Milton H. Erickson at St. Luke's Hospital
Pasadena, CA
October 1958

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When I first heard about the series of CDs, "Milton H. Erickson at St. Luke's Hospital," which were recorded during a conference given by Milton H. Erickson, at St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena California in October 1958, I immediately began wondering what that conference might have been like. One of my first questions was whether students would be taught as they are nowadays, and how things could be done without the electronic devices, VCRs, and all the things we currently use.

I was amazed as I began listening to Dr. Erickson's voice. It sounded so close, so present. At first, he told his students that hypnosis is a phenomenon that requires participation as a means to encourage them to get involved actively during this training course. It seemed that not all participants were familiar with hypnosis so he began with an introduction: "Hypnosis is a technique, a methodology, an approach to the patient, and I expect you to have that amount of medical knowledge references for you to practice in your own field, and you use Hypnosis to facilitate your contact with the patient, to enable the patient to comprehend you better, and to motivate your patient in the acceptance of medical care, and guidance, and advice, and instruction. You see, hypnosis is primarily a method of communicating ideas to people... in

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him from the trance. Dissociation occurs during the trance state. As Erickson says: "There is no attention given to pain, distress, or anything of that sort because there is a fixation of the attention to the important things..." Here by using this technique we can help the mother figure out whether the baby will be a boy, a girl, will she have green eyes, curly hair? And surely the experience will be much more enjoyable."

In order to explain ideomotor phenomena, Erickson talks about the idea of a motor response, a normal response a mother would show by opening her mouth as she is feeding the baby.

There is also a special focus on how a professional can know whether a subject is in trance state. This is explained by using an example of a person who was spontaneously showing signs of a narrowing and fixating attention during a conference, even though she had not been put into a "formal" trance. Recognizing trance states is fundamental, as opposed to asking the person whether they are in trance or not. I liked very much an example of what Erickson did during a demonstration. By using a light trance he promoted a positive hallucination in a woman who did not know that she was in a trance while she talked to Erickson's hallucinated daughter, and kept asserting that she was not in a trance.

In this presentation, Erickson explained that hypnosis also requires a learning process, so people need to learn the type of behavior that is altered during the process.

Another phenomenon that is highlighted is catalepsy, a state where muscle tonicity changes and there is loss of mobility as well. It is emphasized that these are normal phenomena that occur during ordinary waking states. I think this explanation is fundamental since people often believe that hypnosis is an extremely strange phenomenon.

As Erickson explains, it is important that rapport be taken into account. He defines rapport as a: "A state of relationship between the patient and you in which they tend to exclude everything else, and to give their attention to you, and they are responsive to you".

This series also contains a section where Erickson also talks about the case of an 83-year-old man who was dying of cancer and who had extremely acute pain. As Erickson explains, pain is made of three components: memories of past pains, the expectation of a future pain, and present pain. So if the man could develop amnesia for past and future expected pain, then the pain would be cut to only one third and then he could develop amnesia of the present pain too.

I have been reading about Erickson's techniques for some time and I had never found any reference regarding the "Imaginary patient technique" that he used with trainees. By entering trance they could learn ways to induce trance in their clients. One of the aims of this technique is that the trainee finds the right words to say while having enough time to do what is best, for instance working on the intonation and finding the necessary words. As a trainer, many times I have found that students often times are afraid of staring during their inductions. I truly believe that using this technique during courses could help new hypnotists learn more easily, both consciously and unconsciously.

As a therapist, I often find myself working with kids. I liked how Erickson recalled helping when one of his sons fell down and was bleeding. In order to help him deal with the pain better Erickson asked his son to focus on how red the blood was, thus redirecting his attention somewhere else. As I was listening to this anecdote I realized that many times we suffer because we forget "looking at the other side of things" in our lives.

This series of CDs can be very useful both for medical doctors, psychotherapists, and for people who use hypnosis since it provides a wide variety of examples where techniques can be adapted to any particular situation. The language, the use of voice, and the cases can be utilized both by beginners and experienced therapists.

While I was listening to Erickson's voice, I also enjoyed letting my right hand levitate for a while, as I was reviewing the series of CDs "Milton H. Erickson, at St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena, California, October 1958."

Reviewed By:
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