

Hypnotic Realities Visited 40 Years Later

Ernest Rossi, Kathryn Rossi and Roxanna Erickson-Klein graciously asked me to write the foreword for the volume of my choice for the eBook version of *The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson, MD*, and I chose Volume 10, *Hypnotic Realities*. I had wanted to reread this volume first published in 1976, and this honor gave me that opportunity. It is a pleasure to revisit Erickson's work as a seasoned professional now more expert in the methods developed by my mentor. There is a lot to learn from Erickson and in reading *Hypnotic Realities* and I discovered more – even 40 years after his death.

Although *Hypnotic Realities* is not the first volume in *The Collected Works*, it well could be, because it is the most important book in introducing Erickson's hypnotic methods. Even those who have advanced their practice of hypnotherapy will benefit from reading and re-reading it.

And there is another reason why I chose Volume 10. It conjures up a pleasant memory. It was gifted to me by Milton Erickson who inscribed in my copy, "Just another book to curl your hair." Let me explain: When I first visited Erickson in 1973 it was at the end of my counterculture days, and my curly hair was so long it could be pulled down to my waist. I had my hair styled before my next visit with him. I wore more professional clothing. Those changes represented a life transition.

These musings aside, Bernhard Trenkle, a dear friend and expert in hypnosis and the therapeutic use of humor, once told me a joke, which goes like this:

A man named John, a serious stutterer, confidently strides into an employment office and declares that he wants a job selling Bibles. The employment officer cannot help but notice John's speech defect, so he suggests John consider another line of work. John is recalcitrant and insists that he can sell Bibles. For nearly a half hour, John argues his case, and eventually the employment officer acquiesces and gives John a Bible saying, "Obviously you need to see for yourself that you cannot sell Bibles because you stutter. Now go out and try to sell a copy." This leads to another long argument because John insists on getting a box of Bibles, not just one. Finally, the employment officer reluctantly hands John a box of Bibles and tells him he should come back at the end of the day having learned that sales is not for him.

To the surprise of the employment officer, John returns in an hour with an empty box. He sold the entire box of Bibles. Since no one had ever sold a box of Bibles in an hour, the employment officer quizzed John about his method. It seems that John confidently declared to homeowners, "D-d-do you wa-wa-want to b-b-buy a B-B-Bible, or sh-sh-should I re-re-read it to you?"

Jokes can elicit humor. They are evocative forms of communication. We laugh because we have an experience, not because we have learned information. If I give you reasons why you should laugh, it will not prompt a smile. Humor is something that must be experienced.

In rereading *Hypnotic Realities*, I am reminded of the essential nature of hypnosis as something that must be experienced. Once elicited it can be a foundation for subsequent therapy through which the client can have adaptive realizations.

Hypnotic Realities elicits in me the sense of once again being with Milton Erickson, watching his precision; watching as he strategically targets a conceptual goal using the lens of his uncommon perceptiveness. Erickson explored the possibilities inherent in evocative communication. He was a conceptual communicator who oriented people toward a realization by using evocative communication. Erickson's inductions and therapy were evocative, because like humor, evocative communication is required to prompt a realization.

Erickson was wise in selecting Ernest Rossi to be his Boswell. Many brilliant and accomplished therapists studied with Erickson, but Rossi was a superlative and dedicated student and collaborator – and a great writer. And he continued exploring and teaching what he learned from Erickson until his death in 2020.

Ernest Rossi was new to hypnosis when he visited Erickson in the early 1970s. Much of the book is dedicated to hypnotic induction. In it the author provides a roadmap of learning from the master. The transcripts and annotations in *Hypnotic Realities* pop off the page, bringing the spirit of Erickson to life. When the practice of hypnosis began in the medical field, inductions were scripted. Erickson expanded the world of hypnosis. Rather than using rote procedures, he improvised for each patient, tailoring both the induction and subsequent therapy.

Hypnotic Realities codifies some of Erickson's methods. This revised version benefits from being cast in a contemporary neuroscience framework.

The only issue I have with Volume 10 is that some terms Rossi uses reflect earlier understandings. For example, "confusion" may be better seen as "destabilization," which is a milder and more accurate term. Also, "indirection" may be more appropriately described as "eliciting" or "orienting toward." When someone tells a joke, it orients the recipient toward the realization of humor, in the same way an induction may orient someone toward trance. Jokes also have destabilizing elements that prompt humor in the same way that effective hypnotherapy has destabilizing elements that prompt realizations.

Reading *Hypnotic Realities* is a journey worth embarking on because it will orient you toward realizations about hypnosis and its induction and the masterful work of Milton H. Erickson.

I am honored to write this foreword, but also recommend carefully studying the foreword of my esteemed predecessor, André Weitzenhoffer.

And finally, I thank and congratulate Ernest and Kathryn Rossi and Roxanna Erickson-Klein for their dedicated efforts in making this work available as an eBook.

Jeffrey K. Zeig, PhD

Founder and Director, The Milton H. Erickson Foundation

www.erickson-foundation.org

Phoenix, Arizona

