
B O O K R E V I E W

The Beginner's Mind

The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson

Volume 11 – *Hypnotherapy: An Exploratory Casebook*

Review by Richard Hill MA, MEd, MBMSc, DPC

Volume 11: *Hypnotherapy: An Exploratory Casebook*, is the natural sibling of its predecessor, Volume 10: *Hypnotic Realities*. Together they provide unequalled insight into the world of therapeutic hypnosis, Milton Erickson, and Ernest Rossi. The task of reviewing Volume 11 is made much easier by Sidney Rosen, MD, who wrote a foreword for both the original publication and this volume.

In his 1979 foreword, Rosen wrote "...the authors have done the best job to-date in clarifying Erickson's ideas on the nature of hypnosis and hypnotic theory" (p. xii) and "His methods...are more explicitly outlined...than any other writings available." (p. xiv) In his 2014 update, Rosen confirms that "...33 years have passed since this book was published, yet I still stand with that opinion." (p. xvi)

Although there is much more to be said about this volume, these two statements are the clearest reasons why readers should enthusiastically delve into every page.

Hypnotherapy: An Exploratory Casebook is a treasure trove of cases. I found that the best quotes come from the early pages -- in the foreword and preface. Rosen clarifies his intention in contributing to the book: "Both Rossi and I have broad but differing clinical and theoretical backgrounds. Neither of us has worked primarily with 'hypnosis.' Therefore, neither of us has a vested interest in promoting some hypnotic theory of our own." He is equally clear when he writes, "We are genuinely devoted to the goal of presenting Erickson's theories and ideas..." Then he points out, what I believe is important when considering who should be paying attention to Erickson: that this book is directed, "...not only to practitioners of hypnosis, but to the community of psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, which has had little familiarity with hypnosis." (pp. xi-xii)

Chapter 1 introduces and describes the fundamental elements of therapy. Three stages of a therapeutic approach are proposed that seem almost too simple: 1) a preparation to orient the patient toward therapeutic change; 2) a period of therapeutic trance, through activation and utilization of the patient's own mental skills; and finally, 3) a period of recognition and evaluation of those therapeutic changes.

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Readers are then treated to more than a dozen pages of deep exploration into those seemingly simple, fundamental elements.

In reading this, I feel myself being prepared for a book that will not only present the elements and examples of an Ericksonian approach, but also bring it to life with the colors of knowledge, research, experience, and exploration.

I am taken by the sobering comment, "There is no method or technique that always works for everyone or even with the same person on different occasions." (p.3) This statement begs the question: Why are we learning about all these various elements of Erickson's therapeutic process? I find the answer in a simple question: Why are there so many keys on a piano? It seems clear that to produce the method or technique appropriate for a client in a particular session, the therapist needs both a wide scope of possibilities in their knowledge base and the ability to improvise appropriately in the moment. Utilization is the term regularly used to describe the flexibility and responsiveness to the uniqueness of every client and every therapeutic session. This concept is dealt with, in detail, in Chapter 3.

This volume delivers not only the "notes" of the process, but also a rich appreciation of the "tone," "resonance," and "harmonics," through the many cases histories and studies that form most of the volume. Other fundamentals are also addressed before we delve into the cases, including indirect suggestion in Chapter 2, utilization in Chapter 3, and posthypnotic suggestion in Chapter 4. Chapter 4, for example, shows how the approach can be applied to patients dealing with pain, or

in resolving symptoms or trauma, or to emotionally cope, and finally, in facilitating the patient's potential to enable their transformative process. The authors are careful to prepare the reader for the task of exploring the cases to come.

In a delightful treat, the final chapter is a revisit of the famous case of the February Man, which is reprinted in full in Volume 9. This is a truncated version of the case, but with fresh and insightful analysis, reflection, and commentary that brings to light new and unexpected insights. Many of the cases in this volume are treated similarly, with examination, reflection, and commentary, which take readers on a deep journey within each case.

The thoroughness of Erickson's work, both in preparation and spontaneous emergence, is equalled by Rossi's meticulous attention to transcription and detailed analysis. It never ceases to surprise me that Rossi's questions to Erickson so often seem to be just what I want to ask. Rossi has been both an extraordinary gentleman, but also a representative of the "everyman" who reads these volumes, seeking both information and meaning for personal and professional development.

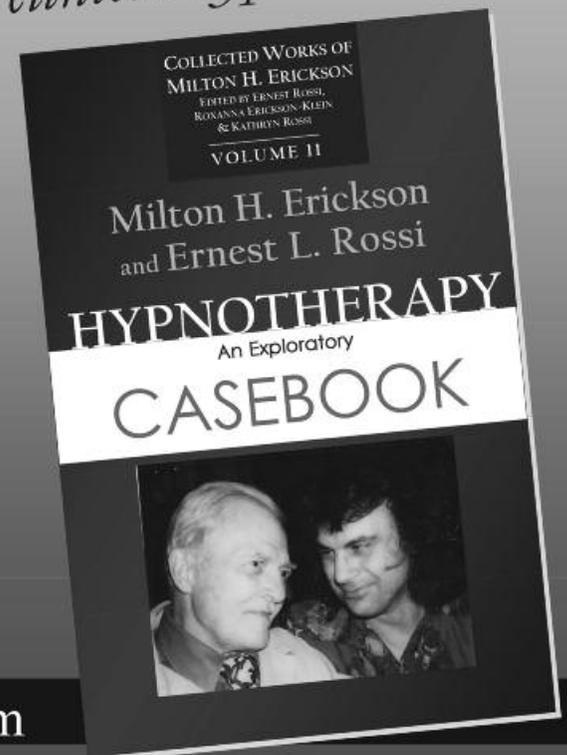
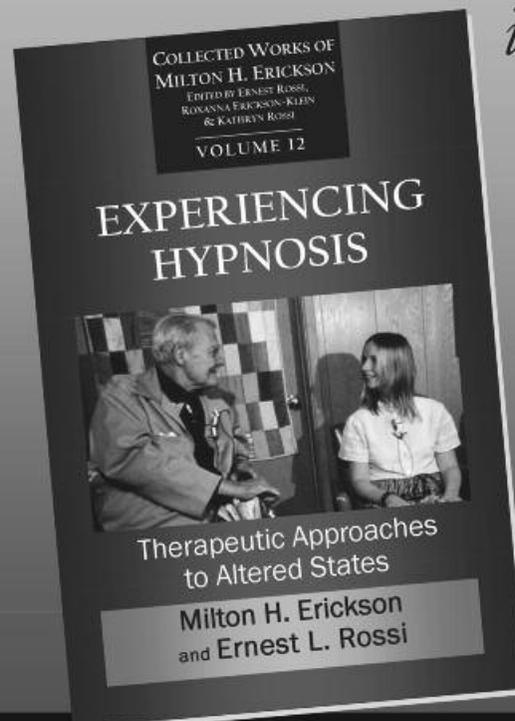
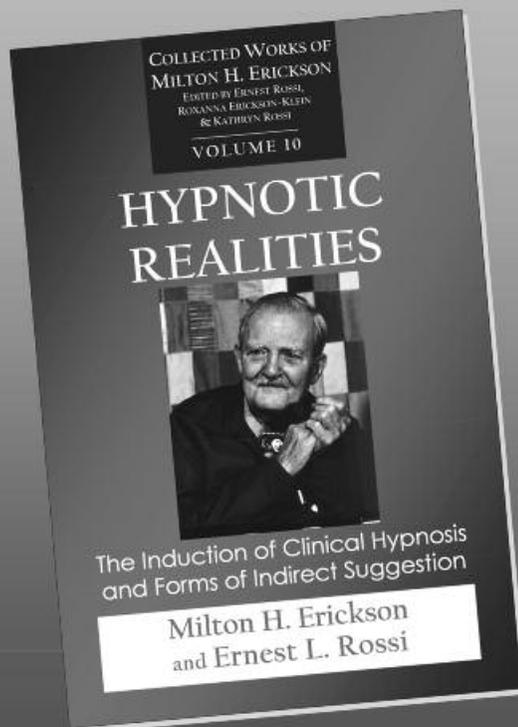
This review is my regular "week with Erickson and Rossi" that occurs formally three times a year. But, I also have intermittent special moments throughout the year when I slide one of these volumes out of my bookshelf and become absorbed in another world for a few precious moments, an hour, or even a day to learn from these great two men. I recommend everyone do the same.

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