

BOOK REVIEW

The Beginner's Mind **Reviews of The Collected Works** **of Milton H. Erickson**

Edited by Ernest Rossi, Roxanna Erickson-Klein and Kathryn Rossi

Milton H. Erickson Foundation Press
 Phoenix, Arizona, 2008-2014
 17 Volumes

Reviewed by Richard Hill -- MBMSc, MEd, MA, DPC, Gordon, Australia

The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson is not just a typical chronology, it is a journey. Each of these volumes brings the reader along with the master as he expresses a theme or shift in perception. Beginning with his earliest research in the 1920s through to his final years, we witness Erickson tease apart the nature of the process, practice, and benefits of therapeutic hypnosis.

Sometimes it's like reading an adventure novel. Drama, mystery, and suspense are created through case studies. We literally feel along with him, as he tunes into his patients to help them discover their own unique healing. At times I was breathless, poised at the end of a page, eager to turn to the next. But, where fiction is organized as an intentional fabrication of reality, for Erickson and his patients, this was reality -- brazen, brash, unpredictable -- yet all the while conducted within the safe containment field of therapeutic hypnosis. Published papers, conference presentations, transcriptions of recordings of actual sessions, interviews and conversations, anecdotes, fragments of notes, and comments all come together to reveal the intention of each volume.

Erickson proposed many original ideas, including the possibility of the mind's influence on biological functions to generate healing processes. Early on, he exemplified this idea firsthand when at 17 he paddled the lakes and rivers of Wisconsin to regain strength after a serious bout with polio (Vol 1, p. xi). In later life, due to post-polio syndrome, he would distract, displace, and reinterpret pain that often wracked his body (Vol 1, pp. 201-208). His prescient thinking is being validated by modern scientific research and the editors have wisely included some of this current material.

Rossi developed an understanding of the deeper biology of how these changes might come about. The science of Psychosocial Genomics (Rossi, 2002; Hill, 2012) emerged to explain the nature of activity-dependent gene expression as a response to non-invasive treatments, such as psychotherapy and therapeutic hypnosis. It is fitting that *Volume 1* begins with a paper from Rossi describing the neuroscience of therapeutic hypnosis and the propositions of psychosocial genomics. The reader receives the necessary background to appreciate the forethought in Erickson's writing.

This overview begins a series where each volume will be reviewed, and recent breakthroughs in neuroscience, biology, epigenetics, and psychosocial genomics are incorporated to further highlight the prescience of Erickson's original works. Future reviews will offer more detailed insights and highlights as they appear to this beginner's mind. Following are the volume titles with one or two defining elements.

Vol 1: The Nature of Therapeutic Hypnosis engages us in the early process and ongoing progress of Erickson's investigations into therapeutic hypnosis. We are introduced to his "beginner's mind."

Vol 2: Basic Hypnotic Induction and Therapeutic Suggestion includes a detailed transcript of a trance induction with commentary and discussion by Haley and Weakland.

Vol 3: Opening the Mind: Innovative Psychotherapy. Erickson, Rossi, and Moore (Erickson's personal physician) answer Rossi's question in his last meeting with Erickson: "How can I have an open mind?"

Vol 4: Advanced Approaches to Therapeutic Hypnosis covers creative, adaptive processes utilized by Erickson. The confusion technique and the use of psychological shock to "facilitate new identity creation" are among the many intriguing approaches and case studies described.

Vol 5: Classical Hypnotic Phenomena, Part 1: Psychodynamics teaches fundamentals of hypnosis from papers published in the 1930s and '40s, interestingly punctuated by a 1973 conversation between Erickson and Rossi and a 1962 paper co-written with Allan Erickson.

Vol 6: Classical Hypnotic Phenomena, Part 2: Memory and Hallucination expands Erickson's work with other researchers, including Erickson's wife, Elizabeth, Stephen Lankton, and Ernest Rossi, who provides a description of the Psychosocial Genomic Healing Response he developed.

Vol 7: Mind-Body Healing and Rehabilitation reveals Erickson's pioneering approach to biological dysfunction, pain, rehabilitation, and healing. Rossi describes the current scientific foundation of mind-body healing and rehabilitation, including brain plasticity, gene expression, and the facilitation of natural internal healing processes, supporting Erickson's intuitive genius, prescience, and continuing relevance.

Vol 8: General and Historical Surveys of Hypnosis offer a historical exposition of therapeutic hypnosis. Erickson's book reviews from the '60s are truly fascinating, showing his capacity to compliment and praise, as well as his erudite ability to be scathing.

Vol 9: The February Man describes this famous case study. The explanations and discussions between Erickson and Rossi as they review the transcribed recordings of the sessions are riveting and informative.

Vol 10: Hypnotic Realities: The Induction of Clinical Hypnosis of Indirect Suggestion is another previously published case. *Hypnotic Realities* is reproduced in its original font and form. Also included is a valuable introduction from the editors and a concluding chapter by Ernest and Kathryn Rossi, updating the science of suggestion as an implicit processing heuristic.

Vol 11: Hypnotherapy: An Exploratory Casebook is the third of four books written by Erickson and Rossi. It's like attending a private master class with Erickson -- preserved in time on the written page. Transcripts of more than 20 cases offer readers a direct experience with Erickson's therapeutic practices.

Vol 12: Experiencing Hypnosis: Therapeutic Approaches to Altered States is the fourth book by Erickson and Rossi, where Erickson trains Rossi in clinical hypnosis. Transcripts of Erickson's casework are discussed and annotated by Rossi throughout. As Rossi learned then, we can learn now.

Vol 13: Healing in Hypnosis is the first of four volumes that bring together Erickson's seminars, workshops and lectures. Florence Sharp began collecting audio and written records in the '60s, which resulted in these fascinating transcripts of Erickson "live." The opening chapter is biographical, not only describing Erickson's upbringing, but also his emergence as a therapist.

Vol 14: Life Reframing in Hypnosis demonstrates how Erickson's naturalistic and utilization approaches directly engage reframing, which is an important mark of his work. Erickson developed an extraordinary sensitivity and observant capacity to know what was available to be utilized. This volume prepares the reader for developing his/her own observant sensitivity.

Vol 15: Mind-Body Communication in Hypnosis provides an understanding of the connections between mind, brain, and body, and how they can affect each other. Erickson is the classic Wounded Healer, and truly understands how the mind can generate healing through our physiology.

Vol 16: Creative Choice in Hypnosis is probably my favorite volume because it deals with the creative interplay within Ericksonian therapeutic hypnosis. Understanding how to be aware, responsible, and yet improvising and non-directive is the gift of this wonderful volume.

Vol 17: The Wit and Wisdom of Milton H. Erickson is not yet completed, but I consider this to be the perfect conclusion. Erickson was well known for his wit and wisdom and the retelling of Ericksonian stories is always a joyful and

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valuable experience.

There is little doubt that this collection is an excellent history of the research and practice of Milton Erickson. Yet, I found it to be more. *The Collected Works*, for me, are a personal journey. Not only am I informed, but I also had the opportunity to experience the wonder, fascination, and tremendousness that, as Rossi explains, are the necessary elements to facilitate neural plasticity and activate gene expression and protein synthesis. This is how we generate personal growth and development. Jeffrey Zeig states, "He was consistently working, consistently being Milton H. Erickson, which entailed having the most profound experience he could with whomever he was sitting with" (Vol 1, p xi). This spirit, I believe, lives on through these wonderful volumes.

Hill, R. (2012). Psychosocial Genomics: A new vision of the psychotherapeutic arts. *Energy Psychology*, 4(2): 47-58

Rossi E. L. (2002). *The Psychobiology of Gene Expression*. NY: W. W. Norton.