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# Hypnosis & Deep Relaxation in Static Apnea

A guideline for possible applications

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## INTRODUCTION

Hypnosis and deep relaxation have fascinated me for a long time. I have experienced the relaxing effects of a guided ‚deep relaxation‘ - which is basically a hypnosis session without therapeutical inputs - multiple times on my own. I have always been amazed about how fast I could get into a deep relaxed, sleep-like state through this. Ever since I started freediving, the thought that hypnosis could actually be very beneficial for apnea accompanied me, which led me to have a slightly more in depth look at the topic for my AIDA instructor course now.

This paper is by no means a how-to guide on how to use hypnosis for static apnea. It is more an introduction to a toolset known from hypnosis, which usage could be beneficial for apnea in my opinion. I will discuss possible applications of hypnosis for static apnea and why I think they could work. This could be of interest for athletes but maybe even more for coaches or instructors. Whether hypnotic tools work or not, whether they work for you or not - it's up to you to find out. If you make experiments, you do this on your own responsibility. Do it under supervision and use a slow progression approach. If you want to get more into the subject, you will find some more in depth information in the works mentioned in the bibliography. To finish this introduction: Rather than acting as a how-to guide, this paper should act as an inspiration for other apneists and awake interest for hypnosis and how it could be used for our beloved discipline - which I hope it will do for one or another!

## HYPNOSIS

The whole following chapter about hypnosis is a very shortened version of the definition of hypnosis as described by Keil. For more in depth information please refer to the source<sup>1</sup>. Keil has a medical background and therefore uses examples from a therapeutic context. I will try to replace some of his examples with situations, that might be encountered in freediving, eg. during a preparation of a static apnea session, whenever possible.

### History & Definition

Hypnosis is one of the oldest medical treatments known to humanity. Whether shamanism, temple trance in ancient greece or Milton H. Erickson's (05.12.1901 - 25.03.1980) modern hypnotherapy, what all the methods have in common, stays the same - the trance. With the development of high-potent narcotics and anesthetics, hypnosis more and more disappeared from clinics and the consciousness of doctors. Then in the 20th century hypnosis underwent a renaissance through Milton Erickson's studies & therapeutic methods, that gave distinction to the modern hypnotherapy.

Keil mentions, that one of the main points in modern hypnotherapy is the work with the „unconscious“ of the hypnotized person. In Erickson's opinion, every human already carries all the resources for every potential problem inside himself. But he is lacking the key to access this resource, so his problem keeps on reoccurring. Through hypnosis the patient eventually reaches a state of trance and deep relaxation, where he might gain access to these resources and therefore might be able to solve his problem.

Hypnosis can be used successfully to treat sleeping-/eating disorders, nicotine addiction, psychosomatic disorders, anesthesia or the rehabilitation of paralyzed muscles. Also common is the usage of hypnosis to get someone into a state of deep relaxation. In such an „empty hypnosis“, the state of trance is used to relax body and mind, but there are no further therapeutic intentions. Contraindications for hypnosis are acute psychosis or any psychotic states.

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<sup>1</sup> Keil 2012, 15-59.

## Rapport - How to get in sync

*„Creating rapport is like dancing Tango. Two persons approach each other, get in tune and slowly one of them takes the lead, so that they can dance perfectly together.“* Ch. Wirl<sup>2</sup>

Rapport can be considered a necessity for a successful trance, without good rapport it is almost impossible to work hypnotically. Rapport could be described as a relationship, that is dominated by harmony and compliance. For good rapport a certain sympathy between the hypnotist and the hypnotized is helpful. Also it helps if the hypnotized finds himself in a good setting, which means he should feel comfortable with temperature, lights and so on.

## Pacing

The hypnotist then can use certain tools, which allow him to make rapport stronger. The process of making use of these tools is called pacing. To describe it in other words: When pacing, the hypnotist adapts the values of the hypnotized and brings himself onto the same level.

One pacing tool is the mirroring of body positions of the hypnotized. This demands some sensitivity and should not be remarked by the hypnotized and therefore not be too obvious. As an example if the hypnotized crosses it's legs or arms, the hypnotist can do the same at a certain moment. The most important thing is, that the hypnotist does not act incongruent, e.g. when the patient sits there a bit anxious with the upper body leaning forward and the legs pressed together, it would not help the process of creating rapport, if the hypnotist leans back relaxed in his chair and open his legs widely.

Another method is breath-mirroring, where the hypnotist adapts the breathing rhythm of the hypnotized, which demands some skill and practice.

A third and one of the most important methods for creating rapport, is Yes-Pacing. This means, that the hypnotized should be able to say „Yes“ to everything said by the hypnotist. This mostly starts with obvious phenomenons, such as body position eg. „You are lying on your yoga mat...“, „Your legs lay on the ground..“, „Your arms are lying next to your body, the palms of your hands are looking up.“, „You inhale deeeeply into your stomach, filling your body with energy and then exhale sloooowly, letting go of aaaany tension..“. Or it can be inner, not obvious phenomenons, which might occur and are known to the hypnotist through own experiences. Because they're not obvious, they must be communicated in a uncertain way, eg. „And maybe you feel that your heartbeat slows down a little bit with every exhale..“,

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<sup>2</sup> directly translated from Keil 2012, 32.

„And while listening to my words, you might notice, that sounds of your environment, like the bubbling of the water in the pool, move to the background moore and more..“.

So why is Yes-Pacing important? Firstly it creates confidence between the involved parties. Secondly our brain is laid out on positive information processing. Keil quotes, that our brain thinks only in positive images and specifies, that we in order to „move something away“ or „delete it“, we first have to visualize that something.

After having spent some time with pacing, the hypnotist can slowly progress to leading.

## **Leading**

Leading begins, when one of the involved persons takes the lead and the Tango dance begins. When leading the hypnotized, in most cases the goal will be to lead him into trance. Leading can be done verbally or non-verbally. Keil states an example of a couple in love drinking coffee in a coffeeshouse. Rapport between a couple in love is very good, so there is a high probability for a following situation: When one of them takes a sip of coffee, he would lead the other person to take a sip as well only moments later.

If there is good rapport established, the hypnotist can even lead the hypnotized into a more relaxed body position or influence his breathing rhythm.

While creating rapport, usually a state of trance is established. The hypnotist might use a specific induction technique to take the hypnotized into trance. This will be discussed later.

## **Suggestions**

Suggestions are the actual core of a therapeutic hypnotic session, because even with best rapport and excellent induction technique, without suggestions, just a relaxed patient remains in the best case. This is called „empty hypnosis“. This type of hypnosis only lasts some short moments and even for a so called „deep relaxation“ the use of suggestions is inevitable. In this case suggestions are not used for therapeutic results, but to make trance deeper and relaxation greater.

So what are suggestions anyway? Suggestions may have a bad reputation because in show hypnosis, there is a general fear of a hypnotist giving a suggestion to the hypnotized, which eventually will accompany him lifelong, doing harm to him. This actually cannot happen, the common opinion nowadays is, that when a suggestion does not match the view of the world of a patient, he will not react to that suggestion or worse, awakes from his trance immediately.

Probably suggestions do not exist as such. More precisely a suggestion is just a normal message, from which the receiver creates a suggestion himself. So the message itself plays a

subordinary role, what really matters to create a suggestion is the context. This fact can be observed in daily life as well. For example: A negative statement about a dress of a bride during a wedding preparation might have a much more lasting influence than a similar statement in just an ordinary situation. An unmindful statement can be made to a suggestion under special circumstances by the receiver.

This special context can be created in different ways in life, may it be a birth of a child, a wedding, a case of death and so on. Similar conditions are established by trance in hypnosis. The colorfulness and liveliness of inner images get elevated, affects and feelings of the patient intensified, Keil describes the process. Trance gives the special context to therapeutic messages.

Suggestions can also be used to deepen an existing trance and to bring the hypnotized into a even more relaxed state.

### **Posthypnotic suggestions**

A posthypnotic suggestion is a suggestion, to which a reaction only happens after the hypnosis, triggered through a key stimulus. Keil distinguished two different kinds of posthypnotic suggestions: The „If-then-pattern“ and the indirect posthypnotic suggestion.

The following is an example for an „If-then“ posthypnotic suggestion mentioned by Keil:

*„And after you awake from the trance, you will always be able, whenever it is necessary for you, to do exactly the same as you did during the trance, to distance yourself as much from your pain, so that it gets unimportant.“*

Erickson favored the more subtle form of indirect posthypnotic suggestions. He defined these as ideas during trance and gave them to the patient as subtle messages. Those ideas in the best case manifest as suggestions, which will not be remembered by the patient, but still will be present in his unconsciousness.

### **Dehypnosis**

After a trance session, the moment for getting back to reality will come. This might happen accidentally or if not, it is the duty of the hypnotist, to get the hypnotized back. How is this done? Schütz gives this rule of thumb: Change as much variables as possible. As examples: Speak louder, fade out music in the background, change your direction of speaking and invite the audience in a definite tone to come back to reality.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Schütz 2009, 22.

## **Induction techniques**

Now that the theoretical background is described, this part will shortly deal with a more practical matter of hypnosis: Trance induction techniques. The induction of trance is a central aspect of hypnosis and stands at the beginning of every session. Through trance induction the patient is guided into another state of consciousness, in which therapeutic work can begin.

Generally we can distinguish verbal and non-verbal induction techniques. I will only discuss verbal techniques, for more in depth information please refer to Keil's disquisition on induction techniques<sup>4</sup>.

We know verbal techniques are verbal confusion (brain cannot handle too much confusion and therefore „backs up“ into trance) or number countdowns packed into a story. From importance for induction is the way of speaking. First of all it is important that the hypnotic text is spoken clearly and is easily understandable. Schütz then emphasizes the following important aspects of speaking<sup>5</sup>:

### **Slow speaking**

Imagine that a fast, hectic voice wants to tell you something about silence, stillness and relaxation. You probably won't be able to relax. The creation of trance happens through stillness and calm and it takes some time to slip into the world of trance, therefore a slow voice is better than a hectic one.

### **Fast speaking**

What immediately contradicts the previous text passage, can in some cases be a valuable tool to create trance. Fast, confusing speaking mentally overloads the listener, which creates a state of tension. This state aspires to get released, which eventually happens and finishes in a deep, relaxed state of mind. This is only necessary if the listener has difficulties to let go and relax. As soon as he is in a more relaxed state, the voice should switch to a slower pace again.

### **Comparisons and images**

A language of images, metaphors and comparisons have a strong effect and create relaxation, as these images have an effect on our unconsciousness and activate our right, creative and emotional hemisphere of our brain.

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<sup>4</sup> Keil 2012, 64-102.

<sup>5</sup> Schütz 2009, 18.

## **Emphasis of vowels**

Schütz mentions, that the onomatopoeic prolongation and linguistic alienation of vowels promotes trance. In his book „Neuromythen“, Schulte<sup>6</sup> proves, that the hearing of vowels triggers a shift to the right hemisphere in our brain. Vowels have a strong emotional significance, this can be used when speaking. As an example the word „deeper“ could be pronounced with a prolonged „e“, „deeeeeeper“. Consonants are analyzed with the left hemisphere of our brain. An interesting aspect here is, that this fact does not count for all languages. Schütz writes, that in Japanese language it is actually inverse.

## **Inarticulate speaking and murmuring**

If the listener already is in a state of trance, you might want to try to murmur on purpose and swallow some syllables, pronounce only the half of a word and so on. While doing this but still keeping the same rhythmic speaking melody, the listener is forced to complement your words with his own fantasy. This stimulates trance.

## **Hypnosis and anesthesia**

I would like to point out on another aspect of hypnosis: The use of hypnosis as anesthetic medium.

*„The application of hypnosis to alter pain perception and memory dates back centuries. Yet little progress has been made to fully comprehend or appreciate its potential compared to the pharmacologic advances in anesthesiology. Recently, hypnosis has aroused interest, as hypnosis seems to complement and possibly enhance conscious sedation. Contemporary clinical investigators claim that the combination of analgesia and hypnosis is superior to conventional pharmacologic anesthesia for minor surgical cases, with patients and surgeons responding favorably.“<sup>7</sup>*

The fact, that through hypnosis the mind can be brought to a state where pain isn't perceived as such, could be of use in static apnea during contractions. More information on hypnosurgery can be found in Wobst's paper.

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<sup>6</sup> Schulte 2001

<sup>7</sup> Wobst 2007

## POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR STATIC APNEA

Now that the theoretical basics of hypnosis have been introduced, I will make some propositions on how this knowledge could possibly be used for static apnea and improvement of static apnea performances. Be aware that these are propositions, they are not scientifically backed. These are my own ideas, that in the best case might work or awake interest for the topic in other fellow apneists. Whether the methods work or not or whether they are better or worse than other methods yet has to be researched. Probably a lot of what I describe here is already used by freedivers in a way or another, maybe not knowing that the same techniques are used as well in hypnosis. For such cases I hope that this paper can give at least some additional background information about how and why these techniques actually work.

### **Deep relaxation hypnosis as preparation**

It is common knowledge, that relaxation of body and mind is essential when doing static apnea. There are different mental techniques used among apneists to get into that deep relaxed state, which enables to calm down mind and body and at the end enable a good performance. Pelizzari mentions Autogenic Training, Katabasis and different other meditations and mental exercises to relax.<sup>8</sup> All these might contain already certain elements of (self)hypnosis.

In competitions athletes usually take some preparation time for themselves just before their performance. Some listen to music, some just lay on a yoga mat and breathe. The reason for this preparation time is to focus, to get into that relaxed state every freediver aims for. Here, I see a possible application of hypnosis, more precisely of „empty-hypnosis“, as described in the chapter Definition & History. With this approach, the freediver only makes use of the relaxation effect of hypnosis. I would like to point out, that the dehypnosis happens before the performance, the effective performance and how the freediver deals with contractions etc., are not affected.

How could this effectively be implemented in a course or competition environment? There are plenty of different recordings or youtube videos out there, containing such deep relaxation trips. These recordings could be used solo, for training as well as in a competition environment, but also in a freediving course, where they could either be played back to the students by the instructor or act as a source of inspiration to the instructor.

I will suggest two that worked well for me. Both of them have in common, that the listener is guided into trance verbally through a relaxed voice and then through his own body, starting

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<sup>8</sup> Pelizzari 2004, 130-135.

from the feet all the way up. The listener is encouraged through suggestions to relax all of his body parts and to let them go more and more. These „trips through the body“ are quite well known amongst freedivers. As an example: Severinsen describes a similar exercise in „breatheology“, where the subject makes a mental trip through his body, coloring all muscles from blue to red while relaxing them more.<sup>9</sup> Yet they might not be used in context of trance. When doing Severinsen’s exercise, it is possible, that the person practicing it gets into a state of trance, but I think this has not to be the case. The same can happen for the recordings mentioned shortly, but in my opinion and personal experience, the trance is deeper with guidance from someone with knowledge about hypnosis.

The first recording is in German, published by Karin Albrecht on the CD „Körperreise, Mental-Reise für Tiefenentspannung“<sup>10</sup> with which I had very good trance results that eventually even ended in sleep. A proposition for a „hypnotic body trip“ in English is a video by Jon Rodes, that can be found on Youtube.<sup>11</sup> Both work in a very similar way and have a duration of about 20 minutes. I suggest putting them on a MP3 player and listening them before a static performance or training. As a measure of safety, only the diver should listen to the hypnotic text, while the coach is buddying as usual. The recordings could possibly be a good inspiration sources for instructors/coaches as well. More on this topic to follow in the next chapter.

### **Useful tools for a static coach/instructor**

Awareness of hypnotic methods might be of value for instructors or coaches. A coach or buddy takes the full responsibility for the well being of the freediver during his dives. He guides him through the sensations and situations created by the dive. For lots of the apneists that I know and for me personally, it is very helpful especially during the phase of contractions, to have a buddy that is able to take tension of the diver through well-directed guidance and speaking. It is probably superfluous to say that the sound and the speed of the voice make a big difference for the diver being able to relax and go through unpleasant sensations or not.

So what a lot of good coaches do, would probably be congruent with what is considered a good practice when speaking and acting as a hypnotist. A good rapport between coach and diver is essential, the diver has to be able to give up control completely to his buddy, this demands trust, which can be intensified through pacing and leading.

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<sup>9</sup> Severinsen 2010, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht 1998

<sup>11</sup> Rodes 2009

For instructors, the knowledge about body & breath mirroring from pacing could already be used in the classroom or during breathing sessions with students to create trust and good rapport. A static coach could use Yes-Pacing to induct trance and to help the diver to relax, while coaching a diver through a static attempt, e.g. „You are gently floating in the water“, „Your head moves fluently together with the movement of the water“ or could make statements about unobvious perceptions the diver might have, like „And while listening to my words, you might notice, that sounds of your environment, like the bubbling of the water in the pool, move to the background moore and more..“.

As for static apnea a trance-like state is usually welcome, the vocal techniques that are trance inducing could be used to lead or keep the diver in trance during his attempts. For me personally, the voice of my static buddy is very important and makes a difference. All these tools like slow, relaxed speaking, the use of images and the emphasis of vowels possibly help the diver staying relaxed - and this could possibly be explained with the fact, that they all are trance promotional.

### **A complete approach - Static Apnea while being in trance**

In the previous two chapters I discussed the possible benefits of hypnosis in two different, isolated situations: preparation and coaching. As a last proposition I would like to discuss a more complete approach. What is meant with a complete approach? The idea is to get into a state of trance during preparation and then start the dive while being in trance. Basically the approach from the chapter Deep relaxation hypnosis as preparation will be taken one step further and dehypnosis will not happen during preparation but rather during or after the dive.

A similar approach is actually taken by Ulf Dextegen, a swedish freediver who uses self-hypnosis for his static attempts and does performances around 9 minutes. He puts himself into trance during his no-contractions phase of the dive to reach a deep trance when the contractions are to begin. He writes, that towards the end of dives, he usually ‚falls‘ out of trance due to ‚hell anxiety‘ caused by CO<sub>2</sub> buildup.<sup>12</sup>

But this has not necessarily to be the case for everyone. It is unclear, if a person in deep hypnosis has the same ability to make decisions about when to end the dive as a person not under hypnosis. This should of course be the case, otherwise this approach would be a serious safety issue. My current knowledge about hypnosis is not sufficient to make a clear statement about this, in my opinion this would be an interesting point to research. I suggest that the slow progression approach should be used and the first dives in hypnosis should last less than the personal best of the diver.

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<sup>12</sup> See Dextegen´s article for more information

If a state of trance is reached, it might become easier to deal with contractions and the ‚anxiety‘ coming often hand in hand with them. The coach - or hypnotist - could use suggestions that make it easier to deal with the negative feelings coming up during the static performance, or through appropriate usage it could even prevent this feelings through deflecting the focus away from them. This might work similar as with pain management through hypnosis and hypnosurgery.

How could this be done then? Probably a similar approach as used for deep relaxation could work. But instead of ending the hypnosis, the text should be adapted to guide the listener into the water and into the breath-hold at some point. During the first phase of the breath-hold the focus would stay on relaxation and different body parts. Before contractions start, the trance should be deepened and suggestions that help dealing with contractions should be given, so when contractions start, they will not be perceived as uncomfortable and unwelcome. The state of trance should be kept as long as possible, while of course getting signals from the diver. At the end of the dive, the diver probably would fall out of trance due to very high CO<sub>2</sub> and would then end the dive.

A good coach or hypnotist could possibly guide a diver through such a dive-hypnosis. Otherwise good results could probably be reached through self-hypnosis, Ulf Dextegen is the living proof for that. Therefore the diver should focus on self-hypnotic methods and train these. There are different books available, that describe techniques for self-hypnosis. Also you can find lots of how-to's online. I will refer to an article on Wikihow, that uses a countdown induction technique, which involves stepping down 10 steps on a stair and end up in the water. This visualization is interesting, as it could be combined with a breathhold when entering the water visually. The link to the guide can be found in the bibliography.<sup>13</sup>

Of course this only scratches on the surface about how hypnosis could be used. Different induction techniques could be adapted. During deep relaxation sessions, post-hypnotic suggestions could be used to handle contractions more easier and so on. The playground is a broad one.

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<sup>13</sup> Wikihow article <http://www.wikihow.com/Perform-Self-Hypnosis>

## CONCLUSIONS

Hypnosis is a potent tool for a wide range of applications. Through trance, resources that might have been unknown to us, slumbering within ourselves, can possibly be accessed. What works for psychotherapy or just to relax, probably works for static apnea or freediving in general as well. I think that knowledge about hypnosis and how it works, might be useful for apneists or apnea coaches & instructors, because it gives another point of view or method on how deep relaxation can be reached and how divers could be coached through their static dives verbally. It also enables coaches/divers to analyze their familiar and commonly used techniques from another perspective, from a perspective of a hypnotist. And this could lead to a better understanding of the tools used and why they work and make sense.

For me hypnosis is a deeply fascinating and powerful technique and I hope this paper helps drawing interest of other apneists for it. The possibilities are wide!

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