor L is alert and that he certainly does not know what is going to come next. Isn't that right, Doctor?

SUBJECT

It certainly is.

ERICKSON

This is a rather simple technique. It is also a technique that you can use with many subjects.

Now listen to me, Doctor. You can look at me. You've been in a trance before and you know it. You're an excellent subject. I'm going to suggest something to you. You can go to sleep very easily, go into the trance just by fixing your attention. I think the best way for you to learn to do it and to demonstrate it for the audience is this: As you stand there, I am going to count from one to twenty. I can count front one to twenty by ones or twos, fours, fives, or tens. By the time I count to twenty, you will be asleep. When I've reached five, you'll be a quarter of the asleep. When I reach ten, you'll be halfway asleep. When I reach fifteen, you will be three quarters of the way asleep. And when I reach twenty, you will be fully asleep. You'll take a deep breath and go way, sound asleep. Will you sit down, please?

Now look at the audience and be aware of them, because I'm going to start counting. 1, 2, 3, 4. 5, 6, 7, 8, 10—half asleep—11, 12, 13, 14, 15,—and three-quarters asleep—16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Take a deep breath and go deep, sound asleep, way deep, sound asleep, deep and sound asleep. Keep on sleeping and really enjoying it.

I want you to sleep what seems to be a very, very long time, and you'll feel rested and comfortable, as if you had slept for eight hours, then I'm going to awaken you. I can count backward, from 20 to 1, and then you'll be awake. At 15 you'll be one-quarter awake; at 10, you'll be one-half awake; at 5 you'll be three-quarters awake, and at 1 you'll be fully awake. All right now, I'm going to count backward. 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15—one-quarter awake—13, 12, 11, 10, and 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—and half asleep—11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Take a deep breath and go way deep asleep. You are, are you not? You can nod your head. You are, are you not? (*Subject nods.*)

Now I'm going to awaken you. And at ten, you'll be half awake, and at five, almost awake. I'm going to have you stand up to do that. Just stand up, Doctor, just stand up while you're still asleep. 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15—one-quarter of the way awake—14, 13, 12, 11, 10—and half awake You're beginning to get more and more awake. 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Wide awake! How are you?

I can count by fours. That's one of the things children like to learn. They start out 4, 8, 12, 16, 20—and deep asleep. Then you can count backward by lives—15, 10, 5, 1—wide awake. Tell me, how did you feel, Doctor?

SUBJECT

Very relaxed, very good.

ERICKSON

What happened when I started counting backward, then started suddenly forward?

SUBJECT

You get more and more conscious of what's going on around you, of people and sounds. Then all of a sudden, bam, everything goes back and you start sagging all over again.

ERICKSON

All right, thanks very much. (*Subject starts back to his seat.*) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Take a deep breath and deep asleep.

You may think all of this a bit dramatic. But sometimes you have to do this in order to get people to understand that you can attract a person's attention, even when he is doing something, such as walking across the floor. You can secure his attention and get his response very readily, no matter what other activity is going

on. It ought to give you a confidence in your own office. Regardless of the disturbance created by patients in the waiting room, your nurse rattling things, or whatever does happen, you can expect your patient to do his particular task. It is not an utterly impossible thing, and 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Wide awake!

Thank you very much Doctor. This sort of up-and-down technique will often enable you to deepen the patient because it is such an easy way of repetition.

QUESTION

Doctor, how would the patient know what you're doing when you start back from 20?

ERICKSON

Ask him.

QUESTION

Will you answer that question, Doctor L? At what point, when you were walking back to your chair, were you aware that you were being spoken to by Doctor Erickson for a specific reason? At what number?

ANSWER

Around 13, I think. At about that point I couldn't move as fast and I was a fit subject for a chair!

QUESTION

Could he have resisted at any point?

ERICKSON

He could have resisted, but the situation was a good one. He was participating and it took him completely by surprise, because he thought he was just going back to the chair.

ANSWER

It was more pleasant not to resist.

QUESTION

Could you get a patient to go still deeper by telling him that you will count above 20?

ERICKSON

That can be done, but it may slow the rate of induction, If I tell a subject that at the count of 20, he will be deeply asleep, he can respond in the same way that

Doctor L did. Then I can say, "Now I'm going to continue to count, and you'll go still deeper." He will then actually go deeper, but if you tell a patient that you will continue to count beyond 20 before you count to that number, he is going to hold back in reserve enough deepening to allow you to finish your count. On the other hand, if you let him give all his deepening possibilities up to 20, then count higher, his only answer is to find still further deepening possibilities.

QUESTION

If you deepen the patient by bringing him in and out, how do you know how deep he went?

ERICKSON

You really have to question the patient to know, unless you have had enough experience, but they have the feeling they are awakening very nicely, when all of a sudden there is a definite change as they start back into the trance. Is that a fair statement, Doctor?

ANSWER

Yes, I think it's in line with what was said about beginning to hold back. I found myself getting ahead of you and holding back. The first time I went to 20, I didn't get nearly so deep as I did when you backed me up. Then I couldn't hold back at all.

ERICKSON

I think that is a very important statement. He couldn't hold back when I stopped and started counting up to 20 again.

QUESTION

Was that because he might be willing and, when he realized he might awaken, he knew subconsciously that it's a nice feeling and just automatically wanted to go back?

ERICKSON

There it is, the psychologic expectation that you'll continue to count backward. The subject is all set for it and, when you suddenly reverse the count and go forward again, there's a terrific pause in his thinking and in his feeling. He has got to get hold of something and here you are counting forward again, so he grabs onto that and goes deeper asleep.