

# BOOK REVIEW

## *The Beginner's Mind*

**The Complete Works of Milton H. Erickson**

**Volume 5 – Classical Hypnotic Phenomena, Part 1**

Erickson Foundation Press

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*Classical Hypnotic Phenomena* begins a two-volume investigation of the phenomenology of hypnotherapy, which has been extensively developed in recent years by Jeffrey Zeig. This volume is the foundational work from Erickson and includes his papers from the 1930s and '40s, and several from the '60s and '70s; it is supported by current updates from Ernest Rossi and others. Similar to the other volumes, there is rich use of detailed case studies.

In this volume, subjects range from amnesia to dual personality, but the recurring concept is the functional presence of the unconscious in the process of therapy. In the Preface we are reminded of how Erickson sought to "...allow serendipity in the form of spontaneous unconscious responses to manifest themselves." (p.xi) And, that the "...characterization of hypnosis as a process of 'manipulation and control' is a caricature of what is more often in actual practice a process of 'hope and seek.'" (p.1)

In Part I, Erickson investigates amnesia. At first, I considered some examples to be just temporary memory loss, but it became clear to me that the inability to remember at a given time can have important implications and revelations about a client. In Chapter 3, Erickson shares an intriguing story about a dog who was taught a set of tricks, but was unable to perform those tricks outside of the house basement (p.25). This same phenomena is discussed later (Chapter 4) in the case of a client who, after a carefully placed suggestion, was unable to recall going into trance, or even attending his appointment, until he entered Erickson's office. While in the waiting room, he was amnesic of his experience. This leads to the extraordinary event of the man walking backwards out of the office, trying to resist the "out of office" amnesia, only to be startled to find himself walking backwards into the waiting room for no apparent reason (p.35-37). We have all had the experience of walking into a room with some intent purpose, but once in the room, having no recollection of that purpose.

These examples demonstrate that conscious awareness can vary in relation to context -- be it environmental, emotional, or temporal -- and produce a unique memory set, or, equally, amnesia set. Rossi called this, "state -- dependent memory, learning, and behavior." That Erickson was considering these phenomena nearly 80 years ago is inspiring.

Part II investigates "literalness," where Erickson and Rossi discuss how consciousness can often protect the neurosis, which "...means consciousness is in a weak position relative to the forces of neurosis, and it [consciousness] needs help." (p.76) Part III addresses age regression, and Part IV, automatic writing. In Chapter 12, Erickson describes a small meeting of college people, and he claims "...people could perform an act consciously...but which could have another unconscious meaning." (p.127) The concept was effectively tested with automatic writing. This phenomena is a central component of some therapies, for example, sandplay and art therapy, whereby the intent is to enable the unconscious to be expressed and brought into conscious awareness.

The investigation of mental mechanisms in Part V further discusses the unconscious mind: "Hypnosis is the induction of a peculiar state which permits subjects to reassociate and reorganize inner psychological complexities..." (p.197) and move beyond the constraints of an egocentric consciousness. Consciousness provides defense for inner dysfunction, and yet, is not in control; consciousness can be driven by inner needs.

This led me to consider recent research that suggests consciousness does not require a detailed sense of our emotional or biological needs. It only needs what is "good enough" to maintain survival and social inclusion. For example, our re-

sponse to a complex biological activity that occurs several times a day produces the simplistic conscious perception -- *I'm hungry* -- with little or no specific detail.

Rossi's recent presentations and papers demonstrate how quantum mechanics lies at the heart of everything in our classical experience. Our consciousness, however, is not able to be aware of quantum properties. Does this mean that the ideal treatment is one that activates implicit, unconscious activity? If conscious control is not the best way to create well-being, perhaps one of the most important things we can do with conscious control is to voluntarily turn it off, allowing the complex inner world to do its finest work. In their 1944 paper (Ch.17), Erickson and Hill list a set of four therapeutic concepts of which the most astounding is the third: "An unconscious conflict may be resolved unconsciously." (p.206). The fourth concept introduces something that we are only recently learning is the most important aspect of successful therapy: "Such unconscious activity can be influenced...by a relationship with another person." (p.206)

Part VI investigates dual personality, which is another way in which the unconscious sets up a protective mechanism. It is intriguing that Erickson was sometimes asked by the "other personality" to help the person who was ill. Dual personality is a self-organized, protective relationship within the isolation, created by the trauma. The client protects themselves with a fractured relationship with the self, but they still seek out a *therapeutic* relationship with Erickson to find resolution. This makes me wonder whether unusual and dysfunctional behavior is how the unconscious triggers others into shifting their attention -- to focus on a deeper relational interaction, which enables therapeutic change. In short, we are not meant to do it on our own. Relationships are the best healers, and symptoms stimulate healing relationships.

In Chapter 21, Erickson and Rapaport use psychometric testing to examine two dual personality patients. It is fascinating to read both the process and results of tests used in the 1940s. This provides the introduction for Part VII, which explores modern testing. The Indirect Trance Assessment Scale, developed by Rossi, is explained in detail, and two papers, based in the recent field of psychosocial genomics, take readers to the cutting edge of current research.

This volume spans research and investigation from 1933 to 2004. We are challenged, as usual, but also tested as we explore the unconscious. The reader will, no doubt, experience conscious change and growth, but I suggest there will also be unconscious activity that may never be known -- only experienced as beneficial change. That is the phenomena of the unconscious.