

BOOK REVIEW

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

Volume 4 – Advanced Approaches to Therapeutic Hypnosis

Edited by: Ernest Lawrence Rossi, Roxanna Erickson-Klein, and Kathryn Lane Rossi

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The opening pages of *The Complete Works of Milton H. Erickson*, Volume 4 pay tribute to Milton Erickson's wife, Elizabeth Euphema Moore Erickson, who possessed "... an ineffable genius for living that is all her own..." (p. ix) Many people know of Milton Erickson's "...disabling problems..." that might have "... inhibited another person's mental functioning..." Yet, in the Erickson household this "...stimulated wonderment and curiosity..." (p. x) From this warm preparation, the editors lead us into "...what may be the most salient of open-ended questions: How do we facilitate the creation of new consciousness and identity today?" (p. xiii)

Part I delves into the Confusion Technique. Erickson intensively worked on this technique, experimenting, testing and refining. Interestingly, the Confusion Technique is founded on our "... unwillingness to keep the confusion." In Complexity Theory, this might be classed as an organizing principle or rule. In the Introduction, Ernest Rossi contends that confusion is a natural condition of the second stage of the creative cycle where therapy is often required. Confusion is a natural state that is utilized by our human system to know where *not* to be and how to stimulate the mental and physical activity necessary to resolve the confusion.

Whenever activity is prompted, it can be assumed that there is an activity-dependent gene expression and various other non-observable biological responses. This invites the idea that confusion may well promote *whole of being* responses. The exact nature of all these processes continues to be the subject of research in neuroplasticity, psychosocial genomics, neuroendocrinology, and other disciplines.

Erickson could not have envisioned some of the current biological discoveries, which makes his ideas and methods all the more fascinating. We have a million questions about the sort of genius who acts in the possibilities of knowing – even though it is not yet consciously known. I feel a heightened excitement reading his early work, much of it written in the 1930s and '40s, while being aware of the current insights into brain plasticity, memory reconsolidation, and neural networks, and the how neurochemicals emerge from the gene expression that constructs the matter of our being.

There are numerous case studies in this volume, some with detailed transcripts that draw the reader deeply into the experience. Erickson was diligent in both preparation and practice. Still, he reminds us that it is "...not a matter of the operator *doing* something...or compelling them...or even telling them what to do..." but being "... primarily a matter of communication of ideas and the elicitation of trains of thought..." (p. 81)

Part II takes the reader into another of Erickson's controversial techniques – Psychic Shock. This technique reminds me of Einstein's comment that it is difficult to solve a problem within the same consciousness that created it. Shifting mindset and neural functioning creates conditions in which there is an opportunity for the neurobiological "system" to reframe – effectively reconstructing connections (reconsolidating) toward a healthier state. Case studies reveal how people who are unhappy, dissatisfied, and unfulfilled, can discover within themselves the existence of someone quite different: a person who is comfortable, enriched, and able to be happy.

Erickson developed and utilized psychological shock in order to overcome

deeply entrenched, rigid psychological states. Again, Complexity Theory informs us about the "edge of rigidity" and the need for creative and inspiring interventions. Erickson knew this more than 80 years ago – more beautiful evidence of his pre-science.

Chapter 15 is particularly interesting for those familiar with the "February Man" technique, which utilizes regression. The most famous case is reproduced in Volume 10, but that is not the only time Erickson played the February Man. This chapter explores fragments of other cases and includes commentary from Ernest Rossi.

Part III explores the testing process of creating/implanting experiences that can metaphorically assist the patient to find a co-existent resolution of the actual problem. This approach bears a degree of risk, and we are wise to read of the extensive preparatory work: "During a period of several weeks the story was rewritten in various wordings many times before it seemed to be satisfactory. Two colleagues read and discussed the proposed complex story..." (p. 253)

Part IV presents Erickson's therapeutic hypnosis approach with psychotics. Working with psychosis requires caution and strict attention, so it is valuable to read how Erickson assisted those with this mental disorder. There are many people with psychotic disorders who function successfully in life, with assistance, and there is much a non-medicating therapist can do to assist them. How do we best serve the issues of the client -- and how do the issues of the client provide insight into the therapeutic action that will most effectively promote beneficial change?

Part V brings us into the present. The editors provide insight into the current knowledge of the deeper biological processes involved in therapeutic hypnosis. Although some of the cases studies in this volume may seem extraordinary and almost magical, it is not necessary to disembodify the experience. It is also not necessary to reduce the experience only to the biological. There is a dynamic system of activity that embraces the *ideo* and the *dynamic*.

Deepening our knowledge triggers curiosity and wonder. Ernest Rossi's 2005 paper, reproduced in Chapter 22, delves into the importance of memory reconsolidation, brain plasticity, and the labile state, where synaptic connections literally change, creating a new state of brain and mind. Memory reconsolidation involves protein synthesis to establish new connections. Rossi's notion of activity-dependent gene expression is elemental in understanding how memory reconsolidation creates beneficial, therapeutic change.

This volume offers readers a fascinating and complex dance around fundamental themes of what the mind is, what it can be, how it alters and shifts, and how it can be altered and shifted. In the current updates, we are introduced to the impact of idea on action – the essence of the *ideomotor* concept. There is a lot to find within these pages. It is like an adventure, searching for hidden treasure. And readers may need to return again and again to discover it all.



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RECALL

VOLUME 15

Substantial changes have been made in Volume 15.

Please contact us and we will exchange a new volume for the old one.

These changes include: A new and expanded introduction; a revised Part IV; and a new Part V, "The Psychosocial Genomics of Mind-Body Healing." Also, the index has been re-compiled to cover the new and updated material.

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