

Welcome to TranceLand!

It's a country you can explore endlessly as I have since I first read about Dr. Erickson and met him in 1973. There's always something new to learn and new sights to see. This series of papers by Milton H. Erickson and colleagues is the second volume in a series documenting the work of the innovative psychiatrist who advanced hypnosis and hypnotherapy more than anyone in modern times.

In this extraordinary volume you will witness the evolution of Dr. Erickson's approaches to hypnotic induction and treatment. And you can go deeper and deeper into TranceLand by reading and re-reading these papers. *Basic Hypnotic Induction and Suggestion* stretches from his early papers from the beginnings of his work in the 1930s to the years before his death in March of 1980. The early papers, more academic in tone and therefore a little more challenging to read, reflected a more traditional approach to induction and treatment.

These early papers clearly show two things:

1. Dr. Erickson is doing his best to present hypnosis as a legitimate medical tool for his medical and psychiatric colleagues. Remember, the medical field was years from accepting that hypnosis wasn't some mystical act practiced by charlatans. In fact, in large part due to Dr. Erickson's championing of hypnosis and hypnotherapy, it was finally recognized as an approved clinical tool in the early 1950s.
2. He was still under the sway of the mainstream of thinking in the field of hypnosis: that the main tool of induction and treatment was direct suggestion. He moved away from this thinking and evolved his own approaches and innovations as the years went on.

In these early papers, he is doing some education about the history and the nature of hypnosis to bring his medical and psychiatric colleagues along to acceptance of hypnosis and hypnotherapy as helpful therapeutic tools. We start to see the development of his own unique ideas and thinking about hypnosis, suggestion, trance and treatment emerging by the 1940s. From that more direct, suggestive approach to trance and treatment, he evolved to using a direct approach to trance induction, but developed a more nuanced and indirect approach to treatment, the "therapy" part of the hypnotherapy. Gradually, his evocation and *Utilization* approaches became paramount and blossomed by the 1950s through the 1970s.

The *Utilization Approach* involves using whatever beliefs, thoughts, feelings, fears, personality traits, habits and even the symptoms that the patient brings to the therapy situation in order to effect trance and make positive changes in the patient's life. This involves trusting that patients have the "answers within," that is, the resources, knowledge and abilities to resolve their problems with the guidance of the therapist.

Dr. Erickson thought the *Utilization Approach* was one of the two major original contributions he made to the field of hypnotherapy (the other being the *Interspersal Method*). Not only did the *Utilization Approach* reduce or eliminate resistance in hypnosis and therapy, but it became the basis for a broader innovation in hypnotherapy and therapy in general. This evolution of his thinking and the creation of *Utilization* marks a radical shift from the purely "suggestive" approach held by most hypnotherapists to a new "evocative" approach to hypnosis and hypnotherapy.

When I first came across Dr. Erickson's approach to hypnosis and therapy, some of it was perplexing. How did he get the seemingly miraculous results he got with "impossible" cases? The answer, I think, lies in this shift from the suggestive approach to the evocative approach to change.

One involves an authoritarian "operator" feeding new and better ideas and beliefs into the patient to help him or her and correct mistaken or unhelpful beliefs and habits. Akin to Emile Coue's famous affirmation, "Every day, and in every way, I am becoming better and better," (Britannica 2021) these suggestions came from the hypnotherapist's ideas of what the patient needed to think and feel.

The evocative approach holds that the patient has the resources and abilities he or she needs to change and the hypnotherapist is a partner and facilitator who invites the patient to evoke those abilities and make new associations and dissolve old associations, so that problem resolution naturally occurs. This is what Dr. Erickson meant when he extolled that one could trust your unconscious. The unconscious Erickson believed in was more a warehouse of learnings and resources that could help in healing than the cauldron of repressed urges and primal impulses that needed an ego and superego to keep in check lest it loose the patient's inner Mr. Hyde onto the world. And this is where the volume really starts to come alive, as we read the clinical applications of this new evocative approach.

From letting a patient diagnosed with violent psychotic episodes determine the pace of his own healing through a series of dreams to brutally berating a patient with a negative self-image in order to gradually build her up and transform her life to helping a woman who was having psychotic hallucinations contain them in time and a manila envelope, Dr. Erickson shows the development of this *Utilization Approach*. Reading these case examples is like being absorbed in a riveting movie. One can't wait to read what happens next and how the treatment proceeded and succeeded.

And, as the volume goes on, we get a glimpse behind the wizard's curtain, as various students and colleagues, John Weakland and Jay Haley from the Bateson research project, and Ernest Rossi, Erickson's late life amanuensis and interlocutor, get a detailed analysis and explanation of each of the words and moves Dr. Erickson uses in various inductions and treatments.

We find out the many levels and strategic moves Dr. Erickson used to mobilize his subjects' and patients' abilities to go into trances and to resolve their issues. This is where we find that knowledge meets art and experience meets skill to subtly lead people to healing.

Jay Haley, featured in this volume, once said that he felt that if he could only understand 50% of what Dr. Erickson was doing, he would be a much better therapist. It may seem like humble hyperbole, but reading the transcripts included in the later papers of this volume and you may start thinking that 50% may take you a lifetime.

I hope you enjoy your journey through this part of TranceLand and the mind of Milton H. Erickson MD and you return for many more visits in the future.

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