

Wanted: Study Hypnotism

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Vladimir is offering a comprehensive course in hypnotism, or gipnotizm as it is known in Russian. By the end of the course — eight lessons of three hours — you should be able to cure alcoholism, hiccups and float on your back.

The syllabus tantalizes with different types of hypnosis — the “rough” hypnosis at 30 centimeters, which I imagine is the sergeant-major approach: “HYPNOTIZE NOW, FOOL!” There is also the intriguing “instant hypnosis” at two meters.

To back up his claims, Vladimir has a number of photos of people on his site. There is the man standing calmly on a pile of broken bottles, something that anyone who so wishes can re-enact in a side street of your choice off Tverskaya from late on May 9. Another has Vladimir in midair, three inches above the broken glass — it is hard to tell whether he is about to land or flying up while thinking: “Ouch! This student is definitely failing this exam.”

His favorite photo is of a man, his back straight and true as he lies across two chairs. So what, you say. But these two chairs are at the far end of his body. He looks like he is floating. Vladimir uses the same photo in his ad in the Zhizn newspaper, the only paper in the world

that advertises the services of psychics next to 3,000 ruble (\$100) penis-enlarging pumps.

Luckily Vladimir's ad was a few pages on from that one. On his site you can see his appearance on the TNT channel where he hypnotizes the host, using the sergeant-major approach, into lying on two chairs, his back straight for almost half a second before the assistants help him up.

The only problem with the back trick is that it has little to do with hypnotism and is a standard magic trick that has been around for years.

TNT will no doubt be shocked to discover that they had not created even more original television that evening. In Robert A. Baker's book "They Call It Hypnosis," the author writes of a stage hypnotist doing the same trick on Johnny Carson's show in the 1970s. There is a photo in the book of the weirdly floating man, which, sadly, Amazon's "Click to Look Inside" did not let me see, but a kind blogger reported the caption as saying that, "After it was taken, Bette Midler came over and sat on his stomach."

Now that I would pay Vladimir to see.

The sitting on stomach of the floating man is a standard part of the routine, too. None of it has anything to do with hypnotism, Baker writes, as most fairly fit individuals can lie the way Vladimir is in the photo.

The person usually lies on three chairs first, and the middle one is then taken away.

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