

The Gateway Experience: Brain Hemisphere Synchronization in perspective.

1. Introduction. In order to describe the Monroe Institute technique for achieving altered states of consciousness(the "Gateway Experience") involving brain hemisphere synchronization or "Hemi-Sync", the most effective way to begin is to briefly profile the basic mechanics which underlay operation of related methods such as hypnosis, transcendental meditation, and biofeedback. It is easiest to effectively describe what Gateway is by beginning with a short description of those associated techniques that share some common aspects with the Gateway Experience but which are nevertheless different. In this way we can develop a frame of reference at the outset which will provide useful concepts to explain and understand Gateway by comparison, as we proceed.

2. Hypnosis. According to the theories of psychologist Ronald Stone and the biomedical engineering models of Itshak Bentov, hypnosis is basically a technique which permits acquisition of direct access to the sensory motor cortex and pleasure centers, and lower cerebral(emotional) portions(and associated pleasure centers) of the right side of the human brain following successful disengagement of the stimulus screening function of the left hemisphere of the brain. The left hemisphere of the brain is the self-cognitive, verbal and linear reasoning component of the mind. It fulfills the function of screening incoming stimuli by categorizing, assessing and assigning meaning prior to allowing passage to the right hemisphere of the mind. The right hemisphere, which functions as the noncritical, holistic, nonverbal and pattern-oriented component of the brain appears to accept what the left hemisphere passes to it without question. Consequently, if the left hemisphere can be distracted either through boredom or through reduction to a soporific, semi-sleep state, external stimuli to include hypnotic suggestions are allowed to pass unchallenged into the right hemisphere where they are accepted and acted upon directly. The result may involve an emotional reaction originating in the lower cerebral region, sensory/motor responses requiring involvement of the cortex, and so on. Both the sensory and the motor cortices of the right cerebral portion of the brain contain a sequence of points known as the "homunculus" which corresponds to points in the body(see Exhibit 1, next page). Stimulation of the corresponding area on the cortex causes intermediate response in the associated portion of the body. Consequently, induction of the suggestion that the left leg is numb, if it reaches the right hemisphere unchallenged and is referred to the appropriate area of the sensory cortex, will result in an electrical reaction being generated that will induce the feeling of numbness. Similarly, the suggestion that the person is experiencing a general feeling of happiness and well being would be referred to the appropriate pleasure centers located in the lower cerebral portion or in the cortex of the right hemisphere, thereby inducing the suggested feeling of euphoria. Finally, suggestions such as one that informs the hypnotic subject that he enjoys enhanced concentration or powers of memory would be responded to in the right hemisphere by accessing unused information storage capacity normally held in reserve as a result of left hemisphere selection and control processes. This aspect will become significant in the context of the Gateway process when attention is given to examining the way that hypnosis may be used to accelerate progress in the early stages of the Gateway Experience.

3. Transcendental Meditation. On the other hand, transcendental meditation works in a distinctly different fashion. In this technique, intense and protracted single minded concentration on the process of drawing energy up the spinal cord ultimately results in what appears to be creation of acoustical standing waves in the cerebral ventricles which are then conducted to the gray matter in the cerebral