



# NCSPP Newsletter

Northern California Society for Psychoanalytic Psychology

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## Sandor Ferenczi as Hypnotist

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An important contribution of Ferenczi to psychoanalysis can be attributed to his expertise in suggestion, which led him to value specifically the suggestive nature of relevant aspects of psychoanalytic practice. The relationship between Ferenczi and suggestion can be traced to his youth and was already present in his pre-analytical writings. Ferenczi was expert in hypnosis, and we find that in some of his psychanalytical studies, as in the development of technique, first done in collaboration with Rank (1924) and later continued on his own, suggestion reappears as a basic instrument of psychoanalysis. Already during his childhood, Ferenczi showed an interest in understanding people and their motivations. In addition, Ferenczi carried out experiments in hypnosis on his sisters and on the employees of his father's bookshop. These interests continued until his studies in medicine and after his medical degree. After graduation, Ferenczi went to Vienna to study medicine, and during his Viennese years, he attended the courses of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and he has referred to one lesson on hypnosis reporting a case of self-hypnosis. At the end of his studies and after his military service, Ferenczi in 1899, at age 26, found a position as registrar at the Rokus Hospital in Budapest.

At the beginning of his career, Ferenczi was attracted by mediumistic phenomena. As a matter of fact, between 1897 and 1899, he had participated in seances at the villa on the Buda hill belonging to Emil Felleter, professor of pharmacology. Therefore, the first article he published in *Gyogyaszat* (Therapy), the progressive journal ed-

ited by Miksa Schachter, was entitled *Spiritismus* (1899). That article describes the various mediumistic phenomena and the controversy between spiritists and anti-spiritists, affirming that a scientific study on these topics could bring substantial progress to psychology. According to Ferenczi, it was possible to study paranormal phenomena scientifically and to find for these an unconscious reason. The author during these years often intervened in the scientific research dealing with these so-called "occult phenomena." In 1900, he reviewed the books *Somnambulism and Spiritism* by Lowenfeld and *Research on Spiritism* by Wajdītis. On this occasion, he maintained the need for rigorous methodological attention to the subject and showed his skepticism towards the research findings. Also in 1900, Ferenczi reviewed a volume entitled *Spiritual Therapeutic Methods*, the synonym for which, as indicated in the title, is "Psychotherapy," where he sustained the fundamental importance of these methods in any branch of medicine and in particular when treating nervous diseases. Moreover, Ferenczi dealt with the suggestive aspects of such interventions, which, according to him, do not diminish in any way their value but rather constitute an essential part of them. In 1902, Ferenczi became chief editor of the journal *Honvedorvos* (Army Doctor), published as a supplement of *Gyogyaszat* by Schachter, who was also chief of staff of the reserves. It was chiefly a supplement on military medicine, in which the pathologies peculiar to the soldiers were discussed. Among the many topics, it also dealt with the suggestive phenomena connected with

the neurotic cases which later were called "war neurotics".

In 1904, Ferenczi reviewed the book *The Role of Faith in Therapy* by Kalloch, where he emphasized and discussed the suggestive aspects of medical consultation. The suggestive elements of medicine are also treated during the same year in the article *Electricity as Therapy*, where Ferenczi was careful to distinguish the effects of electricity on the nerve endings from those obviously suggestive. His continued interest in suggestion appeared right after an article, *On the Therapeutic Value of Hypnosis*, written in 1904, which also dealt with the contraindications discussed using clinical cases. It is obvious that the author had gained great expertise in the field of hypnosis, had developed an open-mindedness and was sensitive to his patients. In this work, Ferenczi approaches with subtlety the nature of hypnosis and the linguistic structure of suggestions for the purpose of both defending the use of hypnosis and a cautionary warning of its application. Ferenczi in this paper refers to a case in which, when

*"putting to sleep a young man of 18, I suggested to him among other things, after waking up, to go to the nearby kitchen and to drink a mouthful of water. When he woke up, in fact, he went out of the room, but when I followed him to watch him, I was surprised to see that he had taken a pitcher, had filled it up to the brim with water and he had already drunk quite a bit. I screamed and I asked him what he was doing, to which he answered that he was planning to drink the whole pitcher of water. The misunderstanding arose from the assonance of the words korny (a mouthful) and korso (pitcher)" (Ferenczi, 1904, Pg. 157).*

During 1906, Ferenczi wrote *Cure with Hypnotic Suggestion*, a substantial article where he discusses the technique and its counter-indications, pointing out that the fear of committing sexual assaults on a defenseless patient as a result of hypnosis is as unjustified as it would be for any other honest doctor in his clinical practice. The author also discussed in great detail the laws that in Hungary regulated the practice of hypnosis. In a following article on *The Prescriptions of the Neurologist* (1906), Ferenczi showed the importance of the suggestive elements in the approach to psychiatric patients, and while he furnished an overview of the medicines available to the neurologist at the time, he points out also the analogous structure to homeopathic medicine found in erroneous medical theories, which sustained the use of medicines completely ineffective. In fact, it was another situation in which the suggestive phenomena played an important role.

Ferenczi wrote on suggestion with unusual skill; he was an innovator (a revolutionary like his father). At the beginning, psychoanalysis is the revolutionary contribution that he will introduce to the Hungarian medical environment; later, he tried to introduce innovations in psychoanalysis which was entering a stagnating stage. One of the innovations experimented by Ferenczi was the "active technique" consisting first in furnishing instructions and warnings to the patient in order to increase the tension so that the repressed experiences could be brought out. In this practice, as in the traditional rule of the counterquestioning of the patient, or in the frustration ensuing, we find simultaneously technical principles of suggestion, which create power, and the application of metapsychological concepts like

the economic principle (Thoma, Kachele, 1985).

Ferenczi's experience with hypnosis, as well as his active suggestions and his coming activity in psychoanalysis, can be rightly considered part of the technique described by him in the article *The Tamed Horse* (1912), where he showed that authoritative directives and coming activities appear alternately in the creation of an invincible suggestive power. At this point, Ferenczi referred to a newspaper article which described how the blacksmith Jozsef Ezer had tamed "Pussy-cat," a female race horse of exceptional beauty which no one before had succeeded to shoe, utilizing alternately menaces and caresses, screams and affectionate words.

through fear, this being the educative means used by parents to which the hypnotized subject was used to in childhood. Ferenczi had great expertise in suggestion, capable of understanding how much even psychoanalysis depends on suggestion. This, however, was the cause for his being ostracized by his colleagues. The preanalytical writings (Ferenczi 1899-1908) show, however, the falseness of Jones' theses, which during the period of the Weisbaden congress in 1932, marginalized Sándor Ferenczi, maintaining that his ideas of the time were the result of mental deterioration.

Vice-versa, it is obvious today when we read the preanalytic writings that such ideas of 1932 were the coherent development of knowledge and clinical

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Ferenczi stated that the effect of hypnosis and suggestion can be connected to the fact that during his life, a man is profoundly conditioned by the obedience he was taught as a child. According to Ferenczi, there are two methods to hypnotize: love and harshness. The capacity to render docile through love (tender caresses, beseechings, and attempts at persuasion with a monotonous and caressing voice) is called maternal hypnosis, and suggestion obtained with harshness (reminders, screaming, orders or overpowering), paternal hypnosis. The first four years of life and, in particular, the relationship with the parents form a person to be receptive to one or the other form of suggestion or for both. Ferenczi pointed out that the success of hypnosis in an adult depends on a tendency to renounce his own will either through love or

theories in the field of suggestion, existing even before his meeting with Freud and refined with his experience as psychoanalyst during his whole career as clinician. As a matter of fact, in 1924 in the book written with Rank, *The Development of Psychoanalysis*, as in 1932 in his speech prepared for the psychoanalytic congress of Wiesbaden, the use of suggestion in therapy was the focus of Ferenczi's position. Ferenczi's position may be mostly due to his departure from the scientific ideal and from the ideal of professional respectability to which the psychoanalytic movement was more and more drawn, since it was seeking an identity clearly distinct from the disquieting identification with mesmerism. The "active technique" of Ferenczi is discordant with the technical-

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scientific idea which aims to substitute an "artificial neurosis" for the patient's symptoms by means of an analytical "neutrality" within the scientific framework of the 19th century.

In an untranslated passage from the original Ferenczi & Rank (1924), they discussed their renewed clinical interest in hypnosis as follows:

*"If only we could capture completely the nature of the hypnotic connection with the doctor, connection which in reality has not become fully intelligible throughout the knowledge of the nature of transference, it would be possible for the analyst to succeed in putting again hypnosis at the service of his technique without the fear of not being able to dissolve at the end the affective umbilical cord which connects the patient to him. The possibility to utilize again hypnotic therapy or suggestive methods would constitute perhaps the culmination (Schlusstein) of the evolution toward which is aimed and should be aimed, in our opinion, the simplification of analytic technique" (quoted in Chertok, Stengers, 1989, p 91).*

We have here a better application of the active method, which initially had been based on prescriptions and warnings to the patients; Ferenczi later chose to give advice and suggestions until he developed a technique of maximum sensibility in the areas that the patient expects from his analyst (see Kohut's concept of self-object relationship). During the psychoanalytic congress at Oxford in 1929, Ferenczi explained how some characteristics of the setting establish favorable conditions for a suggestive relationship and pointed out that this played a significant role in the classical psychoanalytical

treatment. Ferenczi stressed how the analyst creates a suggestive power by setting up an opposition between distension and tension. According to him, psychoanalysis uses two opposing means: the increase of tension due to frustration, and distention due to release. These two principles also apply to free association, in which the patient, on one side, is forced to admit unpleasant feelings, but on the other end, takes advantage of a considerable freedom to manifest his feelings. This brought about a revision of the lengthening analytic process which had produced, according to Ferenczi, a type of authoritarian late-training of the patient based on 19th century scientific criteria. The dominant, "detached," "scientific," "objective" attitude, in fact, led to a limiting of the capacity of human contact on the part of the analyst and to stereotyped clinical activity. ♡

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## The Friends of San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute Informal Conversations Fall 1994

Wednesdays, 7:45-9:15 pm

**October 5:** Linda Goettina, D.M.H.

*Reading and Children: A Developmental Perspective*

**October 26:** Toni Vaughn Heineman, D.M.H.

*How Do You Treat What You Cannot Speak?; The Paradox of Language in the Treatment of Abused Children*

**November 9:** William McKinley Runyan, Ph.D.

*Love, Creativity & Explorations of the Unconscious: The Adventures of Henry Murray and Christina Morgan*

**December 7:** Mark Levy, M.D.

*Medications and Psychotherapy, A Discussion of the Complexities and Dilemmas*

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