

## **You should be trancing, yeah**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

I'm tired of waking each morning with a feeling of ill-ease in my belly

JUST breathe deeply, let your breathing fall from your belly, the voice is saying as I allow myself to move deeper and deeper into a trance-like state. I have always been attracted to the notion of hypnosis, always wanted to try it. The idea of altered states of consciousness fascinates me. But, as with the thought of parachuting from a plane, the idea of losing control terrifies me more.

That is, until last week. I met one of the world's leading hypnotherapy and martial arts experts, Dan Russell, who is based in the UK but visits Australia each year. We got to talking about his craft and the offer to work with a master was too much to refuse. I pack my fears in a little box and go to his studio.

Our two chairs face each other. Russell asks me to reveal what I want from the session. I suffer from a nebulous anxiety. Probably no different from anyone reading this. But I'm tired of waking each morning with a bubbling feeling of ill-ease in the pit of my belly, tired of the endless fears that plague me each time my little girl leaves the house. You are a normal mum, says one friend. You suffer from existential depression, a therapist once told me. And somewhere between those two views probably lies the truth.

Before Russell starts hypnotising me, he talks to me about my problem. I sit looking into his eyes, which remain alarmingly still. He speaks softly, slowly. So slowly it's like a tape that has been stretched. I look into his eyes, wondering when he's going to start hypnotising me but aware that the light in the room is so intense that everything is merging. Russell's face is just a huge pair of eyes and I feel suddenly unconcerned about the state of the universe. A warm sense of wellbeing pervades me. I find myself standing up doing strange things, moving my head this way and that and giggling when I find myself doing what he says.

He tells me he is just proving to me that I am deeply relaxed now. Still conscious, quite safe, but now in touch with what he calls the deeper mind.

This is the art of hypnosis, to get in touch with a part of our brains we don't usually access. The body is excellent at self-healing if talked to correctly. Russell, who has spent time in emergency rooms of leading hospitals, says that the way patients are talked to when they go into deep states of shock can actually determine whether they recover or not. People can live or die on the basis of unconscious messages.

And in this space, vulnerable and yet feeling held and safe, I allow him to take me on a journey into my past, back to the source of the anxiety. It plays out in front of my eyes like a movie, except I experience all the same feelings I had then. It's quite fascinating, intriguing and terrifying at the same time. But Russell keeps reassuring me. I am watching things that I know are frightening to me, and yet I feel secure. This is the art of hypnotherapy. You confront your fears, your wounds, and you get to be a warrior, Russell tells me before the session. Head of the Hypnotherapy Training Centre and Northern School of Tai Chi in Carlisle, on England's Scottish border ([www.hypnotherapytrainingcentre.com](http://www.hypnotherapytrainingcentre.com)) Russell's search for healing has led him to Tibet, Bhutan, Fiji and Taiwan, where he meditated for years and trained in martial arts. He says that what he does is

help people to come into contact with the Buddha mind, their own natural intelligence.

We all have a Buddha mind, he says, an inner guru that knows many things, understands why we feel anxious, hides things it thinks will hurt us, knows how to heal us. We just have to move away from the narrow box of our perceptions and open up to the unused parts of our brain, as shamans and ancient healers always have.

Back to the session and I can see what is upsetting me. We deal with it gently. He works my body, pushing pressure points and saying comforting things. A surge of energy -- powerful, cleansing rushes up through my gut where I'd been feeling anxious and I feel calm and safe before coming out of the trance.

It has been a week since the session. Bombs drop, the world reels towards disaster, the killer flu is at our door, and I actually feel less anxious than usual. One session is not enough to completely eradicate the problem (Russell had to go back to the UK) but it has certainly helped me in this instance. Hypnosis -- when practised reputedly and with integrity -- is one way of bringing the healing gift of meditation into the real world.

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