

## Body & Mind

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Photographed by SUSAN WOOD-WAGNER

# Mind Over Matter

## Tapping into the Subconscious

**H**ypnotist Robert Pargament says he has always been fascinated by the inner workings of the mind. "I have always had a highly developed sense of intuition and a vast capacity for understanding the kind of intelligence that lies just below the surface," he said over tea and coffee and oatmeal cherry cookies one morning in Katonah at William Nicholas. "The majority of people use a small part their mind. Hypnosis expands that potential."

For years Pargament, who is a member of the National Guild of Hypnotists, was involved in exploring various mind modalities including integrative medicine networks and transcendental meditation. But it was through hypnosis that he felt he could best tap into his personal potential. "Hypnosis accesses the power of the subconscious mind," he said. "It allows the body to tap into hidden reserves, and to change our sense of what is possible."

After mastering the techniques of self hypnosis, he realized he could effect powerful changes in himself in very brief periods of time. "All hypnosis, whether self guided or through a certified hypnotist, is essentially self hypnosis," he said. "In order for a person to achieve the goals they desire, those changes have to be motivated from within." He said he realized he could quickly do things and accomplish tasks that otherwise would have taken him much longer without the input of hypnotic suggestion. "I realized hypnosis was a calling for me. It's a healing process that I have the ability to do."

According to an article published in *Discover* magazine about the power of trance, a Stanford University psychiatrist wrote that brain scans show that a hypnotized patient cannot detect the difference between reality and an image that has been planted in their mind. Extensive studies regarding the use of hypnosis in the operating room have documented that by adding hypnosis, operations can be made shorter, less painful and less

dependent on anesthetic drugs. Rigorously controlled studies have also proven that hypnosis reduces pain and controls blood pressure. The hardest part is getting most medical doctors to accept it. Critics object that hypnosis is no different than the placebo effect, because both use the power of suggestion to get the mind to heal the body. But the placebo effect, everyone agrees, works.

Pargament says that smoking cessation, weight loss, self confidence, motivation/procrastination, relationship issues, nervous habits and tics, studying and reading issues, creative blocks, sleep continuity, fear elimination, worry, anxiety, guilt, pain management, sports performance and addictive behaviors are the most common reasons why he is consulted. "In hypnosis you can revisit the cause of a certain behavior by using your unconscious mind," he explained.

Pargament's specialty is working with adolescents and children. "There are so many issues I deal with working with kids," he said. He cited a recent session with a six year old girl who continually banged her elbows on the table, knocked repetitiously on a wall before going to bed, and who engaged in a number of obsessive/compulsive behaviors that not only drove her parents crazy, but made her unpopular with other children. "In a single session she completely reversed her behavior," Pargament said. He put her in a state of light hypnosis and told her a story about a super hero he made up about a Spider Girl (the child had told him her favorite hero was Spiderman) who had tremendous control to control her impulses. The child was able to identify with this super heroine and under hypnotic suggestion in one session stopped her compulsive behaviors. Her family was delighted.

He told the story of another child who had cancer. "The chemo and whatever other chemicals he was on had caused a painful arthritic condition in his legs that made walking difficult." In a course of six sessions, Pargament was able to significantly reduce the pain. An adolescent he worked



Hypnotist Robert Pargament

with had parents who were desperate for a change. "The issue with this youth was that he was virtually lifeless. He lacked any kind of energy and yet he wasn't sick. His eyes were half shut when you talked to him and he spoke in such a monotone that he appeared expressionless. He wasn't autistic. He was intelligent and not using drugs. He had a peculiar way of seeing things, focusing on the edges of things, minutia. All his commentary was of a visual nature." By using a non-directive form of hypnotism originated by Milton H. Erickson, M.D. that purports access to the unlimited resources of the unconscious mind, Pargament used stories of empowerment to blast through the child's dissociative affect so that the boy was able to plow through

his homework, re-engage in sports, and otherwise get on with his life. "I told him his energy is so powerful, he's like a mountain lion or a rhino, as opposed to being as passive as a cow. After eight sessions, this kid became more alive week to week to the point where his therapist called me and said 'Whatever you're doing with this kid, keep it up.'"

Robert Pargament does not rely on one particular system of hypnosis. Instead he takes an eclectic approach, using whatever modality he thinks will work best for that client. He may use direct suggestion or guided imagery, or neurolinguistic programming, based on the work of Milton Erickson, Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir. He also uses age regression, role playing and other insight therapies.

Another less drama-driven area where hypnotherapy can help is in assisting challenged students with concentration and focus. Pargament said he often receives referrals from area tutoring clubs and that he is often called upon to help people of any age who experience test taking anxiety. "I helped a woman pass the bar exam after she had failed twice, and another woman passed her Ph.D. exam with flying colors."

Although hypnotherapy is becoming more roundly accepted (the National Institutes of Health endorses it), still the stereotype of a person on a stage clucking like a chicken remains fixed in many peoples' minds. "There is a fear of losing control," Pargament admitted. "But really, the hypnotic state is very relaxing. I think I have a gift for putting people at ease. I've been told by many clients it is because of my voice, which they find very soothing." A lot of the critical process he said is to spend as much time as possible with a client explaining to them how hypnotherapy works. "I often liken it to yoga, which is a process they're usually aware of."

What Pargament loves about his profession is that the transformations he engenders are so striking and profound. "More and more medical institutions are embracing hypnosis as a viable modality. It's the new medicine. Even Medicaid and Medicare are now offering a ten cent CD on self hypnosis to their clients who experience chronic pain. We are just beginning to understand the power and inner workings of the human mind. It's fascinating."

Robert Pargament is affiliated with the Saw Mill Club in Mt. Kisco and offers seminars through AER Yoga in Cross River. He can best be reached by calling 914 232-9606 or 232-9641 or through his Web site, [www.hypnosiswestchester.com](http://www.hypnosiswestchester.com).

Can anyone be hypnotized?  
"I've yet to meet a single person I couldn't hypnotize," he said, his eyes twinkling. "It really is mind over matter. And by the way, children as a rule are very hypnotizable." ♦