

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUGGESTION

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CHAPTER IX

SUGGESTIBILITY AND THE WAKING CONSCIOUSNESS

IT is now high time to gather up the threads of our discussion and weave them into one organic, living whole; to bring the stray rays of light that reached us in the course of our research together into one focus, and illuminate the dark, mysterious regions we undertook to explore. To do this we must retrace our steps and inspect closer the conditions that admit one into that strange land of puzzles, wonders, and prodigies. A comparison of the conditions of normal and abnormal suggestibility will, I think, prove interesting and valuable, as it might give us a glimpse deep into the nature of suggestibility in general.

To facilitate this comparison, it would be best to make a table in which the conditions of normal and abnormal suggestibility should run parallel to each other.

TABLE OF CONDITIONS OF NORMAL AND ABNORMAL SUGGESTIBILITY

Normal Suggestibility	Abnormal Suggestibility
1. Fixation of attention	1. Fixation of attention

2. Distraction	2. —————
3. Monotony	3. Monotony
4. Limitation of voluntary movements	4. Limitation of voluntary movements
5. Limitation of the field of consciousness	5. Limitation of the field of consciousness
6. Inhibition	6. Inhibition
7. Immediate execution	7. —————

A glance at our last table will show at once that the conditions in both cases are essentially the same, with the only difference that in abnormal suggestibility two conditions are wanting—namely, distraction and immediate execution. This sameness of conditions clearly indicates that both normal and abnormal suggestibility flow from some one common source, that they are of like nature, and that they are due to similar causes. Now a previous study led us to the conclusion that the nature of abnormal suggestibility is a disaggregation of consciousness, a slit, a scar produced in the mind, a crack that may extend wider and deeper, ending at last in a total disjunction of the waking, guiding, controlling consciousness from the reflex consciousness, from the rest of the stream of life. Normal suggestibility is of like nature—it is a cleft in the mind; only here the cleft is not so deep, not so lasting as it is in hypnosis, or in the state of abnormal suggestibility; the split is here but momentary, evanescent, fleeting, disappearing at the very moment of its appearance.

This fleeting, evanescent character of the split gives the reason why suggestion in the normal state, why normal suggestibility requires immediate execution as one of its most indispensable conditions. We must take the opportunity of the

momentary ebb of the controlling consciousness and hastily plant our suggestion in the soil of reflex consciousness. We must watch for this favourable moment; not let it slip by, otherwise the suggestion is a failure. Furthermore, we must be careful to keep in abeyance, for the moment, though, the ever-active, ever-restless waves of the controlling consciousness; we must find for them work in some other direction; we must direct, we must distract them. That is why normal suggestibility requires the additional conditions of distraction and of immediate execution. For in the normal state the waking, controlling consciousness is always on its guard, and when enticed, leaves its ground only a single step, and that only for but a moment. In normal suggestibility the psychical scar is faint; the lesion effected in the body of consciousness is superficial, transitory, fleeting. In abnormal suggestibility on the contrary, the slit is deep and lasting—it is a severe gash. In both cases, however, we have a removal, a dissociation of the waking from the subwaking, reflex consciousness, and suggestion being effected only through through the latter. *It is the subwaking, the reflex, not the waking, the controlling, consciousness that is suggestible. Suggestibility is the attribute, the very essence of the subwaking, reflex consciousness.* That our suggestions should take root and bring forth fruit, that they should become fully realized, we must address them to the subwaking consciousness directly, and in order to do that a disaggregation of consciousness must be effected.

If we turn to the laws of normal and abnormal suggestibility, we find still further evidence in support of our view as to the nature of suggestibility and its relation to the subwaking, reflex consciousness. A mere comparison of the two laws reveals the truth of our position:

*The Law of Abnormal
Suggestibility*

Abnormal suggestibility varies as direct suggestion, and inversely as indirect suggestion.

*The Law of Normal
Suggestibility*

Normal suggestibility varies as indirect suggestion, and inversely as direct suggestion.

The two laws are the reverse of each other, thus clearly indicating the presence of a controlling, inhibitory conscious element in the one case, and its absence in the other. In the normal state we must guard against the inhibitory waking consciousness, and we must therefore make our suggestion as indirect as possible. In the abnormal state, on the contrary, no circumspection is needed: the controlling, inhibitory waking consciousness is more or less absent, the subwaking reflex consciousness is exposed to external stimuli, and our suggestions, therefore, are the more effective the more direct we make them. With full right may we now assert that suggestibility is a disaggregation of consciousness—a disaggregation in which the subwaking, reflex consciousness enters into direct communication with the external world.

The general law of suggestibility is now plainly obvious:

SUGGESTIBILITY VARIES AS THE AMOUNT OF
DISAGGREGATION, AND INVERSELY AS THE
UNIFICATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS.*

* See Appendix B.