



The Healing Hypnotist

This therapist uses hypnotism to help others

By Terry Kaufman

Spend a little time with Bill Blank and you find yourself looking at the world in a whole new light. By day, Blank makes his living as a technical writer, but increasingly he spends his after hours helping people explore and heal themselves.

Blank is a hypnotherapist who has made a name for himself by helping people overcome seemingly intractable problems—smoking, anxiety, phobias—while giving them the tools they need to move their lives forward and develop to their full potential. He works out of an office in the Country Club area home that he shares with his wife, Wendy.

His route to this unusual calling was anything but usual. Trained as a rabbi, Blank served at a synagogue in upstate New York before relocating to Sacramento in 1986 to manage fundraising and administration for the Sacramento Jewish Federation. During his time in the clergy, he had become increasingly fascinated with the phenomenon of what he calls “extraordinary experiences”: singular instances such as dramatic epiphanies that turn people’s lives around, as well as those “aha!” moments that we all experience when a chance comment comes back to us and allows us to see something more clearly.

“I’ve always been interested in mystics, seers, shamans,” Blank says. “There’s real power in those moments when we stop and say, ‘What was that all about?’” All religions, he notes, are permeated by this concept: “Moses went up to the top of the mountain, had a vision, and the whole nation



Bill Blank and Maddie in his office

was changed.” Although the kind of work Blank does today is not as epic as the biblical stories he cites, for his clients the changes are sometimes just as dramatic.

After a couple of years at the Federation, Blank moved on to a writing career and started dabbling in the field of hypnosis. He had previously gone through some “pretty intensive” hypnosis training and had actually been interested in the

practice of hypnosis since his teen years, when a visiting hypnotist placed most of the student body of his Cleveland high school under hypnosis. “Back then, people looked at hypnosis as some kind of voodoo,” he recalls. Today, there is greater acceptance of holistic approaches to healing, and people are more willing to take responsibility for their own physical and mental well-being. “The people who come to see me are

‘self-selected,’” he says, noting they have a vested interest in a successful outcome.

Clients have come to him for help with fear of flying, nail biting and remembering past experiences.

“Hypnosis is best for effecting changes to very specific habits,” says Blank. Almost 80 percent of his clients are trying to quit smoking, generally after having tried alternative approaches unsuccessfully. After two sessions, comprising a total of an hour and a half, fully 85 percent of his clients are done with smoking. “The number is 100 percent for those who completely follow my instructions,” he claims. Having been a smoker himself many years back, Blank can empathize with what his clients are going through. “I draw on my own experience as a smoker; I’m fully aware of the physical and mental challenges they’re going through.”

The sessions start with deep physical and mental relaxation, then progress to stories and imaging. “I help them visualize what being a nonsmoker will be like, including how much money they’ll be saving and what they can buy for themselves with that money.” Blank recalls the

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“jaunty British sports jacket” that was his own nonsmoking reward so many years ago.

Other clients have come to him for help with fear of flying, nail biting, remembering past experiences, and even connecting with past lives. “I respect everyone’s experiences,” says Blank. “Sometimes, the memories are so painful that people have spent their lives protecting themselves. But it takes energy to protect yourself from pain. When you’re finally able to deal with the memories, it frees you up to be much more creative and productive.”

Blank, who received training as a counselor while in rabbinical school, invokes spirituality as he guides his clients toward healing. “I remind them to be aware of their own power,” he says. “Everyone has a strength that comes from deep inside themselves and also, possibly, from a higher power.” Many of his clients, interestingly, are nurses who struggle with their role as healers. Blank

teaches them to become fully aware of their power to heal.

Perhaps the most important lesson that Blank teaches his clients is self-hypnosis. “I teach them to relax their muscles and neurons. At first it’s difficult, but just like riding a bike, once they learn it, it’s easy—and it only requires three minutes every day.” He tells of an 8-year-old boy whose parents recently brought him for help dealing with homework anxiety. Blank found the boy remarkably receptive to the idea of self-hypnosis and feels confident that when next he is overwhelmed by a homework assignment, he will be able to invoke the relaxation techniques practiced in Blank’s office.

“Anyone can be hypnotized,” asserts Blank. “It facilitates intense experiences, and it provides us with a way to be involved in the process of our own self-recovery.”

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